

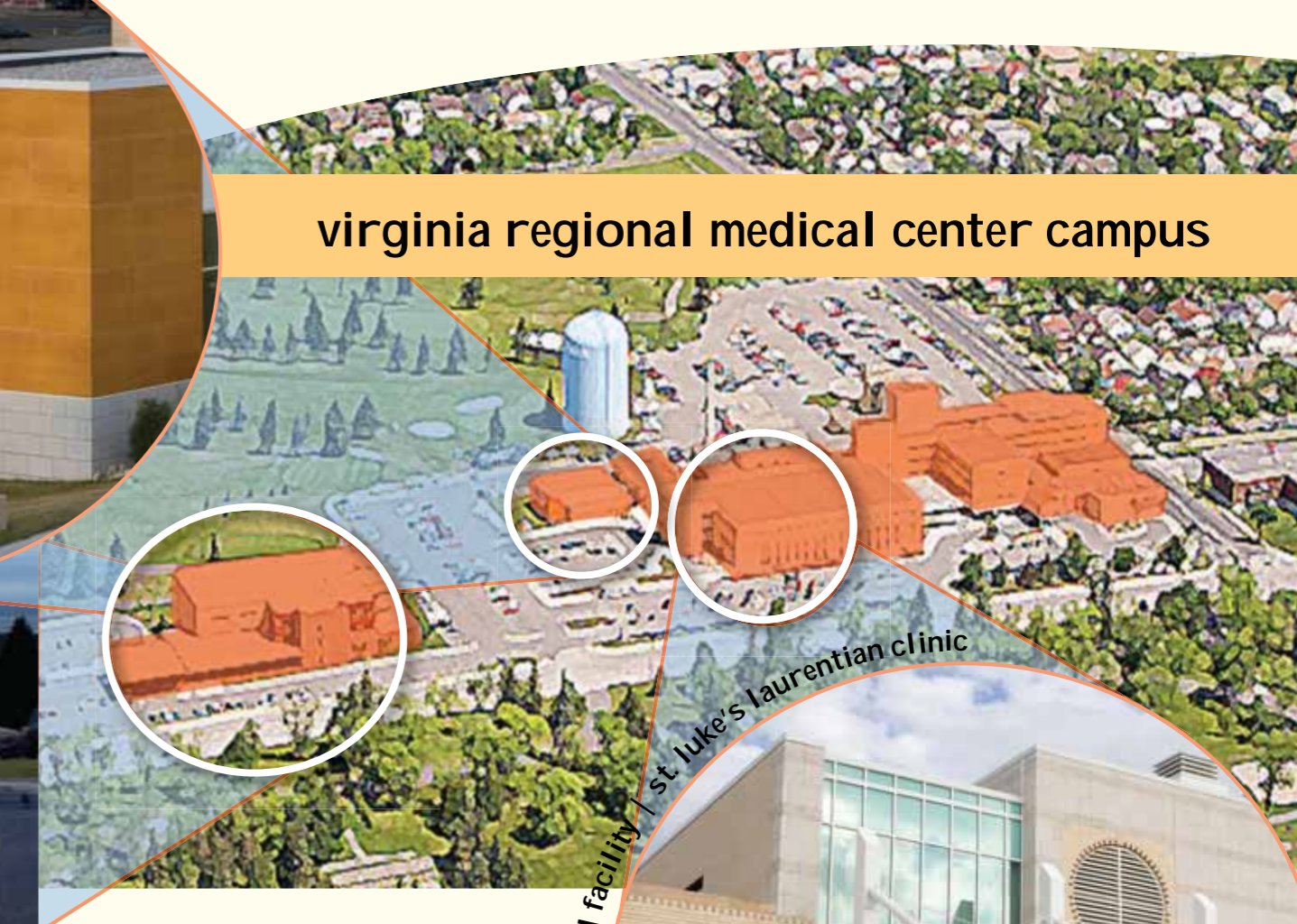
Three tips for strategic planning success



Iron Range rehabilitation center



virginia regional medical center campus



st. luke's laurentian clinic

virginia regional medical facility



Needs of the community were identified in a group setting, so the strategic plan had high buy-in and broad ownership.

In 1998, administrators from Virginia Regional Medical Center (VRMC) recognized a growing need for additional health care options in their service area. They contacted DSGW Architects for assistance and began work on a strategic plan that would eventually transform health care access in northeastern Minnesota. Over a ten-year period, the strategic plan expanded the VRMC from a stand-alone community hospital to a regional health care campus with multiple medical providers.

DSGW partners John Gerzina and Rebecca Lewis credit clear and frequent communication as being vital to the success of the VRMC strategic plan. Based on their professional experience with the project, they share the following tips:

Find common ground

"With any strategic plan, project stakeholders will have different needs and expectations," says Gerzina. "For the VRMC strategic plan, which involved a publicly owned hospital, we met with interested parties early and often. We didn't ask them how the hospital should expand. Instead, we identified the needs of the community. Specifically, what health care resources is the community missing? This approach helped stakeholders share a common vision early."

By hosting ideation sessions with hospital administrators and community members, DSGW drafted several key strategic plan tenets that addressed participants' requests and expectations. This basic foundation helped keep the strategic plan on track. "Because the needs of the community were identified in a group setting, the strategic plan had high buy-in and broad ownership," says Gerzina.

Solicit input from employees

In addition to the community, the group most affected by change is employees. Handled properly, concerns are minimized, and their feedback can help improve a plan.

"The DSGW strategic planning process includes meetings with employees," explains Lewis. "For the VRMC strategic plan, we used their work experiences as a sounding board to validate our designs."

Working with VRMC administrators, DSGW also discussed employee expectations. "With any major building project, employees may feel anxiety," says Lewis. "The key is to share with them exactly what's being done, how it's being done, and, most importantly, why it's being done."

Communicate the master plan

The strategic planning process must be communicated frequently. This was especially true for the VRMC strategic plan, because it involved a high level of scrutiny.

Since the VRMC hospital is community-owned, board meetings are open to the public. It wasn't unusual, therefore, to see coverage in the local newspaper. Instead of restricting information to the press, however, DSGW did the opposite and provided continuous updates to all interested parties. "The strategic planning process was very open," says Gerzina. "Our strategy was to present clear and in-depth information on a regular basis. It helped create trust between VRMC administrators and the community."

With the VRMC medical campus complete, area residents now benefit from care offered by St. Mary's/Duluth Clinic Health System, St. Luke's Laurentian Clinic, a medical arts building, the Iron Range Rehabilitation Center, and a modern community hospital with dedicated helipad—all on one easy-to-access and convenient campus.