



April 7, 2009

The Honorable Arnie Fielkow  
The Honorable Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson  
The Honorable Shelley Midura  
The Honorable Stacy S. Head  
The Honorable James Carter  
The Honorable Cynthia Hedge-Morrell  
The Honorable Cynthia Willard-Lewis

Dear Council Members:

Forty-eight organizations, including ours, have called on the Council and City Planning Commission to demonstrate active leadership in the momentous decisions being made about hospitals for the Louisiana State University and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Specifically, we have asked the Council and City Planning Commission to:

1. Hold public hearings on plans for these hospitals and the biomedical research district, and
2. Direct that the city's Master Plan, now being drafted, include the hospitals and the biomedical economic district in its scope.

We are concerned that members of the Council and Planning Commission have expressed the view that these state and federal projects are not matters for city decision-making. In fact, the proposed projects will have a huge impact on New Orleans citizens and on city government. At an estimated \$2 billion in construction costs, they amount to the largest building and economic-development project the city has ever seen. In terms of our urban environment, they could have a huge impact on the health of the Central Business District and could require demolition of buildings on 70 acres - 27 blocks - of the Lower Mid-City Neighborhood along with the closing of many city streets. They could be the biggest single recovery project New Orleans will experience in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

City government, therefore, must take an assertive role in making sure that the plans for the LSU and VA hospitals are best for New Orleans. The city's Master Plan consultants, in their initial draft, have urged the Council and the Planning Commission to take an active role in land-use and urban design decisions being made for the hospitals and the medical district. The consultants, Goody Clancy, comment on the hospital plan in chapter 10 of the draft: "No city in America can afford to leave its fate in the hands of others, no matter how well intended, when so much is at stake." We agree.

The 48 organizations calling for your involvement are not endorsing one hospital plan over another. Instead, they are recommending that decisions be made in an open and transparent process. They are concerned that planning so far has taken place without any hearings by the Council and the Planning Commission. They are further concerned that the tremendously important Master Plan will not deal with the hospitals and medical district unless you and the Planning Commission direct that to happen. Leaving the hospitals out of the Master Plan, as Goody Clancy has been instructed by the city to do, will seriously undercut that document's integrity.

The organizations have also called on Gov. Jindal to commission an independent side-by-side cost-benefit analysis of two alternative plans for construction of a badly needed new teaching hospital downtown - LSU's plan for new construction, and the RMJM Hillier plan for building a new hospital in the gutted shell of Charity Hospital. Such a rigorous third-party analysis would also measure the economic benefits of putting the hospital in operation earlier, if that can be accomplished by one of the plans.

The 48 groups are a diverse range of New Orleans neighborhood organizations, such as the Broadmoor Improvement Association, the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association and the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization; national groups, like the American Planning Association, which has participated actively in the New Orleans recovery; professional organizations, like Doctors for Charity Hospital; and local planning organizations, like Smart Growth for Louisiana. A complete list of the 48 groups is at the end of this letter. We expect more organizations to join us soon in this call for openness and transparency.

We were encouraged last week that the Council reviewed state health care decisions and recommended that state officials reverse hospital-closing plans that would have an effect on New Orleans health care. Your public hearing and your unanimous resolution calling on the state to reconsider closing a New Orleans hospital (the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital) and to hold public hearings to collect the views of the affected community seem applicable to the LSU/VA hospitals. As Council Member Fielkow said about the resolution, "We think that it's important that the voices of New Orleans be heard."

The planned abandonment of Charity Hospital and the planned construction of major new hospitals are certainly as important to the city as the closing of NOAH.

On August 15, 2007, the Council passed resolution R-07-371 supporting an agreement between the city and the VA, in which the city promises to deliver the proposed VA site in a "construction ready state." That agreement requires the city to clear all buildings and roads and sidewalks from the proposed site of the VA hospital. It requires the city to remove all legacy sewer and water systems from the site, and to make new sewer and water service available to the VA. The agreement also

New Orleans City Council Members  
April 7, 2009  
Page Three

requires the city to make sure that gas and electric services are available to VA. And the agreement promises that the city will do all of this expensive and complicated work within 365 days of VA's site selection. VA announced its site selection last November.

This is a considerable commitment of city resources, and the fact that the Council promised two years ago to expedite permits and zoning without holding any public hearings is remarkable. We think the Council needs to make up for this omission.

Hearings by the Planning Commission and Council on the LSU/VA plans and inclusion of these plans in the Master Plan process must be part of a meaningful engagement by the Council in shaping the city's urban landscape and health care. It will not be sufficient simply to hold an informational hearing where citizen viewpoints are expressed. The Council and City Planning Commission must show active leadership.

Signed,



Bill Borah  
New Orleans  
Smart Growth for Louisiana

Jack Davis  
New Orleans  
National Trust for  
Historic Preservation

Sandra Stokes  
Baton Rouge  
Foundation for  
Historical Louisiana

cc: City Planning Commission members  
Yolanda Rodriguez  
Ed Blakely  
Mayor C. Ray Nagin  
David Dixon  
Goody Clancy

## 48 Organizations Calling for Open, Transparent Planning

Advocates for Environment Human Rights  
American Planning Association  
Broadmoor Improvement Association  
Bywater Neighborhood Association  
C3/Hands Off Iberville  
Camp and Julia Coalition, L.L.C  
Carrollton/Riverbend Neighborhood Association  
Charity Hospital School of Nursing Alumni Association (CHSNAA)  
Coliseum Square Association  
Doctors for Charity Hospital  
Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association  
Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association  
Foundation for Historical Louisiana  
French Quarter Citizens, Inc.  
GNO Affordable Housing Action Center  
Historic Faubourg Treme Association  
Holy Cross Neighborhood Association  
Irish Channel Neighborhood Association  
Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana  
Lafayette Square Association  
Lantern Light, Inc.  
Louisiana ACORN  
Louisiana Justice Institute  
Louisiana Landmarks Society  
Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation  
Lower Mid-City Residents and Business Owners Affected by the LSU/VA Hospitals  
Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development  
Loyola Chapter, National Lawyers Guild  
Mid-City Neighborhood Organization  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
New Creation Christian Church Coalition  
New Orleans Committee to Reopen Charity Hospital  
New Orleans Pax Christi  
NorthWest Carrollton Civic Association  
Partners for Livable Communities  
Phoenix of New Orleans (PNOLA)  
Preservation Dallas  
Preservation Resource Center  
Restaurant Opportunity Center of NOLA (ROC-NOLA)  
Smart Growth for Louisiana  
Social Justice Committee of the First Unitarian Universalist Church  
Southern Christian Leadership Conference Louisiana Women's Division  
Squandered Heritage  
The Renaissance Project  
The Townscape Institute  
The Urban Conservancy  
United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO)  
Vieux Carre Property Owners, Residents and Associates