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## St. John Health to lay out vision for Healthy Neighborhoods Detroit

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT • FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER • FEBRUARY 17, 2009

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Picture Detroit's east side a few years from now, where three large tracts of land that once anchored big hospitals will be transformed into new communities with affordable housing, medical care and programs people need in a troubled economy.

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That's the vision of Healthy Neighborhoods Detroit, a new nonprofit organization being formed by the St. John Health system.

St. John is to announce the plan today at an invitation-only meeting of Detroit civic and community leaders.

If successful, the plan could be a national model of what to do with abandoned or downsized urban hospital tracts.

The plans involve St. John's Detroit Riverview campus and its Conner Creek facility in northeast Detroit, site of the former Holy Cross Hospital, and the former Samaritan Hospital, at Conner near Chandler Park Drive, once owned by the Novi-based Trinity Health system.

"St. John remains committed to these three [campuses](#) and the revitalization of these neighborhoods of Detroit," said Patricia Maryland, chief of the Warren-based St. John Health system. "The future of health care is all about collaboration. We've got to work beyond what have been our boundaries to resolve major challenges we all face."

All three neighborhoods have high rates of unemployment, uninsured people and care that falls below that received by people in more affluent communities, according to a survey commissioned by St. John with the Greater Detroit Area Health Council, an organization promoting collaborative efforts to achieve cost-effective care in Detroit.

St. John has been trying to develop new uses for the properties since June 2006, when its closure of inpatient services at Riverview generated criticism that the Warren-based St. John had abandoned the community at the time it was building a \$229-million hospital in

Novi. It opened in September.



Photos by ANDRE J. JACKSON/Detroit Free Press

Mike Fisher, right, president of the Detroit Community Initiative, speaks with resident Miller Taylor at Conner Creek Senior Living in Detroit on Thursday. The 48-unit senior apartment building, in which DCI has invested \$6 million, is fully occupied and has a waiting list.



Fisher helps Conner Creek resident Jacqueline Brooks use the computer at Conner Creek Senior Living.



Mike Fisher, president of Detroit Community Initiative, is

All three sites already house a smattering of community-oriented programs and health services. But the depressed economy has made it difficult for St. John to find a buyer for Riverview and has held up the sale, now expected by April, of St. John's Conner Creek site to east-sider Mike Fisher, a neighborhood resident and developer long active in northeast-side community groups.

The hope is that St. John and its partners will develop projects that can earn grants from President Barack Obama's economic stimulus package.

Of the three sites, the project that is most ahead in becoming a new multiuse property is Conner Creek.

Fisher's Detroit Community Initiative Inc. already has invested \$6 million in a 48-unit senior citizen apartment building on the site, which is fully occupied and has a waiting list.

Fisher has spent months lining up tax credits, grants and loans to proceed with construction of 48 senior citizen apartments, 90 townhouses and a Town Center created by downsizing and renovating the former hospital.

The center will house community programs, many already occupying space on the site, for tutoring and an adult literacy center, a utility-assistance and home-weatherization program, dance classes for teen girls and transitional housing for veterans. Fisher said he's also talking to Detroit about opening a police mini station on the property.

St. John does not have a buyer for Riverview. The project will continue whether one is found or not, Maryland said.

St. John is talking to two developers about adding senior citizen housing at Riverview, Maryland said. St. John also plans to partner with the [University](#) of Detroit Mercy Dental School to add dental services at Riverview.

The campus already houses an Oakland University School of [Nursing program](#) for registered and licensed practical nurses and patient care technicians; an urgent care center; a primary care center and doctors' offices.

Sister Mary Ellen Howard, director of Detroit's Cabrini Clinic and an east-sider, welcomes the developments, saying "any investment in the east side of Detroit is welcome."

But Howard wants to see the plans coordinated more with the Detroit Wayne County Health Authority's East Side Initiative. She cochairs the initiative for the health authority, which released its own report last year on needs in the area. "I would like to see more broad-based, grassroots east-side input," she said.

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looking to get 90 townhouses built at Conner Creek as well.

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**AREA NEEDS SURVEYED**

St. John Health commissioned a survey by the Greater Detroit Area Health Council of 12 east-side Detroit ZIP codes to find out what residents needed. It found:

- 20% of residents have no health insurance.
- Nearly half of mothers who deliver babies have inadequate prenatal care and their babies have low birth weights and infant-mortality rates twice the statewide figures.
- Preventable hospitalizations are nearly twice the state rate for congestive heart failure and three times those for asthma.
- Patients wait up to a month for care at free and federally funded health clinics and have difficulty getting referrals to specialists. The clinics usually aren't open on weekends, causing over-reliance on emergency departments.
- Three hospital emergency departments in the area operate above capacity.
- Many area doctors are retiring or nearing retirement age.
- Significant health disparities exist between people in the area.

Patricia Anstett

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