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HCA to build hospital on 30-acre site

By Robert Cadwallader
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MANSFIELD - Mansfield has been without a full-service, acute-care hospital for about 15 years. Now the city expects to have two.

HCA has purchased about 30 acres at U.S. 287 and East Broad Street that it plans to use to build a medical campus that will include an acute-care hospital.

The site is west of the East Broad-Matlock Road intersection, just a mile away from where Methodist Health System plans to start construction on a \$132 million, 80-bed hospital complex Friday.

The Methodist Mansfield Medical Center plans have sparked interest from other medical service providers, along with commercial and residential developers, City Manager Clayton Chandler said.

"We have worked really hard to get our first full-service hospital with acute-care facilities," Chandler said. "It's gratifying now to have additional hospitals recognizing needs in the southern region of the Metroplex and choosing Mansfield for their investments."

HCA had been considering its site when Methodist Health System announced its plans in April 2004, said Gary Conwell, vice president of development and marketing for HCA's North Texas Division.

Conwell said there is no timeline for building the hospital, which would be included in the second phase of the medical complex. Population and demographic evaluations will be the key factors in determining a construction date, he said.

Some Mansfield leaders have speculated that Methodist's early announcement may have cooled plans to build the HCA hospital sooner.

"I don't think it's made any change as far as planning to utilize that for a medical office building and imaging and diagnostics," Conwell said. "But there are going to be cases where someone starts a project before you do, and then you have to look at how you want to bring that into your overall plan."

Construction of the first phase of the HCA plan -- medical offices for physicians and radiological and diagnostic services -- would start within a year, an HCA official said.

Economist Ray Perryman, president and chief executive of the Perryman Group in Waco, said communities of 75,000 to 80,000 people often have two hospitals.

Mansfield estimates its population at about 55,000 and projects it will increase to 69,000 by 2010.

Taking into account residents of South Arlington and other cities near Mansfield, it's not a stretch to think that two hospitals could thrive now in Mansfield, Perryman said.

The HCA system has 10 hospitals with 8,700 employees in the Metroplex. The facilities include the 195-bed Medical Center of Arlington at 3301 Matlock Road, the closest full-service hospital to most of Mansfield. HCA also has a small medical office building, Mansfield Diagnostic Clinic, which opened in 2002 next to the proposed hospital site.

Melissa Woodall, the city's interim director of economic development, said city officials didn't know HCA was planning a hospital until shortly before it finalized the purchase of the site in March.

We knew "there would be significant employment and significant capital investment," Woodall said.

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