

July 17, 2020

Bloomington Hospital Reuse Committee
City Hall
401 N. Morton Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47404

Dear Mayor Hamilton,
Dear Senator Simpson,

We thank the Hospital Reuse Committee (HRC), master planner, and others for the work that has been done to date in the redevelopment process for the (current) IU Health Bloomington hospital site. The inclusivity that has allowed neighborhood and community groups and individual citizens to participate in this process is appreciated. We are aware that meetings are continuing with the HRC on July 27 and that the next Public Forum with master planner Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) is scheduled for August 6.

As Mayor Hamilton said in the first Public Forum held on June 16, 2020, this is the “project of the century” for Bloomington in terms of size of the site, scope of the planning process, and importance of hoped-for outcomes that demonstrate the values of our community. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic presents new uncertainties for our community – both near and long term. To plan now for an unclear post-pandemic future may cause us to miss the mark by a wide margin, forcing us to live with unhappy results for decades. We ask that the City delay the site planning process for the foreseeable future.

We believe that we as a community should acknowledge the changes that this pandemic may cause in how we approach this development site. Questions include this partial list of concerns:

- Housing density – how will the pandemic affect the desirability of an increased-density model?
- Post-pandemic housing models – separate entrances, alternation of front/back entries unit by unit?
- Shared spaces – indoor (shared hallways and entries) and outdoor (green gathering spaces, public forums or entertainment areas, etc.)?
- Commercial/retail, corporate, and shared office spaces – what are the lasting market impacts, in part for smaller tech and other start-ups, but also including well-documented challenges to larger traditional brick-and-mortar chains (Macy’s, Kohls, etc.)?

In addition, the current use of virtual town halls to approximate public discussions on this development limits the ability of our community members to be truly engaged. Meaningful discussions with responsive administration and planners happen in real time. The current system of submitting written questions by electronic channels is valuable, but cannot begin to replace the dynamics of in-person community meetings with the planners for rigorous, give-and-take exchanges of ideas. The virtual town halls are simplifying and flattening a process that needs true back-and-forth dialogue to be successful.

There is certainly time built into this schedule to pause the planning process. IU Health will likely not move until 2022. Demolition and site remediation will take months, perhaps a year. More immediately, in the next few weeks we expect the return of up to 45,000 IU students to our community with as-yet unforeseen health and living outcomes. Again, given so many short- and long-term variables, we reiterate our belief that this planning process should be placed on pause for the foreseeable future.

We look forward to your response before August 1st.

Respectfully,
Hopewell Group
McDoel Gardens Neighborhood Association
Prospect Hill Neighborhood Association