

BUSINESS



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SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 2006

MTMC replacement approved

Saint Thomas parent gives permission to build new hospital

By **TODD PACK**
Staff Writer

Saint Thomas Health Services' parent company says it can go ahead with plans to develop a replacement for Middle Tennessee Medical Center, its aging hospital in Murfreesboro.

Plans call for a \$278 million, 286-bed facility that would be built on nearly 69 acres MTMC

bought 3½ years ago in the city's Gateway area.

It will replace MTMC, which has about 200 beds and opened in 1927, although the hospital has been expanded many times over the years.

MTMC can't build the hospital without state permission. Gordon Ferguson, the hospital's president and chief executive officer, said it will apply for a certificate of need in July.

He wouldn't speculate on when construction may begin or when the replacement hospital would open.

Saint Thomas has talked about

replacing MTMC for several years.

Last summer, MTMC hired the architectural firm of Gresham, Smith and Partners to design a replacement facility.

But hospital officials said Friday that Saint Thomas' parent company, Ascension Health, didn't sign off on the project until Thursday.

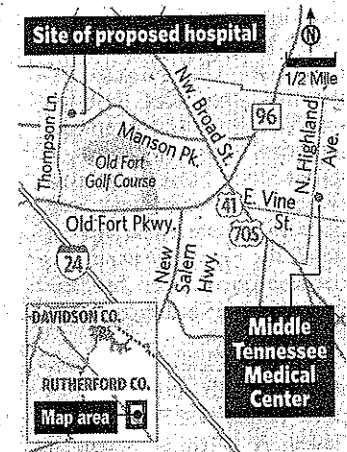
"Last year, when we presented this project to Ascension, they were encouraged, but they wanted to see how the Murfreesboro project fit in with the overall Nashville ministry," said Gordon Ferguson, MTMC's president

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A look at Saint Thomas Health Services' plan for a new hospital.
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and chief executive.

Ascension, based in St. Louis, is affiliated with the Catholic Church and is the nation's largest nonprofit health system. Saint Thomas, based in Nashville, operates Baptist and Saint Thomas hospitals in Nashville and Hickman Community Hospital in Centerville. It said in April that it had signed a letter of



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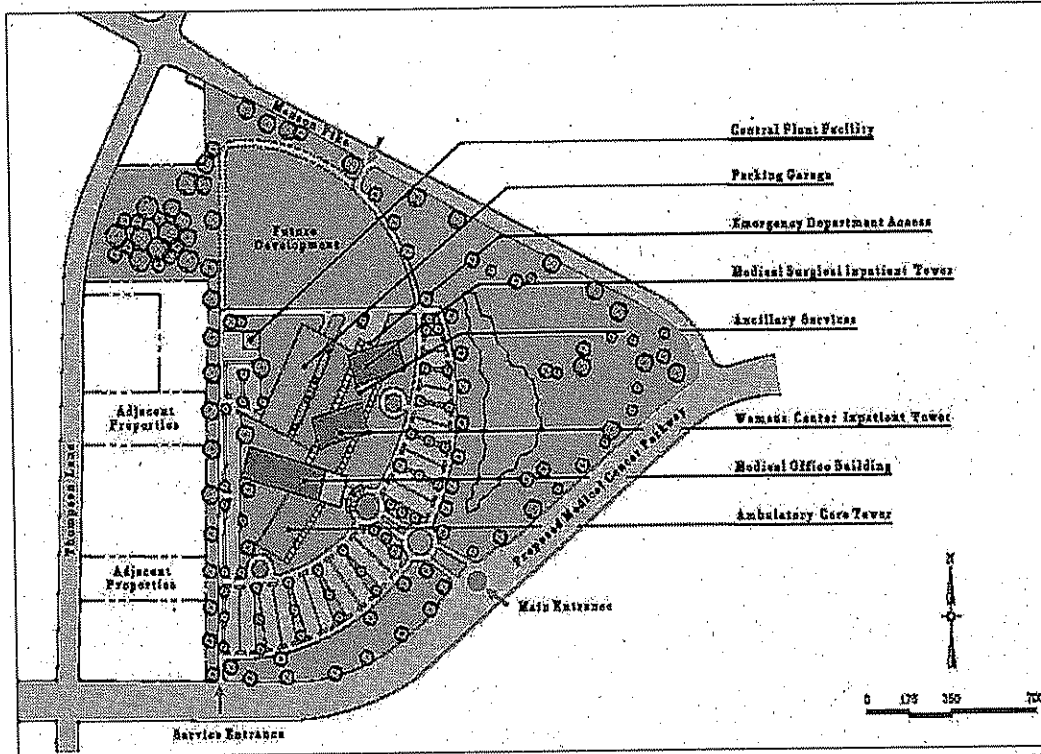


PHOTO COURTESY OF SAINT THOMAS HEALTH SERVICES

Saint Thomas Health Services has received approval from its parent company to go ahead with plans to develop a replacement for Middle Tennessee Medical Center in Murfreesboro.

Hospital: Saint Thomas gets approval to replace aging Murfreesboro facility

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intent to sell DeKalb Hospital in Smithville.

MTMC is the largest hospital in Rutherford County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. That growth has taxed the facility, Ferguson said.

"We have right at 200 beds, and we're hoping to bring an additional 18 beds online around the end of this year because, for some time now, we have had some capacity issues," he said.

Rutherford County's only other

hospital, StoneCrest Medical Center in Smyrna, also has faced capacity issues.

StoneCrest, which is owned by HCA Inc.'s TriStar Health System, opened with 75 beds and recently received a certificate of need from the state to add 26 more.

"There's been great growth in northern Rutherford County," said Neil Heatherly, StoneCrest's CEO.

It isn't unusual for hospitals to oppose a competitor's expansion plans, but Heatherly said he didn't know how he would respond to

MTMC's application to the state because "I haven't actually seen the application. I don't know its scope or the timeframe."

HCA faces strong opposition from Saint Thomas and other area hospital operators to its plans to build a 56-bed hospital in Spring Hill in Maury County. That project is scheduled for a hearing before the state Health Services and Development Agency on July 26. ■

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