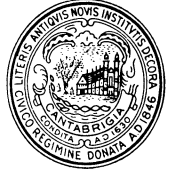




The Cambridge Hospital



1493 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 (617) 498-1000

TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

FROM: Melvin H. Chalfen, Commissioner of Health and Hospitals *MHC*
John G. O'Brien, Hospital Administrator *JOB*

DATE: January 2, 1986

SUBJECT: Council Order No. 10, 12/22/86;
Re: Shelter for Homeless at Hospital

As we have discussed over the past several days, we are able at this time to provide only a cursory statement relative to providing shelter for homeless people at the Hospital. This is attributable to the fact that a variety of regulatory, public health and safety, financial, and strategic planning concerns have not been fully addressed. However, our current assessment indicates that although steps have been initiated to examine how we can better provide medical services to the homeless, there are significant barriers to the proposed plan of providing housing to the homeless at the Hospital.

Prior to briefly addressing some of the significant issues of concern, I would like to clarify exactly what excess capacity exists at the Hospital. As of Monday, January 5, 1987, there will be a thirty-bed unit that is not occupied due to reduced inpatient census. Over the holidays, we additionally were able to restrict access to an eighteen-bed unit due to the seasonal drop in elective admissions that typically happens at most hospitals. In fact, restricting that unit placed extreme pressure upon our resulting capacity to the extent that our remaining medical/surgical beds remained essentially at 100% occupancy.

The aforementioned thirty-bed unit is anticipated to remain vacant while our census remains at this level. This affords us the opportunity to address some much needed painting and minor repairs at this time. This excess capacity is consistent with the situations at most area institutions who are experiencing similar or in some cases even more precipitous decline in inpatient activity. We are currently addressing excess capacity as we develop the strategic business plan that we have outlined to the City Council. The potential future availability of this space is an important component of this plan. Specifically, we are reviewing new programmatic initiatives that are under consideration by our Strategic Planning Committee, as well as potentially housing patients on this unit that may currently be on units that also need repair in the near future.

Mr. Robert W. Healy
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Briefly, our concerns with this proposal fall into the following areas:

1. Regulatory. The thirty-bed unit which is currently unoccupied is licensed by the Department of Public Health for acute care services. Housing individuals who do not meet certain criteria would result in de-licensure of those beds. This would eliminate the possibility of placing patients on this unit in the future and would also severely hamper our abilities to provide alternative health care services that may be needed. There are a variety of other federal, state, and local regulatory issues that are too numerous to mention which have surfaced among the administrative and medical staff.
2. Public Health and Safety. Clearly, housing homeless people in an acute care hospital would have significant public health and safety implications. Of particular concern to the medical staff is the serious strain this would place upon infection control procedures at the Hospital, specifically regarding tuberculosis which is prevalent among the homeless as evidenced by the recent outbreak at the Pine Street Inn.
3. Financial. Utilizing a portion of this facility for non-acute reasons would result in reduced reimbursement by third party payors. The overhead and some other costs that are allocated to the patient unit in question would not be recognized by certain insurers.
4. Strategic Planning. As stated previously, we are actively pursuing future directions for this Hospital. The development of a strategic business plan has been underway with the assistance of the administrative and medical staff and the Health Policy Board. We are assessing how we can utilize our strengths to better meet the needs of our community. These needs, as evidenced by declining inpatient hospitalizations, are changing dramatically. Introducing a dramatic new direction such as housing for the homeless would certainly make this task that much more challenging.

We are very concerned about the pressing needs of the homeless, particularly their medical problems. However, although we are confident that the Hospital can be of assistance in meeting some of these health care needs in the near future, we feel that the barriers to an actual housing program on site are significant. Regardless, we will continue to aggressively examine these issues over the upcoming days.

CC: Health Policy Board Members



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
TEL. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

January 5, 1987

To the Honorable, the City Council:

With respect to City Council Order No. 10 of December 22, 1986, relative to a shelter for the homeless at the Cambridge Hospital, enclosed please find copy of a report from Melvin H. Chalfen, Commissioner of Health and Hospitals, and John G. O'Brien, Hospital Administrator.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mbf
Enc.

Re: shelter for the homeless at the Cambridge
Hospital.

In City Council,

January 5, 1987

Placed on file