

**MONTROSE & CASTLE POINT VA MEDICAL CENTER**  
**Local Advisory Panel Meeting - Public Meeting #4**  
**Montrose VA Medical Center**  
**Building 15, Room 7**  
**July 24, 2007, 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

➤ **Participants:**

**Local Advisory Panel (LAP) Members present:**

- MaryAnn Musumeci, Director Bronx VA Medical Center
- Joanne Malina MD, Chief of Staff VA Hudson Valley HCS
- Benjamin Weisbroth, Deputy Director, NY State Division of Veterans Affairs
- Ben Spadaro, Southern Westchester Veterans Coalition

**Other VA Participants:**

- Jay Halpern, Special Assistant to the Secretary
- Karen Williams, Senior Advisor, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management (OAEM)
- Mike McElroy, Central Office, Assistant COTR
- Carrie Pham, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management (OAEM)
- John Grady, Associate Director of VA Hudson Valley HCS
- Nancy Winter, VA Public Affairs Officer
- John Cliffe, Engineering Service Chief of the Hudson Valley HCS

**Team PwC:**

- Patrick Ryan
- Peter Erwin, PhD.
- Michael Bobbin
- Robert Winschel
- Brent Hussong, Perkins + Will

**Re-use Contractor (Jones Lange LaSalle):**

- Marc Waddill
- Kenyattah Robinson

**Public:**

- Approximately 100 - 110 attendees

**Start at 4:07 PM**

➤ **Welcome and Opening Remarks:** Ms. Musumeci (LAP Chair)

- Called the public meeting to order
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Requested the LAP members to introduce themselves
- Reviewed the agenda
- Overview of discussions from Administrative LAP meeting:
  - Several changes were made to the presentation slides.
  - Added pharmacy and laboratory to the list of currently available services on slide five.

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- A concept paper was submitted to the LAP from staff and stakeholders. The concept paper was discussed and submitted for the minutes for the Administrative meeting.
- The LAP decided every member of the audience should receive a copy of slide nine for an overview of all the options as well as a copy of the entire LAP presentation.
- All the underutilized space on campus will be used in each option, therefore, underutilized space was changed to zero in the slides
- Options that involve renovations will take approximately 14 years and options involving new construction will take approximately 7 years.
- There was a discussion surrounding the financial analysis for each option.
- During the proposed renovation options groups of patients would need to be removed from the medical center at Montrose and relocated to the community. The administrative meeting concluded that this would not be necessary due to amount of vacant space to accommodate patients on the Montrose campus while new facilities are constructed.
- The EUL discussion will take place here but no decisions will be made. There will be another 12 to 18 months of discussions before any decisions will be made. This is not the forum that decides what will happen to the VA property.

### ➤ **CARES Process Next Steps**

- Mr. Halpern explained the next steps in the CARES process:
  - The contractor will take the stakeholder comments from today as well as the recommendations from the LAP and put the information into a report that will analyze the different BPOs.
  - The Undersecretary of Health will then create a review team to review the report.
  - The review team will then brief the Secretary and he will make his decision.
  - It is uncertain how long the Secretary will take to make his decision.
  - The Secretary and the VA are committed to completing the study.
- Mr. Halpern - There are two main decisions to be made from today's meeting:
  - Should we be constructing a new hospital at Castle Point or renovate the current facilities?
  - Should we move domiciliary at Montrose or should it remain here with a new multi specialty outpatient clinic?
- Question 1 - American Legion Member - Are you looking at the capital needs for the present or are you looking at the future needs after the current war?
  - Response from Mr. Halpern - Yes, we are looking at the future needs and forecasts. Before we build or renovate facilities we will

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look at all the new data and make sure our projections are correct and we are using the most current data.

- Question 2 - Vietnam Vets of America that lives in Castle Point - If you were a Vet getting service, where would you like to be? Castle Point or Montrose?
- Question 3 - Vietnam Vets of America - Why can't local woman have a PTSD program in Montrose? They need to travel to Buffalo for service
  - Response from Mr. Halpern - This study did not specifically address the PTSD program. It may be included in the future process. Domiciliary programs have PTSD beds so the PTSD could be considered.
  - Comment from the public - There are 16,000 woman serving in the war now.
  - Dr. Malina - We certainly are looking at all the needs of veterans. We are also looking at the needs of woman veterans.

### ➤ **Review of Stage II Summary Report:** Mr. Ryan and Mr. Hussong

- Mr. Ryan and Mr. Hussong presented the slides on the Stage II summary report.
- Question 1 - Why did the contractor recommend building a two story nursing home at St. Albans?
  - Response from Mr. Halpern - The nursing home at St. Albans will be one story.
- Question 2 (referring to BPO 4) - What are the two color buildings?
  - Response from Mr. Ryan - These are the outpatient facility and residential rehabilitation buildings.
- Question 3 - Director of Veteran Services for Westchester County - Why is there no reuse in the baseline but there is reuse in BPO 4? It looks like the desirable land is all available for reuse. Are the forecasts used including the new war veterans?
  - Response from Mr. Halpern - The forecast numbers will be updated in the future and were updated for the contractor to use in this study.
  - Response from Ms. Musumeci - These are just projections. The forecasts will be run again for the design of the ambulatory care buildings. This meeting is only to discuss the different options. When and if this actually happens new projections will be used for the design of the new facility. The site plans in the presentation are only sketches for illustrative purposes.
  - Response from Mr. Halpern - We work hard to make the appropriate projections and we will continue to make them accurately before any facility is designed.
- Ms. Musumeci - We need to move along with the presentation.
- Comment from the public - The whole system does not work. Not one thing that the public wanted went through at St. Albans. This facility is the same thing.

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- Question 4 - How will we house homeless veterans? There is nothing in the presentation about these programs.
- Mr. Ryan - We need to proceed to let the VA Secretary know your opinion on these options so that the Secretary will make an informed decision.
- Mr. Ryan continued presenting the Stage II summary slides.
- Question 5 - Lieutenant Colonel, Retired Veteran - Once a facility has been given up for rent can we get the land back?
  - Response from Ms. Musumeci - The VA can get back any land that they have leased in an emergency situation.
- Comment from the Public - Would like to discuss the parking, where veterans are located today, the condition of the facilities, etc.
  - Response from Mr. Ryan - The numbers we used for this study will need to be revised and updated. The Secretary will use updated forecasts when the VA moves forward with designing the new campus.
- Question 6 - Can you give us a sense of best case scenario with reuse and construction costs?
  - Response from Mr. Ryan - Reuse proceeds are fairly small compared to the costs of operating and constructing new facilities.
- **Overview of VA's Enhanced Use Leasing Program:** Ms. Williams
  - Ms. Williams presented the enhanced use leasing program slides.
- **Review of Reuse Study:** Mr. Waddill
  - Mr. Waddill presented the reuse study slides.
  - Comment from Public - Reuse opportunities will destroy the campus-like setting of Montrose and Castle Point. Our veterans need that when they are here for psychiatry and substance abuse. Without the campus-like setting, patients of these services will lose the security and isolation they are seeking. How do you feel about destroying the campus for commercial developments?
  - Comment from the Public - Jewish War Veteran - What percentage of those apartments will be designated for veterans? Also have you considered about destroying the campus like settings. Conducted a survey of those vets who died and lost between 250 and 400 suicides. There is no need for all the proposed redevelopment because people now just need a place to relax and recuperate from their experiences in the field.
  - Question 1 - Did you know we can't use a walkway and pool because the roof caved in? The campus is suffering from poor maintenance.
    - Response from Ms. Williams - Yes, we do understand these problems and the contractor would look into the condition of each facility.
  - Question 2 - Would the senior housing be for WWII and Korean War veterans?
    - Response from Ms. Williams - There is no distinguishing between veterans.

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- Question 3 - Do we have any say in the reuse contractors that are selected?
  - Response from Ms. Williams - Yes. There are public forums in which everyone can voice concerns and provide input.
- Comment from the public - The town was willing to maintain the pool. Why didn't you consider this?

### **BREAK: 5:40 - 5:55**

#### ➤ **Public Comment Period:** (All testimony has been paraphrased)

- Ms. Musumeci brought the public testimony period to order.
- Testimony 1: Representative of Senator Charles Schumer
  - The representative read the statement submitted from Senator Schumer.
- Testimony 2: Letter was mentioned by LAP Chair - Testimony from Hilary Clinton.
  - Ms Musumeci announced that a representative was present from Congresswoman Nita Lowey's office.
- Testimony 3: Representative of Congressman John Hall
  - The representative read the statement submitted from Congressman John Hall
- Testimony 4: Supervisor of Town of Cortlandt
  - Six years ago, had the VA approved, the school district and town would have worked together to replace the roof in the pool building. This is bureaucracy at its worst. The politicians are not getting the point. I don't believe we are being heard. I think we should have taken that money for the consultants and put it towards the pool. Cortlandt could partner with the VA to help veterans and keep health care here. It would be a win-win situation. We could use this new partnership to save millions of dollars. People should not have to commute to Castle Point. Keeping services at Montrose will keep jobs.
  - Secretary Nicholson: We spoke about this partnership and now he is gone. We will need to start over again.
  - There was a proposal six years ago and if we moved forward with this proposal we would have the facilities today.
- Testimony 5: Chairman of VFW, Retirees Chapter
  - Reminds the panel that nobody listens to the veterans in the area. Lack of improper information prevents the veterans from being able to work together to get action taken. Pressure needs to be put on

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the VA, representatives need to be forced to help since the local community voted them in

- Testimony 6: Representative of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter
  - This whole process started a long time ago. Read article about leasing Department of Veterans Affairs land and the Lakeside hospital in Chicago. The VA claims that we are not utilizing the property at Montrose. This is because they are sending us to other campuses. Maintenance is not satisfactory.
  - Received an email about the shortage of nurses in the country. The VA has a hard time attracting quality doctors because of the lack of pay. We could put a school here at Montrose.
  - A school at Montrose will improve the quality of care.
  
- Testimony 7: Legislative Chair of the Jewish War Veterans
  - Greatly disagree and testifying against the "great VA Montrose land grab". The CARES Stage II Preliminary Report states on page 7 that patient care will be enhanced by moving patients to two counties north from Montrose campus to that at Castle Point. This makes family travel further to visit patients, and those visits from loved ones come a lot less frequent for veterans. The VA wants to move the patients to Castle Point simply for a divestiture of property, creating the great VA Montrose land grab. Officials want to rent out portions of the campus for non-veteran uses, as well as sell parts of the beautiful site. The LAP has acted as accomplices to the VA scheme, but this needs to change. You, the members of the LAP, need to help by refusing to approve any of the options available through this study. Ms. Musumeci must answer to her political masters at the VA, but no other LAP member must. Secretary Nicholson does not have the power to emasculate this campus. Congress has the ultimate decision-making authority for determining the future of Montrose. Representative John Hall told the Jewish War Veterans that he opposes campus reuse for non-veteran uses at Montrose. The LAP needs to assist veterans to make the land grab scheme die in Congress.
  
- Testimony 8: State Commander for the Jewish War Veterans
  - We should be at the construction phase already. If we want the facility in one or two years it will get built. We could build an entire complex in a year and half but we can't build a VA hospital for 10 or 15 years. Concerned about delivering health care to veterans. After coming back from Vietnam War visited many guys in the hospitals and they were not very well maintained.
  - Concerned about guys coming back from the current war and then they are sent back or somewhere else in the United States. My friend is now on his 5 or 6 tour in Iraq. We will continue to send guys back until we need to draft people.

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- This place was set up as a psychiatric facility after Vietnam War. Somewhere between 250 and 450 veterans committed suicide in the state of NY. 446 men died of which many of them were turned away from the VA. I'm here because I don't ever want to see that happen again.
  - I don't think this reuse program is going to work at Montrose. We need to keep the campus-like and park-like setting for veterans to heal.
  - Anything said here can be challenged in a federal court, and you elect your congressmen. Use your power.
- Testimony 9: Physician and former Chief-of-Staff at Hudson Valley Hospital
    - The closing of the VA will have a significant and severe impact on the veterans. These facilities should be maintained here. If the VA must be closed or reduced the town of Cortlandt should be used to redevelop the campus. Nobody really trusts the VA in Washington to determine what will happen locally. The town can partner with veteran groups so what is developed is in line with what veterans need.
- Testimony 10: Representative of Jewish War Veterans
    - Took a course on driving and learned to look a quarter mile down the road and you will be able to anticipate what is going to happen. This topic relates closely to the Montrose campus. You should look down the road to see what is coming towards you. The VA took advantage of a situation after WWII with the land afforded to them. If the VA gives away land they will not be able to replace that land. Some of the buildings at Montrose have not been maintained. The nation woke up to the serious concerns on the condition of the VA facilities. It will be more economical to renovate the current buildings rather than building new facilities. PTSD and more physical damage are affecting many of our troops. We need to take care of these wounded veterans for many years after they have left the fields of combat. We have to look down the road before permanently downsizing the facilities. Repair of old buildings is not as appealing as new buildings but we should look down the road and preserve what we have for the future.
- Testimony 11: Montrose Elders Representatives
    - Everything you heard about the EUL was new back in 1998 or 1999. It would be good if we could continue to operate the campus the way it has been. The Montrose Elders were able to get private developers and won a contest against big time corporations. This was the best use for the veterans of the Hudson Valley. We prepared a master plan with the national head-quarters. We had a senior housing portion and an affordable housing project. It was

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not veteran exclusive but it was veterans first. I have the original RFP and our proposal here today. The Secretary could legally sign a lease with the group. This is the best way to make the proposal publicly. We would like all the support we can get and send this to the lead of the VA.

- Testimony 12: Veteran
  - If functions are moved to Castle Point or other locations, it is unlikely there will be sufficient demand locally for specialty medical services. Now set with reuse and agrees with what the Supervisor of the Town of Courtland that this could have already been done. The longer this drags on, the less anyone will use it. In 20 years, I will be 100 years old and there won't be anyone around to utilize services. "Never hire someone you can't fire" and "The perfect is the enemy of the good."
- Testimony 13: NY Department of Labor Commissioner for Veterans Affairs
  - Appreciates the veterans that came out today. The most important thing we have is time. We need to get this thing expedited. Current veterans are the largest supporters of future veterans. The bureaucracy is too great. Thanks the Local Advisory Panel for their support and interest. Hopes that the LAP can request to streamline the process for a RFP, do the review, and see if it makes sense; there would be little opposition. Relay a message to Washington DC that the most important thing there is right now is time on Earth, and veterans want to care for themselves while they are able and have resources to do so.

### ➤ **Local Advisory Panel Deliberations:**

- Ms. Musumeci called Local Advisory Panel to order.
- Mr. Spadaro - Want to do the best thing for veterans.
- Mr. Weisbroth - The board unanimously agrees that new facilities should be built. New hospital in Castle Point and new facility here. Believes we should move domiciliary services to Castle Point.
- Dr. Malina - Believes that we should build new facilities here and at Castle Point but we should keep domiciliary services at Montrose.
- Ms. Musumeci - New facilities and ambulatory care services should be constructed at Montrose. Castle Point should construct a new hospital. Believes that the domiciliary services should go to Castle Point from a business prospective. From a veterans' prospective domiciliary services should stay at Castle Point.

### ➤ **Closing:** Ms. Musumeci

- Adjourned the meeting and thanked LAP members.
- Thanked public for comments.

**Adjourned at 7:09 PM**