

Town of Bennington VEPC Hearing

Witness Testimony: Thomas A. Dee, President and CEO, Southwestern Vermont Health Care

Good afternoon. I am Tom Dee, President and CEO of Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC). I joined SVHC in 2010.

SVHC is a nationally recognized health care system with a workforce of over 1400 employees and physician providers and an annual operating budget of \$200 M. We are the 8th largest employer in Vermont. We currently have a presence in three states, primarily serving the communities within Bennington and Windham Counties, eastern New York and the northern Berkshires in Massachusetts.

SVHC providers are members of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Putnam Physician Group, a 125 member multispecialty medical group operated in partnership with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. SVHC includes Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC), a 99-bed community hospital, the Centers for Living and Rehabilitation, a 150-bed long- and short-term skilled nursing facility, and the SVHC Foundation. SVMC also includes 19 primary and specialty care practices with 5 primary care health centers located throughout the region.

SVHC has developed a strategic road map called Vision 2020, which focuses on three key organizational imperatives: building partnerships, transforming our health system and creating financial sustainability. Integral to the successful completion of Vision 2020 is our continued and growing partnership with Dartmouth-Hitchcock. Both SVHC and Dartmouth-Hitchcock will be making substantial investments in our region with the commitment of those investments requiring an economically sound and growing Bennington area. In order for SVHC to continue to be economically viable and provide the highest quality of care, we need to be able to retain and recruit physicians, nurses and support personnel. This last point was the key factor behind SVHC's support of and participation in the Bennington Redevelopment Group and the Putnam Block Project. In order for SVHC to attract, recruit and retain the highest quality workforce, Bennington needs to have a strong, vibrant and walkable downtown with sustainable housing, additional eating establishments, attractive shopping, with cultural and recreational activities.

The Town of Bennington is the core community within the county, and is essential to the vitality and quality of life of the surrounding region. In order for Bennington to grow, prosper and provide opportunities for our community members, the approval of a TIF is critical towards the vision of the new Bennington. This vision can only be attained through the support of and investment in the Putnam Redevelopment Project - which is the hub of Bennington's downtown revitalization. Part of the mission of SVHC is to improve the overall health and wellness of the communities we serve. Research has proven that medical services play a relatively small role in the overall health of a population. The social determinates of health such as economic prosperity, housing, food and nutrition, educational opportunities and the rate of crime play the largest role in determining the well being of a community. The Board of SVHC believes this project is truly in line with our mission to help create a healthy community but we know we cannot accomplish this on our own. We also realize that for this project to succeed, we need to use every tool in our economic

development tool box. Initiatives such as the TIF become vital, especially when the project lacks an external developer with access to major sources of capital.

Southwestern Vermont Health Care and our partners in the Bennington Redevelopment Group have already committed to leasing a sizable portion of the residential and commercial space downtown for use of offices, retail space, student and community housing and medical services. This partnership will build further interest and lead to business activity as individuals and organizations are more inclined to rent where there is already active investment and programming taking place.

If all local businesses and organizations hope to attract and retain the best talent and ensure economic sustainability for the entire county, it is essential that the town offers a vibrant downtown. Normally, a health care institution would not invest in this type of a project, but we felt it was necessary to be an anchor tenant due to the underlying economics of our region—as well as our organization's commitment to revitalizing Bennington's downtown. SVHC's commitment does not end with the Putnam Redevelopment Project. Last year, our institution created the Healthy Homes for Bennington program whereby we purchase and renovate distressed or vacant homes in downtown Bennington and facilitate home ownership. Our program has provided an opportunity for home ownership for individuals who otherwise do not qualify. Similar to the Putnam Redevelopment Project, Healthy Homes for Bennington aims to create an economic multiplier. In our case, renovations to homes are coordinated by local contractors, lending is offered by local financial institutions, and the homes will be sold to our local employees.

The Putnam Block Project is making enormous strides toward the goal of a revitalized downtown Bennington, which will have a lasting impact on our regional economy and quality of life. The approval of the proposed TIF is critical for this project and future economic development initiatives.

Thank you for your support.