



LAUSD Preparing to Sell Surplus Property Near New Granada Hills High

By Tamar Galatzan, LAUSD Board Member

Those of you who have driven past the site of the new high school in Granada Hills, which is rapidly nearing completion, may have noticed a lone, abandoned medical building off to the side. The story behind that comparatively small piece of property is at the heart of one of the key land use issues that impacts the District and surrounding communities.

To understand the situation, it's important to look at how we earlier addressed what could have been a parking catastrophe at the new school.

Prior to my taking office in the summer of 2007, the Board approved funding for construction of the new school, which still carries the unofficial name of Hospital High. The school, scheduled to open next August, is currently the subject of a spirited competition between LAUSD and Granada Hills Charter High School for the right to serve as operator.

Over the past three+ years, I have worked with neighborhood groups, homeowners, the Facilities Department, and the contractors to make sure the planning and design of the school reflects the wishes of the community. Nowhere is this more apparent than the allotment of parking spaces.

The District has an unfortunate tendency to treat parking at new school sites as something of an afterthought, as if it presumes that the vast majority of students attending the school ride public transportation. I'm a big fan of the bus and subway system, but that's not a realistic scenario.

At the Granada Hills location, the initial, paltry allotment of spaces was a disaster waiting to happen. I had visions of cars speeding through nearby streets, desperately searching for an available parking spot. Hardly the way to win over skeptical residents.

Along with District officials, I examined the plans for picking up and dropping off students, as well as projections about number of vehicles expected to park at the school on a daily basis. Together we came up with an alternative design that I believe will accommodate traffic, even on busy days, and spare residents the frustration of having their street parking taken over by the school population.

The medical building has only scant room for parking, but an adjoining church, which is expanding and would like to purchase the property, has ample space to accommodate the increased volume.

A citizen's advisory committee formed earlier this year to recommend what the District should do about 12 parcels of potential surplus property cast a tie vote over whether to sell the Granada Hills land.

My two appointees on the committee, Beth Dymond of Studio City and Gordon Murley of Woodland Hills, voted to sell the property. Last week, the Board authorized Facilities to work toward this goal.

Money derived from the sale would be allocated to Facilities for a one-time, non-recurring capital expenditure. According to the District, the appraised value of the building is \$2.37 million. By law, the property must first be offered to public agencies, and if none of them express interest, then it can be offered for sale to the general public -- such as the church, in this instance.

As one of the biggest single property owners in Southern California, LAUSD has a special responsibility to ensure that the sale of surplus land puts the interests of the community first, and includes the active involvement of community leaders. I am confident that the process involving the Medical Building in Granada Hills meets that standard.