

Community Hospital

In October 2019, Long Beach signed a lease with a private operator to run one of its central acute care hospitals, Community Hospital, which had been closed for over two years. While the hospital had always been privately operated, the city itself owned the property, which put the city in a unique position to oversee the hospital's management.

The city at the time signed a lease with a group that included physicians and a local real estate developer in a lease deal that was highly unusual, in that it shifted the majority of the financial risk to the city. If for any reason the hospital closed, the city would be liable to repay the group for its financial losses, or it could turn over ownership of the hospital to compensate for these losses.

In 2021, the hospital did finally open, but that only lasted for eight months. The new operator eventually closed the facility at the end of that year, citing financial losses from maintenance, staffing and low patient census, along with the looming cost of seismic repairs.

At the start of 2022, we knew we had to delve deeper into this story, as the city was preparing to assess the value of the property and determine whether to repay up to \$30 million in losses, or turn ownership of this historic asset over to a private entity.

There was, however, a significant obstacle we knew we'd have to overcome: The private owner in question happened to be the owner of the Long Beach Post.

Reporters Kelly Puente and Brandon Richardson began interviews, requesting documents and sketching timelines together as they would for any investigation. But almost immediately we began to feel pressure from both the city and our ownership, including several tense meetings between the owner and newsroom leaders that included passive threats of losing our funding and risking jobs of people employed by the company.

We ensured through this process that our reporting adhered to journalistic standards, including what information would normally be divulged to sources and what had to be kept from them as we pursued the story. It was a months-long challenge to remain focused on the story itself, and not the outside pressure we were facing.

The story that resulted revealed exactly what the city knew—or should have known—at the time the lease was signed, how they ignored warnings from city staff about how risky the deal was, and even the credibility of the information they relied on to make their decision in October 2019. For example, the investigation showed that despite what had been said publicly—and had passed without question during deliberations—response times for ambulances to local ERs had not been significantly impacted by the closure of Community Hospital. In fact, the city and private operator should have foreseen that patient demand was low, and that the financial costs of keeping the facility open, given the known cost of seismic retrofits, was bound to fail—and that as a result, the public would lose a long-cherished asset worth millions of dollars.

This was a difficult story to report and write, but one we felt compelled to pursue because that is our mission to readers: To report the news without fear or favor. Along with [this investigation](#), we included [a letter](#) from the executive editor explaining our conflict, and why we chose to pursue the story in spite of it. Our commitment to our readers has always been to provide thorough, fact-based information, and to be transparent about how we do this.