

# Throw Your (Hard) Hat into the Ring During Facility Master Planning

Strategic planning and marketing staff need to have a seat at the table when it comes to developing and updating facility master plans. The decisions made there will impact your organization's product and brand for years to come.

Go for a walk on your hospital's campus today. Follow the path that patients and family members might take to go to surgery, imaging, or medical records. What do you see? What are your buildings and spaces saying to your customers?

As healthcare marketers and strategists, we often tell our customers that we have "advanced technology," that we are setting a "standard of excellence," or that we are "patient focused and caring." Do your healthcare campus and facilities send the same message? Or do aging facilities convey a message of disorganization, clutter, and something less than the most modern approach to healthcare?

If your organization is one of the estimated 50 percent of U.S. hospital facilities that need to be replaced or renovated, or if appearances do not reinforce the reality of your service and care, don't despair. Instead, encourage your leadership to take the time to develop a facility master plan. A well-drawn plan will protect and enhance important physical assets while making sure that outdated facilities and layouts do not send the wrong message.

## Facility Master Planning Demystified

A facility master plan takes a long-range view of a healthcare campus or hospital and how it will grow and be renewed over time. The steps in a facility master planning process include:

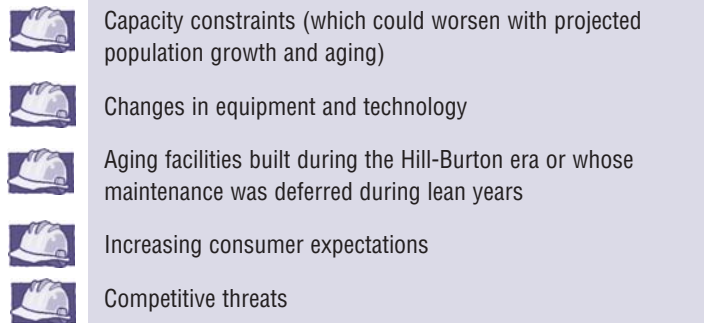
- Assessing an organization's facility, real estate assets, and medical campus to determine repair and replacement needs, the highest and best use of spaces, and the condition of infrastructure.
- Developing or reviewing strategic objectives, market assessments, demand projections, and service-line goals.
- Confirming preferred operating or care models.
- Determining departmental and program space needs as well as numbers and types of inpatient beds needed now and in the future.
- Developing facility layout and configuration options that are coordinated with organizational priorities.
- Determining recommended phasing and estimated costs.

Figure 2 shows a sample floor plan from a facility master plan. The shaded areas are overlaid on the existing floor plan to show opportunities for expansion and new locations for existing services.

Having a facility master plan provides many benefits:

- Matches needed physical resources to planned service development initiatives.
- Aids in decision making among competing priorities.
- Provides cost estimate information needed to develop

**Figure 1. Five Drivers of the Boom in Healthcare Construction**



- business plan ROI information for specific projects.
- Provides a basis for realistic capital budgeting and identification of funding sources.
- Aids in real estate planning and acquisition.

To make good facility decisions, a facility master plan should be the outgrowth of a solid, current strategic plan that outlines service priorities. Many of the early inputs into the creation of a facility master plan are similar to those needed to develop a strategic plan or a marketing plan: market assessment and detailed market share information, historical utilization trends, demand projections for three to five years, and competitor analysis. The competitor analysis should include market share by service line if possible, service-line focus, and medical staff overlap. Other needed inputs to develop a facility master plan come directly from your organization's strategic plan: strategic, program, and service-line priorities, medical staff recruitment targets, and ambulatory strategies.

## The Planning and Marketing Contribution

The role of planning and marketing professionals in master planning needs to be more than simply connecting the outside consultant or architectural firm to the right numbers and documents. The healthcare environment is rapidly changing, making forecasting the future a challenge. Even when your organization's consultants have models to forecast demand, your knowledge of local market forces should be used to customize the resulting forecasts. As a part of master plan development, planning and marketing professionals can also lead scenario planning to consider alternative clinical services, locations, and regulatory scenarios.

As the primary guardian of the organization's branding and positioning, marketers should have a say in the development of a facility "philosophy." Are you striving for the high-touch, patient-focused position in your market? Way finding,

accessibility issues, and a healing environment will be important considerations. Known for your advanced technology? Contemporary design and efficiency of facility layout become critical to own this position in the customer's mind. Community outreach and health improvement efforts can be bolstered by the inclusion of visible resource centers and space for community education and health screenings. The location, size, and number of spaces and amenities for staff will be of major importance in facilities where staff and physician recruitment are perennial issues.

A facility master plan presents a wonderful opportunity to revisit operating models and determine how best to serve customers. Could your organization move to a centralized customer service center or access center, which would include admitting, registration, scheduling, billing, financial counseling, guest relations, discharge planning, and a call center? Is there an opportunity to create an express testing service to consolidate high-volume, quick-turnaround diagnostics? Would a "fast track" in the emergency department improve customer satisfaction? Considering where and how services will be delivered in the future will help you avoid falling into the trap of planning facilities to support current processes and practices if these can and should be improved.

Service-line priorities should be considered with regard to space needed and future growth called for in business plans. Priority services need to be prominently placed where they will have high visibility and accessibility. With the resource constraints facing healthcare organizations today, it is important to keep an eye on strategic priorities. Few organizations can afford to be everything to everyone.

### Channeling the Consumer

Facility renewal and replacement can have a positive impact on your organization's quality ratings. Consumers have a difficult time judging the quality of their healthcare experiences on dimensions such as the expertise of staff, the clarity of imaging results, or the accuracy of lab testing. Instead, patients and families fall back on judging the appearance of your public spaces and staff, the service they receive, and the attitude of staff.

Excellent quality in the consumer's mind includes beautiful, modern, and comfortable spaces. Beyond state-of-the-art appearance, however, a facility master plan should incorporate ways to promote service excellence by enabling staff and physicians to meet and exceed customer service expectations. Patient privacy and safety are other factors that can be enhanced, even at the macro level of a master plan.

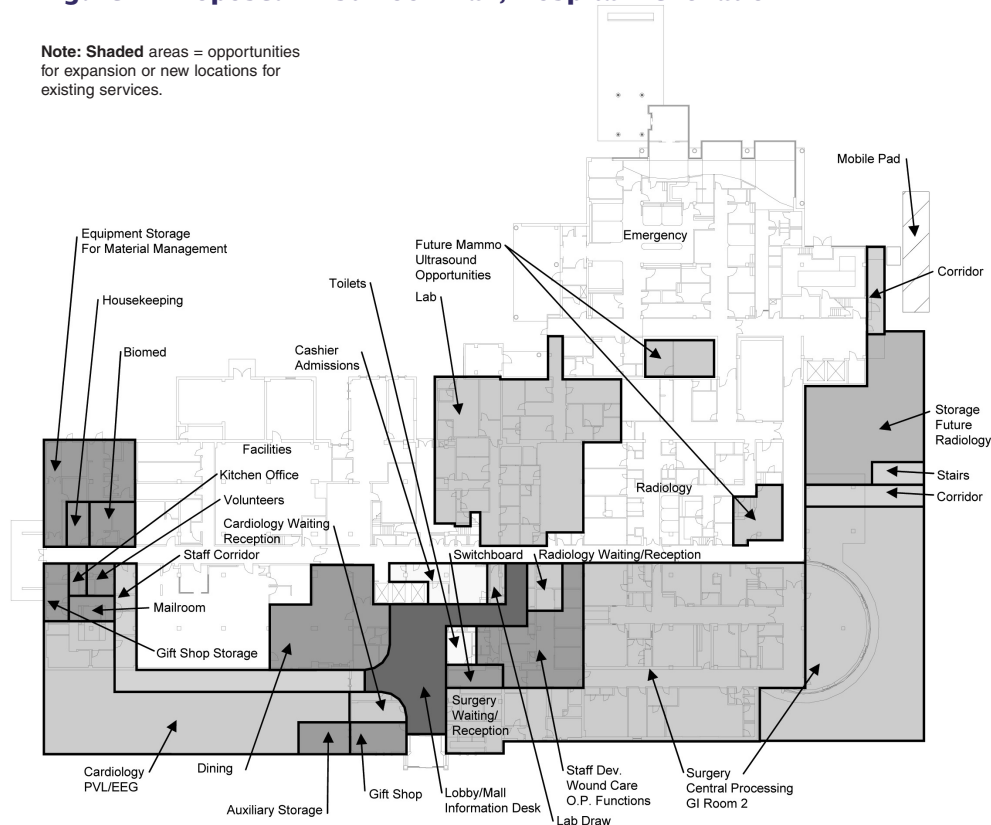
Marketers and planners can serve as the voice of the customer while presenting consumer research and customer satisfaction information. In some organizations, it may be appropriate for planning and marketing staff to conduct focus

groups prior to facility master planning to identify issues—such as noise, parking, or a shortage of private rooms—that need to be addressed in new facilities. Physician focus groups or surveys may reveal facility changes that are needed to enhance physicians' ability to practice efficiently, or may uncover technology or practice pattern changes that could affect utilization.


Later in the facility master planning process, marketing and planning staff can orchestrate focus-group testing of various

**Figure 2. Proposed First-Floor Plan, Hospital Renovation**

**Note:** Shaded areas = opportunities for expansion or new locations for existing services.



facility master plan options to ascertain stakeholder reaction. This step could be especially important if those options are a radical departure from the status quo.

Unfortunately, healthcare organizations sometimes still operate in silos. Facilities staff or the board committee overseeing planning and facilities may undertake a facility master plan in a vacuum, without the benefit of a current strategic plan or the input of internal strategists. That's a mistake. Planning and marketing professionals need to be sure they have a seat at the facility master planning table. The facility master plans that are crafted will be greatly enhanced by the knowledge, skills, and perspective you bring to the process. 

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