

Project to Include Retail, Residential

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Fitzsimons Village will have hotels, offices and a pedestrian bridge over East Colfax Avenue to link it to the medical center

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By Margaret Jackson Denver Post Staff Writer

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A Denver development group is planning a \$400 million project across from the Fitzsimons Life Sciences District in Aurora that will include hotels, offices, shops and housing on 32 acres.

Denver hotel developers Charlie Biederman and Steve Roitman of BWAB Inc. are teaming up with Icon Investment Group to develop the site, the largest privately owned contiguous property in the area identified for redevelopment around the former Fitzsimons Army Medical Center.

Roughly half the 578-acre site is being developed into a medical campus anchored by the University of Colorado's Anschutz Medical Center and Children's Hospital. A biosciences research park, the Veterans Affairs Hospital and a small mixed-use project are planned on the other half.

For the past five years, Icon has been working to acquire adjacent property from 15 landowners.

"We wanted to bring in Charlie because of his expertise in doing mixed-use and hotel developments," said Andrew Klein, principal of Icon. "We got along and determined there were good synergies between both groups."

The groups' Fitzsimons Village will be connected to the medical campus via a pedestrian bridge over East Colfax Avenue. The project will include up to 700 residential units, 500,000 square feet of office space, 100,000 square feet of retail space and two hotels - one full-service and one extended-stay - with a total of 380 rooms and 20,000 square feet of conference space.

"It will be the most comprehensive facility of its kind in Aurora," Biederman said. "This will become a destination for Aurora, not just for the medical center."

City officials have identified the campus' boundaries as land ripe for redevelopment, but the area is untested ground for the kind of full-service hotel being proposed, said Dick Hinson, vice president of the Aurora Economic Development Authority.

"We did a feasibility study to see if it could support a full-service hotel," Hinson said. "...The people we've talked to have said a limited-service hotel would be good and that we need conference space and meeting space."

Because it's in a tax-increment-financing district, Fitzsimons Village will be eligible for the return of incremental property, sales, lodgers and head taxes, said Mark Franzen, project manager for Aurora's urban-renewal division.

The developers expect to break ground on the project by the first quarter of 2008. The entire development is expected to be completed within six years.

Fitzsimons Village is expected to complement rather than compete with developments on the Fitzsimons campus.

The campus "is the kind of critical mass that is really meant to gentrify and evolve the entire area around it," said Hank Baker of Cleveland-based Forest City Enterprises Inc., which plans to develop about 6 million square feet of office and research space on the campus.

But among the biggest challenges facing Forest City is attracting bioscience companies because Colorado can't offer as many incentives as other states, Baker said.

"That isn't the only driver, but it's a consideration," Baker said.

The Fitzsimons Redevelopment Authority owns another 200 developable acres of the site, including the 170-acre Colorado Science and Technology Park at Fitzsimons being developed by Forest City. On another 15 acres, the Pauls Corp. is developing about 500 apartments and ground-floor retail, and the Department of Veterans Affairs is purchasing 23 acres for a hospital.

About 6,500 people now work on the Fitzsimons campus, but their ranks are expected to double with the opening of the CU Hospital in June and Children's Hospital in October, said Jill Farnham, executive director of the Redevelopment Authority. By the first quarter of next year, the campus will house 15,000 people.

"Really, any development across the street is probably positive as it relates to the development of the campus," she said.
"It's just bringing resources and amenities to the population here."