

# Lawmakers approve \$50 million for health sciences center in downtown Camden

The Inquirer

Jonathan Lai Posted: Friday, December 18, 2015, 12:57 PM

Lawmakers gave final approval Friday for \$50 million in bond funding to create a “health sciences” center in downtown Camden. The building is being developed by a joint Rowan University and Rutgers-Camden Board of Governors, formed in 2013 and tasked with creating new health sciences partnerships between the two schools. It will go up at the block diagonally across from the Walter Rand Transportation Center, stretching from Martin Luther King Boulevard south to Stevens Street and from Broadway west to Fifth Street.

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority gave preliminary approval for the \$50 million in June, and in November gave its final sign-off. The Joint Budget Oversight Committee, composed of members of both houses of the State Legislature, approved Friday the issuing of new bonds. “Receiving the JBOC’s approval for us today marks a significant milestone, and the final approval we have been waiting for,” Kris Kolluri, the CEO of the joint board, said in a phone interview. “This gives us all the approval necessary to start the design and construction of the Joint Health Sciences Center in 2016.”

The \$50 million will go toward that building, the main component of a health sciences campus the board is putting on the block, including green space and a planned second building. It will help anchor an “eds and meds” corridor stretching north to Rutgers-Camden and including the Cooper University Hospital and Cooper Medical School of Rowan University buildings. The joint board is expected to put in another \$3 to \$4 million.

Of the lots on the block, the joint board has bought or agreed to buy almost all of them. Three lots have absent owners and the board is preparing to use eminent domain to acquire them; one final property is being negotiated with the owner.

“I’m pretty comfortable in saying that by the end of January we will have control over the entire site,” Kolluri said. In January, the design process will begin, Kolluri said. Engineers start assessment in February, and demolition is planned to begin in March or April, and be done by May. (Two buildings have already come down to create a gravel parking lot.)

Construction, Kolluri said, will begin sometime next fall.