

# Development to attract doctors

**Business:** Proposed office complex would be town's largest

By Don Patterson  
Staff Reporter

A new development in the Westmount area could provide some relief for Okotoks' doctor shortage.

A proposed three-storey office building, called Westmount Square, will include medical and professional offices on the top two floors and retail space on the ground level.

Once completed, the building will help address a shortage of doctors in the community as well as an extremely low vacancy rate for office space in Okotoks.

"It provides a great service in the community," said Grant Greschuk, spokesperson for developer OPTIMUS Building Corporation.

The project is proposed for a site on Westmount Road, across from the new Westmount School.

While it could suit a variety of professional uses, Greschuk said the preference is to see the building largely filled by professionals in the medical and related fields.

"In an ideal world we'd like to see the building filled with doctors and supporting services," he said.

Greschuk said the town's location, demographics and quality of life also make it a good place for the project. He said it will help attract doctors and other medical professionals to the building.

"A big driver for this type of a building out there was, number one, the need for the services," he said.

The site is also located two blocks from the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre and it's 20 minutes from the



A proposed Okotoks three-storey office building, called Westmount Square, will include medical and professional offices on the top two floors and retail space on the ground level.

new south Calgary hospital, something the developer sees as a major advantage.

Greschuk said there are a variety of potential uses for retail space on the first floor. The largest single retail space available is just over 12,000 square feet in size. Ideally, Greschuk said he would like to see a pharmacy set up in the main floor. He said other possible businesses are coffee shops, restaurants or day-cares. The building will also include 300 underground parking stalls and 186 surface stalls.

Construction is proposed to begin in April 2012 and it's expected to be completed in about a year.

Shane Olson, Okotoks' economic development team leader, said the Town has met the developer, but a development permit application has not yet been submitted to the Town.

He said it's an "exciting" development that will meet two critical needs in town.

"This type of building is exactly what we'd like to see," he said.

Olson said the 87,384-square-foot building would be the largest office complex in Okotoks.

Okotoks is short 10 to 12 full-time doctors, but this number could be as high as 20 because most doctors aren't working the long hours some may have in the past.

He said the facility would also be good for specialists such as pediatricians, gerontologists, nurse practitioners or psychiatrists.

The facility will also ease Okotoks' vacancy rate for professional and office space, which he said is almost zero.

"It's essentially zero per cent," said Olson. "It's very, very low."

He said it would be ideal for businesses looking to relocate to Okotoks.

Olson said he has been contacted by many businesses located in Calgary looking

to move to Okotoks but haven't been able to because of a lack of office space.

"I've been here five-and-a-half years and the amount of people I've seen come through that we were not able to accommodate because we don't have a property in place was disappointing," he said.

He said it will also give businesses in town looking to expand a place to do so.

Olson said the commercial zoning on the site would allow for a variety of different retail and professional uses.

He said it will also benefit restaurants and other retail businesses in the Cornerstone and Westmount area.

# Project promises to ease shortage

By Don Patterson  
Staff Reporter

A new office building in the Westmount area geared towards medical professionals is a promising step to easing the doctor shortage in Okotoks, said a member of a group working to bring more physicians to town.

Just how successful it will be depends on the cost of space in the building, said Dr. Leslie Cunning, medical director for the Calgary Rural Primary Care Network.

"It's really about the economics of practice," said Cunning, who is working with the Rural Physician Action Plan (RPAP) and the Town of Okotoks to recruit more doctors to the community.

A developer has proposed an 87,000-square-foot, three story building with retail space on the first floor and office space on the second and third floors. It's the developer's preference the building be largely filled with medical professionals such as physicians, laboratories and other medical specialists.

According to Cunning, a lack of office space has been one of the main impediments to attracting more doctors to Okotoks and the proposed office complex will help in this area.

As well, he said there are doctors in Okotoks who would like to expand their practice and bring other physicians in to work with them, but can't because of a lack of space.

Cunning said the two biggest costs for a medical practice are staff and space, making up at least 55 per cent of the cost. Once lease rates start reaching upwards of \$40 to \$50 per square foot, he said it becomes unaffordable for most family physicians.

"A doctor's practice can easily cost \$110,000 a year and it's just not a sustainable model," he said.

Cunning said having larger groups of doctors working together can help to make it more feasible.

He said he hopes the new facility will help to bring down high lease rates in other office buildings in town.

"Hopefully, it will create a little bit of overcapacity in terms of office space so there's more negotiative leverage for doctors," said Cunning.

He said Okotoks has been well represented in physician recruitment meetings and Town representatives have been working aggressively to attract more doctors.

dpatterson@okotoks.greatwest.ca

OPENING SOON

LOCATED OFF DEERFOOT TRAIL  
&  
130 AVENUE SE

**soul**  
HOT YOGA

STAY CONNECTED AT SOULHOTYOGA.COM

246, 5126 - 126 AVENUE SE 403.234.SOUL (7685)

**FACES**  
beauty is power

PERMANENT LASER HAIR REMOVAL  
Our Christmas gift to you at half the cost.

Western Wheel  
GOLD 2011  
READER'S CHOICE  
AWARDS

WINNER OF 7  
READER'S CHOICE  
AWARDS  
Best Esthetics/Skincare

**FACES**  
beauty is power  
403.995.0442  
Tues-Fri 9-5 • Thurs 9-8  
youtube.com  
(type in facesbeautyispower)