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ST. ALBANS VA MEDICAL CENTER
Local Advisory Panel Meeting – Public Meeting 4
Pratt Auditorium
January 22, 2007, 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

➤ **Participants:**

Local Advisory Panel (LAP) Members:

- Andrew Adler, MD, LAP Chair, Deputy Chief of Staff, NYHHS
- Ralph DeMarco, Executive Legislative Director of the NY State Council for Veterans Organizations
- Seth Bornstein, Director of Economic Development, Laguardia Community College
- Ben Weisbroth, Deputy Director NY State Division of Veterans Affairs
- Olivia Coleman Banks, Community Representative
- Mark McMillan, Deputy Council to Queens Borough President

VA:

- Stephen Gonzenbach, Ed.D., CARES Support Team Leader
- Ray Aalbue, Public Affairs Officer
- Karen Williams, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management
- Claude Hutchinson, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management

Team PwC:

- Kristin Eberhard
- Michael Bobbin

Ellerbe Beckett:

- Jeff Zalewski

Pruitt Group:

- Tom Rosenfeld
- John Watts

Public:

- 90 -110 attendees

Start at 6:00 PM

➤ **Pledge of Allegiance** - Led by Howard Jackson

➤ **Introductions of the LAP and Meeting Attendees** - Dr. Adler

- Special Announcement by Dr. Gonzenbach: Jay Halpern the Special Assistant to the Secretary and Designated Federal Official cannot attend the meeting due to a medical emergency.

➤ **Calls for Motion** - Dr. Gonzenbach

- Call for motion to add language to Standard Operating Procedures to permit questions by the public at the close of each agenda section - Call for Motion
 - Motion made by Ms. Banks
 - Seconded by Mr. Bornstein

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- Motion carries in full
 - Call for motion to approve LAP Meeting 3 Summary
 - Motion made by Mr. McMillian
 - Seconded by Mr. DeMarco
 - Motion carries in full
- **Summary of LAP 4 Administrative Session** - Dr. Gonzenbach
 - The LAP was familiarized with the presentation material during the administrative meeting.
 - Mr. Zalewski presented a conceptual design of a new St. Albans facility.
 - Ms. Williams and Mr. Rosenfeld presented an overview of the Enhanced Use Leasing (EUL) Program.
 - Emphasized again that all designs and site plans are conceptual in nature and not definite plans.
- **Summary of Related Meetings and CARES Activities** - Dr. Gonzenbach and Mr. Aalbue
 - Summarized the following ongoing CARES activities:
 - Continued communications with Elected Officials - Mayors Office and Congressman Meeks.
 - Attended meetings with Community Taskforce.
 - Facility reviews and assessments with VACO offices and related contractors.
 - Briefings with New York city council committee of Veterans Affairs.
 - Newspaper publications ran on January 3, and January 10 publicizing the 4th LAP meeting.
- **Call for Questions by the LAP and the public** - Dr. Adler
 - Encouraged members of the public to keep each statement to a question and to hold open testimony until after all presentations.
 - LAP Questions:
 - None.
 - Questions from the Public:
 - **Question:** Lives in Nassau County and does not believe there was enough public notification of the meeting.
 - **Response from Mr. Aalbue:** Newspaper publications ran on January 3, and January 10 publicizing the 4th LAP meeting. There is a copy of the publication in the lobby.
- **Item of Note** Dr. Gonzenbach
 - There are comment forms provided at this meeting and an electronic comment will be on the public website tomorrow.
 - Comments will be accepted through February 2, 2007.
- **Review of LAP Process to Date:** Dr. Gonzenbach

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- This is the final LAP meeting
 - Secretary directed that the LAP remain involved and have four public LAP meetings to seek community input
 - Explained the role of the Community Taskforce and the continued communication process
 - Discussed further planning issues including submission for consideration in the FY09 budget cycle
 - Noted that this is a long term process
- **Call for Questions by the LAP and the public:** Dr. Adler
- LAP Questions:
 - None.
 - Questions from the Public:
 - **Question:** The word "community" is used loosely by the speaker. Can you clarify specifically what community? Is the Taskforce made up of members of the local community or veterans community?
 - **Response from Dr. Gonzenbach:** The Taskforce is made up of members from the local community.
- **Presentation of Capital Concepts and Review of Services to be Provided** - Mr. Zalewski
- Presented on the conceptual capital plans for the future St. Albans campus.
- **Call for Questions by the LAP and the Public:** Dr. Adler
- LAP Questions:
 - **Question from Mr. DeMarco:** Is it set in stone for only a 180 bed nursing home? This may not be enough space.
 - **Response from Mr. Zalewski:** The buildings are designed at a conceptual level to be modular. It will be easy to add another floor or an additional 60 beds to the nursing home. The buildings are designed in a way to accommodate future growth.
 - **Question from Mr. McMillan:** Can you tell us which buildings will be demolished?
 - **Response from Mr. Zalewski:** Most of the buildings to be demolished are currently vacant. Buildings 90, 92, 93, 91, and 168 are all vacant. Buildings 88 and 89 are currently being used. We structured the program in a way where new buildings will be finished before the currently used buildings are demolished.
 - **Comment from Mr. Bornstein:** Expressed concern about building new facilities while the buildings are occupied.
 - **Response from Mr. Zalewski:** Agrees this is a concern and the concern will be taken into account.
 - **Question from Ms. Banks:** Can you give the public an idea of the timeline for the process?

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- **Response from Mr. Zalewski:** This process takes a great deal of time and has many intermediate steps. In a best-case scenario new buildings will not be occupied for three and a half years.
- Questions from the Public:
 - **Question:** There are 300 patients here at St. Albans. What do you propose to do with the 150 patients that cannot be accommodated in the new facility?
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** We have an average of 160 - 170 patients here and the capacity for 180. The new facility will be able to accommodate the same number of patients.
 - **Question:** At previous meetings the public brought up the fact that we are looking for hospice, domiciliary, women's health, and assisted living services. The presentation was not detailed about what services will be provided in each building. Veterans should not give up any property because in the long run we might need to expand.
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** Emphasized that this period is for questions only and public testimony should take place after the presentations. The services currently provided will also be provided in the future plan with the possibility of expansion. The other services mentioned will be considered in the EUL process. The EUL process provides extra dollars to VA to provide additional services.
 - **Question:** What are the possibilities for considering homeless veterans?
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** Cannot answer that question. Presentation deals with the current design and that topic can be part of a discussion of the LAP later in the meeting.
 - **Question:** Believes that an emergency or urgent care center should be included in this design. Doesn't see how this design is benefiting veterans in the community. We need to consider veterans returning from Iraq. This should be a county-wide decision not just a St. Albans decision.
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** It is not feasible to have an emergency room where there isn't a hospital.
 - **Question:** Is the nursing home at St. Albans going to compete with the NY State Veterans Home?
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** It is not a competition; both are interested in providing services to veterans through the federal and state governments.
 - **Question:** Why is the current slide left out of the presentation handout? This slide that doesn't show the chapel. What will happen to the POW monuments?

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- **Response from Dr. Gonzenbach:** To save paper we provided a limited number of slides. We will make the entire presentation available. Any monuments must be carefully relocated and this will be considered in the plan.
- **Presentation of EUL Program:** Ms. Williams and Dr. Rosenfeld
- **Open Testimony and Questions:** The Public
- **Testimony from Elected Officials:**
(All testimony has been paraphrased and names are used only if testimony was provided on behalf of state or local official)
 - **Comment from the public:** The public has not had a chance to ask questions tonight to clarify the presentation.
 - **City Councilman Leroy Comrie - (D-27th District)**
 - Thanks to the public and the LAP. Three years ago they were considering eliminating this facility entirely. This is a real opportunity to meet long term goals of veterans in Queens. Would like to see a hospital with acute care, diagnostic support, and a teaching hospital in this community. The community is aging and a geriatric care facility is needed. There is an opportunity to create independent and assisted housing for veterans. Veterans coming home from the war in Iraq will need housing. This is a good opportunity for a world class education facility or a school for high achieving students.
 - **Representative of Honorable Congressman Meeks:**
 - Need to keep in mind the troops at war and the veterans that have sacrificed for the country. The Congressman organized a 6th Congressional District VA Taskforce to make sure that excess land here went to uses beneficial to veterans and the community. An independent and assisted living complex would be appropriate for St. Albans. An acute care facility and teaching facility would be beneficial to help with the nursing shortage in New York. We believe an education complex would serve the community well. Commended the LAP and specifically Ms. Banks for their efforts.
 - **Deputy Mayor Dennis Wolcott:**
 - Will submit written testimony. Reinforce the point that the City of New York is here to be part of the Taskforce. The goal is to have a campus that meets the needs of the veterans.
- **Testimony from the Public:**
 - **Testimony 1:**
 - This Building was built in 1948 and most of us live in houses even older than that. VA took over this facility in 1982 and spent over

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\$10 million in renovations. In 1984 they spent an additional \$2 million and since has continued spending on this building. This building was built by the Navy and is stronger than a battleship. It will cost a great deal to demolish. There are different reports on the acreage available on campus. The maximum acreage in the reports is 6 acres which does not match up to the 30 acres presented tonight. Doctors here do not know how to treat women veterans.

- **Testimony 2:**
 - Supports VA Community Taskforce plan. This plan would be an asset to southeast Queens.
- **Testimony 3:**
 - Representative of Senator Maltese. The Senator is a Korean War veteran, and the representative is a Vietnam Veteran. The Senator did not see the notice for this meeting until Thursday. The representative will relay the information from tonight back to the Senator.
- **Testimony 4:**
 - Favors the construction of an independent and assisted living complex for veterans and veteran spouses of Queens.
- **Testimony 5:**
 - Speaker is a member of Congressman Meeks's Taskforce. Proposing an educational complex that would include a high school.
- **Testimony 6:**
 - Representative of Senator Malcolm Smith. Thanks veterans for their service and is also submitting written testimony. First priority is a multi-use sports and education complex. Remaining issues should go to uses consistent with health and educational uses. Should build a college preparatory school that focuses on emerging new technology. Also, an assisted living facility with acute and responsive care should be accommodated on the remaining land.
- **Testimony 7:**
 - Agrees with the concerns of the veterans. Would like to have a place for homeless veterans and is submitting written testimony.
- **Testimony 8:**
 - Some of the facilities have been vacant for 20 years. Veterans returning from war will need hospitalization, and St. Albans has turned into an outpatient facility. Favors the proposal for a recreational facility on the campus.

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- **Testimony 9:**
 - Charges the LAP to make recommendations on the future of St. Albans. Urges the LAP to honor the commitment that re-use will enhance services to veterans. A public school and community center on campus are not compatible with services provided to veterans. Putting a high school next to a retirement home is a not a good idea. The LAP should stick to their mandate to enhance services to veterans.

- **Testimony 10:**
 - JCAP has a long term lease agreement with the VA and provides substance treatment for veterans. JCAP is putting money, time, resources, and care into providing services to the community.

- **Testimony 11:**
 - Land should be used to benefit the public and the veterans. Thanks the LAP for their time.

- **Testimony 12:**
 - A member of the Jewish War Veterans. JCAP is an example of a program that should be based on the St. Albans campus. The city has plenty of land for schools and a hospital. This establishment was built for veterans and it should be kept for veterans. 100% of the campus should be utilized for veterans.

- **Testimony 13:**
 - We all owe the veterans for their service and it is wrong to take from the veterans.

- **Testimony 14:**
 - Veterans deserve all the help, care, and assistance that we can provide. 90% of perception is reality and these conceptual site plans are almost reality. It is unclear how many acres are available on campus. Schools are needed in this borough. If we don't do what's right for the veterans we will not be able to provide care for Iraq veterans.

- **Testimony 15:**
 - President of Southern Queens parks association and part of Congressman Meeks's Taskforce. Supports the proposals for a hospital, expanded park, funeral home, assisted living facility for seniors, and a teaching hospital. Congressman Meeks is concerned about the needs of veterans.

- **Testimony 16:**

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- Member of VA Taskforce. Stands in favor of a new community center with a track and field center that promotes excellence in fitness and health.
- **Testimony 17:**
 - Commends the LAP for recognizing that Queens is overly populated and that Queens is experiencing a great deal of zoning. There is a need for a training educational medical hospital and does not believe a school should be located on the St. Albans campus. Sees a marriage between the needs of the VA and the training of young people.
- **Testimony 18:**
 - Enhancement plan is a very disappointing plan. Veterans are coming home with a wide variety of injuries. Schools do not belong on this space. This space belongs to veterans and should be used for veterans only.
- **Testimony 19:**
 - Grateful for veterans and their families. We should not cut any services to veterans. It is important to dream and there are limitless possibilities for the St. Albans campus. Need to bring more than just a veterans facility to campus.
- **Testimony 20:**
 - Member of the Jamaica NAACP. Favors a training hospital, training facility, assisted living and independent living on campus.
- **Testimony 21:**
 - **Question to the panel:** Will the panel be voting on re-use recommendations?
 - **Response from Dr. Adler:** The minutes of this meeting will be provided back to the Secretary and the messages of the panel will be conveyed through them.
 - **Question:** Can something be done for veterans group to have access to Congressman Meeks's Taskforce?
 - **Response from Mr. McMillan:** Many veterans are on the Taskforce and others are invited. Congressman Meeks is trying to get the word out to the community and increase interest. Encourages people to understand the process. The next phase of this process is crucial to the future of St. Albans.

➤ Comments from the Panel:

- **Ms. Banks:** Thanks veterans for attending and participating. We are aware that everything that comes here is with the veterans in mind and

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is veteran preference. Everyone is invited to Congressman Meeks's Taskforce meetings.

- **Mr. Bornstein:** We are still in the beginning of the process and we have a lot of time to work on this as we go forward.
- **Mr. Weisbroth:** Believes use of St. Albans should not be limited to just one use for veterans, there are multiple possibilities.

➤ **Closing Comments from the Chair** - Dr. Adler

- Thanks the LAP for their time and commitment. Reiterates that the LAP views veterans as first priority.
- Comments from Dr. Gonzenbach:
 - Announcement that on Feb 20th Congressman Meeks is holding a veterans town hall meeting at 6:00pm in the Pratt Auditorium.
 - On behalf of Mr. Halpern we offer our thanks to each LAP member and recognize the work completed.
- Motion to adjourn.

Adjourned at 9:24 PM