

SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

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Hospital's height request makes sense

Scottsdale Healthcare's leaders made it official: They want to go up.

The hospital is asking the city for permission to build as high as 120 feet at its Osborn campus. The request should be a non-issue, but in a town that obsesses about height there's no telling what could happen.

The proposal for an eight-story patient tower is part of a larger request that would replace the four zoning designations that currently apply to the hospital with a "special campus" designation. This would allow Scottsdale Healthcare to put a 20-year redevelopment plan in place with some certainty.

With the land-locked campus having nowhere to go but up, height is central to the rezoning request. The hospital's current limit is 75 feet, which would remain along the perimeter. But the ceiling would rise to 120 feet — shorter than the 143-foot Waterfront towers —

in the center of the 44.6-acre site.

This makes sense. Hospitals work better moving patients vertically, rather than across distances.

But a number of requests for taller buildings have made sense, only to run afoul of intractable neighborhood opposition and City Council politics.

That should not happen with this request. For starters, this is not a commercial project. The hospital, a public good, does not gain the financial advantage from height that a condo or office project would. Scottsdale Healthcare, a non-profit organization, is not seeking greater profit. Rather, it is seeking to serve a growing population.

That may be why most anti-height candidates in last year's City Council election did not oppose taller buildings on the Osborn campus. The public benefit is that clear.

OUR VIEW



PETER CORBETT/THE REPUBLIC

Scottsdale Healthcare wants city approval to build as high as 120 feet at its Osborn campus. The building pictured is 75 feet high.

This should allay fears of those who worry approval of any height sets a precedent for the next project. There will be no other hospital downtown. There is unlikely to be any project that could claim to provide the same public benefit as Scottsdale Healthcare.

And there is this: Scottsdale Healthcare has stuck with downtown through thick and thin.

When many businesses were bailing out, the hospital stayed put. It expanded to new locations on Shea Boulevard and Thompson Peak Parkway, but

it never abandoned downtown. Scottsdale Healthcare has always been a lifeline — medically and economically.

So its request to go as high as 120 feet is not the work of some johnny-come-lately. It is an expansion of its commitment to the area.

As is the rest of the rezoning request, which also asks the city to abandon some alleyways.

This would allow the hospital to present a cohesive image, with a clearly designed traffic pattern, open space and pedestrian-friendly features. Instead of a jumble of buildings and narrow streets, the campus would have a clear rhyme and reason.

The request needs approval from the Planning Commission and City Council. There will be ample opportunity for any opponents to speak. But as rezoning and height requests go, this is likely the strongest case the council will ever see. It just makes sense.