

## Arlington Chamber warns further delay on VHC expansion could send 'wrong message to businesses'



The Arlington Chamber of Commerce is urging the county board to approve Virginia Hospital Center's long-planned expansion project this week, saying further delay could send the wrong message to businesses seeking to relocate or expand in the Northern Virginia county.

Arlington Chamber President and CEO Kate Bates sent a letter to Arlington County Board members on Tuesday laying out the value of VHC to the community and the work it has undertaken in engaging the community in its plans to expand onto an adjacent county-owned parcel through a land-swap deal.

The project, more than three years in the making, was recently thrown into some doubt after the county's planning commission recommended deferral because of issues related to proposed building height, parking garage design and other elements.

"VHC has engaged in a lengthy community process, which has already been extended twice for a total of four months at the request of the county, delaying the project's start and raising its cost," Bates wrote in her letter.

Another deferral on the project will subject it to additional costs that "VHC would otherwise use to provide health care services to the Arlington community," Bates added. She also wrote that each delay puts off a day when Arlington's only hospital is able "to care for its patient load in a full and comfortable facility."

VHC has made several modifications to the project's design to address issues from the community and county staff, including cutting the height of the proposed parking garage. Bates said the reconfiguration of VHC's proposed new parking garage along N. Edison Street has added \$18.3 million to construction costs.

Bates also warned of what another delay might mean for Arlington's reputation.

"Beyond the immediate urgency of providing care for patients in Arlington, having a world-class hospital facility is essential for attracting and retaining businesses," Bates wrote.

“Businesses seek a comprehensive suite of community amenities in choosing where to locate: a hospital that can serve the full community’s health needs can be as important to that assessment as quality schools, a robust transportation network, and adequate workforce housing. Furthermore, the experience of additional costly delays for the development of a nonprofit hospital could send the wrong message to businesses looking to relocate or expand in Arlington.”

Board Chair Katie Cristol told the WBJ in an email on Monday the board is reviewing VHC's application, recommendations from county staff and public comments ahead of a meeting on Saturday, where it is expected to make a decision on VHC's proposal.