

Board picks new hospital site

Opening at Pleasant Valley slated for Nov. 11, 2011

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By [Keith Lawrence](#)
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Owensboro Medical Health System will build its new \$500 million hospital at the Pleasant Valley Industrial Center on the city's east side.

And the board is shooting for a Nov. 11, 2011, opening.

"It's a catchy number," Jeff Barber, OMHS president and chief executive officer, said of the 11-11-11 date.

The decision on the site hinged on whether the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet could get the 3.4-mile extension of the Wendell H. Ford Expressway from Kentucky 54 to U.S. 60 East completed in time for the hospital's opening.

"They're telling us the extension will be completed in 2010," Barber said Monday night after the board voted to buy the industrial park.

"That road combined with the four-laning of U.S. 231 in Indiana (scheduled for completion in 2015) and taking the tolls off the Natcher Parkway will really open that area up," he said.

The bypass extension will have an off-ramp that goes into the hospital's 145-acre property, Barber said.

He said the hospital will buy the industrial park for about \$20,000 an acre -- about \$2.9 million -- from the city, county and Owensboro-Daviess County Industrial Foundation.

Those groups paid \$1.8 million in 1998 for the land for the industrial park, but it has failed to attract any tenants.

Barber said the 57-acre campus on East Parrish Avenue may become home to a women's hospital when the new hospital opens.

"That's one of the things we're discussing," he said. "Under the current certificate of need, all the beds have to be moved at the same time. But we're considering putting OB-GYN on the Parrish campus."

Barber said several universities are talking to the hospital about using part of the Parrish campus for a school of nursing.

The new hospital will need 540 additional nurses, lab technicians and other workers and will have to replace those who retire each year.

A nursing school could be a big plus, Barber said.

He said he's not sure when ground will be broken for the new hospital.

An architect has to be hired and the hospital has to determine exactly how much money it will have for the project.

Meetings will be scheduled with all physicians in the county, community leaders, community groups and former board members to discuss the plans, Barber said.

The land between Pleasant Valley Road and Daniels Lane -- the location of the city's first airport 80 years ago -- will support a building at least six stories tall and possibly seven or eight, he said.

"I guess you can build as tall as you want," Barber said. "But after that, it starts getting pretty expensive."

Pilings would have to be driven deep into the earth to support a taller building, he said.

The board also considered 142 acres next to the Green River Area Development District offices on U.S. 60 West.

But Barber said the east side location next to the four-lane bypass extension will put the hospital on a major highway.

The hospital will have 1 million square feet of space, 487 beds and a staff of more than 3,000, Barber said earlier.

It's expected to generate a lot of traffic, and good roads are essential, he said.