

REAL ESTATE

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WVU's University Park to Redevelop Evansdale Area

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West Virginia University's new University Park housing development, announced March 28, aims to redevelop the area between the Evansdale and Health Sciences campuses.

The \$90 million, multi-purpose development will be located on about seven acres behind the McDonald's restaurant on University Avenue, between Harding Avenue and Oakland Street and stretching along Country Club Road.

It's a site Dean of Students Corey Farris pointed out is centrally located between the university's Evansdale and Health Sciences campuses. It's also near the College of Law, two PRT stations, the Student Recreation Center, sports recreation fields and Milan Puskar Stadium.

Yet to be designed, University Park is envisioned as three buildings — two for suite-style living in residence halls with WVU food service, and one for apartments mixed with retail space — plus parking and green space.

The idea is a "campus village" design that will provide convenient, quality housing options to undergraduate and graduate students and faculty and staff.

It also will increase connectivity between the Health Sciences and Evansdale campuses, promoting walking and, it is hoped, reducing road congestion.

The development is expected to be ready for fall 2015 occupancy.

WVU is acquiring the property from MJR Evansdale Development LLC and related entities in this public-private development partnership.

MJR, a company created for the purpose of developing this property, is headed up by Ryan Lynch of Morgantown, said company legal counsel Brian Helmick of Spilman Thomas & Battle.

Lynch began thinking several years ago about developing some kind of student housing, Helmick said. As a Morgantown resident, he had an interest in educating the city's parking and traffic problems, so he began acquiring options on properties in

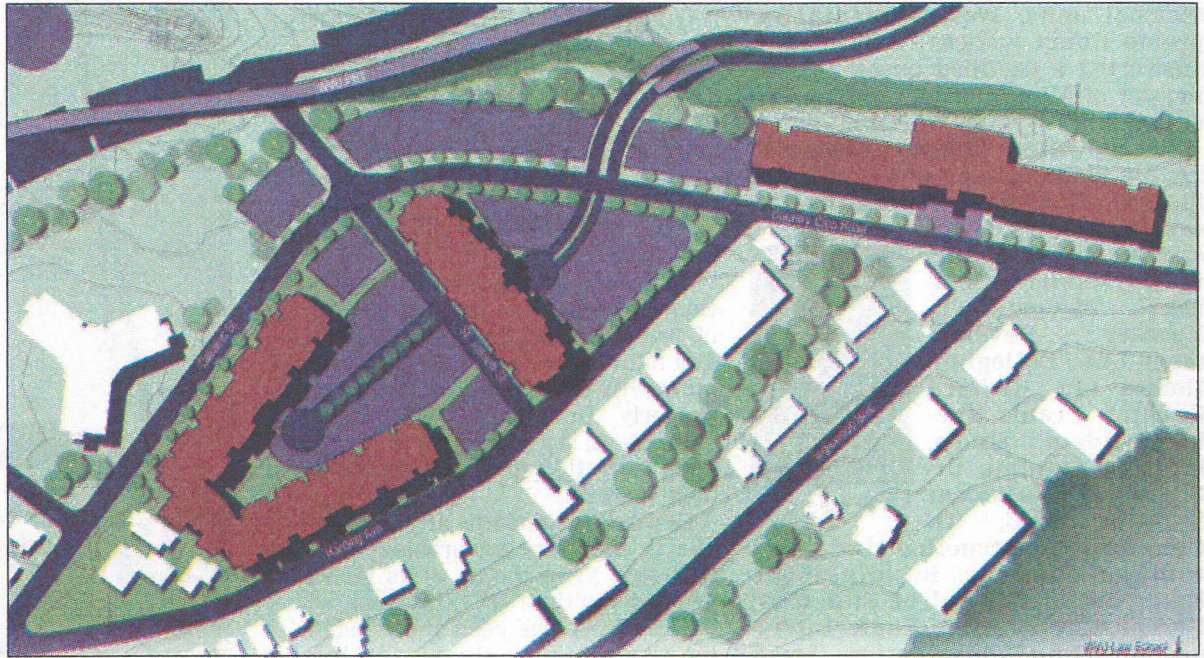


Illustration courtesy of West Virginia University

WVU's \$90 million University Park, two buildings of suite-style living in residence halls and one of apartments, plus parking and green space, will add 1,100 beds to the university's housing stock.

Sunnyside and in this Evansdale neighborhood rather than farther from the campuses.

Once he controlled enough property, he approached the university about public-private partnerships, Helmick said, and the university was interested.

University Place in Sunnyside, announced in October, and the University Park project came out of those conversations.

While the groups of partners differ between the two, the basic model is that the private partner builds the facilities and then leases them to the university.

"This public-private model is not unfamiliar to West Virginia," Helmick said, referencing similar projects at Marshall University and at West Virginia State University, "and it's the trend across the country, especially for higher education. It makes sense because a university's real goal is to educate students, and this is a support service that private developers do well."

WVU has acquired the University Park tracts at a cost of \$14.7 million, to be covered over time by proceeds from the development. Construction financing is the developer's responsibility. Own-

ership of the buildings will be transferred to WVU after 40 years.

University Park is Phase 3 of the current three-phase student housing master plan adopted by the WVU Board of Governors last year.

Phase 1 of the housing master plan is the \$70 million University Place, 980 beds of apartment-style living in Sunnyside, announced in October. Phase 2, yet to be announced, will replace with 588 beds the College Park family apartments on the hill above the downtown campus that were demolished several years ago.

At 1,100 beds, University Park will more than replace about 860 beds of current housing. Those include about 200 beds at nearby Fieldcrest Hall and 160 at Medical Center Apartments, Farris said, both of which facilities will be demolished. The university simply will not renew its lease in 2016 at the adjacent Pierpont Apartments, which provide about 500 beds.

It comes out to an addition of more than 200 beds, and Farris said that will give the university a little cushion for the anticipated renovations of the Towers and Boreman residence halls.

All told, the university will end up with a bed count in Morgantown of about 7,600. That's up from 3,600 a decade or so ago — over approximately which time the university has increased Morgantown enrollment from about 25,000 to about 30,000.

Farris is excited about the upgrade of housing stock.

"Med Center Apartments opened in the early '60s; Pierpont, I think, late '60s; Fieldcrest I believe is the old Mon General Hospital, so it's been a hospital, a senior care facility, then WVU bought it," he said. "They're great facilities, but they've had their useful life."

Up-to-date housing is needed to attract the best and brightest students, he said, and he especially likes the variety that will be available.

"It's exciting that we'll have some new and modern housing to really and truly accommodate all the different people at WVU: veterans, students with disabilities, young couples, international couples," he said. "We'll truly have diverse housing stock that everybody can choose from rather than only being able to help freshmen."