

House new clinics in old buildings

BY JAMES D. QUALK • APRIL 25, 2010

Tennessee Voices



The Tennessean's March 30 article "Health reform may spur building boom" discusses a potential need for new health-care facilities to handle the 32 million uninsured Americans to get health coverage. Clearly the addition of this many people will stress existing facilities and practitioners, creating a need for new clinics.

This anticipated building spur in health care also serves as a good opportunity to expand current urban infill efforts with a focus on green building, thereby strengthening communities while creating healthier places for people to provide and receive care.

Move can revitalize an area

According to a recent *American Chronicle* article, "altogether, 8,000 new federally qualified health center facilities will be opened across the country over five years, more than double the number today."

While some could be absorbed by future expansion of existing hospitals and doctor's offices, many of these clinics will be located in new areas with the highest concentration of uninsured Americans. This presents a perfect opportunity to address economically depressed urban neighborhoods, struggling shopping centers and underutilized strip malls with new medical clinics serving as anchor tenants as a part of broader development schemes.

A good local example of this can be found just south of downtown Nashville at Vanderbilt Health One Hundred Oaks. This previously underperforming shopping center now sees a consistent volume of patients, which has led to other developments and opportunities in the surrounding area.

But we shouldn't stop there. These new clinics should be designed and constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification standards. Case studies from LEED-certified health-care facilities report enormous benefits, including reduction in energy, water and materials use. Bill Cook, operations manager for Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas — the first LEED Platinum hospital in the country — reports that since Dell moved into its new building in 2007, the average length of patient stay has dropped. He believes the patients' surroundings are a major factor. Cook says he often meets patients' family members lingering simply because they enjoy the building. Even though patient stays aren't a major concern in a primary-care clinic, this example shows that green buildings can positively affect the well-being of their occupants.

While the specific need for additional clinical facilities may still be a year or more away, now is a good time to begin planning for potential locations and additional development needs. Because these clinics could be the economic booster shot needed to stimulate development, we're looking at a major opportunity to shape the creation of both physically and economically healthier communities across the country.

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