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## EDITORIAL

# New hope for the city's homeless on Shattuck site

In the face of mythical alternative proposals, the state's plan offers a real solution.

By **The Editorial Board** Updated May 29, 2021, 4:00 a.m.



Shattuck Hospital in Boston's Franklin Park. The state is at odds with advocates about what should become of the site of the soon-to-be-demolished facility. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

For decades, the Lemuel Shattuck Hospital has provided health care to the state's most

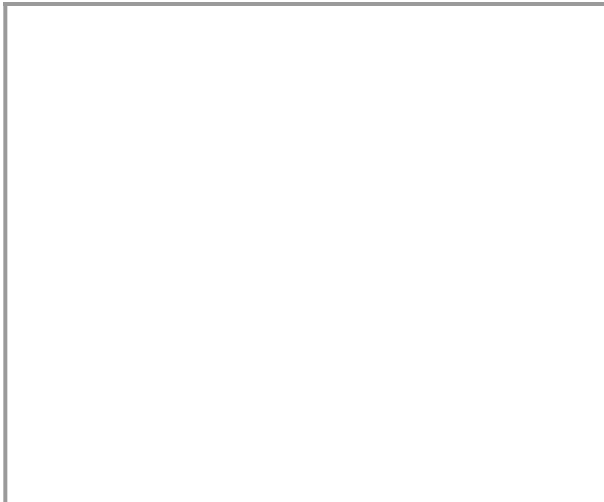
vulnerable patients — the poor, the homeless, and prison inmates spending their last days in hospice care. It has been for most a hospital of last resort.

But the aging facility is too costly to repair or rebuild, a relic of a bygone era in public health on a 13-acre site at the edge of Franklin Park that cries out to be better utilized.

State officials have a plan to make better use of that tract of land — to encourage the development of supportive housing on the site, better connect it to the adjoining greenspace, and still maintain the crucial outpatient services that have long been housed on the Shattuck campus.

But this has now become a case of no good deed goes unpunished, with opponents insisting that the land be returned to the already 500-acre Franklin Park. They're offering an alternative plan, but it's not a viable substitute.

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The state announced more than [three years ago](#) that it was simply not feasible to spend an estimated \$400 million to \$500 million to rebuild completely the nearly 70-year-old hospital near Forest Hills station. So its plan is to move its 260 acute-care and psychiatric beds to the Newton Pavilion at Boston Medical Center.

But the Shattuck site also accommodates a 120-bed homeless shelter and 65 outpatient beds providing treatment for people with substance use disorders, both run by the Pine

Street Inn, along with a methadone clinic and several other social service programs.

Those programs, critical to the city's safety net, would still be accommodated on-site under the redevelopment plan.

The state is proposing to offer a 99-year lease to a developer, possibly a nonprofit, for a plan that includes a minimum of 75 to 100 units of permanent supportive housing for previously homeless people, with such wraparound services as employment support and recovery coaches. It also mandates facilities for physical and behavioral health services and suggests the facilities might also offer vocational services or a community kitchen or food pantry.

But the goal, according to the [state draft planning document](#), is also to “integrate [the] Shattuck campus with Franklin Park,” incorporate more green and open space, improve paths for bikes and pedestrians and access to transit.

You'd never know that from listening to [opponents](#), who simply want the parcel restored as green space and the rest of the services currently offered there assigned to some mythical campus at what is now the MBTA's Arborway bus yard.

There are two huge problems with that. First, the Shattuck land was transferred from the city to the state by statute in 1949 and “remains, statutorily deeded for the purposes of the Department of Public Health” and must continue to serve a public health function. Additionally, the MBTA “has no immediate plans to abandon the Arborway facility, which is critical to the delivery of bus service,” spokesman [Joe Pesaturo told the Globe](#), adding that the yard is home to 118 buses and is the only spot in the city that accommodates buses powered by compressed natural gas.

If the day comes when the MBTA does decide that the Arborway Yard is no longer needed, it certainly won't go begging as a site for affordable or mixed-use housing.

Meanwhile, the city's vulnerable populations deserve better than pie-in-the-sky solutions

— especially when the state plan calls for both services and for reknitting the Shattuck site with Franklin Park.

The city and the neighborhood *can* have it all. And by offering substance abuse services in a part of the city that isn't "Mass and Cass," the area around Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard, the plan also provides its own kind of equity.

The pandemic has only worsened the substance abuse crisis in this city, and solutions can't wait.

Acting Mayor Kim Janey has recently floated the idea of rebuilding a ["recovery campus" at Long Island](#) and using ferries while the city ponders a replacement for the bridge that was torn down in 2014, when it was deemed unsafe. The island was a site for both shelter services and addiction treatment back then.

Janey acknowledged at a recent news conference that "we need to make sure the island is self-sustaining, in terms of its ability to respond should there be a crisis on the island." But the idea certainly deserves consideration as a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

The Shattuck site provides yet another option — one that can be phased in over time and still serve the thousands of people who each year depend on the services offered there, plus providing housing for those desperately in need.

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