

Hospital eyes St. Johns expansion

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ST. JOHNS COUNTY — The St. Johns County Commission has approved an estimated \$180,000 incentives package for a free-standing emergency medical facility to be run by Memorial Hospital in Doctor's Village in Julington Creek.

The five-member board unanimously approved the measure April 19. It includes a caveat that a county administrator can seek additional funding for the project to ensure Hospital Corporation of America Inc., Memorial's parent company, sticks around.

Joseph "Ken" Bryan, chair of the commission, said this is one of the largest incentives packages offered by the county in the past four or five years.

It covers the deferral of taxes, impact fees, water line connection fees and expedited permitting. The deal is a "win-win," Bryan said.

St. Johns' medically underserved

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residents get a viable facility for emergency care. The county gets an injection of high-skill jobs. And HCA, which is based in Nashville, Tenn., gets a series of incentives to make St. Johns a logical choice to set up shop.

"It's all about generating jobs in St. Johns County, and this package does a great job of that," Bryan said. "It's probably the most expensive package we've proposed in some time, especially considering the economic climate. But it's a very inexpensive trade-off for the creation of 30 or 40 high-paying jobs, professional jobs."

An emergency facility would also save money in transportation costs and help keep patients in the county, Bryan said. Most emergency patients in the county are

taken for treatment at Shands Jacksonville, Baptist South or Flagler Hospital.

A free-standing operation like the proposed Memorial facility has all the amenities of a traditional emergency room but caters to patients who need treatment without being admitted to a hospital.

Memorial spokesman Adam Landau said representatives from HCA's corporate office will meet in Jacksonville next week to decide if the incentives are enticing enough to commit to St. Johns County.

"The county has shown they want this emergency facility, and Memorial Hospital Jacksonville thinks this is as strong a location as any other," Landau said. "But we need corporate approval to move forward, and they're looking at other locations in Florida."

He said the decision could take another

two weeks, but there's a "strong likelihood" corporate will approve the St. Johns County location.

AccuBuild Development Corp. President Mark Rubin, the developer of the Doctor's Village location that Memorial has identified as a potential site, said he expects construction to start in the third quarter of this year if HCA approves. The facility would be completed by the second quarter of 2012.

Rubin's Doctor's Village development will house about 55,500 square feet of medical space and about 20,000 square feet for retail. There are two other similarly named Doctor's Village complexes, in Riverside and the World Golf Village. The Julington Creek development, however, is slated to be the largest by a wide margin.

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