TOPIC FOR TUESDAY, JULY 2, 2019:
Is it really possible for hospitals to play a role in revitalizing downtown areas? Will a medical center in Downtown Utica help to improve the health of those living in and around the City?

The answer is yes to both questions.

First, let’s look at the economic contributions of hospitals overall. As reported here before, hospitals and health systems like MVHS play a major role in both the economic health and vitality of cities. For example, in our region, MVHS is one of the largest employers and spends more than $286 million in payroll each year and $113 million in tax dollars are generated by MVHS spending and payroll. In total, MVHS generates $863 million in economic activity for our region. The total amount of MVHS’s direct economic contribution increases each year – and we expect that to continue in the new Downtown Utica location.

In many cities across the country, hospitals act as anchor institutions for the City’s economy and many of these hospitals and health systems are making major investments in their downtown locations. A modern medical center in downtown Utica will be visible to all people who come into or travel by this community, visibly showing growth and development – both welcoming signs to this community.

We’ve already addressed the impact that the new medical center had in the downtown area of Worcester, Massachusetts. Many of you may have been through Buffalo. The medical center in Erie, Pennsylvania, is another example of healthcare revitalizing city centers.

In Utica, a great deal of investment – in hotels, apartments and markets – has already been made in anticipation of the MVHS regional medical center coming downtown. We are confident that this investment will continue as new physicians as well as our current healthcare providers and employees move to the downtown area to be closer to the new medical center.

There are many people who speculate that a health system like MVHS, which is not-for-profit and tax-exempt, is disconnected from small business and community development. But, it’s important to keep in mind that the missions and bottom lines of hospitals tie them to their respective communities. More than other industries, hospitals and health systems have the ability and incentive to leverage resources for community revitalization.

How will this help the community’s health? The healthcare system is changing and there is far greater focus on access to care and preventive services, particularly among more vulnerable populations. MVHS has a strong and growing population health management department and is expanding community outreach and screenings with community partners and organizations in Downtown Utica. This enables us to not only address our community’s health and medical needs, it gives us the opportunity to work with others to address socioeconomic issues and the social determinants of health (e.g., housing, poverty, literacy) in our community that impact overall health and wellness – this is especially true for preventing or reducing the incidence of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease, which are significant health problems in our region.

Why are we still talking about this? The new medical center will be built in downtown Utica. What have been empty lots, many empty buildings and a struggling area will become a vibrant destination point in this community. We all should be celebrating this once in a lifetime opportunity for a community that is so deserving of a state-of-the-art medical center.