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UF lands \$8.2M for incubator at AGH site

The business incubator set for a parking lot at the hospital will provide office space, laboratories and other facilities for start-up companies.

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The University of Florida is getting an \$8.2 million federal grant to build a business incubator on the Shands at AGH site.

The building, scheduled to be completed in December 2011, will provide office space, laboratories and other facilities for start-up companies. It will also house UF's Office of Technology Licensing and UF Tech Connect, which work with researchers to get their inventions patented, licensed and on the market.

"It creates a community of entrepreneurship," said Win Phillips, UF's vice president for research.

UF announced the grant Friday along with plans for the site. The 45,000-square-foot facility is slated to be built on a northwest parking lot of the hospital, which is closing in November. Groundbreaking should happen within two months and construction will proceed even while the hospital still stands, Phillips said.

The demolition of Shands AGH could take as long as a year, said Ed Poppel, UF's vice president for administrative affairs. The process is more like a dismantling than a wrecking-ball demolition, he said.

"There are a lot of things that can be saved, recycled, reutilized," he said.

The federal Economic Development administration awarded the grant. UF is contributing \$5 million toward the facility, which it is calling the Florida Innovation Hub. Phillips said the money will come from licensing royalties.

"We've been very successful ... so we're investing back in the community," he said.

The facility will be similar to the Sid Martin Biotech Incubator in Alachua. Phillips said the new incubator will aim to attract businesses in fields other than biotechnology, such as medical devices and information technology.

UF officials said they'll now work with the city of Gainesville to decide what to do with the rest of the 16-acre AGH property. Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan said she'd like to see a variety of uses that could include restaurants and other retail businesses.

"I would hope with a site of that size ... there would be a mix of things going on," she said.

Phillips said another incubator is a possibility if the first is a success.

While some developers had suggested student housing for the site, Poppel discounted the idea.

"This community right now is very much in agreement that in the current environment we do not need any more undergraduate student housing," he said.
