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### Not so easy

In my opinion, there is something even healthier than secrets, and that is the purposeful misinformation and misdirection of the public.

After reading the so-called news analysis of Irma Strantz and Marvin Schachter ("Secrets are unhealthy," Dec. 13), I would have to conclude that the Pasadena Weekly team is equally complicit in this deception since your editorial staff chose to run an article that is obviously an opinion/commentary piece and tried to pawn it off to the readers as news.

Contrary to Strantz and Schachter's assertions, St. Luke would need more than just a "coat of paint" and some radiological equipment in order to become an urgent care facility. Medical care in California is a regulated industry and permits that were surrendered by Tenet cannot just be transferred. Just because rooms that once housed medical equipment are still in place, we cannot assume that those same rooms will receive permits to house medical equipment. Even though Strantz and Schachter believe that they have the requisite expertise to certify the St. Luke property as appropriate for an

urgent care clinic this does not necessarily make it so.

Even if DS Ventures has every intention to open an urgent care clinic on the property, a feasibility study and environmental impact report would probably be at least two of the steps that would have to take place before any other steps could be taken.

There is no question in my mind that Altadena, Pasadena and surrounding communities are in dire need of a spectrum of health care services, including additional urgent care clinics and emergency rooms. Nor do I believe our communities need one more unaffordable housing development.

However, I don't think besmirching the new property owners, DS Ventures and Councilman Steve Haderlein is the most productive way

to accomplish these goals. Personally, I have found Haderlein very open to listening to the public, as represented at his most recent community meeting that was held at Pasadena High School, and I had no problem reaching and speaking with someone from DS Ventures.

On the other hand, I have found little actual information on Emergency Care Now, of which Strantz and Schachter claim to be members. Perhaps when Strantz and Schachter speak of "back room dealings" or "secret meetings," they are projecting?

GENEVIEVE M. CALAVREUL  
PASADENA

### WRITE TO US

*Unlike other newspapers, we try to publish every letter we get. We also try*

# Pasadena Weekly

## Secrets are unhealthy

Time to end the backroom deals on plans for St. Luke Med Center property

By Marvin Schachter and Irma Strantz

The 13.5-acre St. Luke Medical Center property at Altadena Drive and East Washington Boulevard is one of the largest development sites in Pasadena. Whatever gets built there will have an enormous and irreversible impact on our community for decades to come. Fortunately, the city government has enormous leverage over the future of this site (zoned as public space), because any “nonpublic” development will require a host of city approvals. Unfortunately, however, neither city officials nor the new owner of the site, developer DS Ventures of Beverly Hills, have shown any willingness so far to listen to what community residents have to say about the best uses for the property.

St. Luke was closed by former owner Tenet Healthcare Corp. in 2002, and was sold to Caltech a year later for \$16 to \$20 million. Caltech intended to use the site for adjunct offices and research labs, but soon determined that wasn't feasible and put the property up for sale or lease in April. Last month, Caltech made a windfall profit, selling the landmark site for more than \$42 million to DS Ventures, headed by David Schwartzman.

For almost 70 years, the 165-bed hospital had served as a major health-care resource, providing emergency and acute medical care and surgical services, obstetrics and a transitional/skilled nursing unit. It was shut down by Tenet Healthcare because it failed to meet corporate in-patient revenue demands. In testimony provided by health-care experts and the community at three public hearings in 2002, there was almost near unanimity that the major impact on the local health-care system would be the loss of emergency medical and urgent-care services. The predictions have come true, as documented by several recent studies conducted by the Public Health Department and Huntington Hospital.

After learning about Caltech's decision to sell, our group, Emergency Care Now (ECN), was born, determined to turn back the clock if possible by restoring at least one important health-care service to the community. Comprised mainly of Pasadena, Altadena and Sierra Madre residents who live north of the Foothill (210) Freeway, our coalition has been meeting since May to gather community input about future uses of the St. Luke site and to make sure that City Hall listens to the community's voice.

So far, what we know about the plans for the site is based on whispers and rumors. The community has sought to meet with the developer, but he has not returned our calls. We have tried to get the City Council member in whose district the St. Luke property is located, Steve Haderlein, to schedule a meeting for community residents with the developer. Haderlein apparently has met privately with the developer but has failed to play the role of honest broker and bring the developer to a community meeting. We have met with the City Planning Department to underscore the importance of a public process for planning the site and were met with a friendly reception but the typical protocol response — which is basically silence.

Rather than being proactive and establishing clear guidelines for developing the site, our city officials seem to prefer to wait for Schwartzman to tell them what he wants to do with this property. But Schwartzman doesn't live in Pasadena, and once he builds and sells the site, he won't have any ongoing concern for our community. He'll just take the money and run. We elect our public officials to listen to us, the voters, so that working together we can shape the future of our city.

The community needs time to formulate its ideas, and so far we've gotten a strong sense of what people would like to see on this huge and highly visible property, with its iconic dome. We have heard strong concerns that at least some medical and health services should be available at the St. Luke site to serve Pasadena residents. In particular, residents want an "urgent care" clinic on the site.

Urgent care is the delivery of medical care, independent of a hospital emergency department, on a walk-in basis, without a scheduled appointment. An urgent care center treats many problems, including minor trauma, and offers surgical care and diagnostic testing, including

X-ray and intravenous treatment. Such a center may have extended evening and weekend hours.

More than half of Pasadena residents, as well as people living in Altadena and Sierra Madre who need medical help in the event of an emergency, are unable to find an urgent care clinic north of the Foothill Freeway. Huntington Hospital may be the destination for emergency services, but there is often a wait of five-plus hours before someone can examine you — or you may be taken to a hospital in another city (Arcadia, Glendale or San Gabriel). For example, Huntington had close to 60,000 ER visits in 2006; about one quarter of them were serious enough to require admittance, but more alarming is the fact that in about 40 percent of the cases, the ambulances were diverted to other area hospital emergency rooms.

The emergency department space in the unoccupied St. Luke Medical Center building is basically untouched. A coat of paint, examining room equipment, some new radiology units and the like is all that's needed in order to have a functional urgent care center ready to go. Given a reasonable time frame and equitable leasing arrangements, there is little doubt that a competent medical team could be found to run the clinic.

Sensible solutions for the use of the seven-story, 70,000-square-foot historic building for something besides urgent care might include nursing education, a dental clinic, or specialty clinics for seniors and other age groups, focusing on health problems such as asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Many people also expressed a need for housing on the site to serve a mix of income groups, including families and seniors. Some told us that they would like to see a park or a soccer field. Fortunately, the site is large enough to accommodate a variety of uses. The real issue is whether City Hall will use its leverage over zoning and planning to make this site a model development and an asset to the community.

Because there is a demonstrated need for an urgent care clinic, the developer should be required to set aside space for such a nonprofit clinic and guarantee a reasonable rent.

DS Ventures has already proposed to build 70 market-rate housing units. Just what Pasadena needs — more market-rate housing! Instead, we need housing for working families and for seniors. In implementing its inclusionary zoning ordinance, city officials should require DS Ventures to put the housing on the site rather than just pay an "in lieu" fee into the city's housing trust fund, because there's no guarantee that those funds will be used quickly or appropriately.

The city needs to balance the developer's desire for a profit with the community's need for urgent care and other health programs, affordable housing and open space. Councilman Haderlein's role shouldn't be to cut a deal with the developer based on what he thinks the community wants, or just rubber-stamp what the developer wants. His role should be to make sure that the developer is at the negotiating table with community groups who are concerned about the future of this site.

NOW is the time for the city to begin a collaborative planning process so that residents can influence the development of the St. Luke property. We need an open, transparent process so that whatever happens on the site adds to, rather than detracts from, the neighborhood.

The city can facilitate a win-win situation by bringing the developer and the community together. This — not backroom deals outside of public view — is the way to make Pasadena a better city.

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