

# CLEMSON

U N I V E R S I T Y

14 November 2009

## FAX TRANSMISSION

Sandra Stokes, Executive Vice Chair  
Foundation for Historical Louisiana  
P.O. Box 908  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821

### **RE: Save Charity Hospital and Lower Mid-City**

Dear Ms. Stokes:

When I moved to New Orleans in 1985, I soon became aware of the importance of Charity Hospital in the civic life and cultural history of the city. As a specialist in the field of healthcare architecture, and as a citizen who resided and raised a family in New Orleans from 1985 to 2007, I came to appreciate Charity's architectural importance from many perspectives, not the least of which was its highly innovative architecture. At its dedication ceremony in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt praised this new urban public hospital as a state of the art medical facility. The architecture of this art deco landmark had been directly influenced by the most progressive international advancements in hospital design and planning at the time, including the Hôpital Beaujon, in Clichy, near Paris, which opened in 1935. Beaujon was a groundbreaking, high-rise International Style nightingale hospital that also adroitly expressed the provisos of Florence Nightingale, who had had a profound influence on hospital architecture, internationally, in the period from 1860 to 1940.

Big Charity's variants on the classic Nightingale ward, plus its grand lobby, its out-building sentry structures that flank its central frontcourt on Tulane Avenue, its overall scale and civicness, were just a few of its attributes that contributed to its overall architectural significance.

The 1938 facility was the fourth Charity Hospital, dating from 1738. It ably withstood the test of time, despite years of benign neglect by its owners. From the mid 1980s on the current facility suffered from an extreme case of deferred maintenance. Accreditation issues dogged the institution over the past two decades—many of which would have been completely avoidable had adequate operational funds been allocated incrementally to rectify its cited facility-related shortcomings. A succession of band aid remedies were implemented but the end result was that its owners, in the years just prior to Hurricane



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Katrina, had virtually given up, opting to pursue a total replacement facility in lieu of continuing to operate the 1938 hospital.

It appears that Hurricane Katrina in 2005 provided the LSU Health Sciences Center with what was, in its view, a perfect excuse to abandon Big Charity once and for all. It immediately adopted a flawed, non-transparent, highly questionable strategy of declaring the facility more than 51% destroyed by the hurricane. In reality, this durable, structurally sound landmark hospital, by most independent accounts, sustained no more than 30% damage as a direct consequence of the hurricane. This estimate was the basis for FEMA's reasonable offer of \$150 million to LSU/HSC for repairs. FEMA was correct in its damage assessment and its figures appear to be based on sound analysis, then and now.

The RMJM Hillier report of 2008 presented an extremely sensible, practicable, cost effective, and well documented case for the total restoration of the Big Charity campus.

I have read this report very carefully in its entirety and I concur, without reservation, that by far the most prudent course of action at this time is to restore—not abandon—Big Charity.

Moreover, this progressive strategy will have spared from total destruction a venerable, historic neighborhood that has been cited by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the most endangered neighborhoods in the entire nation at this time. In addition, dozens of local neighborhood and grassroots organizations have endorsed the full restoration of Big Charity and the retention of the historic lower Mid-City neighborhood that has been targeted for clear-cutting by the LSU/HSC in consort with the City of New Orleans.

Please contact me if I may be of any further help in the fight to save Big Charity, and the historic Lower Mid-City neighborhood that has been senselessly targeted for total destruction.

Sincerely:



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Adjunct Professor, Department of Public Health Sciences  
Clemson University\*

\*Note: The views expressed in this letter are not necessarily those of the Clemson University administration or its governing Board of Administrators.