

## Proposed biotech complex could help state

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By Charlie Breitrose/Daily News staff

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A Framingham-based developer announced a proposal this week to build 2 million square feet of biotech facilities in Burlington, which some say could be key to keeping life science companies and jobs in the state.

As Massachusetts tries to position itself as a center of the life sciences, developments such as the new one in Burlington are important, said Peter Abair, director for economic development for the Massachusetts Biotech Council.

The heart of the industry remains in Cambridge and Boston, where 109 companies are located, but Abair said the suburbs have become an important place for the biotech industry to expand.

"It is difficult to do manufacturing in Cambridge and Boston, but if you can have manufacturing facilities along (Interstate) 495 or the Pioneer Valley, it's great for all of Massachusetts," Abair said. "Having available more cost-competitive space outside Cambridge only helps the competitiveness of Massachusetts."

The state has a stronghold in research and development, but could use more manufacturing jobs in the biotech area, said Ted Welte, president and CEO of the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce. Recalling a recent chamber event, Welte said a presentation about the biotech industry illustrated the need to bolster manufacturing.

"They showed a chart which showed Massachusetts did well with research, pretty well with development, but when it came to manufacturing we were losing it to the Carolinas and offshore," Welte said. "You really have to address some of those issues if we are going to take hold of the entire line of the value chain - from research, through to development and manufacturing."

Exactly what type of biotech facilities will be included in the Burlington development is not clear. Representatives from the Framingham developer, Patriot Partners LLC, could not be reached for comment, and which companies are interested in the site was not announced.

The 250-acre development would not be limited to the biotech complex. A senior housing community and a retail complex would occupy part of the land, and some of the land would be preserved as open space, according to reports.

Patriot Partners has other projects along Rte. 128. The group will convert the old Raytheon Headquarters in Lexington into a biotech complex known as Lexington Technology Park. They also redeveloped a former Raytheon plant into a retail complex called Wayside Commons in Burlington.

The fact that developers have targeted Burlington is no accident, Abair said. The town has taken steps to make it more appealing to biotech companies.

"Until recently, Burlington had zoning bylaws that prohibited biotech in large portions of the community, but they recently adopted changes that would allow biotechnology," Abair said. "They are very well positioned at the crossroads of 128 and Rte. 3 and yet, even with that, they hadn't been in that position because of outdated bylaws."

While the complex would be built in Burlington, Welte did not see it as a loss for the MetroWest regions.

"You really have to take the broad view," Welte said. "This is a statewide initiative. It is important to think in terms of the whole state. Some parts (of the state) will probably be clusters for biotech, and I think you will see the MetroWest will be one of them. I think there is plenty to go around."

Abair said residents of the MetroWest will likely benefit from the new facility.

"Something might happen in Burlington, and it might help families in Hopkinton or Sudbury," Abair said. "Same thing with any developing in Marlborough. People anywhere along 495 would probably commute there for a job."

(Charlie Breitrose can be reached at 508-626-3964 or cbreitro@cnc.com.)