

TO: Chairman Lee Holloway, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
FR: Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker
DT: Thursday, January 22, 2009
RE: Immediate Economic Stimulus in Milwaukee County

President Barack Obama and his administration have mentioned their interest in “shovel ready” projects. They want projects that can start immediately.

Instead of waiting to see what the specifics of the federal economic “stimulus” package are when they are passed in February or March, signed by the President and then implemented by the various federal agencies, I suggest that we take action now.

Specifically, I offer ask you and the members of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to take up our plan for the mental health complex.

The proposal to enter into a long-term lease with Weas Development to move operations of the mental health complex to the former Saint Michael Hospital site is a good example of “shovel ready.” Work on the project can begin immediately upon approval by the county.

Our administration has been working with the developers – as well as with staff from the Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare system - for the past two years. Plans are complete and the developer can start demolition of portions of the former hospital and work on the new complex. I ask that the County Board approve a long-term lease for the mental health complex at the former Saint Michael Hospital site.

In addition, this plan will provide a new economic development surge to the northeast neighborhood, which replaces the negative impact of a closed hospital. It also opens the door to new construction and job expansion on the County Grounds as the land currently holding the mental health complex can be bid out to the Medical College of Wisconsin, Children’s Hospital or others. I ask that the County Board approve bids for this land (pending the completion of the move to the former Saint Michael Hospital site).

Some have talked about the construction of a new mental health complex on the County Grounds. Since there has been no work done on site preparation or construction design for a new mental health complex, it would take more than a year before ground could be broke for such a project. This does not seem to match the President’s call for “shovel ready” projects.

In addition, construction of a new complex (as proposed) does not include the type of cost savings included in our proposal to move to the former Saint Michael Hospital site. Building new would cost more to operate and a source to fund those higher costs has not been identified. Conversely, moving off the County Grounds site not only provides long-term cost savings; it also opens the door to the sale of the existing land and development of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center. These funds can be used to provide long-term support for mental health services.

Action on this plan requires approval by a majority of the members of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors. Our plan can commence right away. We can put people to work immediately.

At a time when we are attempting to do things that provide an immediate stimulus to the economy, we do not need to wait for help from the federal government: we help create an economic stimulus in our community today.

Cc: Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors