

MONTROSE & CASTLE POINT VA MEDICAL CENTER
Local Advisory Panel Meeting - Public Meeting #3
Montrose VA Medical Center
Building 15, Room 7
April 17, 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)
- Carrie Pham, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management (OAEM)
- John Grady, Associate Director of VA Hudson Valley HCS
- Nancy Winter, Public Affairs Specialist

Team PwC:

- Patrick Ryan
- Matthew Jarm
- Kristin Porter
- Brent Hussong, Perkins + Will

Re-use Contractor (Jones Lang LaSalle):

- Marc Waddill
- Kenyattah Robinson

Public:

- Approximately 85 attendees

Start at 4:05 PM

➤ **Welcome and Opening Remarks:** Ms. Musumeci

- Called the public meeting to order
- Led the Pledge of Allegiance
- Requested f the LAP members to introduce themselves

➤ **Report of Administrative Meeting & Restatement of Standard Operating Procedures:** Ms. Musumeci

- At the previous LAP meeting over a year ago the LAP made two recommendations that were provided to the Secretary. The Secretary approved the study of two major options. One involves the closure of everything at the Montrose facility except the ambulatory care area with relocation to the Castle Point facility. The other recommendation was the transfer of everything here at Montrose except the residential rehabilitation

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and ambulatory care, with all other services transferring to Castle Point. Inpatient Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) services would be transferred to the Bronx facility, but ambulatory services for these patients would continue to be provided at Castle Point. At Castle Point, a new nursing home facility would be established while other services would be accommodated in new or renovated facilities. At Montrose, there would be a new domiciliary and ambulatory care facility. The presentation by the contractor will cover these options in detail.

➤ **Report of Administrative Meeting & Restatement of Standard Operating Procedures:** Ms. Musumeci

- After each section of the presentation the floor will be opened for approximately 10 minutes to field any questions and/or comments regarding that section.
- There have been some changes to the LAP presentation that the audience has, compared to the presentation being shown on the televisions. Please make note of these changes as necessary.
- The public testimony period is for those who have registered. Comments in written form will be collected, using the comment forms and should be turned into the staff at the back table upon completion.

➤ **Review of Stage I Summary Report:** Mr. Ryan

- Introduced Team PwC.
- Presented the CARES study process and results of the Stage I Study.
- Opened the floor for questions from the audience:
- Question 1: Addressed the proposal for BPO 4 that relocates inpatient SCI services to the Bronx VA. If you are a disabled veteran where would you like to be; Castle Point or the Bronx? The scenic quality at Castle Point is important to the veterans. Despite all of these grand ideas, there is a parking lot at Castle Point that isn't even complete yet.
 - Response from Ms. Musumeci: Nothing will happen unless a building is constructed at Castle Point. We need to confine the questions to this presentation.
 - Response from the audience: The SCI patients should remain at Castle Point.
- Question 2: Representative from the New York State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 69. His primary care facility is Castle Point. The traffic pattern is such that it would be shorter to drive to Albany for care than Castle Point. It would take hours to get to Castle Point by public transportation. The overdevelopment in the area causes heavy traffic and veterans who do not or cannot drive are at a disadvantage. It does not make sense for veterans to come from the city to Castle Point for care. Montrose is prime real estate and this is a ploy for private developers to utilize the land. Would recommend that new development happen before any demolition occurs.
 - **Response from Ms. Musumeci:** No demolition will occur before new facilities to serve veterans are built.

- **Review of Secretary's Decision and Approved BPOs for Further Study:** Mr. Halpern
- Greeted the attendees on behalf of Secretary Nicholson.
 - Presented a review of the CARES study objectives and the Secretary's Stage II study decision.
 - Opened the floor for questions from the audience:
 - Question 1: Comes to the Montrose facilities for outpatient services. There are old buildings at the Montrose campus that need renovation. There is one thing that is not being addressed here; there is a need for women's facilities for those coming home from the war.
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: We will address the need for women's services. New or renovated inpatient facilities at Castle Point would include areas that are appropriate for female patients.
 - Question 2: Is a Department Service Officer for the American Legion. The previous gentleman brought up the issue of transportation. The Secretary will choose the most economically efficient option, but there is a challenge in Hudson Valley of moving veterans from one location to another and providing access for their families. We would like for that issue to be addressed for veterans and their families.
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: When we go to implementation planning, we would consider how veterans that currently come to Montrose will get to Castle Point. The upside is that psychiatric patients currently at Montrose would be at Castle Point where they can easily receive medical care without being transported.
 - Question 3: Uses the gym facilities here. Over five years ago the swimming pool was closed down. It is a disgrace; the funds to maintain it, to fix the roof, were never requested and the result is substantial damage. The people that need pool therapy wanted to contribute to fix the problem and they were ignored. What is the status of this issue?
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: New facilities at Montrose should include all necessary ambulatory facilities, including physical rehabilitation facilities if needed. When VA considers reuse proposals, a recreation center might be a possibility.
 - Question 4: At the last LAP meeting the public and local representatives all made statements that basically said the same thing. We do not want the services moved from Montrose to Castle Point, and furthermore services should be brought back to Montrose. The BPO that the LAP proposed did not agree with the public sentiment at the last meeting. What services will the new outpatient building here include? Are we going to regain the services we used to have here? The LAP did not propose options that the veterans want.
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: Those decisions were made previously and for good reason. That is not part of the scope here. In relation to outpatient services, we would have as many services as the demand would allow for.

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- Response from audience member: The fourth mission of the VA is to help the DoD in emergency situations, and New York is a prime target for terrorist attacks. How are we helping this mission by closing facilities?
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: We have to deal with emergency services in a way that is different than how they were dealt with many years ago.
- **Presentation of Options/Review of Stage II Methodology:** Mr. Ryan
- Mr. Ryan presented an overview of the BPOs, Stage II methodology and next steps.
 - Comment from Mr. Halpern: Emphasized that outpatient SCI services do remain at Castle Point.
 - Opened the floor for questions from the audience:
 - Question 1: Are you aware that Metro North is in the process of developing a Montrose station?
 - Response from Mr. Ryan: We are not involved with that. We welcome your views and input about new developments affecting the area surrounding Montrose and Castle Point.
 - Response from the audience: The new station built by Metro North will be closer to the hospital. You are not keeping up with the themes of the community and specifically what Metro North is doing. You should have a wider view of what is happening in the community.
 - Question 2: I'm a Director of the Veterans Service Agency for Westchester County. In the first LAP presentation it was stated that this was the beginning of a dialog with the public as the Secretary's decision is implemented. Then the recommendations were presented without any follow-up meetings. You made a comment that Montrose is 90% underutilized; that is because services have been removed so veterans have stopped coming here. The only way to get the message to the Secretary is to fire his boss.
 - Question 3: We need to stop the false advertising. We are clearly not putting the veterans first. It is a shame to see how the veterans are being treated when they put our country first.
 - Response from Mr. Ryan: We have been informed that there is a group that is interested in using the Montrose facilities for housing for formerly homeless veterans. The details of that agreement are being finalized.
 - Question 4: The architectural and historic value of the buildings has not been addressed. They are sound buildings that could be reused.
 - Response from Mr. Ryan: That will be considered in reuse study.
 - Response from the audience: There is nothing being considered for the guys coming back from the war with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). What are we going to do in the 10th year of this war with all of the veterans coming home? The future need is not being considered.

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- Question 5: Supervisor of the Town of Cortlandt. We want the services to stay here in Montrose. This is the hub of where people come from in the region. The Castle Point campus is 74 acres less and 20 years older than Montrose. Why put millions of dollars into that facility when this is a larger facility and a hub. The Town and the public have been coming here for 5 years to make statements and the input provided has not been reflected in the study. The VA is not listening to the veterans and officials.
- Question 6: We went through this last year in similar fashion. It is very mixed up and we don't understand your program. The veterans want a full state-of-the-art hospital as well as a cemetery here in Montrose. Per mile there are more veterans here than scattered elsewhere.

- **Presentation of Enhanced-Use Leasing Programs:** Ms. Williams and Mr. Waddill
 - Ms. Williams introduces herself and the reuse team.
 - Ms. Williams presents on the Enhanced-Use Leasing (EUL) program.
 - Mr. Waddill presents on the reuse study for Montrose and Castle Point.
 - Opened the floor for questions from the audience:
 - Question 1: Why is Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL) involved not only with this reuse plan but also with marketing to developers? They are not doing this as charity to the veterans. You are talking about possible uses such as office space which they could benefit from.
 - Response from Ms. Williams: Jones Lang LaSalle is a subcontractor to a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business (SDVOB) and is contracted to assist with the reuse analysis, and possibly with developer selection. The eventual developer will do its own leasing and Jones Lang LaSalle's contract explicitly prohibits Jones Lang LaSalle from working in any capacity on this project except as contractor for the government.
 - Question 2: Chairman of the Cortlandt Veterans Council and Jewish Veterans of America. The EUL program is dependent on vacant buildings, but we do not want the buildings to be vacant. Give us back our services and buildings, and then we would not need your study.
 - Response from Ms. Williams: The healthcare decision will determine the buildings that are needed and if a building is not needed we may consider it for reuse.
 - Question 3: Are you considering uses for the land that will benefit the veterans, such as a public park, or are you only considering revenue generating opportunities? You are just looking to benefit the developers.
 - Response from Ms. Williams: The proceeds from reuse will come back to the veterans, and we can specify in the RFP that we would like to maintain open spaces.
 - Question 4: The cost of keeping the Montrose is being current being expended; millions of dollars in maintenance of these buildings have been spent as these meetings go on. In the Montrose Elders plan, we are talking about including a swimming pool, auditorium and other features that can be used by the community. The heavy population is in Westchester County.

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- Response from Ms. Musumeci: If the Secretary makes a decision, then an RFP will go out and anyone that would like to submit a proposal can, such as the Elders. This is not the purpose of this meeting.
- Response from the audience: This is the right place to discuss this topic. The Elders have already submitted a proposal for the development plan and it was accepted. The plan is all down on paper. It will allow for a continuum of care for veterans and their spouses. All types of patients would be here, and this would work as it does in Manhattan. Going up to Castle Point is absurd; most of the population is here. You have a two year window to do something here before Secretary Nicholson is gone. The veterans have needs. A combination of medical care and housing is possible on this campus.
- Question 5: We responded to the RFP in 1999, and the Elders won that competition and then submitted a development plan. We are still waiting for a response to move forward with the plan. We could start tomorrow. It incorporates the desires of the town of Cortlandt.
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: In 2002 and for four years prior to the start of the CARES process we received no money from Congress for capital projects. We started the CARES process to look at our needs. Your proposal was held until we were able to determine the future of Montrose and Castle Point. We are now determining the forecasted demand and capital need. You will have an opportunity to submit your plan again during the EUL process. We will start a process and the intent here is to provide those kinds of residential services for veterans.
 - Response from audience: How can we trust you? Other projects got their money approved.
 - Response from Mr. Halpern: It is our intent to go forward and develop these areas.
 - Response from audience: The Montrose Elders' plan should go forward.
 - Response from Ms. Williams: Reuse cannot move forward until the healthcare plan footprint is identified.
- Question 6: The veterans were promised that if they put in time in the service that they would be taken care of. Where do you come in with a leasing program? You can't take this facility out of the control of the government. There are wasted tax dollars from other things that should be used here. This facility should be controlled by the US Government. Some of the people on these committees should be sent to Iraq to see how it feels.
- Question 7: Is there anything in the reuse legislation that limits those who can submit a proposal? For example, are those organizations who receive income from federal grants prevented from submitting an RFP?

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- Response from Ms. Williams: We are not aware of any such limitations. You'll find that there may be relationships you can form or be part of a leasing component.
- Question 8: Wants to know where the funds go for leases with private entities. What happens to the loss of taxes when the private industries set up sweet heart deals? The county and state offer infrastructure; where do the taxes go?
 - Response from Ms. Williams: There are no "sweet heart deals" – the enhanced-use lease legislation requires by law that VA receive fair market value for any leased assets. It is up to any selected developer to negotiate tax payments with the local municipality depending on the specifics of that particular development. .

Break at 5:30PM - 5:45PM

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

- Ms. Musumeci brings the public testimony period to order.
- Testimony 1: Supervisor; Town of Cortlandt
 - The Montrose facility is located in the Hamlet of Montrose in the town of Cortlandt. Members of the community have been coming here for the last five years to speak to the local committee and the CARES report. We are tired, we're older, and we want the services to stay here. We placed bids almost 8 years ago. We already did the RFPs. We do not want to do the RFP process again; it is a waste of time. Take some action and make some decisions. Met with Secretary Nicholson at this site to discuss partnering with the VA to keep the services here for the veterans. None of the ideas shared with him are in the report, and it appears that they have not been heard. The VA talks about leasing and not selling the land because if they lease it they can get more money. The bottom line here is economics and profits. Attended a rally at this facility and it was asserted that the services will stay here in the facility. Cortlandt has a plan that is objective and economical to partner with the VA. The town has resources and can partner with the VA. The plan includes how much their projected savings would be.
- Testimony 2: Representative for Senator Charles Schumer
 - Thanks the LAP for the opportunity to present his thoughts on the BPOs. Is concerned with the Secretary's decision to transfer acute psychiatric, long-term psychiatric and nursing home care to Castle Point. Westchester County has the most veterans. Moving these services would place a burden on the friends and families of veterans. The decision needs to be revisited. Is concerned that the Stage II options would not enhance care and make more cost effective use of VA resources. While the EUL program may be able

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to offset capital costs, we must be cognizant of costs beyond capital, such as how reuse will serve our veterans. Does not want to see the Montrose campus leased to private developers without a binding commitment to serve the veterans. The Montrose campus should continue to house residential treatment and offer ambulatory care services. It is unclear why reuse was not studied in BPO 1. The panel should keep in mind the new generation of veterans returning to Hudson Valley, as well as the aging veteran population. Veterans have sacrificed for us, and we must provide them with the highest level of care in the most convenient means possible.

- Testimony 3: Representative for Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
 - Appreciates the opportunity to communicate thoughts and concerns regarding the CARES process at Montrose and Castle Point. Opposes the May 2004 decision to transfer all inpatient psychiatry and nursing home services to Castle Point. Is concerned about the proposed options which would result in moving domiciliary services from Montrose to Castle Point. The May 2004 decision to move inpatient psychiatry and nursing home services from Montrose was made without a strategic plan and sufficient dialogue with veterans. The objective is efficient delivery of high quality healthcare for veterans. To achieve this requires greater transparency and more open dialogue with veterans. Veterans should be adequately consulted as the process moves forward. Now is the time to reaffirm the pact we made as a nation with our veterans.

- Testimony 4: Representative for Congressman John Hall
 - Thank you for holding this local hearing. We must do what is best for our veterans who have served with courage and distinction. It is important that we use the VA land in Hudson Valley in ways that assist our veterans. The EUL program is an opportunity to reuse underutilized buildings and assist veterans in new ways, but this will only occur if the Secretary requires certain conditions be met. Income from leased property should go toward capital investment to improve care. VA should not use EUL to cover operating shortfalls. Funding from EULs should be invested in facilities to serve veterans. Housing costs in Hudson Valley are rising and there is a need for low-income and subsidized housing. Veterans deserve affordable housing that could be provided on the Montrose campus. The Secretary must look at the long-term needs of Hudson Valley veterans. Future generations of veterans will have more unique healthcare needs, and we must protect the ability to expand services in the future if necessary. Appreciates the work of the LAP and looks forward to working with the VA to improve services to Hudson Valley veterans.

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- Testimony 5: VFW State Representative and Director of Sullivan County Veterans Service Agency
 - Has seen the VHA come a long way and commends the administration for that. There are still shortcomings in the system such as long waiting periods and placement of OEF and OIF veterans in need of rehabilitation services. The role of the military has changed drastically; for the first time they are deploying men and women. Many are returning with grave injuries requiring long periods of hospitalization. Promises to veterans are not being kept. Veterans here must be assured that any closures will not deprive them of services that they rightly are entitled to. VFW fights for a full continuum of care for all veterans. The study must consider accessibility to services, timeliness of care, and the utmost quality of care.

- Testimony 6: American Federation of Government Employees, Local 1119
 - There are 1100 workers mainly at Montrose but some at Castle Point and other CBOC units around the state. There are concerns regarding VA options to modernize the Montrose and Castle Point facilities. Does not mean to suggest that the BPOs presented have not been carefully considered. Local 1119 is not in support of the BPOs because they undermine the principles behind why the Montrose and Castle Point facilities have been established. VA should redirect funding to reinstitute all programs previously closed at Montrose. All proposed changes have failed to discuss necessary criteria to meet the requirements for veterans to become productive citizens. There has been some discussion of restructuring transportation, but planning is failing to convince that this will meet needs. The objective to move services from Montrose to Castle Point will cause adjustments to living situations and will cause veterans to be deprived of treatment. The Department has been blind to the loss of critical programs such as substance abuse treatment, medical libraries, nursing homes, outpatient treatment and other special programs. Positions have been eliminated in the process as well. The Department has already established a timetable for review of options and submission to the Secretary. Request that this submission include the common sense option of restoring all facilities and services at Montrose and Castle Point.

- Testimony 7: Vietnam Veterans of America
 - The exact same comments are being made as were at the last LAP meeting. At the end of the day the panel voted on two options that disagreed with the comments from the public. VA had to start cutting back on services after many years of flat-lined budgets. Services have been slowly taken from Montrose and given to Castle Point. Due to limited transportation to Castle Point, low

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income vets would find it impossible to get there. At the last meeting we testified that we did not want FDR torn down, but the LAP recommended to do just that. Wants services to return to Montrose. Many soldiers are returning from the Gulf wars. Because of media coverage of Walter Reed we are seeing an increase in funding. We should use this increase in funding to reinstate facilities at Montrose. New York City will remain a prime target of terrorist attacks. Mission 4 of the VA is to serve as a backup to DoD, but they cannot properly do that if there are no facilities left at Montrose. We want a guarantee that before even one building is torn down, that the new buildings will be open and operational.

- Testimony 8: President of VVA Chapter 49
 - Received an email with the statement "If you don't stand behind your troops, feel free to stand in front of them." The process to date has brought testimony from the public that has fallen on deaf ears. Programs are being cut at Montrose with only a promise that they will be replaced at Castle Point. The intention of the Secretary is to begin a process that once started cannot be stopped; which is to eliminate the Montrose VA. This issue is solely about controlling the budget. The process has been demeaning to the veterans. Construction at Montrose must maintain all medical units and PTSD units and plan for future use. Reduction of medical services in this area will affect to the veterans who need it most and have no alternative for care.

- Testimony 9:
 - The proposed solution here is to move things to Castle Point and establish an EUL here at Montrose; this is disturbing. Went to Vietnam three times. Referenced a letter in 2002; reviewed the people who submitted the letter. Started out the process with high hopes. All of the work and planning is done; no need to spend another \$20 million. To do this again would be a travesty. The Elders plan was the only one that considered veterans because it was drafted by real veterans.

- Testimony 10: Member of Montrose Elders Veterans Committee.
 - The Elders Veterans Committee is composed of 95% veterans. The VA put out an RFP for an EUL for a portion of the campus. The Elders competed among big developers in the area and won because we put veterans first. Would like to see the buildings reused. Over the years there have been investments made in the facilities; these buildings can be gutted and reused. They were well built. Proposed that the facilities be used for assisted living with veteran priority. Can't understand why this would be done all over again with the same plan. This is the same plan being approved in

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other places around the country and has the same priorities that everyone wants. We played by the rules and won; and we wouldn't require one dollar from VA. Isn't that what we want?

- Testimony 11:
 - Resident of Cortlandt for 25 years, member of Cortlandt Veterans Committee and multiple other veteran organizations. Has benefited from outpatient services at Montrose. Medical professionals here are more than competent and concerned about helping veterans. It would be very difficult for veterans to travel to Bronx or Castle Point to receive care that they already receive at Montrose. Is in favor of Montrose Elder's proposal for an EUL. Also supports the town of Cortlandt veterans' priority objectives. Believes that the two objectives of maintaining and enhancing services at the Montrose campus and creating a retirement community are compatible and should move forward without delay.
- Testimony 12: VVA Chapter 541 president
 - The only progress that has been made from all these hearings is that PwC made over \$8 million without one penny for the veterans. PwC is the only one moving ahead here. The longer we wait the more that they make. Can't understand why it has taken so long.
- Testimony 13: Deputy Commissioner of the NY State Department of Labor/ Commissioner for Veterans Affairs
 - Thanks to the LAP for their review and diligence. Obviously there are decisions that will be unpleasant and ideas shared today that are not agreeable by everyone. All ideas presented have been intended to help veterans. Disappointed that there are imminent changes that are not in the best interest of veterans. After all this time, we believe that another round of review and another year or two delay would be an eternity for returning veterans. There should not be a brand new review required and brand new presentation for all of the proposals. We have had conversations about the future of the facility; while disappointed that services will be transferred to Castle Point, the Montrose facility gives us a golden opportunity to create a veterans village where many services could be provided. If there has to be housing here, it should be prioritized as veterans housing. We could be #1 in NYS for a veterans' community. Hopes that there is no more delay in the process.
- Ms. Musumeci: Reminds the public about the channels available to provide feedback. Everything said at the meeting as well as written comments will go to the Secretary.

➤ **LAP Comments on BPOs and Q&A:** Ms. Musumeci

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- Mr. Weisbroth: It is important that the lack of transportation to Dutchess County be taken into consideration so that veterans are not isolated from the services they need.
- Ms. Musumeci: The building in Castle Point will be built and open before services are closed here at Montrose. We are talking about at least a 10-year project. We are also talking about a full service ambulatory care facility here that includes radiology, labs and testing.
- Comment from the audience: Castle Point takes care of veterans as well as people that West Point should be taking care of. I see many active duty military there.
- Ms. Musumeci: The VA has a contract with TRICARE and they take care of active duty military. That is part of the fourth VA mission to support DoD.
- Comment from the audience: I think we should take a vote on which options we want right now so that this can go back with the LAP. All in favor say "Aye"?
 - Audience Members: Many of the members stated "Aye".
- **Closing:** Ms. Musumeci
 - Adjourned the meeting and thanked LAP members.
 - Thanked public for comments.

Adjourned at 6:51 PM