

Department of Veterans Affairs

Greater Los Angeles Campus



Draft Master Plan

January 28, 2016



Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

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I. Introduction to the Plan

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Introduction

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Greater Los Angeles (GLA) Medical Center is part of the larger VA GLA Healthcare System that serves over 90,000 unique Veterans in Kern, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The GLA campus is located at the major intersection of Sepulveda Boulevard, Interstate 405 (also known as the San Diego Freeway) and Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. The campus is located in the densely urbanized Brentwood neighborhood, and encompasses approximately 388 acres. The GLA campus is one of largest medical center campus in the VA system. It provides a full range of medical services to eligible Veterans, including state-of-the-art hospital and outpatient care, rehabilitation, residential care, and long-term care services. It also serves as a center for medical research and education. The GLA Medical Center serves as a major training site for medical residence in partnership with the David Geffen School of Medicine the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and University of Southern California (USC) School of Medicine as well as more than 45 colleges, universities and vocational schools in 17 different medical, nursing, and other healthcare and administrative programs

In January 2015, a settlement agreement was reached in the June 2011 lawsuit that a number of lawyers, including the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, filed against VA (*Valentini v. McDonald*) on behalf of several Veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America, and Carolina Winston Barrie (a descendant of family members that deeded the GLA campus to the United States). The lawsuit alleged that VA violated the covenant contained in the March 1888 deed whereby the United States acquired title to the GLA campus, by misusing parts of it for commercial purposes in lieu of caring for and serving Veterans – namely chronically homeless Veterans with significant disabilities, and other underrepresented Veterans that are severely disabled, aging, or female Veterans.

The settlement agreement reached in *Valentini v. McDonald* was memorialized in a “Principles Agreement” executed between Secretary Robert McDonald and Ron Olson, Esq. of Munger, Tolles, and Olson, LLP law firm. The settlement agreement memorialized VA’s intent to prepare a new Master Plan for the campus to help in VA’s goal to revitalize the campus to be Veteran focused. This goal includes making supportive housing and other services available on campus, so Veterans will have a choice to live on or off campus, and have access to a more welcoming and healing environment in which to live and receive care, services, and benefits to which they are entitled. The Principles Agreement also reflects the intent of VA and the former plaintiffs to work collaboratively in coordination with key Federal, State, local, and community

stakeholders, Veterans, Veteran Service Organizations, and charitable and philanthropic entities, to end Veteran homelessness in greater Los Angeles. A key element of the Principles Agreement was for VA to solicit input and feedback from those stakeholders for this Draft Master Plan.

The Draft Master Plan for the GLA Campus is a framework that will assist VA determine and implement the most effective use of the campus for Veterans, particularly for homeless Veterans, including underserved populations such as female Veterans, aging Veterans, and those who are severely physically or mentally disabled. The primary considerations include: (a) the provision of appropriate levels of supportive housing on the campus, in renovated existing buildings or newly constructed facilities, while taking into account the parties' assessment of available housing units available in the greater Los Angeles community; (b) respect for individual Veteran choices on whether to seek housing at the GLA campus or in the local community; (c) parameters of applicable law, including but not limited to the appropriate integration of persons with disabilities into the community, and applicable environmental and historic preservation laws, regulations, and consultation requirements. (d) need for appropriate levels of bridge and emergency/housing along with short-term treatment services on campus, to provide state-of-the-art primary care, mental health, and addiction services to Veterans, particularly those that are chronically homeless.

VA is now excited about the progress made to date and the future opportunities that lie ahead; to improve Veteran outreach and coordination with all stakeholders sharing in the common goal of improving the overall well-being of Veterans and their families, on and off the campus; to help end Veteran homelessness; to assist Veterans with the transition and reintegration back into community after service to our country, and to be a leader in environmental sustainability. VA cannot solve these problems alone and appreciates the shared commitment of the key stakeholders involved, including the former Plaintiffs in the *Valentini* litigation, Federal, State, and local authorities, Veterans, Veteran Service Organizations, legislators, faith-based organizations, community partners, philanthropic organizations, and the local community.

Background

In March 1888, the United States received a donation of the land now comprising the GLA campus from John P. Jones, Arcadia B. DeBaker, and John Wolfskills, with the understanding and intent for the site to be used to establish a Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Shortly after the Korean War, nearly 5,000 Veterans called the campus home. In fact, the federal government maintained this purpose for the property with fidelity until the 1970's, but over years it transitioned into a condensed healthcare and research campus leaving land, housing and amenities unused and in disrepair.

Today the property, comprised of approximately three hundred eighty-eight (388) acres located in the heart of Los Angeles, currently supports one of the largest medical center campuses in the VA system. In this capacity, it provides Veterans with access to a full continuum of healthcare services in a range of treatment environments including hospital, residential, long-term and various outpatient settings. However, at present the campus itself is not authorized to offer resources beyond medical care, such as housing with support, as it had been for many decades prior in accord with its original charter as a home for disabled Veterans.

With this context in mind, it is well known that homelessness among Veterans is a serious problem and, according to a recent report, that the State of California alone accounts for one-

quarter of the nation's homeless Veteran population. Further, VA and HUD data indicate that approximately 10% of the nation's homeless Veteran population is concentrated in one region, namely LA County, significantly more than any other such region in the United States. Of note, this same part of the country also accounts for the nation's highest numbers of new Veterans currently returning from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the highest number of female Veterans, populations that may be at risk for becoming homeless.

Though there is no argument that medical care is of the utmost importance for Veterans in general, many need additional resources, especially those struggling with social issues that include (or increase the risk for) unstable housing and/or frank homelessness. In recent decades, Veteran needs and vulnerabilities have grown in both size and scope due to the large population from earlier eras that is aging and the return of a new generation from recent conflicts that presents an unparalleled set of reintegration challenges requiring a range of non-medical resources to be fully addressed.

On-Campus Housing

Consistent with the Deed of 1888, utilizing the GLA campus to develop on-campus "homes" is a critical component to the local solution for ending Veteran homelessness. Not only can on-campus housing help fill LA's well known shortfall in housing inventory and mitigate its exorbitant real estate market, but the property itself offers an attractive choice for the most disabled and medically compromised Veterans who will prefer to live on this historic site in LA's west side as opposed to elsewhere in the community. Perhaps most importantly, campus-based housing will provide a clinically indicated option for the neediest aging, chronically homeless, and other vulnerable Veterans who will have better life outcomes in this type of enriched environment.

VA recognizes that it cannot solve Veteran homelessness alone and that it will take the combined, coordinated efforts of the entire local community to solve this problem. As such, campus-based housing must be carefully planned to help ensure the development of a safe and dignified community that functions effectively in its own right but also one that operates in coordination with surrounding neighborhoods as well as other care and service entities located off campus.

Master Plan Input, Goals, and Vision

Key to the creation of a successful master plan, and stipulated in the Partnership Agreement, was the need to solicit input from a full range of stakeholders in determining how best to use the campus in a Veteran-centric manner so that Veterans living on or visiting the campus will be able to experience superior care, support, convenience, and customer service. The results of this outreach, which included input from thousands of Veterans in working sessions throughout LA county, a public comment period that collected a record number of entries (1002) on the federal register and several surveys led to the goals below which have been used drive the Plan.

1. Use the planning process to create a 21st Century model for Veterans' care that honors those who have served our nation and serves as a symbol of national pride and innovative change.
2. Revitalize the site to its intended purpose as a home; a vibrant community that includes the

development of high quality housing tailored to priority Veteran subpopulations with robust supports that promote wellbeing and holistic, strength based services to augment existing structure of healthcare services.

3. Ensure transparency and accountability in land use and partnering decisions by engaging Veterans in the process that underlies the site's revitalization.
4. Make certain that all on-site programs, activities, resources and initiatives are offered in a culture that prioritizes the needs and wants of Veterans from every service era, and their families.
5. Develop a variety of high quality supportive housing that is tailored to the needs of vulnerable veteran sub-populations populations (e.g., chronically homeless, severely disabled, aging veterans with disabilities, females with dependents and other Veterans suffering from significant trauma and addictions disorders that have experienced housing instability) who have been prioritized to live on-site.
6. Offer user-friendly access to a holistic set of resources provided on-site for the benefit of Veterans and their families whether living on campus or residing elsewhere in the greater Los Angeles community.
7. Interconnect campus operations in real time with available off-site resources including VA facilities, state, county, city, neighborhood systems, Veteran Service Organizations and non-profit organizations.
8. Create opportunities on campus for all Veterans to interface safely and network constructively with the community at large and in the process facilitate their successful reintegration into civilian society.
9. Optimize the site by maintaining its legacy as a home wherever possible through restoration of original structures, thoroughfares, open space, trees and natural terrain while developing new facilities that are compatible with the home's scale and character.
10. Create a safe, secure sustainable campus that is not fully reliant on VA funds for development and operations of housing and services while ensuring future land use activities beyond the providing of healthcare, benefits, and memorial services, directly benefit Veterans and their families, and help foster a culture where Veterans are welcome and free to engage with each other, their families, VA personnel, and other stakeholders, to help improve their lives and overall well-being.

The Draft Master Plan that follows in this document describes a framework and vision of how the GLA campus can once again provide a home for those Veterans most in need by offering on-site housing with individualized support to augment its resources as a medical center campus. Of paramount importance to the vision, therefore, is the development of various campus-based options for permanent supportive housing (homes and apartments) as well as temporary, triage-based housing (emergency, bridge and transitional) in adequate quantities to have a robust impact on the overall homeless problem in LA. Such inventory will need to be co-located on campus with state-of-the-art care for homeless, elderly and women Veterans including robust mental health and addiction services that are easily accessible. In addition, the campus will need to be structured and operated according to evidence-based homelessness

prevention and urban planning sciences, consistent with best practice approaches such as the Housing First model described in Section II.

To both augment and complement housing-focused development and homeless support services, the Draft Master Plan describes how various campus-based resource options can be put in place to address not only the needs of Veterans suffering in the streets today, but also ways it can be used to help other Veterans avoid joining the homeless ranks down the road. As such, the Draft Master Plan sets the stage for pursuing a land use plan that promotes the wellbeing of both homeless and/or otherwise vulnerable Veteran populations and at the same time leverages the property to serve as a catalyst in life for those Veterans who seek access to core reintegration-oriented opportunities such as alternative healthcare modalities, education, training, employment, benefits, legal, and spiritual services, as well as entrepreneurial, recreational, and social activities.

With the adoption of this Draft Master Plan, VA confirms its intent to create a 21st Century campus by renovating and protecting the property's historic features and functions as a home, expanding its resource offerings to meet current demands, enhancing its open spaces and natural features, improving its internal navigability and circulation, and optimizing its connection to the greater community, all in the interest of supporting LA's Veteran community in the broadest sense. As such, the Draft Master Plan commits VA to developing and operating the campus as a safe, welcoming, vibrant and sustainable community where Veterans, including women, disabled, and elderly in particular, will feel comfortable and proud accessing the resources they have earned.

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