

Pineville moves towards development of Central property

 Jeff Matthews, jmatthews@thetowntalk.com, (318) 487-6380 6:52 p.m. CDT June 8, 2015

Bill allows transfer of state hospital property to downtown development district



(Photo: The Town Talk)

When Central Louisiana State Hospital moves, the City of Pineville will be ready for the opportunities left in its wake.

A bill that passed the legislature Monday authorizes the future transfer of the Central property to a rejuvenated development district. Stakeholders hope Senate Bill 217 lays the groundwork to move quickly on development of the property when it does become available.

"As things unfold, obviously properties are going to become vacant," said Pineville Mayor Clarence Fields.

"When that happens, we want to have some means of getting them back into commerce."

Central, which was established in 1906, is slated to move to a new facility adjacent to Pinecrest Supports and Services Center in Pineville. There is still no firm timetable for the move, which was announced in 2012.

When Central does move, hundreds of acres of property will be available for potential development. Most of Central's 1,500-plus acres are between Main Street, a former commercial hub that city officials are hoping to jump start again, and U.S. Highway 165, which is expected to increase in importance with a new four-lane roadway and bridge over the Red River.

"We're trying to create a vision for the future," Fields said. "Central is a big part of that."

SB 217 allows for the transfer of the state-owned Central property to the Pineville Downtown Development District, which has been dormant for several years.

Stakeholders see the district as a means to facilitate development opportunities, not only at Central but at nearby areas including the riverfront and possibly the shuttered Huey P. Long Medical Center. The district's powers include receiving property, borrowing money and issuing bonds.

"This can serve as a vehicle for development," Fields said. "Not unlike other entities that have been created to handle vacant properties, such as the England Authority."

A separate bill, House Bill 715, reforms membership of the Pineville Downtown Development District's board. It passed the legislature on Saturday.

The seven-member board will have three appointees from the city of Pineville and one each from the Rapides Parish Police Jury, Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance, the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce and North Rapides Business and Industry Alliance.

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