

## HEALTH CARE

# Walter Reed move to double patient and traffic load

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Staff Reporter

If designs by the Navy are carried out as planned, the Bethesda merger of the National Naval and Walter Reed Army medical centers will bring 690,000 square feet of new construction, add at least two new parking garages — and handle double the number of patients currently treated at the Rockville Pike campus.

At the same time, employees and patients who use the new facilities, not to mention nearby residents, will have to contend with the current traffic-carrying capacity of Wisconsin Avenue and four of Montgomery County's busiest intersections.

"There's already significant congestion on Wisconsin," said Ollie Oliveria, a program manager for Navy Medicine in the National Capital Area. "Our addition is going to obviously further exacerbate the problem. But we are working with the county and local officials to see what options are available to us."

In four years, the merger of the two military hospitals is expected to see more than 1 million new or renovated square feet of space in an expansion estimated to cost upwards of \$1 billion.

In preliminary concept designs for the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the product of the federal Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC) process, the Navy is calling for 261,000 square feet in hospital renovations and 690,000 square

## Big plans

The preliminary design plans for the merged hospital include:

- Renovations to bump up the number of beds from 243 to about 345, which will be private rooms.
- Construction of a four-story, 457,000-square-foot addition for to serve more inpatients.
- Construction of a six-story, 533,000-square-foot outpatient building.
- Two new parking garages totaling 1,700 spaces. Officials also hope to build a third garage at some point to bring the number of spaces up to 2,300. (Not yet approved.)
- Another several thousand square feet worth of new administrative offices, as well as fitness and rehab spaces. (Not yet approved.)

feet in new construction of inpatient and outpatient towers.

The initial concept design is just that — initial. BRAC officials are planning for further campus adjustments, including at least two parking garages and additional administrative and rehab space, as portions of Walter Reed Army Medical Center pack up from its current location in the District to move in with the National Naval Medical Center at the latter's 243-acre home by 2011.

The new Bethesda campus blueprint is designed to handle double the Naval hospital's 435,000 annual patients and almost a third more of its 7,700 total head count.

The Navy's plans come at the same time as nearby Suburban Hospital continues its own \$135 million quest to grow, to meet the area's medical needs.

Oliveria said road improvement options the Navy is exploring with county officials range from adding a turn lane on Wisconsin Avenue, to giving the campus its own Beltway exit ramp, to changing campus exit and entranceways.

After delays in June and September, the Navy Department said it's still finalizing its master and transportation plans, and their effects on surrounding traffic — key ingredients for the transformed campus to win final regulatory approval.

"The Navy has worked very hard to work with affected agencies," said David Levy, director of the urban design and planning review division of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCP), the federal government's central planning agency.

For now, BRAC officials on Sept. 27 won NCP approval for initial hospital renovations that bump up its bed count from 219 to roughly 345, turning them into private rooms. The NCP also gave the nod to a four-story, 157,000-square-foot addition for more inpatient space, as well as a new six-story, 533,000-square-foot outpatient building. They will flank the campus' flagship building, a 20-story tower built during Franklin Roosevelt's era.

In addition, BRAC officials are planning, but have yet to receive initial approval, for at

least two new parking garages totaling 1,700 spaces — one a nine-story structure for patients and the other an eight-story structure for staff. They hope to build in a third garage, hiking their new space capacity up to 2,300. They said the campus will also need another several-thousand square feet worth of new administrative, as well as fitness and rehab space. All of that is expected to nearly double the original \$500 million cost estimate.

They hope to win final approval by next spring, followed by shovels hitting dirt in the summer. Construction must finish in 2010 in time for the 2,500 additional staffers and average 2,500 daily patient load expected to change their District addresses to Bethesda. And neighbors will be watching each step to ensure their home addresses aren't harmed in the process.

"We need to know what that means on a daily basis," said Ilaya Hopkins, president of the East Bethesda Citizens Association, a group of 1,200 households just south of the National Naval Medical Center campus. "The intersections are all already at maximum capacity. There's a lot of cut-through traffic in neighborhoods not build to handle that."

Suburban Hospital, which aims to file for a county zoning exception by early next year for its own three-phase campus overhaul through 2020, said it doesn't expect the new Walter Reed campus to affect its initial plans to build a new patient tower, physician office building and parking garage.

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