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Background:

The current state of mental healthcare in the United States is a result of deinstitutionalization which occurred in the 1960s, combined with inadequate and under-funded community-based mental health care programs and the significant stigma that has historically been associated with the mental illness and substance abuse disorders. This has forced the criminal justice system and hospital emergency departments to be the “backstop” for people with serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and neither are well equipped to deal these crisis situations or manage these types of illnesses on an ongoing basis.

Louisiana, and St. Tammany Parish, are in a similar position as many communities across the country. Parish emergency departments experience ~2,160 annual visits related to behavioral health and the Parish jail reports ~65% of inmates report substance abuse disorders. As a result, St. Tammany Parish Government has been proactively pursuing opportunities to address the behavioral health needs of its community over the past several years:

- 2010: St. Tammany Parish Government formed a suicide crisis committee.
- 2011: Volunteers of America formed a Crisis Response Team supported by Parish Government.
- 2012: Southeast Louisiana Hospital closed; President Pat Brister directs the formation of the St. Tammany Parish Behavioral Health Task Force (BHTF) in response to hospital closure and increased demands for behavioral health resources.
- 2013-14: BHTF collaborates with Louisiana Public Health Institute and the National Council for a study of the current state of behavioral health in the Parish and provide recommendations for increased access and coordination of care.
- 2015: St. Tammany Parish Government purchases Southeast Louisiana Hospital from the State of Louisiana. The Parish subsequently sold 34 acres encompassing the acute inpatient psychiatric hospital to Northlake Behavioral. Parish Government retained southern portion of the campus which it seeks to repurpose for services described below.
- 2016: St. Tammany Parish Government hires consultant, Kurt Salmon, to provide Safe Haven Master Plan and implementation strategies. See Master Plan https://media.wix.com/ugd/36ea00_bf0f72c969e04866934a50b362f805f1.pdf