

The Right Note: Delaying the Hospital Expansion?

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The Arlington Planning Commission is recommending that the County Board delay consideration of the Virginia Hospital Center's planned expansion, due largely to pushback from neighbors.

Arlington's long history of community involvement is a good one. Taking neighborhood concerns into consideration, particularly when it comes to mitigating traffic volume around the hospital, is not without merit. The Planning Commission, however, wants to send the hospital back to the drawing board largely for aesthetics, asking that they move some of the taller buildings to a different location in the plans to create less of a "wall" between the hospital and the neighboring single family homes.

While the Metro corridor has a natural step down effect from large buildings into residential neighborhoods, the hospital has long been established in the middle of single family homes. And these neighbors moved into the area with the full knowledge that Arlington's only hospital was there.

Our population continues to grow as the County Board adds more density to our major corridors. In addition to impacts on schools, it means our healthcare needs will grow as well. Allowing the hospital to expand will add 101 beds to that capacity right here in our community and meet the needs for the next decade or so.



The hospital already adds upwards of \$50 million a year in community benefit, according to the Chamber of Commerce. The proposed expansion will add not only short-term construction jobs but permanent jobs for doctors, nurses, clinical professionals and many other support staff here in Arlington.

As the County Board knows from its own projects, construction delays add to construction costs. This is an important factor in favor of quick approval of this project, particularly in the face of healthcare costs that are already growing faster than inflation.

Virginia Hospital Center is an asset to Arlington. It is needed to meet our healthcare needs and it provides good jobs. That is why there is little doubt that the Board intends to ultimately approve this project, and almost just as certainly additional expansion will be needed in the future. With all of this in mind, they should move forward as quickly as they can rather than causing an extensive delay.