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Tour shows off progress around Smilow Cancer Center

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By Mary E. O'Leary Register Topics Editor

NEW HAVEN — The “beacons” of light and welcome are in place as fast-tracked development of ancillary buildings to the Yale Smilow Cancer Hospital unfold in the medical district downtown.

A tour Thursday of the six-story 55 Park St. building, which will house all the patient lab work to support the entire Yale-New Haven Hospital complex, showed the multi-colored glass-paneled structure well on its way to completion.

“We wanted something that would be a beacon of well being. The idea of this building is that it is a threshold to the ... whole hospital, and in that way it is a kind of welcome mat to the city,” said architect Barry Svigals.

The panels pick up the colors of the adjacent \$467 million cancer hospital that will start opening the first four floors of its outpatient clinics from October to January, with full occupancy of the 14-story structure, which includes 168 beds, unfolding from January through April.

The tour, led by hospital and construction officials for city officials and the press, also covered the 2 Howe St. hospital garage and mixed-use development, plus portions of Smilow.

The three buildings represent \$627 million in construction work and 1,000 construction jobs. Mayor John DeStefano Jr. said they will bring \$2.5 million to \$3 million in taxes and PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) to New Haven.

Given the strained state and national economies, the mayor said all this work “has been a huge benefit” to area families.

There was a real camaraderie on the tour among the hospital and city personnel, a sharp contrast to the tense battles over zoning and labor issues negotiated prior to construction.

One of the features on Park Street is a four-story atrium that all those parking at the

adjacent Air Rights Garage will enter to gain access to Smilow across South Frontage Road.

The glass structure will be lighted 24/7, and anyone coming down Route 34 to Interstate 95 “will see this building aglow,” Svigals said.

The second floor of the \$60 million lab facility has an auditorium that seats 150 people, while the fourth floor leads to a bridge over South Frontage Road for the main entrance to the specialty outpatient clinics at Smilow.

The ground floor has 13,000 square feet of retail space that is expected to attract a restaurant and service-related businesses by spring.

The tour of the 500,000-square-foot Smilow Cancer Hospital includes a green roof on the seventh floor that will serve as a healing garden for patients and their families.

Trees were planted there months ago, and the tranquil space, with views of the city, will also have a water feature and a heated floor to melt snow, making it accessible year-round. Rain will be collected and recycled to water the plants.

Norman Roth, senior vice president for administration at Y-NH, said the green roof was an important feature recommended by patients. “To be able to bring this kind of space to an urban setting really enhances the care environment,” Roth said.

The large ground floor entrance area to Smilow, where more than 1,000 outpatients are expected daily, was taking shape with the reception area carved out. There will be an indoor waterfall and a player piano, and valet parking out front.

The tour ended with a view of the 24 one-bedroom apartments along North Frontage Road that cover one side of the cancer center garage. The apartments are expected to be used by patients or their families who are at the hospital for extended outpatient stays.

Along Howe Street, construction continues on the commercial office space that will be leased by Yale, while four retail spaces are expected to be filled by spring.

DeStefano summed up the tour by looking ahead to the next phase of development as the city works with state officials to close Exit 3 of the nearby Route 34 connector to accommodate an office and lab building by Carter Winstanley, with another 600 jobs.

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