## St. Charles Hospital in Suffolk County Plans $5.7M ED Expansion

St. Charles Hospital, which is in Port Jefferson and is part of the Catholic Health system, filed plans last week to expand its emergency department using a $4 million grant from the state.

The $5.7 million expansion project was prompted by "pure need," said Jim O'Connor, president of St. Charles as well as St. Catherine of Siena Hospital in Smithtown.

St. Charles' emergency department was laid out in 1997, when patient needs were different, O'Connor said. For many years hospital administrators discussed making St. Charles a rehab-only hospital, because Mather Hospital in Port Jefferson had a sufficient emergency department.

Then, when the pandemic hit, St. Charles needed a larger space to treat adults and kids and to separate Covid-19 patients. The department also treats chemical dependency detox patients who need their own space.

The emergency department, which currently treats more than 20,000 patients annually, will have the capacity to handle 3,000 to 4,000 more patients per year following the expansion, O'Connor said.

The project will take the department from about 7,000 square feet to about 11,000, O'Connor said. Plans also call for the addition of nine patient bays, which will allow for negative pressure and isolation areas and make patients more comfortable, hospital executives said.

"This is about making the 3-year-old and their family comfortable in the ED, without people so close to them," said Ron Weingartner, chief operating officer at St. Charles.

The hospital is primarily financing the project with a state Department of Health transformation grant that it received in 2019. The rest of the money is coming from the hospital or fundraising efforts, officials said.

O'Connor and Weingartner said they expect to break ground early next year and finish the project by early 2024.

Catholic Health operates six acute-care hospitals, three nursing homes, a home health service, hospice services and a network of physician practices across Long Island. —