

A new vision for NH's veterans and military community

Maureen Beauregard

Guest Columnist

New Hampshire has one of the nation's largest per capita populations of veterans. Since 2007, Easterseals NH has provided a wide variety of services to more than 9,000 veterans, military members, and their families through our Veterans Count program. We've learned a lot along the way, and with new research, a new partnership with the state, and with your help, we are embarking on an unprecedented effort to expand our commitment to the military community unlike anything achieved in New Hampshire.

Last year, the State of New Hampshire awarded Easterseals NH \$23 million to develop a campus for military members and their families at our underutilized 15-acre campus in Franklin. It is a humbling investment in our non-profit, and we are honored to bring to life the vision of a campus that will provide enhanced care to our veterans and their loved ones.

In order to bring forth the first-of-its-kind military and veterans' community in the Granite State, we committed to seeking robust and thorough feedback from the community. Easterseals NH created a Campus Taskforce to provide insight and expertise and solicit input from subject matter experts on developing a financially sustainable and impactful campus for service members, veterans, and their families.

Over nine months, the Campus Task-



Easterseals NH held a press conference to showcase design plans, created by PROCON, for its new military and veterans campus to be developed in Franklin. Pictured from left to right are speakers from the event, John Stebbins, Managing Director, PROCON; Andy MacWilliam, Chair of the Board of Easterseals NH; Maureen Beauregard, President & CEO, Easterseals NH; Commissioner Taylor Caswell, NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs; Commissioner David Mikolaities, NH Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; and Michael Salter, Veterans Count Volunteer, Easterseals NH. PROVIDED

force attended local and regional site visits of high-quality military and veteran programs; conducted interviews and outreach with state officials, nonprofits, and other providers; sent surveys to providers and members of the military and veteran community; led discussions with local officials from Franklin; identified a construction design and

build partner; and zeroed-in on exactly what needs the campus would fill.

Here's what we learned:

- 90+ percent of respondents to the provider survey expressed an interest in collaborating in offering services on the campus;

- Top needs of active military members and veterans include mental health services, awareness and navigation of services, care coordination, and housing support and stabilization;

- Top needs identified for caregivers and families of service members and veterans include respite and support groups; social events, and child care;

- Top three amenities offered on the site suggested by respondents include trails, pool, and barn.

Based on this feedback, we developed a vision for the campus we believe will meet needs through a whole new approach to veterans care:

- Affordable Housing: Provide 30 fully accessible rental housing apartments for veterans and assist in the creation of a care plan, engage residents in work and volunteerism, and offer peer and social offerings on campus to build community.

- Hub of services: Integrate care coordination with a variety of providers to streamline recovery and access to services.

- Therapeutic Services: Offer therapeutic recreational and creative opportunities that span equine therapy, service dog programming and training, accessible paths throughout campus,

dedicated space for outdoor music and performance activities, provide space for art therapy, build a playground with accessible features, and other traditional fitness and wellness opportunities.

- Retreat Center : Offer space for respite overnights and group meeting areas.

- Community Engagement: Offer grassroots, skill-based programming, engage local businesses, organizations, and individuals in supporting the project financially and through volunteerism

Construction begins in September. It will be developed in stages, over several years, based on our ability to raise the needed funds to complete all aspects of the campus. The first phase will focus on affordable housing, the retreat center, and hub of services, anticipated to be completed by December 2024.

In order for the campus to be truly successful, we need the larger community to spread the word about the campus, follow its development, and financially participate in making this a true center of excellence to serve those who served.

A full report of our community engagement process and results can be found on our website at www.eastersealsnh.org/military-veterans-campus. We invite you to join us in this mission of compassion for our veterans.

Maureen Beauregard is president and CEO of Easterseals NH, VT, and Farnum. This column first appeared in New Hampshire Bulletin.