

# Community Meetings:

St. Joseph Medical Center Paulsen Pavilion - April 10, 2025

Cornwall Park Neighborhood Association - May 27, 2025

## Audience Questions

Q: Does PeaceHealth have all the necessary permits and approvals? Is this process faster for a hospital?

A: There have been multiple steps in the process, and we appreciate working with our partners in the City of Bellingham and Washington State Department of Health. We recently received the final Certificate of Need for our 80 additional beds.

There is added complexity in building a hospital, such as a Certificate of Need, which can take longer than residential or other types of commercial construction.

Q: How much capacity is PeaceHealth adding?

A: Our expansion allows for incremental growth of inpatient beds. We are licensed for 255 beds and utilize approximately 220 to 230, including observation beds. We will be using 322 as the new number for inpatient beds. The operational goal is to have single occupancy rooms with the capability to be used for two individuals, if needed.

As part of the expansion, we are also adding to our ED fast track capacity by 12 stations for patients with less acuity.

Q: What is PeaceHealth's response if there are significant Medicaid reductions?

A: Like many other healthcare organizations, we are bracing for potential significant impacts to Medicaid and Medicare. The infrastructure of healthcare services is at risk. The PeaceHealth Mission calls on us to care for all, including those who lack insurance or are otherwise unable to pay. Our doors are open to everyone and will continue to be.

Q: Given varying wait times in the ED was there discussion regarding adding even more capacity? How will the expansion impact staffing?

A: We are creating as much additional capacity as viable given our current footprint. The current construction standards require larger rooms than when our current ED was built. We are also increasing the number of triage rooms.

In terms of staff, we are actively recruiting and working to support our staff in all areas of their practice development.

Q: How is PeaceHealth preparing to care for patients with more complex needs? How is PeaceHealth recruiting and retaining more specialists?

A: Complex medical needs is an important issue that we are facing. We have improved access in some specialty areas, such as OB/GYN and cardiology, and are actively recruiting for several clinicians to meet the growing needs of the community.

Q: Will the expansion include additional security measures?

A: Security for our patients, visitor and caregivers is a top priority. Our ED currently has a new weapons screening system and two security guards at all times. We are also looking to make improvements the visitor badging process for improved security.

We have more security officers than ever before and are engaging more with Bellingham police. Caregivers with safety concerns are encouraged to talk with their supervisor or leadership so we can take action to bolster and strengthen protocols. We want all who are withing our space to feel safe.

Q: Is PeaceHealth receiving any funds from the City of Bellingham affordable housing funds?

A: No. PeaceHealth is not receiving any funds from the City of Bellingham for the expansion.

Q: How do you keep people from using the ED for things that are not an emergency?

A: We have specific requirements once someone enters the ED and we cannot just turn them away. We do community education periodically on using the ED vs. Urgent care clinics. It would help if urgent care clinics had extended hours. We've also reorganized operations at our ED to get patients triaged and moving through the department quickly, cutting down wait times.

Q: How will traffic be affected on Ellis St. with all the construction? Will there be more cars using Ellis St. as a throughfare?

A: There will likely be more traffic and delays as construction starts on Squalicum Parkway. There will likely be more cars turning east/right onto Squalicum to get to the garages. The City did delay the water main replacement along Ellis until next year.

Q: Are there plans to moderate the turn lanes from Squalicum toward the Garage and from the Garage Drive onto Squalicum/left onto Ellis? There have been near misses as opposite cars use the same turning lane.

A: No plans at this time to change.

Q: With the expansion of the hospital, how many jobs are you planning to add/grow?

A: Job opportunities will evolve as the hospital does and in stages.

Q: Will there be more helicopter noise with extra helicopter trips?

A: Sound mitigation was part of the research and preparation in the design process. Helicopters will land and deliver/pick up patients, then be stored on the helipad to the north of the hospital, not on the roof. Helicopter noise and routes are determined by several factors

including weather and the FAA. The Navy helicopters are louder and they test/visit 6-7 times a year -- they will not land on the roof at all because they are too heavy. Unless we expand cardio/neuro services, we don't expect to see a huge increase in demand for helicopter trips.