

Minutes
SUNY Downstate Medical Center
Council Meeting
Alumni Auditorium
May 20, 2013

Council Members Present

Dr. Monica Sweeney

Chair

Dr. Phillip Abramowitz

Dr. Randall Bloomfield (by phone)

Onyedikachukwu Momah

Douglas Pfeil

Dr. Constance Shames

Rev. Dr. Paul Smith (by phone)

Rev. Elgin Watkins

Council Members Absent

Ms. MaryAnne Yancey

Downstate Administration in Attendance

President Dr. John F. Williams

Astra Bain-Dowell

George Caralis

Alan Dzija

Dorothy Fyfe

Dr. Ian Taylor

Ellen Watson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The meeting was called to order, with Dr. Monica Sweeney presiding as Interim Council Chair. Minutes from the February 5, 2013 meeting were approved as submitted.

COUNCIL MEETING DISCUSSION

Dr. Williams opened the meeting by introducing Lora Lefebvre, SUNY Associate Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs, who explained that SUNY was in the process of responding to a legislative mandate

calling for SUNY's Chancellor to develop a Sustainability Plan for Downstate. Ms. Lefebvre noted it is critical that Downstate be saved: the medical center plays an essential role in training New York State's healthcare workforce, producing twice the number health professionals than Columbia and Cornell; it has the only School of Public Health in New York State focusing on immigrant and urban health; is a significant part of the healthcare pipeline; and it serves a community with great need and high levels of disparities. She explained that as the result of various pressures, Downstate's University Hospital—like hospitals across the country – is experiencing significant stress, and that much work is being done to address its challenges, at both the campus and SUNY-system levels. This includes bringing in a new management team and reviewing all elements that contribute to creating efficient operations. SUNY has also expressed confidence in Downstate by extending a \$75 million loan to help bridge operations until turnaround can be achieved.

Dr. Williams added that while an all-out effort has been directed at reducing Downstate's deficit, the process needs to be accelerated. This includes submitting and then implementing the Sustainability Plan, as mandated by legislation enacted at the end of March. He explained that a range of options have been reviewed; and that the objective of today's Council meeting was to seek suggestions from the Council as the Chancellor moves forward in finalizing the Plan. He noted that the Council meeting had been preceded in the morning by a Town Hall Meeting that gave the community and stakeholders an opportunity to express their opinions.

Dr. Sweeney then asked for comments from Council and audience members. Dr. Shames said that she sees a need to retrain staff, and to improve systems to enhance productivity and improve customer service. Reverend Dr. Paul Smith asked for a review of the next steps regarding LICH. Dr. Williams explained that under the temporary restraining order released by Judge Baynes, Downstate leadership was prohibited from discussing LICH; a copy of the restraining order would be sent to Council members for review. Dr. Lefebvre amplified Dr. Williams comments by explaining that while Downstate had withdrawn the closure plan for LICH submitted to the Department of Health, discussion about LICH's future were still restricted under the terms of the restraining order. She explained that SUNY and Downstate are taking steps that will enable broader discussion about the future of LICH. A request for information – a formal process to elicit responses from parties that may be interested in taking over LICH services – has been issued, and SUNY expects to be able to articulate a full sustainability vision. She also explained that the Sustainability Plan will only be operative if it is approved by both the Department of the Budget and the Department of Health.

Dr. Sweeney noted that so many individuals at LICH are leaving that closure may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Reverend Elgin Watkins urged that Downstate investigate options to create revenue, rather than simply cutting services. Among the possibilities he suggested were converting the 250 unused beds at LICH into assisted living or senior housing; pursuing additional grant and research funding streams; advocating for legislative changes that could contribute to making LICH financially viable; and replacing the value that had been pulled out of LICH by its former owner. Doug Pfeil asked if we were working in partnership with Kings County and investigating if we can offer services that it does not; Dr. Williams responded that there had been extensive discussion with HHC. Dr. Abramowitz asked for more briefings on the issues, and Dr. Sweeney asked if someone from Council could be at the table during discussions

on the Sustainability Plan. Dr. Williams responded that the meetings have been geographically disbursed, and those working on the plan are rarely in the same room but that any member of the Council is welcome to participate. Dr. Sweeny noted that we are all fighting for the same goal: to save UHB and its campuses. She asked what the next steps would be and urged that the root causes of how Downstate had arrived at its current crisis be reviewed – from payor reimbursement rates to negotiated contracts, and whatever other structural issues make it difficult for Downstate to successfully move forward.

Ms. Lefebvre ended the meeting by thanking Council and participants for attending. “I know that we will continue this discussion,” she said. “I ask for the Council’s support as we move ahead.”

Ms. Lefebvre’s presentation and information on the Sustainability Plan can be accessed at:
<http://www.suny.edu/hospitals/downstate/>

Archived video minutes of the May 20, 2013 meeting are available at:
<http://www.downstate.edu/ia/downstate-council.html>