

bedford county nursing home

Potential sale of Bedford County Nursing Home sparks concern

Shannon Kelly

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The Bedford County Nursing Home is shown in July 2019. Earlier this week, Bedford County posted notice of a special-called meeting Monday evening for a public hearing regarding the potential sale of property "encompassing the Bedford County Nursing Home."

Justin Faulconer

Some members of the Bedford County community are voicing concerns with the prospect the county-run nursing home could be sold, saying they were blindsided by the announcement and are worried their loved ones' quality of care could be adversely affected.

Earlier this week, Bedford County posted notice of a special-called meeting Monday evening for a public hearing regarding the potential sale of property "encompassing the Bedford County Nursing Home."

Originally established as the County Poor Farm in 1831, the Bedford County Nursing Home in the Falling Creek complex at 1229 County Farm Road has a long local history as a publicly-owned institution.

Nursing home operations are overseen by Bedford County officials, who approve budgets and payroll, proposed projects or hires, and other operating matters.

Bedford County public information officer Shelley Basinger confirmed Monday's public hearing is regarding potential sale of the nursing home, though she said Bedford County staff want to emphasize this does not mean a sale is a "done deal."

Basinger said county officials will not conduct media interviews till after Monday night's meeting.

A statement from Bedford County's public information office said Bedford County is considering selling to privately-owned Roanoke-based American HealthCare LLC, operator of Heritage Hall Healthcare and Rehabilitation Centers, "due to its positive reputation in the region, similar business model in terms of payer mix with Medicaid residents and focus on providing care in rural areas."

The statement said American HealthCare's company culture "aligns well with Bedford County's."

"With the ever-increasing regulatory environment surrounding nursing homes, the responsibility to make wise decisions in this area is best addressed by industry experts who specialize in healthcare compliance, rather than local government officials who do not have this expertise. This has always been a challenge, but the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced the Board's curiosity to explore other options," the county statement said. "The healthcare employee COVID-19 vaccine mandate, as reaffirmed by the United States Supreme Court, is contrary to the positions of all Board members and has further complicated uniformity with how employees are treated across all departments of County government."

American HealthCare representatives could not be reached for comment Friday.

Some nursing home staff members and family members who have loved ones living at the home said they were first notified of the development this week, seven days or less prior to the special called public hearing.

Primary concerns shared by staff and family members who spoke to The News & Advance included potential deterioration in the quality of care residents receive by transitioning from locally overseen public care to a privately owned for-profit company, and what staff and family members feel is a lack of transparency from their local leadership.

Nursing home staff said they were first notified of the potential sale Monday, just one week prior to the public hearing where the board of supervisors will vote on whether or not to approve selling the facility to American HealthCare.

Bill Vickery, a registered nurse who works at the Bedford County Nursing Home after 18 years working at Oakwood Health and Rehabilitation Center in Bedford, said he thinks selling the facility would be "a disaster."

Having worked at other nursing home facilities, including in an administrative capacity, Vickery said he is worried a for-profit company would make staffing cuts, which in turn could negatively affect the quality of care offered to residents.

Despite being a smaller organization, Vickery said, the Bedford County Nursing Home has four activities staff, a staff education nurse and an infection control nurse, which is an aspect he likes about the current model.

"A for-profit company, no matter how good-intentioned they are, they're not going to provide that same level. It's just the way it is," Vickery said.

Noting a high trend of nursing homes being sold to other companies during the past several years, Vickery said he was concerned if a sale goes through, the Bedford County facility could get sucked into that trend.

"It might be, yes, maybe the initial company is a good company. But you don't know; they're not bound to not sell it to the next company. Once it's out of your hands, you've lost control," he said.

Family members of county nursing home residents said they were not notified of the development until Wednesday, giving only five days' notice of the public hearing that will decide the fate of the place their loved ones live.

Julie Stanley's 98-year-old mother has lived at the Bedford County Nursing Home since 2018.

"We wouldn't want any other place for her," Stanley said.

She appreciates the many activities provided for residents and said staff have been "more than outstanding," showing compassion and care. Stanley fears the quality of care would deteriorate if the facility is sold to a private company.

Coming from a career working for Virginia government health care-related departments and closely with Medicaid providers, Stanley said she has seen what can happen when a nursing home facility is privatized.

"I have long understood that that is publicly not the best thing to happen to a nursing home, in terms of quality of care of the residents," she said. "The current nursing home structure operated by the county is completely accountable to the board, and the citizens and Bedford County, and that accountability will not be there anymore."

Five days' notice of a potential sale of her mother's nursing home, with little information about why this is happening, seemed "unconscionable," Stanley said.

Tracey Jamerson, of Bedford, said her 81-year-old mother has lived in the county nursing home since February, finally getting in after being on the waiting list since last October. With limited options for those on Medicaid or Medicare, the Bedford County Nursing Home was one of the best available options — but Jamerson said she was impressed with the facility for other reasons upon visiting compared with some alternative places she had looked into, from quality of care to upkeep of the facility.

"It was like a breath of fresh air when I went up there and toured," Jamerson said.

Jamerson likewise worries about losing the quality of care and a community environment for nursing home residents if Bedford County gives up oversight of the nursing home. Having heard stories of how residents in some nursing homes owned by private, for-profit companies can end up in overcrowded, neglectful, otherwise negative situations, Jamerson said she is concerned a lack of local oversight and accountability by the county through public care could result in similar problems, especially if a new owner decides to do things like make staffing cuts.

"I think that this is a rare gem, and it needs to be preserved. I don't think privatizing it is going to be good for the patients or the staff," Jamerson said. "I hate to see it, after I've waited this long to get her [my mom] in there, finally get her in there and get her settled, and then to hear this."

Jamerson and Stanley both said they heard about the public hearing from the nursing home, not from the county offices.

Nursing home staff and resident family members encouraged the public to attend the public hearing at 7 p.m. Monday at the Bedford County administration building on 122 East Main St., Bedford, or contact their supervisors to voice their input.

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Company withdraws offer to buy Bedford County Nursing Home

Shannon Kelly
Apr 19, 2022



The Bedford County Nursing Home is pictured in this file photo. In a work session Monday, the Bedford County Board of Supervisors discussed ideas for the creation, structure and bylaws to form a nursing home advisory committee.
Kendall Warner, The News & Advance file photo

BEDFORD — After a week of public outcry in response to the potential sale of the Bedford County Nursing Home to a private, for-profit company, Bedford County Administrator Robert Hiss announced at a special-called public hearing Monday night that the company withdrew its offer to buy the nursing home earlier Monday afternoon.

The audience of dozens of nursing home workers, family members of residents and general public erupted in cheers after hearing the offer was withdrawn.

Roanoke-based American HealthCare LLC had made an offer to buy the Bedford County Nursing Home. Nursing home workers were informed of the potential sale April 11, just one week prior to the public hearing, and family members were not notified until April 13, they said, resulting in many feeling blindsided by their local leaders.

The board of supervisors and county administration are responsible for overseeing the nursing home operations, approving things like budgets and new hires, and keeping up the facility grounds. The Bedford County Nursing Home was the only one in Virginia still operating in this manner, Hiss said.

In a statement from Bedford County's public information office last week, which Hiss reiterated points from during Monday's meeting, top reasons for the decision to sell the facility included the board's feeling its members were not nursing home

administrators; increasingly tight, complex and changing regulations in the nursing home industry were difficult to keep up with; and the COVID-19 vaccination mandate for health care workers went against board members' beliefs and values on personal liberty. The statement said American HealthCare's company values and mission aligned well with what county officials and board members sought in a potential buyer.

Dozens of community members packed the Bedford County administration building Monday night to speak against the sale of the nursing home, while others sent emails for the record if they could not attend in person.

Residents' family members and employees alike shared the overarching concerns the quality of care offered at the home would deteriorate due to profit-oriented goals of a private company, and consternation over the short notice of the potential sale and general lack of transparency from their local leadership.

More than 20 people spoke, and many of the speakers shared the stories of awful experiences their loved ones endured in private nursing homes prior to coming to the Bedford County Nursing Home, recounting how their parents or relatives were left sitting in their own filth; were forgotten on the toilet for hours; or suffered general neglect and lack of compassion. All these speakers said the care from staff at the Bedford County Nursing Home is above and beyond what they could have hoped for. This publicly-operated nursing home was life-changing, offering unparalleled care and compassion, they all agreed.

Nursing home workers offered insights gained from working at private nursing homes before coming to the county's nursing home. All said the quality of care offered was vastly different, mainly because a private company has profit-oriented goals. Several of them witnessed some of the squalor residents' family members spoke of.

Terri Wilkerson, who said she worked at the Bedford County Nursing Home for 22 years of her career in the field, said she also served in an administrative capacity in a privately-owned company.

"I have also worked in a private sector nursing home. I can assure you that care is not the top priority," she said. "I can tell you many times, I walked out on the floor and had to collect supplies, cut staff out, in order to meet the demands for profit. That is not what you want for Bedford County Nursing Home, or any nursing home located in Bedford County."

Richard Rogers, who said he is nearly 83, told the board he has told his wife that should anything happen to require he go into assisted living, he wanted to go to the Bedford County Nursing Home due to its excellent reputation.

"Why would we want to get rid of something that is helping out community?" Rogers asked.

In response to questions on transparency, Hiss said when striking deals and negotiating business matters in the private sector, public meetings are not required. The only requirement was a public hearing, such as the one held Monday night. He said the board and administration consulted with legal professionals and others throughout the process of seeking and identifying an ideal buyer. After shortlisting potential buyers to five companies, four submitted offers and were interviewed. Hiss said American HealthCare "emerged as the top candidate" based on criteria Bedford County officials had established for potential buyers.

District 4 Supervisor and board chair John Sharp said the catalyst in pushing to sell the nursing home was his opposition to mandating the COVID-19 vaccination for employees.

Heather McDonald, whose mother resides at the county nursing home, pointed out due to federal mandate, health care workers will be required to have the vaccine no matter who they work for.

“All of these employees, whether they work at Bedford County Nursing Home or some other place, if they’re health care employees, they’re going to have to have the vaccine. Whether you save them from it or not, it’s not going to save them, because that is their career. If somebody else comes in, they’re going to make them have the vaccine,” she said.

District 1 Supervisor Mickey Johnson said he was opposed to the county selling the nursing home. Although he said he did not have answers as to how the local government bodies could better manage the facility at the immediate moment, he said, “I do have a heart for it.”

District 3 Supervisor Charla Bansley said she grew up visiting many nursing homes in the area due to involvement with church ministries, and agreed with speakers the Bedford County Nursing Home’s environment was something rare and special.

“We do have a treasure. I have to agree with that,” she said.

District 7 Supervisor Tammy Parker thanked speakers for attending and also thanked the county nursing home staff for providing such an outstanding living situation, based on client testimony.

District 5 Supervisor Tommy Scott said the board was not “trying to pull anything on anybody,” or make a “shady” deal. He said closed meetings were necessary because there were “so many parties involved” in the process.

“I heard a lot of comments tonight that I wasn’t aware of, and I have to take all that into consideration,” Scott said. “We listened tonight, and I think we heard.”

Supervisors and county staff did not say they wouldn’t consider the sale of the county nursing home in the future, but for the time being, the facility remains in local government hands. No discussion occurred about whether or not to continue looking into selling it.

District 2 Supervisor Edgar Tuck encouraged citizens to offer constructive suggestions on how to help more effectively manage having a county-operated nursing home, to help navigate the ongoing challenges that arise, particularly in regard to tightening and complex industry regulations and staffing issues. This way, the county nursing home could remain the way it currently operates.

Many speakers said they would be glad to work toward finding solutions together to keep the Bedford County Nursing Home operating as it currently does, raising the idea of forming a committee that includes industry professionals or creating internships within the nursing home to help fill the staffing gap while also benefiting up-and-coming workers in the field.

“If you truly do want ideas, then I’m willing to be a part of that conversation,” said Terri Lamb, who said she works as a controller for a large company in Lynchburg and whose mother lives at the Bedford County Nursing Home.

Bedford supervisors vote to keep operating Bedford County Nursing Home as public facility

Shannon Kelly

Apr 26, 2022



The Bedford County Nursing Home is seen on Tuesday, April 19, 2022.

Photo by Kendall Warner, The News & Advance

BEDFORD — The Bedford County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution Monday “to continue to operate the Bedford County Nursing Home as a county-managed facility.”

The move comes after public outcry against the potential sale of the Bedford County Nursing Home to a private, for-profit company.

At a special-called public hearing April 18, more than 20 Bedford County residents signed up to speak against such a move. During the public hearing, Bedford County Administrator Robert Hiss announced the potential buyer, Roanoke-based American HealthCare LLC, had rescinded its offer earlier that afternoon.

The resolution adopted Monday reads, in part, “... after the potential buyer withdrawing their offer and considering the public comments, it is in the best interest to not sell the nursing home.”

It was resolved for the county “to continue to maintain the Nursing Home operations in a professional, caring, and efficient manner.”

At the April 18 public hearing, speakers expressed their concern the care their loved ones receive at the county-operated nursing home might worsen under a profit-oriented company, and described what felt to many like a lack of transparency from

local leadership about the potential sale, causing numerous Bedford County residents to feel blindsided.

Nursing home industry and health care professionals, nursing home residents' family members and members of the general public said the nursing home was a "gem" and the county should continue to operate it as it had since its founding as the County Poor Farm in 1831.

District 2 Supervisor Edgar Tuck told the audience during the April 18 public hearing if everyone wanted the nursing home to continue operating as a county-run facility, the board could use suggestions on how to better manage overseeing such a facility.

Multiple attendees offered on the spot to help advise or establish a committee that could aid in finding solutions.

On Monday, the board discussed this idea of a committee to help manage nursing home operations and relieve some of the burden on them, talking about getting industry professionals on board to offer their expertise. No final decisions were made regarding such a committee, but conversations will continue in the future.

"This is why we have public hearings. The board received impactful comments from the community and that feedback was important to them in their decision-making process. They listened and processed what they heard, ultimately making the decision to keep the nursing home operating as a county department," Hiss said.

Part of the county's reasoning for looking to sell the nursing home, Bedford County officials said in a statement April 14, was because county supervisors were not nursing home administrators, and the industry was growing increasingly complex and stringent in its regulations.

Another reason the board considered selling the county nursing home, the statement said, was the COVID-19 vaccination mandate for the workers there. Such a mandate went against board members' values and beliefs on personal liberties, the statement said. District 4 supervisor and board chair John Sharp said publicly April 18 this particular detail was a catalyst in his decision to favor selling the nursing home.

A closed session regarding the Bedford County Nursing Home initially had been scheduled on Monday's meeting agenda, but was canceled in favor of adopting the resolution to maintain county operation of the facility.

The county nursing home has a wait list, and due to staffing shortages, Bedford County officials said it currently is operating at two-thirds capacity. The nursing home seeks more employees, particularly LPNs and CNAs. A sign-on bonus incentive was approved several weeks ago by the board of supervisors to support the ongoing hiring efforts.