



Architects & Planners

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Commission on Streamlining Government
c/o Jerry Guillot
P. O. Box 44481
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Re: Charity Hospital Feasibility Study

Dear Sir or Madam:

Over the course of the last year, there have been several statements regarding the feasibility of reusing historic Charity Hospital from both supporters and opponents of the idea.

It is imperative, that at this critical juncture, we clarify some of the misconceptions and we also place some issues in the right perspective:

- a. The historic structure was assessed by a team of nationally recognized experts in the field, namely Robert Silman Associates and GBG, along with our own in-house experts who specialize in the reuse of historic buildings and specifically early twentieth century construction, as in the case of Charity Hospital. The assessment was performed with the aid of state-of-the-art scientific instruments and technology that allow us to understand and very reliably develop the Scope of Work for the repair of the exterior building envelope. Dismissing scientific and systematic analysis in a peremptory way, as has been done to-date by those who oppose the reuse of Charity Hospital as a health care facility, does not necessarily make the findings of the RMJM Hillier team erroneous. In conclusion, the arguments against reusing Charity because there are issues associated with the exterior envelope of the building and/or its structure, are arbitrary and capricious and are not based on solid evidence. To this day, the RMJM Hillier study is the only report that has provided a scientific assessment that can guide the repair and reuse of the building in a sensible way.
- b. Another misconception is that the layout of the building is not suitable for a state-of-the-art health care facility. Our plan indicated very clearly how the building can be used as a modern, state-of-the-art hospital, following the most stringent contemporary healthcare design principles, sound preservation techniques and sustainable technology.

Functionally, Charity Hospital's floor plates conform to modern healthcare facilities standards, providing a podium to accommodate large and complex medical and surgical functions, which support the bed tower floors above. The existing floor to floor height at the 1st and 2nd floors are ideal for operating rooms and diagnostic facilities and all elements that make up a modern diagnostic and treatment podium. The building footprint and shape also complies with contemporary design standards of enhancing daylighting and providing views from all patient rooms.

The RMJM Hillier building assessment resulted in a clear and compelling planning and design vision for an optimal, patient-centered, hospital experience. Again, dismissing this plan without sound planning and design reasoning, which has been the case up to this point, appears to be arbitrary.

- c. The schedule for the project was questioned and was deemed unrealistic. On the contrary, our schedule and sequence of implementation proposed the following:



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- The project can be implemented with multiple design/construction packages.
- First would be selective demolition and removals, preparing the building for construction
- Second would be exterior building envelope and structural repairs
- Third would be infrastructure and base building systems
- Fourth would be interior/architectural construction

If the reuse of the building had been chosen as the appropriate option, by now the project would have been well under way in to construction, if not completed, without the delays that have already occurred.

- d. The project budget was heavily questioned. Again, the opponents have done so, with erroneous statements. Our assumptions were very clear. The building would be gutted and a completely new infrastructure and interior architecture would be constructed. In that respect, there is no difference between a cost estimate for new construction and the renovation of Charity. In addition, the exterior repair program was based on the rigorous analysis and scientific assessment that was conducted, an approach that appears to be unknown to the opponents of the reuse of the historic building.
- e. Finally, the criticism that the study failed to address the ancillary needs of a modern hospital, as envisioned by LSU, raises the same questions from the supporters of the reuse of Charity. What planning and systematic study was conducted in the reuse of the structures that surround Charity as potential support facilities for the new complex? How was this option deemed not feasible prior to concluding that the only option is the leveling of a historic district and the construction of a new hospital complex? Frankly, it appears that the decision was already made without any systematic assessment, planning and urban design study on the potential of reusing Charity, the surrounding structures and the investment already in place of two medical institutions.

Old Charity could have been, and still can be, reused in a cost effective way, creating again a state-of-the art medical facility in New Orleans, without the loss of a National Historic District.

We thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George C. Skarmeeas". The signature is stylized and includes a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. George C Skarmeeas, AIA, AICP
Principal
Director of the Preservation Design Studio

Cc: Sandra Stokes (FHL)