

**St. Albans VA Medical Center
Local Advisory Panel Public Meeting
May 5, 2005
Pratt Auditorium**

Start Time: 3:00 PM

Participants:

- Local Advisory Panel (LAP) members present: Robert Schuster (Chair), Ralph DeMarco, Andrew Adler MD, Mark McMillan, Seth Bornstein, Ben Weisbroth, Olivia Coleman Banks
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Consultant: Ryder Smith, Garey Fuqua, Jessica Panish
- Perkins and Will (P+W): Susan Niculescu, Sally Hinderegger
- Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Support Team: Steve Gonzenbach, Michael McElroy (Assistant Contracting Officers Technical Representative), John Mazzula, Alan Hackman
- Others: Jay Halpern, Kate Tulloch Esq. (VA-Office of General Council), Christine Crockett, Stephanie Berkson, Mike Chew Yu, Public (estimated attendance 70-80 excluding above, other VA support staff, and media)

Opening Statements: (Mr. Schuster)

- The Chair called the meeting to order.
- Mr. Schuster led the Pledge of Allegiance, and then asked the others to introduce themselves including: LAP members, Team PwC, and P+W.
- LAP accepted Robert's Rules of Order, and then adopted Standard Operating Procedures.
- Stephen Gonzenbach provided the overview from the administrative meeting.
- The Chair provided the lay-out for the public meeting.
- Mr. Schuster mentioned that the public comment section will begin at 6:30 and that all comments would be transcribed. Also, those with comments will have the option to provide written testimony.

Demand Planning and Statistic Presentation

- Stephen Gonzenbach presented slides summarizing demand planning and statistical analysis.
- The Secretary's decision was stated: "The St. Albans campus was not designed for modern health care delivery, is aging, and is in need of replacement. To ensure veterans are cared for in safe and operationally efficient settings, VA will implement plans to replace the infrastructure at the St. Albans campus..." - Mr. Gonzenbach emphasized the Secretary's decision was to "replace" facilities at St. Albans, and not to demolish anything.
- Questions from Panel: none
- Questions and Comment from the Audience:
 - The nursing home and domiciliary beds always seem filled. How can the VA develop models based on data because the beds are always full?
 - Response: Our beds have been used extensively. Projected workload is established by VACO based on future need and not on current usage.
 - Are projections way down because veterans are being sent to Brooklyn?
 - Response: The data presented does not reflect relocation of any services to Brooklyn.

- What is the value of this property?
 - Response: We are only taking questions related to presentations.
- Did you mention providing services to others in the community?
 - Response: At this point it's clearly only local veterans being served at this facility, but additional services might be provided that would attract other veterans who come from various areas.
- Long-time patients are leaving this facility, so where do they go?
 - Response: We can't answer this specifically at this time, but in general, priority goes to 70% service-connected veterans for hospital care and nursing home care.
- To what do you attribute the decrease in services in 2013?
 - Response: It is reflective of current budget proposal that states veterans in category 7 and 8 will have enrollment fees. The calculations take into account that proposal. The decision on enrollment fees has not been acted upon in Congress, but we can go back and look at data if that happens, which is also based on the Secretary's Decision.
- Are you going to convert St. Albans into a full-service facility?
 - Response: This is inconsistent with the Secretary's Decision. We don't know the options yet because we have to look at the data in greater detail and this meeting is the first step in the process. Our charge is to primarily look at long-term care and ambulatory care.
- Question regarding 2nd page of presentation; statistics show outpatients from Queens going to clinics in the Bronx, why?
 - Response: This is a satellite clinic, in Queens, operated by the Bronx VAMC; we will look at the data further.
- How can we do planning without mental health, domiciliary, or nursing home data?
 - Response: We can not do planning until the projected workload data is finalized. Data for these services should be available soon.
- I would like to see data in a hand-out prior to meetings.
 - Response: For a copy please drop your name in box in the back of the room. In the future, materials will be made available in advance.
- Nursing home beds are badly needed and soon. Also, there's no parking in Brooklyn, and veterans can't take the train to Manhattan. There's plenty of vacant space, so it should be opened for care for these patients.

Methodology and Tools, including Options Development and Timing for St. Albans

- Ryder Smith, Lead Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP presented slides.
 - Recapped the history and background of the Secretary's Decision and the goal of the current study.
 - Outlined what will be studied, the study phases, timelines, PwC's role, and project organization chart.
 - Introduced the idea of Business Plan Options (BPOs) and PwC's approach to developing and evaluating BPOs.
 - BPOs will be based on the clinical services required and consider location, organization of services, ownership of buildings and land, and operations of buildings and land.
 - Public and Interest Group input will be sought through four principal means: first in the meetings with LAP; second through written testimony; third through a website, and fourth via a mail stop.

- Input will be collected, analyzed and considered in option development.
- Questions from Panel: none
- Questions and Comment from the Audience:
 - Expressed concern that hard copies were not received before the meeting.
 - Response: The next meeting should be held somewhere between late July through September. Materials will be made available earlier in advance of meetings.
 - Asked how many contractors the Government retained for this project.
 - Response: Answer is four - PwC, P+W, Davis Langdon and a separately contracted real estate planner.
 - Expressed concern that a preliminary plan had already been developed based on what was heard.
 - Response: The only pre-conceived plans are those instructed or outlined in the Secretary's document. Follow-up question regarding use of open space? The response was that no decision has yet been made.
 - Concern expressed regarding internet link to the Secretary's Decision document not working.
 - Response: The website is now up and running for all 18 sites: www.va.gov/cares/stalbans.
 - Asked that consideration be given to how to improve quality of healthcare. Also asked how coordination would be done with the studies being done in Brooklyn and Manhattan.
 - Response: Team PwC has the same site leader for all New York sites so that appropriate and informed options and recommendations can be made taking into account all sites.

The Chairman asked has special services such as laundry and kitchen would be considered.

- Response: This is part of the infrastructure that will be evaluated.

As the business portion of the meeting concluded earlier than expected, the Chair requested a vote to open the meeting to public comment earlier than scheduled. A motion was made to open the meeting to the public, which was seconded and passed unanimously.

Open Floor for Audience Comments:

- **Testimonial 1:** Asked if a community nursing home being considered instead of a VA hospital.
 - Response: No, VA home only. This study is being done to show the re-use opportunities.
- **Testimonial 2:** Asked if the public would get all data figures?
 - Response: Yes, the study data and findings will be available to everyone.
- **Testimonial 3:** Commented that when re-use is discussed, "prioritize" vs. "maximize" means to do something additional and get the most out of it.
 - Response: The study will be determining the best use of the property based on recommendations while maximizing VA services.
- **Testimonial 4:** Recommend that the community not be given any federal land. This is a veterans' facility and should be 100% used for veterans. Also, sees a need for board certified doctors on-site.

- **Testimonial 5:** Stated that veterans need to have a say in what happens at St. Alban's facility.
- **Testimonial 6:** Commented that the community has to be part of the process.
- **Testimonial 7:** Believes there is a need for a separate domiciliary facility and need female services where a woman veteran can come in with her children.
- **Testimonial 8:** Believes the community wants veterans to receive the most use of the land. The community is not trying to reduce the care given to veterans, but if the facility is going to be moved or demolished for something else, then they are interested in accessing the site.
- **Testimonial 9:** Suggested the facility is a very old structure and is literally falling down and difficult to maintain. Further, believes it is clear that a new facility is needed on this site but the old facility should be utilized while new facility is being built. Also believes there are needs for extended ambulatory care at this site and that a facility should be built that is modern and provides a broad-range of services.
- **Testimonial 10:** Concerned that in-home care has not been mentioned and needs to be because that's the direction healthcare is going. The testifier wanted to know how the study would consider in-home services.
- **Testimonial 11:** Believes there is not enough pharmacy space and shelving. The individual is looking forward to working in a new building with modern equipment with easier dissemination to patients.
- **Testimonial 12:** Stated that there has been a lot of dollars put into the facility. A new roof was added 5 years ago at a tremendous cost. The government has expended a lot of money on the current facility. The library used to be on 2nd floor – was just recently renovated. Building B was completely rebuilt and asbestos removed and took two years to complete. C3 is being completely renovated now. Suggests that it would be more sensible to build up infrastructure and keep as is. It would be costly to demolish the building. Believes there is still a lot of asbestos in buildings and that solar panels could cut electric bills in half.
- **Testimonial 13:** Believes that it is a waste of tax payer's money to tear down and rebuild a new nursing home, with no chapel, no auditorium. Veterans need a place for prayer, religious services, community activity. The auditorium means a lot to veterans. Does not believe there is anything significantly wrong with the facility. New elevators, new rooms, etc need to be added. Believes the facility should be left in tact and fixed up!
- **Testimonial 14:** Believes it doesn't make sense to tear down one building and build a smaller one. The testifier stated that St. Albans was "our house" and they like the care provided. Testifier believes that if there is going to be a new building then make it a new hospital, not just a nursing home.
- **Testimonial 15:** As a community member, testifier believes the hospital should be left as is with additions or be reconditioned... If the facility is going to be made larger, it should be made better.
- **Testimonial 16:** The testifier felt the current buildings needed to be replaced with new facilities and there is a need to create hospice center and elder care center. Also believes there is a need for 3 times the nursing home beds currently available because this facility serves all of NY and Vietnam veterans are getting older. Testifier also believes separate hospice care is necessary, the domiciliary program needs to be separated out in its own building, and the clinic needs to be full-service so veterans don't have to travel for care.
- **Testimonial 17:** The testifier is against replacing these buildings because of the cost. Asked if the facility been utilized to maximize funds already invested? The library has been relocated downstairs and buildings A4 and A5 have had structural

- changes. They are all fairly new and not cost effective to tear down. Believes modernizing current buildings will be more cost-effective and installing solar systems would be cheaper.
- **Testimonial 18:** Testifier asked if public would be notified in ample time about the next meeting.
 - Response: Notification will go to all media outlets, VSOs and related groups. It will also be posted on the internet as well as in newspapers.
 - **Testimonial 19:** Testifier asked where the public could get information regarding the broad-stroke plan.
 - Response: PwC has been contracted to come up with alternatives. The Secretary's Decision Document provides the "broad-stroke" plan.
 - **Testimonial 20:** Testifier asked if contractor has made an inspection of the facility.
 - Response: Team PwC will perform a walk through of the facility in addition to gathering the facility data.
 - **Testimonial 21:** The testifier believes an additional 200 parking spaces or up to 1000 more will be needed if a higher census is anticipated.
 - **Testimonial 22:** GYN care requires use of the shuttle service which takes 2 hours to get to Brooklyn. Some women veterans can't walk and get to shuttle. Thus a shuttle trip to Brooklyn requires an all day commitment. Also asked that consideration be given to the 30% of veterans who are homeless, as well as the need for hospice care.
 - **Testimonial 23:** The testifier described himself as a living example of what this facility can provide: 1) used the system here for dual hip replacements, 2) was homeless in 1998 and under psychiatric care ever since and in PTSD program, which saved his life. The testifier believes this facility needs to be modernized and totally utilized, not just for current veterans, but for those over fighting now.
 - **Testimonial 24:** The testifier is a Nassau resident concerned that St. Albans is the closest facility and it is far to travel to get care. From where the testifier lives North Port VAMC, is over an hour in travel time.
 - **Testimonial 25:** PwC needs to provide list of what it will cost to demolish and to rebuild this building. Recommended all figures be shown and the building should be upgraded.
 - **Testimonial 26:** Testifier believes travel times and lack of quality physicians are a big problem and that veterans need a full-service hospital in this location.
 - **Testimonial 27:** Testifier recommends consideration is given to constructing a simple Village for family-centered senior care. Next to this, build a daycare facility for children where the seniors and children can interact. This would create about 300 new jobs.
 - **Testimonial 28:** Recommended keeping the current structure and modernizing it and adding OB/GYN, CAT scan, and other needed services.

Testimony from Public Officials:

- Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott (of NY City on behalf of Mayor Bloomberg): He stated the city is working hard to overhaul school system, and one of the greatest challenges is lack of space. He stated the city proposes a school be built on the VA campus. The City would like to use 3 acres for grades 6-12 to alleviate over burdened schools and offer college prep classes to allow students to earn 2 years of college credits. Given the proximity to the VA, they further propose an emphasis on health sciences.

Deliberations:

- Ben Weisbroth: Believes they do need to plan ahead and provide handouts so everyone feels prepared. He believes service for female veterans is a must; so is hospice. Expressed the goals of keeping the community involved and finding out what will make this a full service hospital.
- Andrew Adler, MD: Noted he has been taking care of veterans for 30 years, and respects the passion that all the testifiers have. Expressed his hope to meet the Panel's obligation to veterans. Acknowledged the veterans are looking for more services, and hopefully, VA can provide them. Said he had heard specialty care, female care, hospice, and some talk about more beds as areas to look at. Also said he heard a lot about wanting to keep this building and carefully consider reuse of current property.
- Mark McMillian: Stated that is clear this facility still represents something to veterans. The community is happy with the space the way it is and just wants to change if that space is going to be outsourced and no longer needed for veterans. Expressed that people need to understand the study objectives and the role of the LAP. The LAP is in place to hear and listen to public input and concerns. He thanked participants for their input.
- Olivia Banks: Offered an apology for those who didn't get ample notice about meeting, and stated it will be improved in future. Noted she heard of the need for full-service facility here. She emphasized the need for an updated pharmacy and the need for female services.
- Ralph DeMarco: Stated that the VA budget keeps getting cut and the VA Directors are always struggling to best spend the funds they are given. Believes the room should have been full of veterans. Stated that those attending should vote for those Congressman that are supportive of veterans.
- Seth Bornstein: Stated that the community's input is extremely valuable and supported the hospice idea.
- Robert Schuster – Reiterated that areas highlighted today include adult day care, hospice, in home care. He thanked the audience for it's for spirited conversations.

Adjourn: 8:45PM