

# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Thursday, December 22, 2011

## Braddock Leaders Pleased With Plan for Former Hospital Site

By Len Barcoucky



Braddock officials had high praise for the \$20 million redevelopment plan unveiled Wednesday for the site where the community's hospital and an adjoining parking lot once stood.

Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato, who leaves office Jan. 3, said the project will include flexible office and retail space, 24 units of rental housing, 11 single-family homes and a 20,000-square-foot community park facing Braddock Avenue.

"Thank you for all you've done for Braddock and to get something done on the hospital site," Braddock Council President Jesse Brown told Mr. Onorato.

"Dan's the man," Mayor

John Fetterman said, praising Mr. Onorato's efforts to bring government and private dollars to the distressed town. "It says so much about Dan that he was willing to invest in a community that offers little political payback."

While saying he was very pleased with the plans, Mr. Brown said one critical need remained to be met: more medical-care facilities. With the closing of UPMC Braddock in January 2010, residents lost easy access to an emergency room.

Mr. Onorato said talks were continuing to find a replacement facility.

As for the new project, Mr. Onorato said construction of

phase one -- a 26,000-square-foot office building -- will begin this summer.

"I said we'd assure that something would happen before I left office," Mr. Onorato told reporters at a news conference.

The plans were drawn up to address a number of the town's needs and included input from residents and elected officials, he said.

The decision of UPMC to close Braddock Hospital at the same time as it was building a new facility in more affluent Monroeville drew condemnation from borough officials and community groups. Mr. Onorato had pledged a quick turnaround on reuse of the site, located on Braddock Avenue between

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Fourth and Fifth streets.

After the hospital was closed, several lawsuits delayed demolition of the building until October of that year. Site clean-up was completed in April, and TREK Development was selected to come up with a reuse proposal in September. Rothschild Doyno Collaborative is the project architect.

Mr. Onorato said the proposed \$6 million, two-story office building will include space for, at the least, a primary-care medical practice. Mr. Brown said his community still seeks a commitment for an urgent-care or similar health center. Such free-standing clinics offer a broader range of medical services, including X-rays.

Mr. Onorato said having the new office and retail space will help make the borough's case with medical providers. "Braddock will be able to say, 'We have a new building in

place,' " he said.

While UPMC Braddock was exempt from property taxes, the new development on the hospital site will be tax-paying properties.

Possible tenants for the new flex-space office and commercial building could include the county health department and Community College of Allegheny County, which would rent space, Mr. Onorato said. With construction scheduled to start in summer, that structure should be completed 12 months later.

Work on the 24 units of rental housing should start next fall and be finished a year later. That portion of the project has a budget of \$9.3 million.

TREK Development will begin construction of 11 single-family homes in spring 2013. The budget for those for-sale units is \$2.75 million.

Construction of the new park

will cost \$250,000. Infrastructure improvements will cost about \$2 million.

UPMC has agreed to provide \$3 million in matching funds that will make the project eligible for \$3 million in state aid, Mr. Onorato said. Other major sources of funds include \$8 million in low-income-housing tax credits, \$5 million in federal, local and private equity money and \$1 million in private lending.

TREK Development President William J. Gatti Jr. said purchase of the housing tax credits was particularly attractive to banks, which are required under the federal Community Development Act to invest in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. In return for an upfront payment of about \$8 million, the buyer of the tax credits would be able to reduce federal income taxes over the next 15 years.