

**ST. ALBANS VA MEDICAL CENTER**

**Local Advisory Panel Meeting – Public Meeting 3  
Pratt Auditorium  
October 19, 2006, 4:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

➤ **Participants:**

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

- Robert Schuster, LAP Chair
- Andrew Adler, MD, Deputy Chief of Staff, NYHHS
- Ralph DeMarco, Executive Director; VSO
- Seth Bornstein
- Ben Weisbroth
- Olivia Coleman Banks, Community Representative
- Mark McMillan

**VA:**

- Stephen Gonzenbach, Ed.D., CARES Support Team Leader
- Jay Halpern, Special Assistant to the Secretary and Designated Federal Official, Office of Strategic Initiatives
- John Mazzulla, Public Affairs
- Kevin Casey, Public Affairs
- Karen Williams, Office of Asset and Enterprise Management

**New York State Division of Veterans Affairs**

- George Basher, Director.

**Team PwC:**

- Peter Erwin, Ph.D.
- Matthew Jarm

**Ellerbe Beckett:**

- Jefry Zalewski

**Pruitt Group:**

- Tom Rosenfeld

**Public:**

- 30 attendees

**Start at 4:15 PM**

➤ **Opening Remarks:** Robert Schuster (LAP Chair)

- Calls the meeting to order.
- Pledge of Allegiance led by Ralph DeMarco.
- Thanks attendees and asks LAP members to introduce themselves.
- Reviews the agenda for the meeting.
- Reviews Standard Operating Procedures for meeting.
  - The first session is for presentations and LAP members only. There should be no questions from the audience until the public portion of the agenda.

## Approved

- **Summary of LAP 3 Administrative Meeting:** Stephen Gonzenbach
  - Introduces VA special guests.
  - The LAP met in an administrative session from 2:00 - 4:00pm this afternoon. This is the first formal meeting of the LAP since late September of 2005. The meeting gave the LAP members an opportunity to understand the decisions made by the Secretary, the analysis done by PwC and the option that the Secretary has decided on for St. Albans. The LAP members were able to address any preliminary questions and comments that they had.
  
- **CARES Study and Business Plan Options (BPOs) Presentation:** Peter Erwin and Jay Halpern
  - Dr. Erwin introduces himself, reviews the scope of work provided to Team PwC and gives the presentation on Stage I findings and recommendations.
    - Dr. Erwin notes that the detailed Stage I Report is available on the CARES website
    - A copy of Dr Erwin's presentation is available on the CARES website
  
  - Dr. Gonzenbach makes an announcement, introducing Craig Lindwarm from Congressman Ackerman's Office.
  
  - Mr. Halpern reviews the Secretary's Decision
    - A copy of Mr. Halpern's presentation is available on the CARES website
    - **Comment from Mr. Schuster:** As an observation on the revised map - The distance appears to be further for the veterans to get to the chapel.
    - **Response from Mr. Halpern:** The map being displayed still factors in multistory buildings so the layout will be different when one story buildings are developed into the map.
    - **Question from audience:** When are we going to be able to ask questions?
    - **Response from Mr. Schuster:** After the break at 6:00.
    - **Comment from Mr. McMillan:** Stated for the audience that in future meetings hopefully their participation will be allowed throughout.
    - **Question from Mr. McMillan:** Can we be assured that the plans will not change when a new administration comes into the office.
    - **Response from Mr. Halpern:** CARES is independent from any political party and there shouldn't be any change in the course of the study. Confident that the new administration will continue to strive to keep the VA the best healthcare system in the U.S.

## Approved

- **Comment from Mr. Weisbroth:** If the auditorium cannot be used for the new facility could it be considered for reuse and if so will a new auditorium be built in the new facility?
- **Response from Mr. Halpern:** It could be considered for reuse by a contractor/developer. There will definitely be a chapel in the new facility. An auditorium of similar size cannot be built in the new facility, but there will be conference rooms.
- **Question from Dr. Adler:** Once the services are determined for a site it goes out in an RFP; however it's not guaranteed that they will all be accepted. Consideration should be given on the healthcare services provided and any interest in expanding the services (i.e. ambulatory surgery suites). How would one go about requesting those services as opposed to the RFP process?
- **Response from Mr. Halpern:** To add services money must be identified to fund those services. It would be hard to imagine a major increase in new services on the campuses; however there are private markets that may want to come in and provide services on the campus. Introduces Karen Williams from the Office of Asset and Enterprise Management to speak further on this issue.
- **Comment for Ms. Williams:** The Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) program is looking to competitively bid the excess land/assets in order to capitalize the veteran's assets. Will be working with the Pruitt Group to structure the reuse opportunities. When searching for contractors they will look at leasing opportunities which could include services in-kind. The mission is more important than the actual cash.
- **Question from Ms. Banks:** How long will the leases last?
- **Response from Ms. Williams:** We can develop leases up to 75 years; however the normal is between 50-60 years.
- **Question from Ms. Banks:** The only thing that the government would provide is the leased land?
- **Response from Ms. Williams:** Correct, the developer would be required to bring their own resources. We will look at options that are viable to the area. It is hard to know exactly what the options are until it goes to bid.
- **Question from Ms. Banks:** If there are elderly veterans interested in coming to this area, what chance would this middle class group have on getting the land?
- **Response from Ms. Williams:** The marketing effort will have to look at developers who are developing that type of housing. Since it is the government's land they can dictate how the land is used.
- **Question from Mr. Bornstein:** In terms of timing, when will we know what types of healthcare services will be in the facilities so that it can be determined what services need to be addressed in the EUL?
- **Response from Ms. Williams:** The healthcare and reuse processes are being done at the same time.

## Approved

- **Comment from Mr. Halpern:** By the 4th LAP panel the services will be ironed out.
- **Comment from Mr. Bornstein:** Interjected that hospice needs to be documented as an additional service moving forward.
- **Comment from Mr. Schuster:** It would be nice to develop something that will meet the needs of the veterans and also possibly meet the needs of the community.
- **Comment from Dr. Gonzenbach:** There is currently analysis being done to identify what is done and not done at the center. Once this analysis is completed other services can be considered.
- **Comment from Dr. Adler:** Need to identify what services are needed and a way to bring them into consideration.
- **Comment from Mr. Bornstein:** In crafting the RFP make sure that community input is provided.
- **Response from Mr. Halpern:** That will be factored in.
  
- Mr. Halpern reviewed the stakeholder input slide and ways to provide comments.
  
- Mr. Schuster thanks the Secretary for allowing the LAP to continue and calls a 30 minute recess.

### Recess from 5:25 PM - 6:00 PM

#### ➤ **Open Testimony:**

**(All testimony has been paraphrased and names are used only if written testimony was submitted or if testimony was provided on behalf of state or local official)**

- Robert Schuster called the meeting to order. Mr. Schuster discussed the operating procedures for the public testimony. He requested that the comments should be completed by the time that the red light signals. If there is time afterwards testimony can be continued.
- **Testimony 1: Jason A Kaatz**
  - Senior Vice Commander for the Department of New York.
  - Jewish war veteran.
  - Returned to the State of New York with 236 men after duty to find no care and was even turned away from the VA.
  - Veterans at North Shore Hospital with VA cards cannot easily get to Brooklyn.
  - 25,000 veterans in this county and 80-90% are WWII veterans who are taking care of themselves.
  - Today's events are disgraceful.
  - A nursing home facility is needed in this community.
  - This is a beautiful facility that was once 250 patients and now half of the patients have left because VA could not take care of them.
  - This is a shrinking facility and with a million men under arms and units rotating back and forth they don't know where to send these soldiers to get benefits and medical care.

## Approved

- There needs to be a reality check by the VA. We don't get a decent budget from the VA. Those from Congress should tell their bosses that this is unacceptable.
- There are 25,000 men in this county who need medical care and have to go someplace else. They're all going to end up dying.
- There needs to be a fix for the short term (i.e. modernization) and something constructive on the long-term (i.e. 10 years for now).
- Submitted hardcopy of testimony.
- **Testimony 2: Roger Scotland**
  - Deputy Director for Citywide Education & Youth Services - Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and Community Development.
  - On behalf of the Office of the mayor and the Bloomberg Administration as the policy advisor to Dennis Walcott.
  - Resides in the community and is a graduate of the New York public school system.
  - Understands the needs in SE Queens for education.
  - An overhaul has been done to the public school system over the past 3 years to try to address the severe overcrowding in the school system, especially in the high schools. Queens' schools are among the most overcrowded in the city.
  - Understands that access to care is the primary goal of VA and the city
  - Proposes using some of the land to build a school on 3 acres.
  - The city would look at constructing a school for grades 6 - 12. The school would potentially be an early college secondary school that would offer college preparation geared towards healthcare competencies and health science studies.
  - Possible partnership with the VA.
  - The area is primarily residential and the development/construction would factor in for harmony between the community and VA.
  - Submitted hardcopy of testimony to LAP
- **Testimony 3:**
  - Member of Disabled American Veterans.
  - Renovations were done less than 10 years ago and it would be a waste to destroy the buildings.
  - Reuse opportunities which include shopping facilities and schools are foolish and penny wise
  - There is no place for a noisy school around a nursing home facility.
  - Why is money the major consideration if no one knows the cost of destroying the facilities?
  - This campus has history as the Navy built it shaped like an anchor; Navy personnel have died here and babies have been born here.
  - Recommended that the chapel be used
  - This is God's country.
  - Remember America the beautiful so lets keep it now and forever
  - 82 year old veteran with nothing to gain financially from being here.

## Approved

- The lack of attendance at this meeting does not reflect the lack of interest or care. The public notification of the meeting was lacking and he just yesterday received notice of it.
- This meeting has been poorly organized and equipment should be set up prior to the meeting and not during the meeting.
- The buildings are old and we need better care for the veterans.
- Recently heard that they are out of vaccine for flu shots.
- More Physician Assistants are treating veterans than ever before.
- Will new buildings cure the delays in receiving care?
- Listen to us and then decide for yourself.
- **Testimony 4: Gerald Alperstein**
  - Speaking on behalf of the Department of New York and Commander Melvin Saks.
  - Read submitted testimony.
  - Reuse should be limited to VA specific endeavors.
  - Chapel should be maintained
  - There was no mention of the reuse recommendations in the decisions from the Secretary.
  - Moving in institutions like public schools would be incompatible with the VA missions.
  - Supports the LAPs' decisions regarding the preservation of the chapel and auditorium
  - Submitted hardcopy of testimony.
- **Testimony 5: Brian Simon**
  - Executive Assistant to Representative Gregory Meeks.
  - On behalf of the Congressman Meeks.
  - Glad that this event is taking place; however wishes more people were involved from the community.
  - The Congressman wishes he could be here tonight but his thoughts are here.
  - Must be mindful when stating that there has been preliminary research. Need to make sure there is a common objective between the VA and the community.
  - The Congressman wants to make sure that the Veterans returning have a place to get the kind of care they will need. This includes looking at the types of symptoms that the Veterans have.
  - Need to make sure that the facility is improved physically and that the kinds of healthcare services that veterans need are improved as well.
  - There is no reason why someone living in Queens County has to travel to New York to receive the care that they need.
  - The reuse of the land needs to be analyzed to preserve the character of the community.
  - There is currently a major issue with development and re-zoning issues regarding the types of developments trying to move into Queens, including multi-family units.

## Approved

- Must make sure that moving forward everything that is raised is formally documented.
- The format on how business is done moving forward needs to be a joint effort by all parties involved.
- There is not a lot of vacant land in New York and when people hear that there is vacant land here they will jump at it. The land here serves our veterans and we need to make sure that nothing is done to disrupt that.
- Improvements must be done for not just appearance but also for the services provided.
- Congressman Meeks will further address this issue in the future.
- **Testimony 6: Jeff Diggs**
  - On behalf of the Deputy Majority Leader of New York.
  - Veterans from WWII are in their 80s and Veterans from Vietnam are in their 60s. In between was the Korean conflict, which he was a part of and he's in his 70's.
  - Has an issue regarding the rationale for the decision process and the projected decrease for outpatient mental health as there will be an explosion of need from returning veterans from Iraq.
  - Will private healthcare organizations duplicate the services that are supposed to be here for the Veterans and if so who will pay for these things.
  - Recently visited Walter Reed and saw amputees and others with long term needs which will eventually become VA problems.
  - Represents the community and stated that this is a major concern by the people about what will be on this site.
  - Heard that there can be guidelines but that they [stakeholders] cannot specifically tell the developer about what should be here. This issue needs to be addressed and should be given careful consideration.
  - Where are the projections coming from? The figures need to be validated and they need to reflect reality.
- **Testimony 7:**
  - Member of the Elders Ministry in St. Albans, representing herself.
  - Does not feel that this is a good evening; however is happy to be here to learn what is going on.
  - The LAP should have more than two members representing the community on it.
  - Does not understand why there was a 30 minute break when there were very concerned people. The break caused people to leave that were here during the first session.
  - The community should not accept a proposal that is written by outsiders who don't know anything about the community.
  - Hear rumors of building a new school. There is already a lot of money now in schools which are not being managed appropriately.
  - Brother, father and husband were all veterans.

## Approved

- The community should be involved with the plans since they will be affected.
- Has lived in St. Albans for over 45 years.
- Has been fighting in this community for everything (education and decent jobs) and is still fighting now for elders.
- Does not want to see elders have to sell and move away.
- The elders want assisted housing on the vacant land.
- The people that have paid taxes all these years here should be involved.
- **Testimony 8:**
  - Chief Operating Officer of J-CAP
  - On behalf of Thomas White (CEO of JCAP).
  - JCAP has been providing services on this campus for 24 years including substance abuse and mental health services.
  - Committed to continue to provide these services working with the VA any developers to ensure that the services provided are consistent with the needs.
  - For years veterans and their families have come into their program and received successful treatment.
  - Commitment to modernization and want to continue to upgrade their facilities.
  - Has made around half a million dollars of improvements to their leased facilities in the last few years.
  - Wants to work to identify gaps in the services for the veterans in order to address their needs.
  - Ready to work with all of the groups present at the meeting
- **Testimony 9:**
  - Representing the Greater Alban Cathedral
  - Commended the panel and VA for viewing this as the beginning of a planning process and that the comments made today will have a serious impact on what will happen to these grounds.
  - There is an opportunity for innovation which is what the veterans have fought for. This gives an opportunity to get better facilities on these grounds.
  - Wants to see the VA get more money from Congress to make these renovations.
  - This is an opportunity for a public and private partnership in order to, first and foremost, set up a planned community for veterans, recognizing that all veterans' needs are not the same.
  - His church operates a veterans' program for single family homes in the community, so if anyone needs a place to live they should contact the church.
- **Testimony 10:**
  - Vietnam veteran.
  - Not happy that they are going to tear down a perfectly sound structure and put up satellite buildings.



## Approved

- The federal government is making it complicated. They should take the money and get the personnel needed and refurbish the facility that they have now.
- All of the current developers and contractors in the area are currently overloading the system. These plans will only further overload the system.
- The government isn't taking care of its veterans and it's time for the veterans to get what they deserve for what they have done.
- 2,600 kids killed in Iraq and nobody even knows what the injured are but it's probably 10 times that amount.
- This building has been here since 1956 and his uncle used to cook in the kitchen.
- Veterans will go on and on and as long as America is fighting wars there has to be a place for them to get well
- The rich don't care.
- Must look out for the interests of the veterans.
- Please use common sense.
- **Testimony 11:**
  - Speaking on behalf of himself as a veteran.
  - Consideration should be given for a facility that can handle someone that potentially could become a homeless veteran. If the family stays together there are all kind of services available; however if the veteran abandons the family services are often difficult to receive.
  - Remember that the middle word in LAP is advisory.
  - Four members of the panel are connected to the Veterans and two are connected to the community. This is not a bad balance and the make up of the committee is not a bad make up for the process.
- **Testimony 12:**
  - Vietnam veteran and a VA patient.
  - Representing the VFW.
  - Patient at Saint Albans.
  - Keeps getting referred to other hospitals including Brooklyn and Manhattan to see a doctor.
  - If money is going to be spent then why don't they build a hospital in Queens or Nassau County since they have the largest veteran population?
- **Testimony 13: Jason Katz (continued)**
  - On behalf of the Jewish War Veterans
  - Upset because it will be another 5-7 years before ground would even be broken for a new facility.
  - Dozens of veterans at North Shore, with VA cards, who can't afford the care up there.
  - The VA has some of the top doctors and they should be here.
  - The VA is losing business because it is not taking care of their business.

## Approved

- There needs to be a short term fix. At the very least there needs to be an urgency center built if they can't get an Emergency Room here.
- If a solidier needs help they have to go all the way to West Point.
- Discussion of building this and building that 10 years from now is great, but there needs to be care here now, including a 24 hour care facility.
- Remember that there are services here right now that need to be fixed (i.e. the pharmacy needs to be extended, space needs to be added and consolidation needs to be done).
- Mr. Schuster closes the open testimony session and thanks the participants.

### ➤ **Meeting Summary (review comments and concerns from public and LAP):**

Robert Schuster & LAP Members

- **Comment from Mr. Schuster:** Explained to the panel that there will not be a hospital based on the Secretary's decision.
- **Comment from Dr. Adler:** There is a desire from the community to alleviate the need to travel out of the area to find services. Whatever decision is made there needs to be a focus on the expansion of services, including an urgency center.
- **Comment from Mr. DeMarco:** The VA will not do it based on the budget.
- **Question from Ms. Banks:** Would there be a way to provide outpatient service to include extended care providing diagnosis?
- **Response from Dr. Adler:** Under certain circumstances something could be set up.
- **Comment from Mr. Halpern:** There could be recommendations to examine gaps in emergency services during the capital plan.
- Panel agrees unanimously to look into this issue further.

### ➤ **Closing:** Robert Schuster

- Adjourns meeting and thanks LAP members.

**Adjourned at 7:00 PM**