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Cancer Center Nears in N.J.

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By DAWN WOTAPKA

The race is on to bring proton therapy cancer treatment to the region.

Manhattan-based Tessler Developments says it is near a deal with Jersey City officials to build a proton therapy center on a roughly 2.5-acre parcel. The plans would also include commercial space and about 1,000 market-rate apartments, some earmarked for those undergoing treatment. Construction could start in 2013.

Tessler and Jersey City officials say there is a tentative agreement to sell the land for \$15 million.

The project comes as another effort to bring proton therapy to the New York City area moves forward with the involvement of some of the area's most prestigious medical centers, including Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and the NYU Langone Medical Center.



Tessler Developments

A rendering of the proposed proton therapy center, which also would include office space and apartments.

The treatment involves using a proton beam to precisely deposit a cancer-treatment dose near a tumor or affected area with less scattered radiation to the rest of the body, said Dr. Glen Gejerman, co-division chief of urologic oncology at Hackensack University Medical Center. It has so far been studied on brain tumors and on lung, pediatric and prostate cancers.

The controversial therapy is supported by some doctors who say it targets tumors more effectively than conventional radiation and is safer on surrounding tissue and organs.

Others have been critical, saying the relatively new therapy hasn't been subjected to enough peer-reviewed research.

In Jersey City, officials hope the project—situated near Jersey City Medical Center, the New Jersey Turnpike and a light-rail station—would help transform the area into a medical powerhouse that can compete with nearby Manhattan's cutting-edge medical offerings. Supporters say it could create about 500 construction jobs and more than 2,500 full-time jobs when combined with other growth.

"It's something that puts the city on the map in the world of science," said **Jamie LeFrak**, a local businessman and a volunteer board member with LibertyHealth System, the Jersey City hospital's parent.

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Jersey City Medical Center's chief executive, Joseph Scott, said the therapy would have no affiliation with the hospital, but he would welcome it as a neighbor.

Proton therapy is expensive and hard to find. There are nine centers nationwide and seven being developed, not including the Jersey City and Manhattan sites, where construction hasn't started. Not all insurance covers the procedure.

The nearest facility to New York City is at the University of Pennsylvania, though a center in Somerset, N.J., should open early next year, said Leonard Arzt, executive director of the National Association for Proton Therapy in Silver Spring, Md.

There has been a rush to build treatment centers. While only 1% of cancer patients received this treatment last year, that number is expected to grow to 2% to 3% in the next five years.

The New York City location, proposed for West 57th Street in Midtown, has received contingent approval, according to the New York State Department of Health. Construction could start next year.

The Jersey City deal still faces multiple hurdles.

It needs approval from the Jersey City Council, which has to transfer the land to the city's redevelopment agency, which would then finalize a purchase contract.

Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy said he is optimistic.

This is "important for the city, so we should get the requisite number of votes," he said. "We'd like to put this on the tax rolls ASAP."

It still must be licensed by the state Department of Health and Senior Services as an ambulatory care center. No application has been submitted, the agency said.

Yitzchak Tessler, Tessler Developments' owner, said he's requesting licensing. To help fund construction, he said he has lined up \$250 million in private investments he declined to specify. He said he has signed contracts for \$90 million worth of equipment and software.

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Activist groups said they had conducted independent sampling of caulk from 13 New York City public schools and found that all tested positive for toxic PCBs.



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