

By [Dean Olsen](#)

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Planned Parenthood moves to city's west side after selling downtown building in 2015

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Planned Parenthood opened a new facility at 601 Bruns Lane after moving from the prior location on East Washington Street. Justin L. Fowler/The State Journal-Register

Not without controversy, [Planned Parenthood of Illinois](#) opened a new Springfield health center Monday in a new location — the city's west side — after [selling its downtown building](#) last year to make way for a future bus transfer center.

“We look forward to providing women’s health care in the community for many years to come,” said Brigid Leahy, director of public policy for the Chicago-based not-for-profit.



The move to 601 N. Bruns Lane, after \$220,000 in renovations in recent months, surprised residents and business owners who learned they would be neighbors of Planned Parenthood only after signs were posted this past weekend.

Some residents said they oppose Planned Parenthood because it provides abortions. And some members of Springfield Right to Life protested on the sidewalk outside the new facility, which was built in 1988 and formerly housed a cell phone retailer, a Republican Party call center and a private business college.

“It’s horrible,” said David Mundelius, 56, a retired Chicago municipal worker who lives a few doors south of the facility. “I have to walk by every day and get the creepy feeling of what’s going on inside. It’s like the devil coming to your backyard.”

Another neighbor, the Rev. Wilson Douglas, 92, pastor of Wesleyan Holiness Church, lives in the parsonage with his wife, Ruth. He said he is “100 percent opposed” to Planned Parenthood because “the Bible says ‘Thou shall not murder,’ and so therefore when you kill a little child, you’re murdering.”

The new site, like the now-vacant health center at 1000 E. Washington St., provides the abortion pill, known as “[medication abortion](#),” to terminate a pregnancy in the first trimester.

The center doesn’t provide surgical abortions, and there are no plans to offer surgical abortions in Springfield, Leahy said.

Planned Parenthood officials say abortions represent a sliver of the low- and no-cost health-care services they provide to a disproportionately low-income clientele.

Stealth buyer

Planned Parenthood didn’t need to notify nearby property owners because the business zone in which the new 6,000-square-foot site is located allows for medical offices and other health-care facilities.

The organization’s practice when making moves is not to inform neighbors ahead of time, Leahy said.

“We wanted to make sure everything went smoothly,” she said.

Not everyone was negative about the new neighbor. Tosha Smith, who lives next door, said she has used Planned Parenthood in the past “for birth control.”

Officials from nearby United Community Bank, Calvary Academy and Noonan True Value Hardware either didn’t return phone calls or wouldn’t comment.

The building permit requested from the city for Planned Parenthood’s renovation work didn’t list Planned Parenthood as the business. The request instead listed the words “medical office development” and a Chicago address, but it’s not unusual, improper or illegal for businesses to list subsidiary organizations on building permits, zoning administrator Matt McLaughlin said.

Property records filed with the Sangamon County recorder’s office indicate Planned Parenthood apparently bought the property through a trust from Springfield resident John Pruitt in March 2015 for \$530,000.

Pruitt, the owner of E.L. Pruitt Co., a provider of mechanical services, said he owned the one-story building for several years and sold it through a real-estate agent. The name of the limited liability company that purchased the property didn’t indicate it was connected with Planned Parenthood, Pruitt said.

If Pruitt had known Planned Parenthood was the prospective buyer, that probably wouldn’t have stopped the sale, said Pruitt, who is Catholic and whose denomination’s leaders have condemned Planned Parenthood.

Ward 9 Ald. [Jim Donelan](#) said he was unaware of the new arrival to his ward until a constituent informed him Saturday.

“I would like to reach out to that resident,” he said.

Donelan, who is Catholic, wouldn’t state his views on Planned Parenthood but noted that the Springfield City Council has no say over the opening of a business that complies with zoning requirements.

“I know some people have issues with them,” he said.

Downtown preferred

Planned Parenthood’s downtown site served more than 2,300 patients in the fiscal year that ended in June 2015. The new site, with additional patient exam rooms, is larger than the previous health center and will allow the facility to serve even more patients, Leahy said.

She stressed, however, that Planned Parenthood would have remained downtown if the Springfield Mass Transit District hadn’t begun acquiring properties near the downtown clinic for the district’s future bus transfer station along the 10th Street rail corridor.

Planned Parenthood feared that SMTD would seize the property at some point in the future through eminent domain if Planned Parenthood wouldn't agree to sell. The transit agency paid for the property with \$470,000 in federal grant funding.

The transit agency's managing director, Frank Squires, said eminent domain proceedings haven't been threatened or initiated with landowners in relation to the bus transfer center.

Planned Parenthood vacated its former downtown clinic building last week, he said, adding that the building remains vacant. SMTD allowed Planned Parenthood to remain in the building after the sale while paying \$1 each month as part of a month-to-month lease.

At the new Planned Parenthood site, larger rooms will provide more comfortable surroundings for staff and clients alike, Leahy said. The center's services will include birth control, emergency contraception, sexually transmitted disease testing and treatment, HIV counseling and testing, pregnancy testing and assessment of reproductive health problems, she said.

The center has a new phone number: 546-1060.

The new center opened with an ironic visual image: A large billboard that extends over the property, carrying an advertisement for the children's hospital operated by a longtime Catholic institution, Springfield's HSHS St. John's Hospital.

The HSHS ad portrays a child and the words, "Our top pediatric specialists, caring for what matters most."

The display of the ad next to Planned Parenthood was "purely coincidental," St. John's spokeswoman Catie Sheehan said. "We've been leasing that billboard for years."

— *Contact Dean Olsen: dean.olsen@sj-r.com, 788-1543, twitter.com/DeanOlsenSJR.*

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