

Housing & Health Coming to Live Oak

By Jondi Gumz

In my 25 years here in Santa Cruz County, I've seen lots of housing developments. I've seen new medical buildings get built. And I've seen dentists invest in new offices.

This is the first time I've seen a development combining affordable housing, health care and dental care, all at one location.

It's a first for Santa Cruz County, perhaps for the state and nation, and no small venture, estimated at \$65 million to \$68 million.

You'll see construction underway at 1500 Capitola Road in Live Oak, five minutes from the Capitola Mall.

What makes this possible is a very unusual partnership of three nonprofits where the leaders were willing to step out of their silos, resulting in synergy; doing more for people who didn't have dentists, or doctors or affordable housing in their neighborhood.

A year from now, in summer 2022, they will have a 20,000-square-foot primary care



Partners in the project put their shovels into action at the groundbreaking.

center, serving pregnant moms, children, and people who are homeless and a dental clinic with 11 chairs. Next year, construction will start on 57 affordable rental units, projected to house 157 people.

Let's name names.

MidPen Housing, based in Foster

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"Housing & Health" page 8

"Housing & Health" from page 5

The 3.6-acre site, like others in the county being redeveloped, is next to property with a problematic former use allowing soil and groundwater to be contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals.

A 569-page report on the site found tetrachloroethene, a likely carcinogen, a dry cleaning solvent known as PCE -- likely used by the Fairway Dry Cleaner, which operated from 1966 to 1984, creating an underground plume. The operators are no longer available to provide information on chemical use or waste management practices.

Sampling of soil vapor found PCE exceeded the residential environmental screening level in 22 of 34 vapor samples, with the highest 15,600 micrograms per cubic meter, and TCE exceeded it in 21 of 29 samples.

Other chemicals of concern were attributed to a gas station which had underground storage tanks and also is out of business.

Contamination issues are a major reason for-profit developers haven't redeveloped the former Skypark airport site and the Watkins-Johnson (later Aviza) plant property.

In the case of 1500 Capitola Road, a dearth of available properties led the nonprofits to focus on a solution, with state regulators approving a remediation system.

Fundraising

The biggest contribution, \$6,075,000 promised over five years, comes from Central California Alliance for Health, a not-for-profit health plan serving 320,000 members in Santa Cruz, Monterey and Merced counties.

Dientes will get \$2.9 million, Santa Cruz Community Health \$2.65 million, and MidPen \$625,000.

"Prevention and early intervention in dental care are often overlooked and are core to the vision of Dientes," said Dientes CEO Laura Marcus. "The project would never have gotten off the ground without the Alliance and many others in our community who are stepping up to make this dream a reality."

Santa Cruz Community Health CEO Leslie Conners said, "We are deeply grateful." She said Santa Cruz Community Health has been aligned with the Alliance since it launched some 25 years ago, with the two nonprofits sharing missions "to improve access to quality care for those who need it most."

MidPen Housing Chief Real Estate Development Officer Jan Lindenthal called the Alliance an "exceptional" partner, adding, "Thanks to their support, residents of Santa Cruz County will have the access to health care and affordable housing they need to live happy and healthy lives and achieve their dreams for the future."

Alliance's CEO Stephante Sonnenshine explains, "Access to treatment, regular preventative care, and stable housing is key to achieving and maintaining positive health outcomes."

Community Foundation Santa Cruz County is investing \$2.2 million.

The California Health Facilities Financing Authority is providing \$1.5 million each to Santa Cruz Community Health and Dientes.

"It takes a village," said Drew Gagner, chief philanthropy officer of the Dominican Hospital Foundation.

"Very inspiring," added Dr. Bill Maclean, physician in charge for Kaiser Permanente Santa Cruz County.

Local philanthropists Bud Colligan and Bob and Sharon Bailey spoke to show their support.

"We're still raising money," said Carol Fuller, who at 75 decided to invest \$500,000 out of an inheritance in this project to



Photo Credit: Jondi Gumz

Carol Fuller (from right) with Leslie Conner and Cynthia Mathews.

match other gifts. "This project spoke to me -- social justice, dental care."

After Fuller spoke, a woman approached her, check in hand. ■

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To learn more or make a donation, visit: <http://1500CapitolaRoad.org>

Cover Photo: Anthony Arya entertains at the groundbreaking.