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Landscape architecture is experiencing a resurgence in healthcare development projects - by William Fleming

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Wow, what a year 2017 has been here in New England! William Fleming Associates (WFA) has been fortunate enough to work with many great clients, and some of the best commercial developers/healthcare providers throughout New England. As with many professions, landscape architecture is experiencing a resurgence in healthcare development projects because of our client's needs to meet a new goal – a “healthy” goal. WFA has been a part of this profession for over 30 years, and no other time has been seen as so challenging as the upcoming problems we are facing.

Consumers are more educated on environmental/health related issues and are taking them more seriously. These “health-centric” values will be important as the national merchants are becoming more and more health conscience to match this goal. Our growth over the past decade along with the economic downturn has put tremendous pressure on our healthcare systems in both suburban and rural settings. To develop these “health-centric” centers for commerce in these underdeveloped areas we constructed the infrastructure to service these new locations of human activity. Incrementally our clients have financed many necessary city/town improvements from sewer, water, traffic and addressed neighborhood problems including an increased tax base!

With the economy on the uptick, healthcare and retail are now merging together in communities throughout New England. Healthcare/retail organizations are collaborating to improve the patient experience and population's health, not only by embracing preventive care and value engineering measures, but also by creating healthcare environments that resemble retail experiences.

Today's healthcare providers are reaching deeper than ever into rural communities, luring consumers with convenient care into a smaller, less expensive outpatient footprint to reduce costs for the end user. In turn, retailers in the commercial markets are capitalizing on an opportunity to provide healthcare services in the same space their customers buy health-related products such as groceries and pharmaceuticals etc... Whether commercial retailers are aggressively pursuing these opportunities on their own, more are partnering with healthcare providers with the result being of a growing mix of healthcare and retail strategies in site selection, design elements and locations. Add

to this, the trend toward more and more national retail merchants setting up branded shops within healthcare campuses and healthcare spaces moving into former retail stores, the lines between healthcare and retail have become non-existent.

With that said, together with several of our new or recently completed successful healthcare projects, we have also witnessed the challenges that can occur on complex healthcare projects that have resulted in major delays and significant cost increases. This has highlighted the need for state governments and private sector providers to come together to consider alternative partnership approaches that provide value for money, shared risk management, and innovation in healthcare delivery.

The idea of healthcare as an institution is fading as today's healthcare consumers demand care and convenience that mimic their experience in commercial retail establishments. Facilities/providers that successfully bridge the gap between healthcare and retail will not only drive a medical care model that responds to how we live, but will create environments that are sources of health. Public/private delivery of infrastructure, retail and health services is not new to America, but there are increasing opportunities for healthcare providers to work more closely together with retail developers to create more innovative partnerships and integrated plans of site design.

In 2017 we have already seen healthcare/retail commercial partnerships beginning to aggregate. Our clients continue to explore this new market place and are identifying areas of opportunity every day. For WFA this niche of design work is just adding to our expanded portfolio of experience. William Fleming Associates has been fortunate enough to help many of our great clients and some of the best healthcare providers/commercial developers throughout New England to guide them through this current market, and will continue to do so!

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