



Planning as a Crisis Mitigation Tool

“The recent impact of a meandering and destructive storm is a stark reminder of the need to prepare for the unexpected. In the moments that follow, advanced planning to ensure facilities are restored with increased resiliency delivers a definitive return on investment. While natural disasters can be unexpected, healthcare organizations today are subject to any number of influencers that can be anticipated in advance and appropriately accounted for through good planning.”

These were words written by BSA's Melanie Harris in the Houston Medical Journal back in 2017. They could not ring more true than right now, in the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Preparing for the unexpected is imperative in assuring the continuity of care to every patient. While an event of this magnitude may not have been on the radar a mere six months ago, it certainly is now. Planning has taken on an entirely new meaning amid this crisis. With the future implications and downstream impacts still not fully known, we must be proactive in our response and plan for many different possible scenarios.

Each organization approaches its master facility plan differently, as they should - each is a unique institution with a unique vision.



Healthcare is in continual evolution, driven by advancements in science, changes in reimbursement, and process improvement to enhance the delivery of care, patient experience, and staff effectiveness. The rate of change continues to accelerate as a reaction to both internal and external pressures. Technology and access to information have a significant impact on how we access, deliver, and monitor healthcare; however, the built environment by its nature is more static and less transient. Planning for growth and expansion can be achieved in many ways. Great planning not only provides focus to a vision but a certain nimbleness of execution that is not reactionary to change but preempts it.

Development planning for healthcare facilities is generally examined in short (2-5 years), mid (6-10 years), and long-range (10-20 years) increments. The quicker the schedule, the more granular the detail. Short-range plans are limited in size, scope, and often budget and

generally include renovations, backfills, and aesthetic renewals. These short-range plans usually prepare the way and make advanced provisions for a mid-range plan. Mid-range plans may examine extensive renovations, additions, expansions, and new construction. Planning for long term growth relies on master plans that act as a roadmap and must remain adaptable to changes.

Long-range planning must be comprehensive and yet, less detailed. It looks at facilities and campuses on a macro scale and concerns itself with the larger picture. The strategic master facility plan is intended to align the organization's strategic goals and operational vision with its capital plan and financial latitude. This, in turn, leads to the identification and quantification of physical resources needed to serve those goals. Often facilities assessments are an integral part of this process. Each organization approaches its master facility plan differently, as they should - each is a unique institution with a unique vision.

As a system that has expanded in response to market growth and increasing service demands, Children's Mercy has, like many health systems, added services and facilities to its core operation in a piecemeal fashion over several years. The result, a system and facilities experiencing inefficiencies and flow issues. With continued growth on the horizon, the hospital developed a 10-year master plan that would help the hospital use current space more efficiently while developing a strategy for meeting future demands without overbuilding. Through the review and analysis of 2.5 million square feet, Children's Mercy was able to shift the location of specific operations and services to optimize patient volumes, reduce overloads on the main campus and improve overall services. Identifying underutilized space on secondary campuses, it was recommended to move clinics and services that did not need proximity to the main campus, reducing hospital pinch points, improving overall flow, and making better use of the other campuses. At the same

time, service lines were identified that would be better positioned in different geographic areas due to surrounding demographics. Also, they provided a phasing process that would make it possible for the hospital to eventually add to or replace its main, aging facility without disrupting services. The ability to adapt the long-range master plan through short-range improvements without compromising the overall vision, as in the case of Children's Mercy, is the signature of a well laid and preemptive strategic master facility plan.

Mid-range planning is equally critical and addresses more imminent growth and expansion needs. BayCare Health System in Tampa, Florida, planned for such an event with its 400,000 square-foot St. Joseph's North Hospital in Lutz more than 10 years ago. The facility was designed in 2007 and completed in 2010. The 3-story hospital was designed for a 2-story vertical expansion through thoughtful design and planning. In early 2017 the hospital initiated the 2-story addition, which was

completed in 2020, just as planned. To facilitate this expansion, the original structure was designed for the additional loads and column stubs placed at roof level to minimize disruption to ongoing hospital operations. The mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems were sized for increased loads. For a hospital, disruption of services and inconvenience to patients, their families, and staff alike is the most significant concern, and this project is a prime example of accommodating the growing needs of a facility while avoiding any of the detrimental effects of such measures.

Short-range planning then addresses work that provides for immediate needs. These projects usually allow the organization to address a pressing or critical need that can be accommodated through remodeling an existing space to improve the patient care experience. This will enable facilities to ensure continuity in service as demands change, sometimes with minimal warning. Developing and updating plans for ongoing growth, Saint Luke's Health System ensured the entire system worked cohesively. A series of separate plans for each of the system's 10 campuses, complemented by an overall view to help with facility and operational coordination, was completed. To establish a "Highest-Best" use of existing facilities and identify additional needs, the plan sought to allow the system to be responsive to the marketplace, potential programs, and physician-recruitment efforts, and to work in concert with the Health System's strategic plan initiatives. On the system's main campus, a key consideration was

determining a plan for moving patient services from older spaces into newer ones. Ongoing growth has created a need for additional beds, and the facility also has seen considerable expansion in its ambulatory programs, surgical services, and emergency department. At the same time, the plan identifies opportunities for growth and improved space use on other campuses, helping to ensure system-wide efficiencies. With an approach that responds to campus-specific operations and process-improvement opportunities, the plan delivers site development plans for each campus, addressing everything from high-level service-delivery needs to patient, visitor and staff access, parking and aesthetic features.

Planning for growth and expansion is daunting since change can be unpredictable - but that is a critical parameter of planning. Mergers and acquisitions, political unrest, digital transformation, natural disasters and the global pandemic we are currently facing can add a whole new layer to the already complex drivers that influence facilities. However, proper planning can allow a facility to maintain and expand services with resiliency amidst significant change. Strategic goals - both financial and operational, cultural and geographic differences, strengths, and weaknesses all contribute to unique plans tailored to specific needs. The ability to anticipate change is reflected in our understanding of the organic nature of healthcare delivery, and what we often attribute to foresight is, in fact, just good planning.

Authors:

Melanie Harris, Healing Practice Director
Email: mharris@bsalifestructures.com

Chase Miller, Senior Architect
Email: cmiller@bsalifestructures.com



bsalifestructures.com
800.565.4855