

## **UM BioPark looking to expand**

by Melody Simmons, *The Daily Record*, July 10, 2011

While new development in much of Baltimore has slowed, a plan to expand the geographic boundaries at the University of Maryland BioPark and clear the way for a total of up to 2 million square feet of lab, hotel and office space will be considered by the City Council on July 18.

Officially, the move for expansion of the West Side biotech park started in late April, when UM officials met with the city's Department of Planning to detail a new development plan for the 10-acre site, expected to hold 12 buildings when it is built out.

But the growth there in biotech startups and other research companies over the past seven years sparked the need to seek city approval to aggressively expand the Planned Unit Development plan more than a year ago, UM officials say.

"This allows us to triple in size from the original zoning," said James L. Hughes, president of the UM Health Sciences Research Park Corp., which is overseeing development of the BioPark. "By having the new PUD in place it means we can respond quickly when there are opportunities to put up any new buildings."

That also means jobs, says William H. Cole IV, a member of the City Council whose 11th District is on the cusp of the UM BioPark. The park employs more than 500 workers in three buildings that total 455,000 square feet.

"It presents an opportunity to create a larger anchor for that side of Martin Luther King Boulevard," Cole said. "You can build a neighborhood around that. The growth will bring new residents to Baltimore and hopefully keep them here."

Plans by the East Baltimore Development Inc. to build a 1.1 million-square-foot, world-class biotech park across town near the Johns Hopkins Hospital have stalled, despite relocation of more than 1,200 households at the 88-acre site in Middle East and financial commitments totaling about \$564 million — \$212.6 million in public costs.

Only one biotech building has been built at the EBDI site, despite the clearing of 31 acres in Phase I for as many as five buildings.

The 278,145-square-foot John G. Rangos Sr. Building opened in 2008 and was only 80 percent occupied this spring. Retail space on the ground level on Wolfe Street has never been leased.

The EBDI redevelopment is undergoing a revision to include more commercial and office space. One of the vacant lots originally cleared for development of a biotech building will be the site of a Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene lab, expected to break ground this year.

By comparison, the UM BioPark's growth has been impressive, Cole said.

"I do think that that type of development shows that what UM Baltimore is doing is working," he said, adding that the EBDI project is "a different biotech park."

"And the fact that there is need for expansion now shows they have managed their project well," Cole said. "Their ability to grow shows that it is headed in the right direction."

The UM BioPark broke ground in 2004 and opened its first building in 2005. The development is linked to the University of Maryland School of Medicine and the University of Maryland Medical Center. In 2007, it was named the Emerging University Research Science Park of the Year by the Association of University Research Parks.

By 2010, the BioPark had filled two buildings and a new state Forensic Medical Center opened at the site as well as a parking garage with 638 spaces.

The BioPark received \$65 million in tax-exempt federal stimulus funds late last year, enabling developers to obtain tax-free financing for the expansion efforts.

That plan to be presented for a final vote at City Hall next week includes changing the seven-year-old PUD to include an area that encompasses some of the historic, older communities in the Poppleton and Hollins Market area.

A list of addresses will be presented to the council that include much of the 800 and 900 blocks of West Baltimore Street, the 800 block of West Fayette Street, six addresses in the 800 block of West Fairmount Avenue and the 900 block of Booth Street.

Those addresses, west of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, are expected to hold new lab buildings, another parking garage and a \$35 million, 140-room hotel by 2014. An apartment tower is also being considered, said Hughes, the research park president.

Also, a \$200 million Maryland Proton Treatment Center is expected to open in 2014 at the BioPark, offering advanced cancer radiation treatment, called proton therapy. A letter of intent to build in the park was signed in October.

"It's a wonderful cluster of biotech companies that Baltimore didn't have before," Hughes said, adding employment projections total up to 3,000 workers over the next decade.

The original PUD spread across five acres. But as the park has filled, UM has purchased additional land in two-acre increments, Hughes said.

"We have been working on it in earnest over the last 12 months," he said. "We have had a lot of community meetings, and have been working with a city design panel and with developers."

One activist who questions parts of the BioPark expansion is Thomas Ward, a retired Baltimore City Circuit Court judge, former reporter for The Baltimore Sun and a local historian.

Ward said the expansion could potentially threaten St. Peter the Apostle Church, a historic structure with stately Greek Revival-style columns at the corner of Hollins and Poppleton streets.

The church was dedicated in 1844. It was once home to Irish immigrants who lived on the city's West Side and helped build the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Among those associated with the church was New York Yankee slugger Babe Ruth, who was baptized there.

Ward successfully lobbied to place the church on a special list of historic preservation places held by the city's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation. That list is temporary; an Aug. 4 hearing is scheduled before CHAP to consider permanent status, Ward said.

Hughes said the expansion plans do not include the site of St. Peter's. He also said that speculation in the community that UM would purchase the present site of in the 700 block of West Fayette Street for \$1.2 million is premature. Ward said that speculation includes a sale of St. Peter's church to Carter Memorial.

"I am not going to be able to comment on that," Hughes said, of the controversy. "No, we haven't purchased Carter Memorial, and we are not purchasing St. Peter's. Neither are part of the PUD. They are not in the footprint. We're not going to touch a hair of St. Peter's."

In the meantime, small businesses are opening near the UM BioPark, including a coffee shop and a Goodwill boutique.

"I think it's an encouraging sign," Cole said.