

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT OUR LENOX HILL NEIGHBORHOOD, INC.
830 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10021

August 13, 2019

Council Member Keith Powers
4th District Office
211 East 43rd Street, Room 1205
New York, NY 10017

Sent via email

Dear Council Member Powers,

We are a group of neighbors in Lenox Hill who have come together to protect and promote the unique residential nature and historic character of our neighborhood. Our quality of life is immediately threatened by Northwell Health's announced plans to rebuild and redevelop Lenox Hill Hospital as a colossal, destination medical center and luxury residential condo, with complete disregard for the interests of our community and the Upper East Side Historic District that surrounds the hospital site. We will join with block associations, public interest and historic preservation organizations, and other neighbors who are opposing Northwell's overreaching redevelopment plan. Together, we represent many hundreds of residents in the 4th District of New York City.

We call on you and our other public officials to *reject* the multiple zoning changes and variances that Northwell needs to build the massive hospital buildings and oversized residential tower it has proposed, that are so out of scale and context with the Lenox Hill neighborhood. Expansion of the hospital and the addition of a residential tower on this scale will result in increased automobile traffic, excessive demands on public transportation, sidewalks that are crowded with more patients and hospital employees, and a higher volume of ambulances and truck deliveries, all of which will overwhelm the infrastructure and pose major safety and environmental risks in a dense residential neighborhood. If allowed to go forward, this project will destroy a part of New York City that the zoning code was intended to protect.

The massive scale of Northwell's proposed development will destroy a unique and historic neighborhood in New York City.

The 516-foot tall hospital tower facing Lexington, the 490-foot tall residential condo tower facing Park Avenue, and the more than 200-foot tall mid-block hospital building proposed by Northwell will dwarf other structures in the surrounding

area. The result will be a massing of buildings that is *more than double* the zoned limit and will cast shadows as far as Central Park. By more than doubling existing hospital space and emergency services, Northwell will significantly increase ambulance traffic, truck deliveries, patient visits, and demands on public transportation and parking, in a neighborhood that is already severely stressed by the current operations at Lenox Hill Hospital.

Northwell has not been a good neighbor since it acquired Lenox Hill Hospital. It has ramped up ambulance drop-offs on East 77th Street and truck deliveries on East 76th Street without regard for the impact on the neighborhood. As it is, both narrow side streets are closed to thru traffic multiple times a day and the subway stop at Lexington and 77th Street is jammed beyond capacity at rush hour. Semi-trailer trucks idle on Park Avenue for hours in the traffic lanes, waiting to turn onto East 76th Street, causing traffic jams from 72nd Street to 86th Street day and night. Complaints from neighbors whose peace and enjoyment of their homes have been disrupted, have gone unanswered by Northwell.

Allowing Northwell to increase the volume of emergencies, other patient visits and deliveries will exacerbate the problems with traffic flows and access to public transportation in the neighborhood, as well as result in increased air pollution, noise and other environmental risks. Northwell has recently taken over one of the few parking facilities in the neighborhood with the intention of converting it to medical offices, adding to the acute shortage of parking in an area that cannot bear increased automobile traffic. The Department of City Planning should require *independent* environmental, transportation and traffic studies to assess the impact of Northwell's complete redevelopment plan on the neighborhood's infrastructure and habitability.

Why should zoning changes be approved for Northwell, including to construct and profit from a luxury residential tower, when they would never be considered for a private developer?

A central component of Northwell's proposal is to build a 41-story luxury residential tower with 200 units on the southwest corner of its present block, facing Park Avenue, which it plans to sell off as a way to finance part of its redevelopment costs. Northwell needs a zoning change to construct a 490-foot tall tower on a site that is currently zoned for a maximum of 19 stories or 210 feet, whichever is less, and to change the use of the site from medical services to a residential condominium. The hospital site has been providing public medical services to the neighborhood since the German Hospital first moved to the location in 1885. No private developer would ever get the zoning changes to build such a massive residential tower in the Park Avenue corridor of the Upper East Side. Why should Northwell be given more favorable treatment to sell luxury apartments?

Because Northwell proposes to use part of its site for this residential project, it has to compensate by overbuilding the hospital structures in its plan, including a 51-story tower on Lexington Avenue and a mid-block building that both exceed the existing zoning limits. The proposed residential tower has a cascading effect on the project design, as the medical facilities must fit into a much smaller footprint, resulting in a proposal to overbuild the medical towers to almost 3 times the maximum allowed height. Why should the Lenox Hill neighborhood bear the adverse consequences of Northwell's desire to profit from selling luxury residential real estate?

The 8- to 10-year demolition and construction period proposed by Northwell will severely damage the neighborhood and create environmental and safety risks to the public.

The Northwell plan proposes to keep the hospital operating while the Lenox Hill Hospital site undergoes demolition and construction for an 8- to 10-year period. No residential community can survive 10 years of construction on this scale—just look at the severe damage done to local businesses and residential values on 2nd Avenue during the 10 years of subway construction. Our neighborhood is filled with schools, religious institutions, hotels and cultural attractions which have school children, residents and tourists visiting the community and walking on the sidewalks adjacent to Lenox Hill Hospital every day. The disruption and risks of a 10-year construction period—the noise, the dust, the sidewalk and traffic diversions and stoppages, the risks to public safety—are unacceptable and dangerous.

Northwell has never disclosed the full scope of its development plans which, taken together, will permanently alter the character of the Lenox Hill neighborhood.

Northwell has been opaque, if not deceitful, about its development plans for the entire Lenox Hill neighborhood, not just the existing Lenox Hill Hospital site. Northwell has bought, optioned and leased additional properties in the neighborhood and taken steps toward development, including the massive site on 3rd Avenue one block from the hospital where demolition is already underway. The Lenox Hill residents and public officials have never been informed about or had a chance to comment on the complete picture of Northwell's long-range plans. Representatives of Northwell have publicly denied that the plans for Lenox Hill Hospital and the 3rd Avenue site have any connection to one another, which is preposterous on its face. The negative impacts on the community will certainly be compounded by multiple development sites in close proximity that will permanently alter the neighborhood's character. The City Council and other authorities who are being asked to approve zoning changes would be irresponsible if they examine Northwell's plans piecemeal, without assessing the overall impact on the surrounding area.

Finally, we are not opposed to modernizing and improving Lenox Hill Hospital to better serve our community and the Upper East Side. Northwell has under-invested in the hospital facility over the years and the decline in the physical plant under its ownership has been visible to all. Moreover, there are historic buildings on the site, including original hospital buildings and a mid-19th century residential building, that Northwell has allowed to deteriorate but that could be restored and incorporated in an upgraded hospital, honoring Lenox Hill's architectural legacy. But any improvements must comply with the current zoning code, address community concerns, and minimize the negative impacts on life in the neighborhood.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and possible solutions with you and other public officials who will be faced with these decisions.

Sincerely yours,



Andrew D. Soussloff
Chairman and President

cc: Ms. Alida Camp, Chair
Community Board 8

Ms. Elizabeth Ashby, Co-Chair
Ms. Elaine M. Walsh, Co-Chair
Zoning and Development Committee
Community Board 8

Mr. David Helpern, Co-Chair
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