



September 18, 2018

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Dear Chair Cristol:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce to reiterate the Chamber's encouragement, first articulated in our letter dated July 23, that you approve the Virginia Hospital Center (VHC) site plan as submitted.

The Chamber strongly disagrees with the recommendation of the Planning Commission that the Board again defer its consideration of this site plan. Desiring to be a good partner and to serve the whole community, 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. Further deferral of this already-delayed project will impose additional financial and time costs that will redirect resources that VHC would otherwise use to provide health care services to the Arlington community. For this reason, the Chamber encourages the Board to approve the site plan application without further delay.

VHC provides vital services to the Arlington community. As Arlington's only hospital, VHC serves more than 115,000 Arlington residents—over half the county's population—every year. It is clearly our community's hospital of choice as 75% of Arlingtonians who require inpatient care receive it at VHC and 80% of residents who deliver babies do so at VHC. Arlington's reliance on VHC is growing rapidly as the county grows. Since its last expansion in 2004, VHC has seen a nearly 40% increase in patient admissions, 56% more emergency room visits, and over 70% more outpatient procedures performed.

The hospital also contributes over \$46M in community benefits annually, including services for patients referred from the Community Services Board (CSB). The Arlington Pediatric Center cares for more than 3,500 in-need children. VHC provides specialty care, laboratory services, pharmaceutical support, surgeries, and in-patient services to patients in the Arlington Free Clinic network. Moreover, VHC promotes healthy living for the entire Arlington community, including offering more than 6,000 free counseling sessions and support groups for cancer patients and survivors annually. VHC is essential to the health of our community, and a growing community requires a growing hospital to meet our needs.

VHC works to provide the best possible patient-centric care outcomes within the constraints of a very tight physical site. Still, desiring to be a good neighbor and community partner, VHC has worked with surrounding residents through an extensive community process dating back to February 2015 to mitigate as many concerns as possible. To date, VHC has made more than 100 modifications to the design of its application in an effort to address issues raised by County staff and community stakeholders. Participants from across the community discussed these modifications in six Site Plan Review Committee meetings. Moreover, to listen and to respond to neighbors' concerns, VHC went above and beyond the site plan review process, providing a walking tour of the site and participating in 37 community meetings with representatives of the three surrounding civic associations and neighboring homeowners associations.

Among the changes to VHC's initial application has been a major reconfiguration of the planned garage along N Edison Street, resulting in \$18.3 M in added construction costs. The new garage has reduced bulk by placing

42% of its parking underground and adding setbacks for above-grade levels, thus putting the highest elements over 200 feet from the nearest house. The updated garage has 350 fewer parking spaces than VHC believes it needs, a figure below both the zoning ordinance and industry standard, but which it will accept to reduce garage massing. VHC has expanded pedestrian connectivity through the site and to the neighboring community. It has lightened the façades of its structures and worked to step down into the neighboring community. VHC has been and will continue to be an attentive neighbor, and will do its best to work with its neighbors, consistent with patient-care outcomes as its highest priority.

Continued delays to the expansion of VHC cost the community through two channels. First, and most directly, delays raise the cost of construction. Already, VHC estimates that it has spent \$3M more than it would have had the site plan received approval in May, as originally planned. Further delays would raise construction costs yet higher at an estimated rate of \$1.5M per two months' delay, diverting funds that VHC otherwise could use for patient care. The second, more indirect but no less real, cost of delay is in limiting VHC's capacity to meet patient demand. Already, VHC often cares for more patients in a given day than its 350 beds can accommodate, resulting in delays and care being delivered in suboptimal locations within the hospital. VHC will need to add a minimum of 85 beds in five years and 130 beds over 15 years to serve the projected growth in Arlington's population. Each additional delay in the approval of the site plan application puts off the day when VHC will be able to care for its patient load in a full and comfortable facility. Absent a timely expansion of VHC to accommodate its patient-centric mission, the community as a whole will bear these costs.

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

For the continued health of the entire Arlington community and to serve our wellbeing as a location to live, work, and do business, the Chamber believes it is essential that the proposed expansion of Virginia Hospital Center move forward without delay. The Chamber therefore respectfully requests that the Board approve the VHC site plan application at its September 22 meeting so that this important project may proceed.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Bates". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: Arlington County Board members Christian Dorsey, Libby Garvey, John Vihstadt, and Erik Gutshall; and County Manager Mark Schwartz