

# **Guest Comment by Thomas Duncan**

## **Talbot council president writes about Memorial Hospital plan**

March 30, 2007

*This letter was addressed to Joseph Ross, president and CEO of Memorial Hospital at Easton, from Talbot County Council President Thomas Duncan.*

This is a follow-up to discussions you had with Talbot County Councilman Peter Carroll on March 13 concerning relocation of Memorial Hospital to a site owned by Talbot County adjacent to the Community Center just north of Easton. The total area would be approximately 90 acres with a proposed lot line adjustment and substantial road frontage on both U.S. Route 50 and Maryland Route 662.

Location. This location has a number of positives. It is centrally located but without the traffic problems typically associated with prime locations. It is only 7.6 miles from the intersection of Routes 50 and 404, providing ready access to central and western Queen Anne's County. It is also just north of the intersection of Routes 50 and 309 (Cordova Road), with direct access only 8.2 miles from northern Caroline County and eastern Queen Anne's County. It is less than 10 miles from the Caroline County border on State Route 328 (Matthewstown Road), the most direct route from Denton and central Caroline County. Southern Caroline County will use State Route 331 to Black Dog Alley.

All emergency vehicles from Caroline and eastern Talbot would turn north on Black Dog Alley and avoid Easton traffic altogether. The county is currently widening Black Dog Alley between Route 338 and Chapel Road. Easton residents as well as those who live in the western neck areas could get to the new hospital without having to travel on Route 50 by going the back way along Route 662, past Chesapeake Publishing and the MVA, but could also use Route 50 if they chose. Dorchester and south Talbot would be served by Route 50, also currently being widened through the Town of Easton.

Substantial road frontage and a dynamic new campus on Route 50 at this location would make the new facility highly visible, easy to find, and clearly memorable to hundreds of thousands and ultimately millions of highway users.

Infrastructure. The existing road network provides easy, central access. Any highway, cross-over, or intersection improvements would be directly related to hospital access to the site and the increased traffic associated with the hospital itself. There would be no spill-over, unrelated traffic problems the hospital would inherit from surrounding businesses or local traffic. The Routes 50/309 intersection brings all state and county roads mentioned together and is already signalized. Improvements to the Routes 50/309 intersection, if any were required, would be coordinated between the State Highway Administration and the county.

Water and sewer are essential and expensive to design, permit, and construct for a stand-alone system required if the hospital were to move to Route 404. Proximity to Easton would allow the hospital to tie into Easton's existing water and sewer system at a fraction of the cost, in coordination with Easton.

Assuming town approval, tie-in might occur in several ways, by extension of water and sewer outside the town boundaries, or by the county buying capacity and making it available to the hospital and adjacent Talbot County Community Center, which is currently on well and septic. The county doesn't speak for the town or Easton Utilities on this issue, but we believe we can work cooperatively with the hospital, Easton Utilities and the town.

Airport. This site's proximity to the airport provides unique advantages that the hospital's long-range, strategic planners may want to consider. Current plans call for extension of its runway to allow non-stop, direct flights to Europe and beyond and installation of the latest all-weather landing systems so we will have unencumbered operating capability.

Transportation. Public transportation would be provided by regularly scheduled bus service to and from downtown Easton, coordinated with existing bus schedules to other parts of Talbot and beyond. The county provides funding for bus transportation, participates in strategic planning, and would certainly do everything within its power to insure that a regional medical facility at this site would have an adequate public transportation network.

Physician attraction and retention. The county could apply for grants and low-interest loans for capital acquisition and infrastructure improvements to construct a state-of-the-art medical office complex adjacent to the hospital site. These lower capital costs would boost economic opportunities for physicians and physician groups. These facilities and economic opportunities would present an attractive package, coupled with the attractive Eastern Shore lifestyle.

Terms. The county proposes to make this parcel available to Shore Health System for a new hospital without charge for as long as SHS operates that hospital on that site. Should the hospital be closed or move, the county may require the land returned in its original condition or that it be purchased at the prevailing market value. The county will make sewer and water available to the property line, minimizing connection costs.

The county and all our citizens need the hospital to stay in the immediate Easton area. The Town of Easton is of the same mind. This proposal is our offer to make this happen. So the county wants to provide you and the Board of Directors of Shore Health Systems Inc., and the Board of the University of Maryland Medical Systems Corporation with its sense of why this issue is so important to this community.

While health care is obviously the hospital's primary mission, the hospital is also the central, dominant force in this community's economic life.

The \$180 million gross annual revenue generated by the hospital is the key to the economic engine driving this community's economic health. Loss of the hospital will have extremely depressing, harmful economic effects on Easton's and Talbot's economy.

Talbot County recognizes the prerogatives of the Boards of Directors, both at Shore Health Systems Inc. and at the University of Maryland Medical Systems Corporation, to pursue what is best for the hospital's continued growth and success.