



News

PUBLIC HEARING REQUESTED ON FUTURE OF UNION ER

May 21, 2017

FILE PHOTO

View of Union Hospital.

By **THOMAS GRILLO**

LYNN — Six community organizations and unions have asked the panel deciding the fate of emergency care after **Union Hospital** closes to make their deliberations public.

In a letter to the **Urgent/Emergent Care Planning Group**, which includes hospital executives and public officials, the groups suggested a hearing be held at an accessible location in the evening, and publicized in advance, with notices in English and Spanish.

“We want our voices and concerns about care to be heard,” said **Pamela Edwards**, an organizer at the **Massachusetts Senior Action Council**, a grassroots

organization that encourages its members to address policy issues that affect their health. "Many seniors believe **Partners HealthCare** is not listening to them and don't care about us."

The **New Lynn Coalition, North Shore Labor Council, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Neighbor to Neighbor, Massachusetts Education Fund**, and the Senior Action Council are in agreement that the panel has lacked transparency. They said it's been very hard to get information about the discussions since the sessions are closed to the public.

"We are writing because it is critical that the Urgent/Emergent Care Planning Group share its findings and recommendations with Lynn as soon as possible by way of a public forum," the letter said.

Last year, the state **Department of Public Health** approved a \$180 million expansion of **North Shore Medical Center** (NSMC) that will close Union and move the beds to the new **Salem** campus in 2019. The medical facilities in Lynn and Salem are a part of **Partners**.

Dr. David J. Roberts, NSMC's president, said the city's only hospital will be shuttered in the fall of 2019 and sold. The sale could be sooner if the need for service continues to dwindle, he said.

While Roberts has pledged to maintain ER services in Lynn, it's unclear where they would be housed.

"It would seem that events are accelerating faster than originally anticipated. Union Hospital patients, as well as 1199SEIU members and the Lynn community deserve to know what is being planned to provide for their emergent healthcare needs, on how emergency care will be provided once Union Hospital closes," according to the letter.

At its most recent meeting last month, the public and the press were barred from the working session at City Hall. At the time, **Laura Fleming**, a hospital spokeswoman, could not explain why the public was excluded.

Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy did not respond to a request for comment. State **Sen. Thomas McGee** (D-Lynn) declined comment.

Fleming declined to be interviewed. In a statement, she defended the Urgent/Emergent Care Planning Group's private meetings.

"Once the planning group has completed its preliminary review, it will bring forward data and options for broader discussion and community input," she wrote in an email. *Thomas Grillo can be reached at tgrillo@itemlive.com.*