

Features

Near Northside Gets Much-Needed Health Clinic

The facility, which will serve families in a traditionally low-income neighborhood, will open next year in Avenue Center, a community resource center across from Moody Park that is being developed by Avenue.

By **Lisa Brown** | August 15, 2019 at 10:05 PM



The facility is located at 3517 Irvington Blvd. in Houston's urban core.

HOUSTON—In 2017, Near Northside was designated as one of five pilot neighborhoods for Mayor Sylvester Turner's Complete Communities initiative, which focuses on ensuring Houston communities have the quality of life elements needed for residents to live and prosper in their own neighborhoods. These elements include adequate access to healthcare, educational resources, healthy groceries, parks and green space, quality public transit and economic opportunities. The initiative seeks to address these needed elements and includes provisions for sufficient affordable housing, which has become a growing concern across Houston, including in the Near Northside community.

Avenue, a local nonprofit dedicated to developing affordable homes, is collaborating with Legacy Community Health to bring a much-needed community health clinic to Near Northside. The facility is located at 3517 Irvington Blvd. in Houston's urban core. The 6,200-square-foot facility, which will serve families in this traditionally low-income neighborhood, will open next year in Avenue Center, a mixed-use community resource center being developed by Avenue across from Moody Park.

"We are excited to collaborate with Legacy Community Health to improve healthcare access for working families in Near Northside. Like Avenue, Legacy is committed to improving the quality of life for all, including low-income households that are cost burdened and struggling to accommodate healthcare costs," said Mary Lawler, executive director at Avenue.

"Creating healthier communities starts with healthier families and that is not possible without adequate access to quality affordable healthcare. The Legacy Community Health Clinic at Avenue Center will provide Near Northside residents with improved access to healthcare providers and a state-of-the art healthcare facility, both of which are critical to building healthier and happier communities."

Avenue Center will feature approximately 30,500 square feet of community programming space. In addition to the new Legacy Community Health clinic, Avenue Center will offer area residents access to a wide variety of programs and services including homebuyer education and counseling, financial education, space for meetings and trainings, and an early childhood education center, which will help address the shortage of early childhood education options in the community.

Legacy Community Health is a not-for-profit Federally Qualified Health Center that provides comprehensive care to more than 150,000 patients at more than 30 clinics in Southeast Texas, regardless of a patient's ability to pay. The agency, a United Way of Greater Houston agency, will provide primary care and behavioral health services at the Near Northside clinic.

"We look forward to our collaboration with Avenue in the new Avenue Center and hope that it will inspire further investment in healthcare services for underserved communities across Houston and the state," says Legacy Community Health CEO Katy Caldwell.

The Near Northside is home to approximately 25,000 people, more than one-third of whom live below the poverty line, compared to Houston's overall poverty rate of 23%. Health disparities are a key concern in the community, where nearly 40% of residents lack health insurance and approximately 11% of residents have previously reported serious psychological distress. Childhood obesity is also a prominent issue in Near Northside, with more than 50% of children reported to be at unhealthy weights.

Lawler noted that the goal of Avenue Center is to conveniently co-locate a variety of vital resources for residents, especially low-income families, to improve access to essential support services that will improve the quality of life for individuals and the community as a whole.

“For 10 years, Avenue has worked closely with the Near Northside community to support development and revitalization efforts that enhance the quality of life for working families, while preserving the historic and cultural integrity of the neighborhood,” Lawler tells [GlobeSt.com](#). “Part of this work involves providing greater access to vital resources for area residents, especially low-income families. With Avenue Center, we have focused on addressing unmet needs in the community and co-locating important supportive services such as healthcare, childcare and homebuyer education to improve the resilience of the neighborhood and improve the quality of life for all.”

Avenue tapped architecture and engineering firm Page for the design for Avenue Center, which is inspired by the cultural fabric of the Near Northside community as well as Avenue’s existing development portfolio.

Avenue is currently in the midst of a capital campaign which has raised nearly \$10 million for Avenue Center (toward a \$12 million goal) from organizations that include the city of Houston, Complete Communities Improvement Fund, BBVA, Houston Endowment, The Fondren Foundation, Midway Foundation, J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation, Green Mountain Energy Sun Club, The Brown Foundation, The Hearst Foundation, Camden, Trammell Crow Company, Cullen Foundation and Wells Fargo.

During the past 27 years, Avenue has helped revitalize Houston neighborhoods by leveraging more than \$117 million in investments for developments including 200 single-family homes, 756 rental units and 140,000 square feet of commercial space. Last year, Avenue was recognized with the prestigious Jack Kemp Excellence in Affordable and Workforce Housing Award from Urban Land Institute.