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St. Johns trying for freestanding ER

The Memorial-affiliated site would be alternative to Flagler Hospital

By Kevin Turner
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The St. Johns County Commission on Tuesday approved the maximum allowable incentives to attract a full-service emergency room that would be like no other in Northeast Florida because it won't be attached to a hospital.

Unlike hospitals, freestanding emergency rooms don't need a "certificate of need" from the Agency for Health Care Administration to be located in an area, said Julie Young, an AHCA health services facility consultant. But the planned 11,000-square-foot building still would need AHCA approval of its plans and construction, she said. There are six in other parts of the state: Ocala, Destin, Port St. Lucie, Largo, Aventura and North Port, according

to the AHCA website.

Location of the freestanding emergency room isn't a done deal, however, said Mark Rubin, president of AccuBuild Cos., developer of Doctors Village, at 3635 Race Track Road. That's because Nashville, Tenn.-based HCA still is considering other candidate sites statewide.

But with the commission vote Tuesday to offer up to \$180,000 in tax credits for impact fees and other costs the developer would pay, the St. Johns

County location is getting a leg up with strong community support, he said.

The plan is backed by HCA affiliate Memorial Hospital Jacksonville, and Memorial spokesman Adam Landau said HCA representatives will be in town next week to review the candidate site. If approved, the Doctors Village emergency room will be a Memorial Hospital emergency department. It would be housed in a building that would cost an estimated \$7.5 million

to build and \$2 million to equip, with a workforce of 30 to 40.

"We're certainly excited that the community is getting behind this project," Landau said. "We're still waiting for corporate approval. We certainly hope it will be us."

Landau didn't say specifically how many candidates there are in Florida, but said the Doctors Village site was "on the short list." He also said

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when finished, it will offer hospital-like care.

"We will be able to do everything in the freestanding ER that we would be able to do at our ER in the hospital," he said.

Gina McLean, director of marketing and strategic planning for Flagler Hospital Inc., said it would be a good thing that St. Johns County residents have an

additional place to go for emergency medical care, even if that means that St. Johns County EMTs are taking them to the St. Johns Memorial emergency room instead of Flagler Hospital.

"It would be our hope that every facility in the community would be up to par," she said. That includes accreditations for emergency conditions such as chest pain and stroke care, she said — attributes the Flagler facility has, she

said.

"We are going to get with corporate and push for this," Landau said. "We just feel this is an area that is growing. People in that area want quality care close to home."

When built out, Doctors Village is to have 55,500 square feet of medical and office space and 20,000 square feet of retail space in 10 buildings, Rubin said.

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