

Scientology Plan to Buy Site Worries Neighbors

By MIKE WARD and VICTOR M. VALLE, *Times Staff Writers*

A plan by an affiliate of the Church of Scientology to buy a former hospital in the foothills above Altadena to house church archives and to serve as a training center for ministers is running into opposition from neighbors.

"There's a lot of fear and worry," said William Kellogg, chairman of the Altadena Town Council's Land-Use Committee.

Most of the concern centers on Scientology and its adherents, Kellogg said, rather than on the use of the 198-acre property, which was occupied by La Vina Hospital until last year.

The Church of Spiritual Technology, whose principal mission is the preservation of Scientology materials, has entered escrow to buy the property from Huntington Memorial Hospital of Pasadena.

Completion of the sale depends on the church's ability to obtain a conditional-use permit from the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission. The commission staff is reviewing the permit request and will schedule a hearing.

Price Not Disclosed

Neither hospital nor church officials would disclose the purchase price, but the Rev. Leo Johnson, secretary of the Church of Spiritual Technology, said it is "considerably less than \$5 million."

Johnson said that only 19 acres of the property, at the north end of Lincoln Avenue, are developed. He said no building alterations are planned.

The church's main purpose, Johnson said, is to safeguard the writings, lecture tapes and films of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, who has not been seen in public since 1980. The archives include 4,000 lecture tapes that are being transferred to higher-quality tape for preservation, Johnson said.

In addition to holding archives, the property would serve as a center to train ministers, Johnson said. From 55 to 200 people would live on the premises.

Terry Tornek, a former Pasadena planning director who is helping the church develop plans for the site, said the proposal "is about as benign a use as could be proposed." **Opposition is coming only because**

people are concerned about religious cults, he said.

"If this was a Catholic monastery, there would be no question," Tornek said.

One concerned neighbor, Gordon Dillinger, said he is worried that the property will become a base for recruiting church members.

"If they do that, if they begin knocking on doors to recruit youngsters, then it's really going to be a detriment to the community," he said. "I would really be upset about that."

Johnson said the church will not recruit.

"We will not be contacting our neighbors as far as bringing them into the church is concerned," he said.

Church officials outlined their plans at a recent meeting of the Altadena Town Council's land use committee.

Kellogg said that the committee found no objection to "the layout—there's plenty of parking and everything" but that it did hear from people worried about the controversy that has surrounded Scientology.

The Town Council, on recommendation of the committee, plans to schedule a community meeting on the issue. The council is an advisory group. The decision on the conditional use permit rests with the Planning Commission.

Legal Battles

The Church of Scientology has been involved in numerous legal battles. In the most recent, a court in Portland, Ore., awarded a former church member \$39 million on her lawsuit charging that the church cheated her out of \$3,253 in course fees and literature by promising that Scientology was an exact science that could be used for everything from improving eyesight to developing creativity.

Kay Murphy, public affairs director of Huntington Memorial Hospital, said the hospital has been trying to sell the Altadena property for more than a year. The Church of Spiritual Technology has made the only substantial offer, she said.

The hospital has owned the facility since 1982, when it merged with La Vina Hospital, a center for the treatment of respiratory diseases.