

City's CORE plan spacious for health-care industry

Published in the Home News Tribune 4/30/02

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New Brunswick: The city's plan to redefine its downtown over the next 10 years includes not only an area for new medical and biotechnology facilities but space for the city's expanding hospital and medical-school community to continue growing.

The city's CORE, or Commercial, Office, Research, Entertainment, Vision Plan would realign the health-care industry's expansion by bringing the medical campus across the railroad tracks from Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

The CORE plan, which is a concept at this point, calls for an unspecified medical institution between the tracks, Paterson Street, the Bayard Street Presbyterian Church and Joyce Kilmer Avenue. On the next block, between the tracks, Bayard and New Streets, a corporate biotechnology building is proposed.

Commercial and institutional offices would be added on two neighboring blocks at Bayard Street and Joyce Kilmer Avenue. The plan would add 450,000 square feet of laboratory space in that area.

Next Step

Because the four blocks have different shapes and sizes, the details for developing them could change. The next step is to determine which block works best for which facility by analyzing building types and lab layouts, said Christopher Paladino, president of the New Brunswick Development Corporation, which is involved with the CORE plan.

Putting biotechnology and medical facilities on those four blocks was proposed because of Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital's nearby location and nationwide research trends, said Paladino.

"It's geography. There's a move through the country that private-sector research likes to be where public-sector research is being done," Paladino said.

Also, residents and small businesses have objected to the hospital's growth along Somerset Street and down French Street making further expansion in those areas difficult.

The medical community seems to support the move in a new geographic direction. The city has discussed the CORE plan concept with Robert Wood Johnson and other major city institutions such as Johnson & Johnson.

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital president and CEO Harvey A. Holzberg called the city's idea to expand laboratory space "a great plan."

The city's idea to expand medical facilities mirrors what is happening at hospitals across the state, said Ron Czajkowski, a spokesman for the New Jersey Hospital Association.

The demand for services at New Jersey hospitals continues to grow while the medical facilities operate on a break-even or razor-thin profit margin, Czajkowski said. To meet the demand, hospitals must expand or assess the services they are offering, he said.

Some New Jersey hospitals affiliated with medical schools, including Robert Wood Johnson, are building on their reputations as teaching hospitals by providing new technology, research within the medical campus, Czajkowski said.

Two University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey projects - the ongoing Cancer Institute of New Jersey expansion and the planned Child Health Institute research facility - will create a "critical mass of research" that can attract private-sector medical research to the downtown area, Paladino said.

The Cancer Institute and Child Health Institute are part of a tremendous expansion over the past year of the medical campus in the City. The growth has included the hospital's own projects and those affiliated with UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Bristol Myers Squibb Children's Hospital opened in March 2001 and the Cancer Hospital of New Jersey is expected to open soon. The 450-car expansion of the Paterson Street parking deck was completed several months ago. The cancer institute will triple the size of that UMDNJ facility.

Tremendous Growth

Even more is on the drawing board.

The hospital wants to add a 150-room hotel atop a multilevel parking deck on French Street next to, or on the site of, Doll's Place pub. The hotel would cater to hospital visitors.

Robert Wood Johnson also hopes to include a cardiovascular institute, which would be a UMDNJ program offering research and outpatient space.

Robert Wood Johnson will offer land next to the children's hospital for the construction of the Child Health Institute and a rehabilitation-center extension of the Children's Specialized Hospital in Mountainside.

Commenting on the projects Holzberg said: "That's extraordinary. I don't know of a hospital in the country with that kind of growth."

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