

## City grant helps Hospice to stay put in Towncrest

Written by Josh O'Leary Iowa City Press-Citizen

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With an eye toward future growth, leaders of Iowa City Hospice, which is marking its 30th anniversary this year, had a decision to make.

The non-profit could stay put at its home of 13 years in Towncrest — the well-established but fading office area on Iowa City's eastside built in the 1960s as a medical campus — or find a more modern space elsewhere.

Ultimately, Hospice opted to upgrade its 45-year-old office building at 1025 Wade St., where work has begun this fall on a \$335,000 project that will renovate the facility inside and out. Hospice's decision was swayed in part by a \$25,000 grant from the city, part of a program introduced three years intended to spark redevelopment in Towncrest.

"We looked at a number of options — whether to stay in the Towncrest area or to locate someplace else," said Maggie Elliott, Iowa City Hospice executive director. "The grant from the city was part of the decision-making process to stay in our current location."

Iowa City Hospice's project is the latest to benefit from the city's urban renewal incentives programs, rolled out in 2010 with the aim of spurring new developments or the renovation of existing buildings in Towncrest.

In 2010, the Iowa City Free Medical Clinic, 2440 Towncrest Dr., received \$175,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant money, administered by the city, for renovations. And last year, the city council approved \$950,000 in incentives, including \$625,000 in tax-increment financing, for a \$5 million project by MDK Development. That developer's two medical office buildings at the corner of Muscatine Avenue and William Street are scheduled to open in November, according to the city.

For the city's part, it has begun work on its William Street streetscape project, which includes new on-street parking, new pavement and sidewalks, landscaping and lighting.

While the transformation for Towncrest laid out by city planners three years ago has been slow to take shape, Elliott said given the several years it took Hospice leaders to decide on its course of action, she understands the makeover will take time.

"We're excited to be a part of what's going on out here," Elliott said.

Tracy Hightshoe, a community development planner for the city, said Iowa City Hospice's project is the latest positive step toward the revitalization of the area.

"Things are happening in Towncrest, it just takes a while," Hightshoe said.

Iowa City Hospice's exterior upgrade, assisted by the \$25,000 facade renovation grant, will include constructing a new entryway, replacing the roof and installing energy efficient windows. The interior will feature a new community space, new meeting and break areas, and a more open floorplan. The project is scheduled to be complete by mid to late 2014.

Iowa City Hospice, which was founded in 1983, purchased its Towncrest property in 2000. Today, the organization employs 70 people and provides services to nearly 100 people a day, Elliott said.