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THIS STORY

Business park is one step closer

City seeks lease for VA site it hopes to redevelop

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Plans are moving forward for a technology-oriented business park at the Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center on Milwaukee's west side.

Advertisement Mayor Tom Barrett is to announce today that city officials will seek a long-term lease for 37 acres of surplus property at the VA grounds, west of Miller Park Way and north of W. National Ave., in order to redevelop the site.

The city's proposal will include a business park that targets firms involved in medical research.

The business park would seek to create partnerships among companies, the medical center and area universities and colleges. It would be a major part of redeveloping the VA grounds, according to conceptual plans presented by city officials to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

As part of the plans, the VA grounds would receive major improvements, including the restoration of several historic buildings that make up the original 19th-century Soldiers Home. The site was established in 1867 as one of four asylums for returning Civil War veterans.

Another portion of the grounds would house America's Freedom Center, a museum and education center.

City Development Commissioner Rocky Marcoux outlined the city's conceptual plans in recent meetings with officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA officials have since asked the city to prepare a formal offer to lease and redevelop the property, according to Barrett's office.

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Proposed Business Park

DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PARK PROPOSED

Plans are moving ahead for a technology-oriented business park at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center grounds.

Journal Sentinel

Graphic/Journal Sentinel

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Dean Martell, the VA's business development specialist, could not be reached for comment Monday.

A tech-oriented business park at the VA grounds, just off I-94 near Miller Park, could complement efforts to better tie together technology companies in Milwaukee and Madison.

The VA business park could serve as a home for tech businesses as the Milwaukee County Research Park, in Wauwatosa, runs out of room. No timeline for development was provided.

The 175-acre park, which is bordered by U.S. Highway 45, Mayfair Road, Watertown Plank Road and Wisconsin Ave., is getting an \$89 million, 506,000-square-foot office complex for GE Healthcare, which opens in February with 2,100 employees.

With the new GE Healthcare building, the park will house more than 4,000 employees, including those who work for Medical College of Wisconsin, United Healthcare, Children's Health System, Tushaus Computer Services and Divine Inc.

The city's business park proposal comes as civic leaders in Milwaukee and Madison seek to close the gap between tech-oriented developments in Wisconsin's two largest cities.

Political, academic and business leaders are initiating efforts to combine Milwaukee's financial resources and larger work force with Madison's intellectual property and innovation to compete with technology hot spots such as Boston and California.

That comes after some disappointments for southeastern Wisconsin, including the decision by the UW System Board of Regents to put a 275-acre expansion of University Research Park on the far west side of Madison instead of a location closer to the Milwaukee area. The existing park, a 255-acre breeding ground for companies that spring from research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is near capacity.

The city's redevelopment plan for the VA grounds also would resolve a conflict over the location of America's Freedom Center.

The Freedom Center would be a museum and education center presenting the history of military conflicts and diplomatic efforts in the 20th and 21st centuries that have preserved the nation's freedom.

"I believe this historic campus presents an opportunity for Milwaukee to better promote its past, honor its soldiers and create a brighter future for all citizens," Barrett said, in a statement. "We can restore, reuse and breathe new life into the historic site and at the same time attract high-quality jobs through development that fosters collaboration with the VA Hospital and area universities and colleges."

The Freedom Center's supporters had proposed building the long-delayed project along the lakefront, just north of the Milwaukee Art Museum.

But museum officials and others opposed that idea, citing concerns about overdevelopment along the lakefront.

Yet other improvements would include a new boulevard from National Ave. to the Freedom

Center; a parking structure with 1,200 to 1,500 spaces just east of the main hospital, and improved water, sewer and electrical utilities.

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