

Northeast Round Rock poised to become academic, medical center

Medical developers and schools are making plans to build in the rapidly developing corridor along University Boulevard.

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ROUND ROCK — The announcement last month that there will be a new medical complex in northeastern Round Rock means that the city is one step closer to having a full-fledged medical district with research, academic courses and hospitals.

The Round Rock Wellness Center will eventually have 160,000 square feet of medical offices and a surgical center near **University Boulevard** and Sunrise Road. The project, which has an estimated cost of \$30 million to \$40 million, will open its first phase in spring 2008.

But the center is generating enough interest from potential tenants that the other phases could be built at the same time, said the developer, Robert McWilliams of Kinsman Ventures LLC, based in Plano.

Round Rock Chamber of Commerce officials are excited about the development because it's one of several that they hope will help support burgeoning medical industry in the city.

"We have an opportunity not to rely so heavily on Dell, and that's pretty important to the health and vitality of our community," said Charley Ayres, the chamber's director of business retention and expansion.

Most of the developments are taking place in the northeastern part of town along University Boulevard, formerly Chandler Road.

"In five years, you won't recognize it," said Jim Stendebach, Round Rock's planning director.

In the past three years, the land, which used to be home to farms, has attracted an IKEA home furnishings store, an outlet mall and two hospitals.

The Scott & White University Medical Campus will open at the end of the month, and Seton Medical Center Williamson will open farther east at University Boulevard and FM 1460 next year.

Together, they could have more than 650 hospital beds.

Seton planners wanted to build there because of the abundance of land with easy access to major highways and roads and because of the tremendous growth in Williamson County, said Mark Hazelwood, president and CEO of the medical center.

And the hospitals wanted to be near what could be a site for three educational institutions focusing on health care.

Texas State University already has a branch on University Boulevard, and St. David's Community Health Foundation donated \$6 million to build the St. David's School of Nursing, which is set to open in 2010.

In western Round Rock, St. David's Round Rock Medical Center is undergoing a \$100 million expansion.

Last month, the Legislature set aside money for Texas A&M University System Health Science Center to build a clinical campus in Round Rock, which is set to open in rented space next summer.

It's too early to say where in Round Rock the campus will be built, but "certainly being part of an academic corridor is ideal," said Christopher Colenda, dean of the Health Science Center's College of Medicine.

Austin Community College is also planning to build a Round Rock campus nearby if residents in the Round Rock school district vote to be annexed into the ACC taxing district.

The city sees the "major opportunity" for melding the educational and medical business potential of the area, Stendebach said. "Everything has happened so fast that we're trying to put some of these concepts together."

Several acres in the area are in the process of being rezoned to possibly be used as an extended care hospital, Stendebach said.

The schools and medical facilities probably will be sandwiched by housing and mixed-use projects, Stendebach said.

A subdivision with single-family homes is in the area, and high-density housing and mixed use projects are in the conceptual stage.

A rail line being planned from San Antonio to the Austin area could include a stop near the medical complexes if city officials have their way.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin