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Uni hospital dream takes a giant leap

URGENT negotiations have shored up a land deal that has locked in the site of a proposed Cairns University Hospital.

A decision on Wednesday guaranteed Cairns will become home to a University Hospital after the signing of a historic agreement reached between the state government and James Cook University.

Two weeks ago Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, on a visit to Cairns, issued a stern ultimatum demanding JCU agree to release several valuable parcels after the university signed a \$10m deal to buy a 12,331sq m site bounded by Sheridan, Grove, Charles and Digger streets. On Thursday the Premier was relieved the critical health precinct had been finalised after months of delay.

"I'm so pleased we have a site locked in, land ready and everyone is now working on delivering this major asset for the region sooner rather than later," she said. Deputy Premier Steven Miles – tasked with ensuring a deal was reached – said after a meeting on Wednesday all key parties agreed on the best site for the precinct.

"The (project) will proceed on a Cairns CBD block ... in the heart of the CBD and conveniently located near the hospital," he said.

Mr Miles said his department would now co-ordinate a joint master plan for the site in collaboration with JCU and Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service.

Service chairman Clive Skarott said the Cairns Health Innovation Centre would become the flagship building of the Cairns University Hospital.

"The Cairns Health Innovation Centre is the first stage of our Cairns University Hospital redevelopment project and would allow us to collaborate on clinical research, trials, education, training, innovation, Indigenous health and community engagement," he said.

"We're looking forward to working with JCU and the Queensland Government to deliver a great precinct."

The precinct will include a new health building for the Cairns Health Innovation Centre. CHHHS will relocate some of its research, education and training services to this new centre, which would allow the service to expand its patient bed footprint and relieve pressure at the adjacent Cairns Hospital.

JCU Cairns campus director David Craig was buoyed by agreement of all stakeholders.

"They have worked through their process and we have worked through ours and we have (secured) a good outcome for everyone," he said.



JCU vice-chancellor Professor Sandra Harding said the precinct would help to attract and retain specialists from around the world. "The development of the precinct ... allows for the co-location of students, teachers, clinicians and researchers, making this a creative and exciting place in which to study and work," she said.

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