

VHC Health's Arlington expansion moving forward — with larger price tag



By [Sara Gilgore](#) – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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*Virginia Hospital Center anchors VHC Health's Arlington campus.
COURTESY PHOTO*

VHC Health is moving ahead with plans to build a behavioral health and rehabilitation facility in Arlington, but officials say the project will take longer and cost more than originally projected.

The plans, [first announced in January](#), involve bringing a new building to a 5.8-acre property at 601 S. Carlin Springs Road, a few miles south of VHC's main hospital campus. To make it happen, the health system still has to buy back that land, which it previously sold to the county.

The project, originally pegged at \$80 million, now has a \$135 million price tag, Adrian Stanton, VHC's vice president of real estate acquisition and development, told me in an email. As with many construction projects these days, the increase can be directly attributed to the rising cost of materials, Stanton said.

It's one of multiple projects on VHC's plate, including a \$40 million expansion of Virginia Hospital Center, the system's flagship hospital building at 1701 N. George Mason Drive.

VHC Health's behavioral health and rehabilitation facility

VHC and Arlington County first signed a letter of intent in mid-January for VHC to repurchase the county's land and develop the site, but the two sides have yet to decide a purchase price.

The health system intends to submit to the county a site plan and use permit in early 2024, Stanton told me. That would kick off the county's formal review and approval process, which would likely extend through next year. The goal, he said, is to get the submission before the county's planning board and full board by the end of 2024.

As part of that process, VHC would have to secure approvals for zoning, civil and construction plans. It would also look to apply for a certificate of public need in Virginia with the state's health department in early 2024, according to Stanton, several months later than initially planned. Stanton did not say what caused the delay. A decision from the state could take seven to nine months.

VCH would hope to lock in all approvals by the end of 2024 and break ground "soon after," either at the end of 2024 or early 2025, Stanton said. Construction would take 12 to 18 months.

That likely puts delivery at least a year behind original projections. VHC said in January it would aim to break ground in late 2023 or early 2024, with a delivery target of late 2025. VHC did not immediately return a request for comment about the reasons for the delays.

VHC is still evaluating the building's design, which the county's review process will influence. It's also assessing how many beds and which services it would need, "and that could also impact the design and square footage of the building," Stanton told me, noting the facility must fit on the site's 5.8 acres. In January, VHC described its vision for the new facility as a single-level building comprising 85,000 square feet and underground parking.

With this project, VHC joins a growing group of health systems pouring dollars into expanding their behavioral health services and capacity. It's all with an eye toward meeting skyrocketing demand for mental health and substance abuse care, as opioid drug overdoses and deaths climb.

Virginia Hospital Center's expansion

VHC is advancing this project as it looks to "address some longstanding capacity constraints" at Virginia Hospital Center — to the tune of \$40 million, Stanton said.

The health system opened [a long-awaited outpatient pavilion](#) over the summer, and has since moved all outpatient services from the hospital building to the new space. That also comprises a shell space on the sixth floor, which isn't yet earmarked for anything specific.

Now, VHC is continuing to backfill the recently vacant space in its acute-care facility — namely, adding more medical-surgical beds by the end of 2024. The work also involves bringing a behavioral health evaluation section to the emergency department; expanding cardiology, critical care and ancillary support areas; and renovating the women’s and infant health services space, according to Stanton.

The expansion has also included [broadening VHC’s ambulatory footprint](#). A Fairfax primary care office in the 3000 block of Hamaker Court is slated to open in February 2024, following others that recently went live in Kingstowne, Springfield and Alexandria — the latest in [a longer roster of clinics](#) VHC has opened over the past couple of years.