

## The Record: Valley must grow

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The Record

HOSPITALS ARE places of healing. It is more than ironic then that The Valley Hospital's so-called "renewal" has cut deep wounds into the greater Ridgewood community.

The hospital wants to radically alter its existing 15-acre campus – creating new buildings that will accommodate single-patient rooms and larger state-of-the-art medical equipment and will allow the hospital to remain competitive.



**The Valley Hospital**

There is little dissent on the subject of Valley's need to modernize. There is little dissent over the value of single-patient rooms — beyond privacy and comfort, infections are reduced and patients fare better. There is little dissent that Valley should be allowed to renew, expand or renovate. The dissent is focused on how much, how long and how high.

In recent weeks, the debate has become volatile as the Ridgewood Planning Board moves closer to a vote — expected next week — on a change in the master plan that would permit the erection of 94-foot buildings on a site surrounded by homes and a middle school. Valley has proposed one such building.

Some of the volatility is Valley's fault. The hospital underestimated possible opposition to a construction project that could last seven years just for Phase One, as well as the legitimate concerns that a project of that length and size adjacent to a middle school may endanger students' health.

Opponents of the project want smaller structures. Valley has said this is the best possible use of its campus. Both sides can agree that anyone living near a hospital should expect that there will be periods of growth and, with it, construction. But we note that seven years' duration is more biblical than practical to people living near the Valley campus.

We have long believed that compromise is possible; that there is some way of changing the master plan to let Valley continue to be both an important health care center in the greater metropolitan area and a good Ridgewood neighbor. But as tempers flare and protests continue, compromise seems unlikely.

Valley's renewal has become highly politicized. On Monday, the Planning Board actually held a public hearing on Valley at the same time as the wake for one of the board's members, Anne Zusy, who was also a councilwoman. Surely, if we cannot ratchet down the Valley debate long enough to respect the dead, we have a problem.

We believe Valley must be allowed to grow. We believe the ultimate goals and objectives of the hospital are in the best interests of the community it serves. We are cautious about a change in the master plan that will limit Ridgewood's ability to regulate this project or future growth on the site and ensure that reasonable accommodations to its neighbors are made. But it is time for the Planning Board to let Valley proceed.

While The Record's editorial board works independently of its owners, we believe in full disclosure. We expect this from officials voting on issues; our readers have a right to expect this of us. Our publisher serves on Valley's President's Council, a voluntary board that has no role in shaping hospital policy.

We know our support of Valley's renewal will not be greeted with cheers by some in Ridgewood. We have heard those concerns; they are legitimate. We pledge to remain vigilant and hold Valley's feet to the fire if it abuses the zoning changes it now seeks.

In these final days before a vote, we urge hospital officials to be as forthcoming to the public as possible. We realize that if the Planning Board does not approve the plan change, it is probable the hospital will continue the fight. Neither the hospital nor Ridgewood will benefit from a protracted legal battle.

Valley must be allowed to grow — we believe there is consensus on that issue. If we all can agree on that, there must be a resolution that will enable a community hospital to heal the sick inside its doors and not open wounds outside them.

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