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Kansas City Council approves Oxford on the Blue office park plan

BY LYNN HORSLEY - THE KANSAS CITY STAR

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The Kansas City Council gave the green light Thursday to the Oxford on the Blue biotech office park plan.

Supporters hope that, combined with the planned Cerner campus, this project north of 87th Street between Interstate 435 and U.S. 71 will help transform south Kansas City.

“As people learn more about this, they are going to be as excited about it as they are about the Cerner project,” Councilman John Sharp said.

The council approved property tax abatement, zoning and planning changes for what would ultimately be a 344-acre, mixed-use development intended to include biotech offices as well as residential. The entire project, which is being led by James E. Stowers III, may take 25 years to build out.

Two council members, Russ Johnson and Scott Wagner, said they supported the development but strenuously objected to allowing tax abatement for the entire site.

“This is ludicrous,” Johnson said, arguing that tax incentives should be reserved for truly blighted urban areas of the city, not for a speculative project on such a vast tract of largely vacant land near 87th Street.

The majority of council members said they are glad the project is coming to Kansas City rather than Johnson County, and incentives are still needed to ensure progress in this part of the city.

Councilman Ed Ford said the Planned Industrial Expansion Authority will determine the level of tax abatement for each building, and some buildings may not get the tax break.

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