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Anthem community site selected for Florence hospital

By MARK COWLING, Staff Writer

June 23, 2008

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**FLORENCE - Pulte Homes has applied to rezone the northern corner of its Anthem community for what could eventually be a 40-acre hospital campus with medical offices.**

Gilbert Hospital CEO David Wanger told the Town Council Monday that he is expected to also be CEO of the new "Florence Hospital at Anthem." He said the new hospital would continue Gilbert Hospital's core emphasis on ER service and its "core business principle" that "the physician should govern the entire patient-care experience."

"We're the home of 'door to doc in 31 minutes' and we do it 98 percent of the time. ... The demand is now to go out and replicate the model and Florence is the first place we're going to do that," Wanger told the council. The property is at the southeast corner of Hunt Highway and the Franklin Road alignment.

The site is "nothing short of exceptional for us," Wanger said. He said residents could see dirt moving around Thanksgiving, with completion in late 2009 or early 2010. Pulte and Gilbert Hospital confirmed earlier this year that Gilbert Hospital is buying approximately 10 acres for a future hospital. With the rezoning now pending, it would have an additional 30 acres to master-plan the hospital campus.

The land is currently zoned for housing. The Town Council Monday heard the first reading of an ordinance to amend Anthem at Merrill Ranch's planned unit development for the new "MO" zoning on approximately 40 acres. The ordinance also includes expanding the planned commercial corner northwest of Hunt Highway and Merrill Ranch Parkway by 8.4 acres. The ordinance will return to the council for action on July 7.

The project's design review application would then go before the Planning and Zoning Commission in July. Wanger told the council the hospital would be very cooperative with the community's wishes for outside appearance.

Once design review is complete, the hospital can submit construction plans and apply for permits, Planning Director Mark Eckhoff said.

The hospital could help kick-start development on the other three corners of Hunt Highway and Franklin Road. A Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is planned across Hunt Highway on the southwest corner. The business and commercial park La Entrada is planned on the northern corners, Eckhoff said. Wanger said, "Hospitals tend to drive a lot of development."

In a public hearing on the ordinance Monday, Phillip Cross of Pulte Homes told the council the company has now closed more than 850 home sales in Anthem at Merrill Ranch, adding approximately 1,500 residents to Florence.

Wanger said the Florence hospital would have 20 rooms for emergency room patients, including trauma and triage; 36 inpatient beds (18 general acute care

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and 18 incarcerated acute care); four ICU beds; MRI, CT, nuclear medicine, digital X-ray and ultrasound; a full-service diagnostic laboratory; a pharmacy; two operating rooms with full surgery capabilities; 350 employees after the first year; and a medical staff anticipated at 150 after the first year.

As for the correctional beds, "no one will see those folks coming in or being treated," Wanger said.

He said the hospital would have an estimated payroll of \$15.5 million and gross revenues of \$40 million to \$50 million the first year.

Banner Health broke ground June 5 on its Banner Ironwood Medical Center on North Gantzel Road in Queen Creek. The 220,000-square-foot hospital is expected to have 24 beds and a full-service emergency department with 19 private treatment areas.

Wanger said the new Florence hospital should open at about the same time as the Queen Creek hospital. He said he would like to be first, but it's not essential to the business plan.

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