

November 23, 2008

Scottsdale council backs hospital towers plan

By Ari Cohn
Tribune

While newly elected Scottsdale City Council members responded favorably to the idea of allowing hospital towers up to 120 feet tall at Scottsdale Healthcare's Shea and Osborn campuses, hospital officials have no immediate plans to go forward with construction.

The local health care organization surveyed City Council candidates on the possibility in September.

Keith Jones, Scottsdale Healthcare spokesman, said all of the candidates indicated they would favor rezoning land at both the Shea campus, 9003 E. Shea Blvd., and the Osborn campus, 7400 E. Osborn Road, if hospital officials indicate expansions are needed.

Jones said the need for new hospital towers isn't likely to arise for 10 to 20 years.

"We do long-term campus planning. I think the thought was to see what the level of support would be if the need is there in the future," he said. "There is no immediate plan for adding height at either hospital."

Councilman Ron McCullagh, the top vote-getter in the Nov. 4 election, said any expansion would be conditioned on appropriately buffering the hospital from surrounding neighborhoods.

"It is something within reason subject to seeing exactly what it is they're proposing," McCullagh said. "They are a huge asset to this city."

Jones said the demand for more space is dependent on the number of hospital patients.

"It's always based on the need for additional volume. What we try to do is look ahead, to imagine if growth continues at 'x' pace," Jones said. "A lot can happen between now and then."

The candidates' potential support for hospital expansions does not mean Scottsdale Healthcare will move forward with a request to do so in the near future, he said.

"It's nice to have the candidates express support and acknowledge that there's a community benefit that hospitals provide," Jones said.

The company submitted preliminary rezoning applications for its Osborn campus to the city in July. The request calls for establishing a special campus district zoning on the 45-acre site to allow for expansions of the main hospital building, new medical office buildings, new hospital towers including one as high as 120 feet, and more parking.

Over the next three years the company hopes to build a 60-foot neurosciences office building at the southeast corner of Scottsdale Road and Second Street, a new surface parking lot, a new parking garage and a 75-foot east hospital tower, according to preliminary plans filed with the city.

The 120-foot, or 8-story, west hospital tower is slated to be built sometime after 2020. Today, the tallest building on the campus is the hospital itself at 75 feet.