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ALLSTON BRIGHTON, WATERTOWN

Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center plans new facility on state property in Brighton

Posted by Matt Rocheleau July 25, 2012 05:24 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center hopes to construct a new, \$19.4-million medical building on state-owned property in Brighton where a State Police barracks and salt and sand maintenance facility currently operate, officials said.

State officials said the barracks and the salt and sand facility will move to other yet-to-be determined sites.

The new medical facility would allow the health center to consolidate two of the five medical sites it currently operates in Allston, Brighton, and Waltham.

Plans call for a 45,000 square-foot community medical center and parking space that would be completed by spring 2015, according to the proposal the health organization has outlined in a letter.

To help kick-start funding for the new center, the organization has received a

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To help kick start funding for the new center, the organization has received a \$5 million federal grant authorized through the federal health care law. The grant, announced [earlier this spring](#), requires that the new facility is certified for occupancy by April 30, 2015.

The proposal calls for a center that would be between two and three stories tall and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certifiable.

The building's entrance would face Western Avenue, according to the proposal. A portion of the property will be reserved so the state can build a new, 12,000 square-foot building. Construction would require environmental remediation and plans for the new new medical building would likely require further public approval.

The 2.2-acre site is bordered by Soldiers Field Road to the north and Western Ave to the south. The abutting property to the west houses the historic Charles River Speedway headquarters building, which the state is in the [process of exploring](#) ways to preserve and reuse.

Through [legislation](#) approved two years ago, the state has agreed to lease the property to the nonprofit health organization for a to-be-determined fair market rate for 50 years, with two 10-year lease extension options. The property is worth about \$3.5 million, according to the city.

The organization's existing medical locations in Allston – its main site at 287 Western Ave. and vision center at 300 Western Ave. – would consolidate into the new building, along with its administrative offices at 1380 Soldier's Field Road, officials said.

The new facility would allow the health organization to serve an additional 5,500 patients, nearly doubling the roughly 6,000 patients served currently at the two Western Avenue locations, the proposal said.

The health organization is working to secure another \$15 million through financing and fundraising over the next three years to defray the costs of the entire project, officials said.

The organization also plans to sell a half-acre of property it owns in Allston and use the sale's proceeds toward the new facility's cost, according to Paola Ferrer, the organization's development director.

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“While we purchased the Cambridge Street lot many years ago at market rate with the intent to expand there, it is now too small to meet our growth and expansion needs,” Ferrer wrote in an online forum for neighborhood residents.

The property comprises a small area of green space and a parking lot along Cambridge Street near where the roadway meets with Harvard Avenue. That site used to house the Washington Allston School, which opened in 1879 burned down in 1977. The city assesses the property’s worth at nearly \$470,000.

Under the leadership of Allston resident Joseph M. Smith, the community health center was established in 1974 at the Charlesview Apartments complex. The organization said it now serves a total of nearly 12,000 patients annually across its five locations.

“The demand for services at our health center has been growing exponentially,” Ferrer wrote. The organization has “more patients seeking care than we have the space to serve at this time.”

In early May, the organization announced it was one of 11 Massachusetts community health centers selected to share in Affordable Care Act grants totaling nearly \$34 million – money that federal officials estimate will help the centers provide care to roughly 42,500 new patients.

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