

The Hitachinaka General Hospital was refurbished in June 2010. The refurbishment also strengthened the hospital's handling of acute or perinatal cases, including its emergency medicine services.

Special Report

Urban Development for Health and Vitality

Hitachinaka city and Hitachi work together to revitalize city center

As they face the prospect of rapidly aging populations and falling birthrates, revitalization of city centers has become an urgent issue for Japan's regional and medium-sized cities. Trends such as the population increasingly being concentrated in the major cities, the rise of large suburban shopping centers, and the negative effects of globalization on local industry are causing the railway station precincts and other downtown areas of Japan's regional cities to lose the vibrancy and bustle they once enjoyed, making this an issue that will require more vigorous measures to resolve in the future. Against this background, Hitachinaka city in Ibaraki Prefecture has embarked on a joint public-private project for the city center called "Kenko Ikiiki Machizukuri" (urban development for health and vitality). The project takes advantage of a hospital refurbishment to strengthen the role of the medical facilities located in the city center and undertake a comprehensive urban development in conjunction with the redevelopment of surrounding areas. As a joint venture between Hitachinaka city and Hitachi, the project is attracting considerable attention from around Japan as a model example of how to go about city center revitalization through collaboration between a local government and a corporate group.

Creating a City where People Can Live Safely

East Japan Railway Company (JR) Katsuta Station is the gateway to Hitachinaka city and Hitachinaka General Hospital (previously called Mito General Hospital) is a corporate hospital run by Hitachi, Ltd. The hospital is a five-minute walk from the East Exit of the station along the main street that runs toward the sea, followed by a right turn. On entering this brand new hospital, which completed reconstruction in June 2010, your first impression will be of the expansive lobby with its high ceiling together with the prominent directions printed in large text, friendly-looking electronic displays that utilize IT

(information technology), wide corridors decorated in soft shades of color, and other features that express the patient-friendly concept behind the building's design.

Hitachinaka city and Hitachi are now embarking on a new urban development based around this hospital.

City mayor Motoki Homma, described the initiative by saying, "Hitachinaka city was created by the merger of Katsuta city and Nakaminato city in 1994. The city formulated an overall plan that aimed to make Hitachinaka an 'independent and collaborative city with links to the wider world in which prosperous industries and a vibrant way of life can thrive' and set about creating a town that is lively and affluent and in which people can live safely.

“Medium-sized cities around Japan are very worried about the loss of vitality in the neighborhoods around their main railway stations and city centers. With the aging of society, they are also struggling to ensure the availability of high-quality medical services. This is also true of Hitachinaka city and, in the area of medical services, we placed our hopes on what was then called Mito General Hospital which, although a company-run hospital, was set up to provide general medical services. In conjunction with a plan formulated in 2006 to rebuild the hospital, we also received a proposal from Hitachi for a city center revitalization plan to be undertaken in conjunction with the hospital redevelopment. Because basing town planning around the hospital was essential for providing residents with a safe place to live, we reviewed this plan in consultation with the regional branch of the Medical Association. At the same time, we also decided to proceed with a plan to reinvigorate the neighborhood around the station’s East Exit, an issue left unresolved after the refurbishment of Katsuta Station.”

Subsequently, Hitachinaka city, Hitachi, Ltd., Mito General Hospital (as it was then known), and Hitachi Life, Ltd. (a Hitachi Group company) established a “planning committee for city center revitalization work” in February 2006 to act as a mayoral advisory panel.

A Hospital that Cares for its Community

Yoji Nagai, Manager of Hitachinaka General Hospital who has been an energetic proponent of the urban redevelopment being undertaken in conjunction with the hospital refurbishment since it was first planned, gives his views as follows.

“In addition to Hitachi staff and their families, the hospital has since its establishment in 1946 also provided medical services to the general population of the region. Although a medium-sized hospital, it is the only general hospital in the region and

approximately 80% of outpatients are ordinary citizens. However, with the aging of its existing facilities and a need for earthquake-strengthening, we decided on a plan for rebuilding.

“There were once more than 300 company-run hospitals in Japan, but that number has now shrunk to around 70 and of the hospitals being run by Hitachi, including ourselves, some are facing difficult business conditions. With Hitachi itself experiencing a tough business climate, the fact that approval was given for the rebuild represents not only concern for the welfare of Hitachi staff but also a desire to make a contribution to the region. Our aim is to strengthen further our role as a ‘hospital that cares for its community.’ In the belief that this would require cooperation with the community and would provide an opportunity to come up with a model appropriate for dealing with the aging of society through collaboration with the city administration, we consulted with the Urban Planning and Development Systems at Hitachi (since renamed the Urban Planning and Development Systems Company).”

At the same time, the Urban Planning and Development Systems was embarking on initiatives aimed at supplying an extensive range of safe, secure, and comfortable solutions to society through urban developments based on a vision of “creating cities that are healthy and vibrant places to live.”

The area around the hospital contains sports parks, cultural facilities, and other city amenities as well as an adjacent supermarket and the main shopping precinct for the Katsuta district. Other nearby facilities included Hitachi employee housing and a large site owned by Hitachi Life, and moves were already in progress toward the redevelopment of the hospital’s city-center neighborhood which is adjacent to a railway station served by express trains. Sites with all of these conditions being present together are a rarity anywhere in Japan and it was decided to treat the plan as a model urban



Motoki Homma,
Mayor of Hitachinaka City

Indications of how patients' needs have been taken into account are evident all around the hospital, such as clear signage and a staff station that integrates seamlessly into the corridor.

development suitable for a community with a very high proportion of elderly people. It was also agreed that Hitachi Group would be involved in all aspects of the plan.

Urban Redevelopment Project Gets Underway

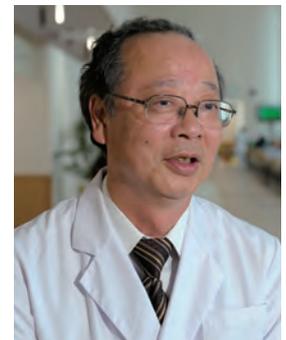
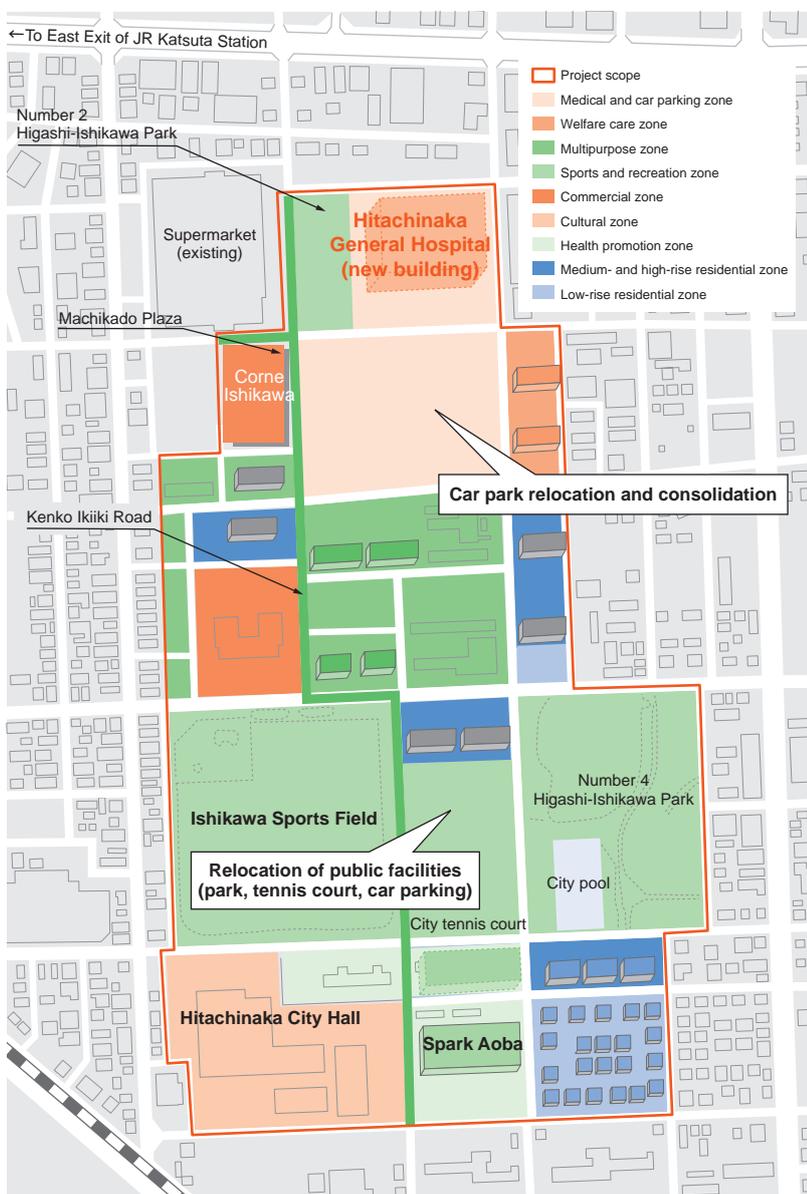
The area to be redeveloped is a rectangular region extending approximately 1 km in the north-south direction and 300 m in the east-west direction and taking in parts of Ishikawa-cho and Aoba-cho. The planning committee got started on planning work in accordance with the various existing plans which included the general town plan, city master plan, and city center revitalization plan.

Having set the objective of creating a “garden-like city center

that conveys the sense of a high standard of living,” the concept of “urban development for health and vitality,” and the image of a “compact city” based around the existing city center, the project set out to “create a composite living space in which people of all ages can walk the streets and live their lives without fear for their safety.” Specifically, the area was divided into “medical and car parking,” “welfare care,” “sports and recreation,” “culture,” “health promotion,” “medium- and high-rise residential,” and other zones to improve functionality with the intention of drawing on the synergies between the different zones to create a desirable urban neighborhood. Although the first step was to rebuild the new hospital to the north of its existing location, most of the land was used for contract car parking which needed to be relocated somewhere.

Also, because facilities such as sports fields, parks, and tennis courts were spread around the area, there was a need to consolidate these. It was also considered desirable to provide good quality footpaths and reorganize the local street layout which dated back to the era of staff housing, but this required the understanding of the residents who used these amenities.

In response to these challenges, the planners came up with a number of measures including: (1) a new multi-story car park to be constructed to the west of the hospital to provide the contracted parking and improve land use efficiency, (2) based on the need to provide convenient services for those living around the hospital, the retail stores (Corne Ishikawa) that formed the street frontage



Yoji Nagai, Manager,
Hitachinaka General Hospital,
Hitachi, Ltd.

Zoning plan for “Kenko Ikiiki Machizukuri”
redevelopment project

were to be incorporated into the multi-story car park to provide city amenities and ensure the vitality of the area, (3) the city and Hitachi would execute a bold land swap to clarify the zoning of the sports and recreation zone, and (4) the construction of footpaths to improve access to the hospital and the facilities located around the railway station. A key feature of the development is the “Kenko Ikiiki Road,” a 4-m (approximately) wide footpath running north-south through the area. Park benches, health and playground equipment, and other facilities are to be installed at suitable locations to promote walking for health and the footpaths are to form a network around the region in the future. In addition to the existing sports park, the health promotion zone will also include the construction of a fitness club (Spark Aoba) which provides indoor sports facilities. The concept is that these facilities will also be linked to Hitachinaka General Hospital so that it can contribute to illness prevention by providing residents with health management rather than just medical treatment.

Renamed as Hitachinaka General Hospital

In addition to planning, specific measures were also implemented to strengthen the services of the hospital.

To this end, and to strengthen the hospital’s emergency medicine capabilities in its role as a regional base hospital in

the event of a disaster, the hospital’s capabilities for dealing with critical cases was enhanced by measures that included making it a regional center for the coordination of cancer diagnosis and treatment, the construction of a new ICU (intensive care unit) and CCU (critical care unit), and the addition of five new operating theaters. Meanwhile, effort also went into enhancing rehabilitation services, providing a full range of diagnostic services, and improving medical coordination including working with the region’s obstetricians on plans for a perinatal center. In terms of its size, the hospital has expanded its outpatient capacity from 630 to 700, its inpatient beds from 215 to 290, and its diagnostic (health checkup) capability from 80 to 100 people.

Mr. Nagai commented as follows. “We placed our emphasis on providing ongoing support through the acute phase and on to recovery and subsequent rehabilitation through close liaison with regional medical and nursing services and others, and on providing health guidance and health management to prevent lifestyle-related diseases from an early stage before the need for hospital care. In Onomichi city, Hiroshima Prefecture, for example, the patient’s primary physician has the lead role but works together with care managers and in-home service providers to provide efficient medical treatment and nursing services. We have adopted the same practices here. We also seek to work with the regional branch of the Medical Association

Urban Functions Coexist with Extensive Gardens

Walking around the site of the urban redevelopment

Walking around the area to be redeveloped, the demolition of the old hospital building to the south of the hospital is mostly finished and work is now underway on Number 2 Higashi-Ishikawa Park just off to the west. The walking path loop is easy to get around even for people in wheelchairs and handholds have been fitted along part of the path to help people doing walking exercises together with a miniature hill for use in rehabilitation.

The west of the park joins on to Kenko Ikiiki Road where, on the far side of a crossroads plaza fitted with park benches, Corne Ishikawa with its beautiful glass facade is complete and a pharmacy and a convenience store are open for business. A supermarket is also just across the street. The reporter is told that the city administration is considering a proposal to build a canopy to protect people from the rain along the path from the crossroads to the hospital entrance.

At the Machikado Plaza at the crossroads, young women are sitting down for a rest on the park benches. Walking south from the plaza along Kenko Ikiiki Road one reaches Ishikawa Sports Field. Here the pathway shifts to the left toward the park to which the tennis courts were relocated and which adjoins

Number 4 Higashi-Ishikawa Park to the east. South of the tennis courts, Spark Aoba, a fitness club with an indoor pool that is due to open this fall, is undergoing its final touches. To the west is Hitachinaka City Hall which is a venue for concerts and other events.

The impression one gets after a walk around the area is that there is a lot of foliage with many large trees having been preserved. The fact that the entire area is flat will be a relief for the elderly. As the zoning also provides an area for the construction of residential buildings, the town conveys a calm impression. (August 2010)



Ishikawa Sports Field (top)
and Hitachinaka City Hall
(bottom)

and have provided space for primary physicians to accompany patients to the hospital in cases where this is appropriate so they can utilize the hospital's equipment to perform diagnosis and treatment. To provide support in areas such as health maintenance management and during the recovery period and beyond, we have made it possible for patients to stay in residential buildings, welfare centers, and other facilities within the region to provide day-to-day care and be able to respond to sudden changes in condition. We have also strengthened our emergency medical services to help give residents piece of mind even in extreme situations.”

With this in mind, the name of the hospital was changed from its previous name of Mito Hospital (Mito General Hospital), which derived from Hitachi's Mito Works and which it had had since being opened, to Hitachinaka General Hospital.

Total Support of Living

It took the planning committee only five months to complete its plans and the concept for the “Kenko Ikiiki Machizukuri” redevelopment plan was submitted to the mayor in July 2006.

The city was also quick to respond. Once Hitachi had formally authorized the rebuilding of the hospital in September 2007 and the construction of the multi-story car park building in February 2008, the city administration came forward with public support including the awarding of urban development grants and subsidizing Hitachinaka General Hospital in its roles as a regional base hospital in the event of a disaster and an emergency medical facility. The city also started work on the surrounding roads, footpaths, parks, and other facilities. In particular, the plans were able to proceed smoothly thanks to the vigorous efforts made by the city which included the

complex procedures associated with the major land swap in which city and company land were exchanged and explaining to residents about the removal of city roads.

Hitachi's Total Life Support Service made a major contribution to the redevelopment plan. In collaboration with Hitachi's Urban Planning and Development Systems Company, Hitachi Building Systems Co., Ltd. constructed the Corne Ishikawa multi-story car park building which includes retail shops and is managed by Hitachi Life. Hitachi Life also constructed the nearby Spark Aoba fitness club and has plans to build and manage residential and other buildings designed for the elderly in the future. Hitachi Life operates a wide range of businesses including providing housing in the Ibaraki area, managing rest home facilities, and providing in-home nursing services and fitness services that include health management. For the future, it is also looking to draw on this know-how to provide services such as IT-based healthcare monitoring services, community portal services that convey local information, and area security services. Also on the horizon is the prospect of using service robots to assist people with the daily lives.

Resident Vigor Brings Hospital Town to Life

Traditionally, the forms that cities have taken in Japan have included castle towns centered around a castle and temple-gate towns built around a temple. With the country now facing the prospect of a very high proportion of elderly people, the idea of a hospital town with a focus on hospital services has the potential to become a key concept in urban development. As a hospital town centered around the provision of medical facilities and total healthcare through collaboration between Hitachinaka city and Hitachi, the city center revitalization is attracting attention from local governments around Japan and has received a steady stream of visitors coming to observe and collect information.

Calling for the assembly of soft power to develop the town, Mayor Homma said, “Our objective is to create a vibrant Hitachinaka city and make it a town in which people want to live. We also want to make the “Kenko Ikiiki Machizukuri” redevelopment something that not only residents but also people from nearby towns will find attractive. The city has put together a development plan for the city center district including the Katsuta Station East Exit redevelopment and we are also investigating introducing services such as a community bus that will link the hospital, railway station, shops, and other locations.

“What is required for initiatives like these is ‘resident vigor.’ The Katsuta district is home to many residents from around the country and there is a high level of social interaction. We hope that residents will interact with the companies, shopping areas, and others to jointly create a vibrant urban development.”



Corne Ishikawa, a multi-story car park building shared with retail premises (top), and the Spark Aoba fitness club (bottom)