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**Sent on:** Thursday, November 2, 2023 8:31:51 PM

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**Subject:** Public Comment: Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167 2023-11-02T20:31:48Z

A new GMCB Public Comment has been received.

**Submit Time:** 11/2/2023 8:31:48 PM

**Name:** Peter Elwell

**Affiliation:** Commenting as an individual resident, as a former Town Manager, and as the current Deputy Director of a non-profit organization serving people experiencing homelessness

**Town/City:** Brattleboro

**Topic:** Community Engagement: Hospital Sustainability and Act 167

**Comment:** Having learned that Act 167 is requiring an existential review of Brattleboro Memorial Hospital's (BMH's) role in the greater Brattleboro community, I feel compelled to offer my perspective both personally and professionally. Professionally, I know that a thriving BMH is essential to our community's well being. BMH is increasingly intertwined with community partners in a variety of innovative and impactful programs. I appreciated BMH's broad and deep presence here during my seven years as Brattleboro's Town Manager. In my current role at Groundworks Collaborative, I see up close the importance of BMH's participation in our shared Healthworks initiative, providing physical health services (and partnering with the Brattleboro Retreat on providing mental health services) to underserved (mostly homeless) people with extremely complex needs. We are building on that partnership to add community outreach services that will serve a wider variety of people and address less acute needs. Both programs will take some of the overload off of BMH's emergency department, especially with regard to mental health crises that can be brought on by unmet social and physical health needs. And both programs will improve the physical and mental health of some of our region's most vulnerable residents -- people who would otherwise be neglected entirely or would be among the costliest patients to treat. Personally, I was born at BMH and both of my parents died there. My birth in 1962 and my mom's death in 1993 are old news, but testament to the long arc of BMH's service in our community. My dad's death in 2022 provides a current example of how essential having an excellent local hospital is for local families. Dad was in-and-out of the hospital during the last six months of his life. Some of this time was in the ICU at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center more than an hour north of Brattleboro. It is an extremely difficult experience for Southern Vermont families when we have to rely on faraway facilities and medical professionals during times of extreme stress (and distress). Dad received excellent care at Dartmouth, but the team providing that care were strangers and the required travel was burdensome for loved ones who were his support team. And, while it wasn't true for Dad, in some circumstances the additional distance to reach the facility could mean a worsened outcome for the patient. In contrast, during his three separate hospitalizations at BMH and especially during the final one as he moved from acute care to palliative care to a peaceful passing, he also received excellent medical care, but at BMH it was provided by local people where he was treated with more personal attention and surrounded more readily by loved ones in his time of greatest need. The recent expansion and modernization of BMH's facilities is positioning the hospital to play an even more pivotal role in the lives of thousands of Southern Vermont families. We need that -- a BMH developed to its full potential -- rather than any shift toward reliance on larger, less personal, more institutional (and not necessarily better!)

medical facilities far away. Our community has many significant needs. We have higher rates of poverty and homelessness than elsewhere in Vermont and a population whose average age is climbing faster than many other parts of our state. But literally from birth to death and regardless of income level or social status, everyone in our region benefits from BMH being our local hospital.

**Post Comment:** Yes