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July 20, 2025
UVPM: 19,000

As City Council Takes up Lenox Hill Hospital Overhaul, Critics Rally at City Hall

Some Lenox Hill residents insist that Northwell Health's plan to transform the Lenox Hill Hospital campus doesn't include enough improvements to justify the cost to the neighborhood. They rallied outside City Hall on July 16, before a NYC Council hearing on whether to approve the overhaul.



The New York City Council has less than 50 days to sign off on Northwell Health's desired \$2-billion overhaul of Lenox Hill Hospital, and local opponents are furiously hoping to keep Council members from voting their approval. If members give it a "yea" vote, the \$2-billion project heads to the mayor's desk for final approval.

The hospital organization hopes to consolidate the 10-building Upper East Side hospital campus into one large tower on Lexington Avenue, taking nearly a decade of construction to complete. It would be between 395 and 436 feet tall, after an original proposal soaring past 500 feet generated intense blowback and was scaled back by the hospital.

A group of fierce critics of the proposal held a rally on the steps of City Hall in the blistering morning sun, on July 16, to emphasize why they find such a proposal detrimental to their neighborhood.

Speaking to assembled press, including *Our Town*, they enumerated a laundry list of frustrations that they've been voicing for months. Namely, they believe that the proposed construction length of nearly a decade is too long, and that the proposed building height is still too tall; they're further arguing that the creation of 25 new single-patient rooms, one of the overhaul's main priorities, is not enough of a healthcare improvement to alleviate their other concerns.

Virginia Maloney—who just won the Democratic primary for City Council's East Side District 4 seat, and who seems poised to represent an area that includes the hospital in the fall—was in attendance at the rally.

Maloney, the daughter of former US Senator Carolyn Maloney, told *Our Town* that she has “lived on the East Side for my entire life. I now live just one block away from Lenox Hill Hospital. If I ever faced a medical emergency, that's the hospital that I would go to.”

“I am concerned about the scale and scope of the project,” she added. “I'd love to see more engagement with countless community organizations, neighbors, Community Board 8, and civic groups— including Civitas, Friends of the Upper East Side, Carnegie Hill Neighbors, and the Landmarks Conservancy. We all support modernizing Lenox Hill Hospital . . . but we need a plan that adds more than 25 beds.”

Stacey Krusch, one of the lead advocates behind an anti-overhaul campaign known as Save Lenox Hill, talked to *Our Town* after departing the winding-down press conference for some shade up near City Hall's entrance. “We've got the community behind us,” she said. “It's hard to believe that it's falling on deaf ears. This is our chance.”

“In City Council, we have 51 or so members, so hopefully they’ll get the picture,” she continued. “We’re for modernization of the hospital, of course, and there will be construction jobs. What we’re saying is that what they’re proposing doesn’t fit . . . for 25 beds . . . it will ruin the fabric of the neighborhood, and set a dangerous precedent.”

Soon after, Lenox Hill Hospital Chief Executive Daniel Baker rolled by for a press conference of his own, this one held in the shade. He defended Northwell’s plans to add only 25 beds, as he said that creating single-patient rooms would “change the experience for our patients. We’re creating better outcomes operationally. It’s better for their anxiety, and it’s better for their loved ones who are visiting.”

He went on to say that “we,” meaning Lenox Hill Hospital, “have been a part of that neighborhood before it existed. We have to work together. It’s things like failure of zoning and failure of investment that cause healthcare systems to fail.”

So far, it’s fairly hazy as to whether a plurality of City Council members will agree with Baker. Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine voted his “conditional” approval of the overhaul, which he granted only after getting promises from Northwell that they would create a community task force, as well as a new mental-health outpatient clinic elsewhere in the neighborhood.

Community Board 8, meanwhile, voted against the proposal after echoing activists’ concerns. However, the City Planning Commission gave the proposal its unanimous approval on July 2, kicking it off to the City Council. “To continue fulfilling this critical role, the hospital needs to evolve with the times,” CPC’s Dan Garodnick said. The Council has less than 50 days to vote on the proposal.

“*“We all support modernizing Lenox Hill Hospital . . . but we need a plan that adds more than 25 beds.” — Virginia Maloney, Democratic candidate for City Council District 4*