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COUNCIL APPROVES 120 PSYCHIATRY BEDS AT NORTH SHORE MED CENTER

By Chris Triunfo

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BOSTON, SEPT. 12, 2018....State regulators on Wednesday gave North Shore Medical Center approval to construct 120 adult, geriatric and pediatric psychiatry beds, the allotment originally approved in 2016 before the medical center and Partners HealthCare scaled back their plans.

The medical center, which is located in Salem and owned by Partners, in January 2017 filed a request to reduce the number of planned psychiatric beds to 90, citing "unprecedented and untenable financial losses in FY16 for both Partners and North Shore Medical Center," as well as the anticipated addition of 380 new psychiatric beds in other area facilities.

According to Partners, its system is "experiencing unmet demand for inpatient psychiatric beds at its other facilities." Among them is Massachusetts General Hospital, and Partners says these other facilities are unable to accommodate patients who are coming in from the North Shore Medical Center's service area.

The Public Health Council approved plans Wednesday calling for 60 adult psychiatry beds, along with 30 geriatric and 30 pediatric psychiatry beds. Partners anticipates accepting patients in the planned beds in October 2019, with construction and occupancy components of the project complete by June 2019.

Representatives from the medical center assured council members that the beds can be added at no additional cost "thanks to the re-allocation of funds." The maximum capital expenditure associated with the beds would remain at nearly \$170 million.

Council member Harold Cox questioned medical center president David Roberts about the center's evaluation of needs. "This is the third time North Shore comes here," Cox said. "How do you determine need? What is the real need?"

Roberts responded by citing the closure of 120 of the 380 beds that were anticipated to open in the area.

"With the closure of 120 beds at two unaffiliated facilities, Westwood Lodge and the Lowell Treatment Facility, as well as the demand we have noticed, it is clear that there is need," he said.

Council member Lucilia Prates-Ramos asked Roberts about the role the medical center will play in helping the homeless. If the bed request is approved, the center would be one of the hospitals with the largest psychiatric facilities in the state and "we look forward to working with the community," he said.

Following Roberts' presentation, the council unanimously voted to approve the amendment.

END

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