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Building Expansions: The Solution Next Door

In today's complex and competitive health care arena the only constant is change. As health care facilities struggle to keep up with the demands of regulatory and market forces, space continues to be "the final frontier."

Across our client base, we see similar needs: office space, storage, parking and space for new programs and initiatives. In an urban setting where land is at a premium, the problem of enlarging a facility is made more difficult by restrictive zoning.

Through our recent project work, we have found that the solution is often right next door. Most health care facilities are located in low to medium density residential zones where land costs are still relatively affordable. In many cases, facilities already own residential buildings or abutting parcels that are being used somewhat inefficiently for storage and office space.

Local zoning limits the amount of health care space that can be built on a given according to floor area ratio (FAR). FAR is essentially the total permitted above ground floor area expressed as a multiple of the land area.

A strategy we have successfully employed to increase the yield of a parcel is to classify a health care addition as a free standing ancillary services building or community center.

An ancillary services building could house:

- a new kitchen
- a dialysis suite
- a physical therapy suite
- storage
- social day care
- parking
- staff office space

Conversely, available space within an existing health facility is now created as functions move next door. In residential care facilities, we have often reassigned this space to residents and families by creating new amenity zones.

Although this type of addition would have a physical connection to the existing building, it would be classified as a separate, free-standing building and lot with its own certificate of occupancy. This is critical to maximizing yield since some facilities may be overbuilt and a merger with an abutting parcel would only reduce the degree to which it is overbuilt, leaving little or no room for new construction.





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New construction, although more costly than interior renovations has several offsetting advantages.

- New construction eliminates the phasing, logistic and life safety concerns associated with constructing in occupied space.
- There are fewer compatibility issues with the integration of new systems/equipment with an older infrastructure.
- Assuming that outpatient programs and offices are located within the addition, it is severable from a real estate perspective.