

January 21, 2011

The New York City Council

Committee on Veterans

Subject: Resolution 0422-2010

Good morning! My name is John Chichester and I'm here to address the Committee on Veterans, regarding Resolution 0422-2010. I'm speaking on behalf of Vets Helping Vets, an organization from South East Queens that was formed to provide services to needy combat veterans, as well as veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The services we provide range anywhere from providing food to the hungry, clothing to those in need as well as providing direction and support to all veterans entitled to any/all benefits from the Veterans Administration, the City and/or State government. In addition, we concentrate on eliminating all bureaucratic roadblocks they may encounter after returning home.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on Veterans, I'd like to thank you for putting this important subject on the council agenda.

Vets Helping Vets is in full support of Resolution 0422-2010 and has been in a battle, along with other organizations, with the Veterans Administration for years as it progressively limited the available services and discussed privatizing the land. The existing St. Albans Veterans facility requires a complete renovation with the goal of having it become a full service hospital which should mirror other major Veterans hospitals. With the closing of three hospitals in the Queens Area and more and more veterans returning from war, the need is to add and not take away. This facility should have an emergency room, a primary and extended care facility for men and women, a full

scale women's section to deal with OB/GYN care, mammograms, and oncology, as well as other female specialty areas of medicine. In addition, there should be an adequate (in size) and comprehensive treatment facility with a nursing home and domiciliary services for all homeless veterans. Homelessness and suicide among the veteran population is greater than in any other category of the population. If my statistics are correct, there were 58,000 deaths that occurred during the Vietnam war and there have been more than 60,000 that have committed suicide.

When I speak about the St. Albans VA facility I speak from experience. I am a Vietnam Veteran; I was wounded in action and was subject to the inhalation and digestion of Agent Orange, one of the most potent toxins known to man. In addition, I was wounded in my right ear and have limited hearing and I live with severe back pain caused when my parachute failed to open properly. I have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and take significant medications. It is for these reasons as well as the fact that I visit the St. Albans facility several times a month that I am very concerned over the pending development of the land. The St. Albans facility has continued to eliminate services and force veterans to go to either Brooklyn or Manhattan. Wounded or disabled veterans should NOT have to travel for treatment after putting their lives on the line for their country. The Brooklyn facility is congested and it is nearly impossible to locate parking and has also been mentioned by the Veterans Administration as a possibility for closure in the recent past. The Manhattan VA hospital is located in one of the most congested areas in New York City and the costs for tolls and parking are prohibitive. Please remember, many of these veterans are disabled and are unable to take public transportation. While the Veterans Administration does offer some shuttle bus service it is not normally available on a regular and frequent enough basis. If you use the shuttle service you are prohibited from having early morning appointments.

Of more pressing concern is the VA's plan to close down the existing facility, build a much smaller center in its place and practically **GIVE** away 25 acres of land to develop a large number of housing units that are simply **NOT** needed. The St. Albans neighborhood infrastructure would never be able to accommodate the addition of thousands of vehicles and pedestrians. Why would the Veterans Administration build thousands of housing units in an area that has a 13% or greater vacancy rate? Why would the Veterans Administration select a developer that has a less than stellar reputation and is closely tied to a former congressman who has a dubious history? This certainly reeks of cronyism or worse! Why would the Veterans Administration build unnecessary housing in a minority community without the input and approval of the local residents? Why would the Veterans Administration completely ignore the veteran community and not provide us with the FULL SERVICE HOSPITAL we have earned? When I was drafted in 1967 I was promised the government would take care of me once I finished my tour. As is evidenced here they DID NOT keep their word.

I'd be remiss if I did not mention the fact that the Veterans Administration had previously given 53 acres of this same land to the City of NY so a park could be built. There is something dramatically wrong with this math and process. Of the total original pie, the VA has determined the Veterans that have fought and died for their country only deserve 25% of that pie.

Why is it that the Veterans Administration feels so strongly that the existing property is underutilized? As **MOST** combat veterans have some sort or another type of depression, why can't they make the grounds "depression friendly". A fountain, benches, green grass, birds, places to sit on the grass and possibly a basketball court for those that are

physically capable of exercising. This would be therapeutic and would help the mental state of veterans more than all the pills prescribed by the VA. The VA believes that every square inch of property must have concrete on it. Using the VA theory, imagine if NYC sold City Hall Park, Bryant Park, Central Park and Riverside park to private developers. While I'm not an expert in Real Estate I'm certain this would turn the \$120 billion deficit into a billion dollar bonanza. The reason they don't do this is because we need trees, parks and places to gather etc.

In closing I'd like to state that the Veterans Administration has the moral (and legal) responsibility to take care of ALL veterans, men and women. The VA should begin upgrading the existing St. Albans facility to a full service, state of the art facility that can provide the immediate and necessary care for conditions such as diabetes (known to be caused by Agent Orange exposure), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Post Traumatic Brain Injury and other Mental Health Illnesses as well as all other preventive medicine required to keep veterans healthy. Install an updated physical therapy unit, a complete radiology department and have the services available that are common (and normal) in hospitals. Vets Helping Vets supports the resolution (0422-2010) put forth by the Committee and is most appreciative and grateful for the support of its members.

I am confident that the City Council will closely monitor this process and scrutinize every request from the developer/VA as they relate to zoning issues, permits and all other land use laws that may be involved.

Again, the community and the veterans are against this development.

Thank you for your time.



In Service to America

Vietnam Veterans of America
Queens Chapter #32, Inc.
New York



To Councilman Matthew Eugene, Chair of the NYC Council Veterans Committee, Members of the NYC Council Veterans Committee and Guests.

As President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Queens Chapter #32 and on behalf of the Executive Board, Board of Directors and the membership I would like to express our outrage on the decision of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to assign the development of the St. Albans VA Health Care Facility to developer St. Albans Village, LLC. This decision by the VA showed total disregard for the wishes of the Queens veteran's community along with the community in general.

For several years, the VA conducted the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) study under the guise that it wanted what was best for veterans and also to provide a 'State of the Art Medical Facility' at the St. Albans Campus. Numerous hearings were held to allegedly listen to the wishes of the veterans and to take said wishes into account when designing the new facility. In an effort to work with the VA, Queens and Nassau Veterans submitted proposals at these hearings for the following:

1. Full Operating Hospital with Emergency Room.
2. Veterans Hospice Facility.
3. Women Veterans Domiciliary.
4. Veterans Assisted Living.

As a result of these hearings, the VA has chosen not only to turn their backs on the wishes of veterans but to also implement an 'Enhanced Use Leasing Program' which would give them the authority to turn over twenty five (25) acres of the fifty five (55) acres that make up the St. Albans VA Health Care Facility.

As stated by a VA representative at the last hearing, "We are holding these hearings because by law we are required to".

In an article which appeared in the June 24th addition of the Times Ledger, it was stated that a the top administrator of the St. Albans Village, LLC has been surrounded in controversy in the past few years over housing projects and has been accused of neglect by several tenants in several Jamaica apartment buildings. The article further stated that said administrator was also a Board member of the New Direction Local Development Corp. which is currently under investigation by the federal government.

It has completely astonished me that not one Queens elected official as a result of the VA's decision, has spoken up and come to the defense of the same Queens Veterans that have elected them to office.

88-61 76th Ave. Glendale, NY 11385 • (718) 830-0037 • FAX (718) 830-9553

• A Non-Profit National Veterans Organization •
• Chartered by the U.S. Congress •

I am also in receipt of a copy of a letter sent to Congressman Gregory Meeks by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki. This letter is in response to Congressman Meeks letter to the Secretary stating the position of both the Veterans Community and the St. Albans Community as it pertains to the St. Albans VA Health Care Facility.

As I stated earlier, there has been an ongoing battle by both the Veterans Community and the St. Albans Community to put an end to the Enhanced Use Lease proposal which the Department of Veterans Affairs has steadfastly insisted on implementing on the site of the current St. Albans VA Health Care Facility.

In said letter, the Secretary states that due to the diminishing Veterans population, the VA is not considering a full-service medical center for the St. Albans Campus. As the Veterans Community and the St. Albans Community has continually stated, the population data used to reach this conclusion is based on the results of the 2000 Census. This census was taken prior to the United States being involved in two wars simultaneously (Iraq and Afghanistan) and is thereby flawed. Also, the Secretary does not take into account the veterans of Nassau County who also use the existing facility.

Secretary Shinseki also states that veterans can travel to the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan and Brooklyn campuses by using what the VA calls VHA access standard. As we in the Veterans Community know, this system is unacceptable as it does not take into account weather and the ability of the veteran or their dependents to get to a VA facility.

Also, the Secretary does not provide a response to the concerns of the St. Albans Community as they pertain but are not limited to increased population; increased traffic; and the overall quality of life in the Community.

As President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Queens Chapter #32 and on behalf of the Executive Board, Board of Directors and the membership, I respectfully request that the NYC Council headed by it's Veterans Committee, step forward and adopt a resolution calling for the Veterans Administration to put an end to the Enhanced Use Lease Program as it pertains to the St. Albans VA Health Care Facility. This issue has gone on long enough and it is time for our elected officials to provide the support they have continuously promised.

As always, the Veterans Community and the St. Albans Community is available to discuss these issues with you at either your District Office or your Washington D.C. Office.

Respectfully,

Pastor Toro Jr., President
Vietnam Veterans of America
Queens Chapter #32



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

November 8, 2010

The Honorable Gregory W. Meeks
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Meeks:

I am responding to your letter regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) plans for the St. Albans, New York, campus of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System and your support of a full-service acute care Veterans hospital at that site. VA officials are aware of the concerns you cited from your conversations with local stakeholders and will continue to address them as VA finalizes its plans to provide quality health care services in this area.

Due to the diminishing Veteran population, VA is not considering a full-service medical center for the St. Albans campus. Veteran population data, compiled by the National Center for Analysis and Statistics, projects a significant decrease in the Queens, New York, area. The population of Veterans from Nassau and Suffolk counties is projected to decrease as well. It is important to note that the number of Veterans cited represents the total number of Veterans residing in the county. A smaller percentage of that number is eligible for VA health care, and not all eligible Veterans choose to use VA services. These projections take into account and are adjusted to include Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans and current Servicemembers. In addition, Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) access standard for drive time to a full service acute care hospital in urban areas is 60 minutes. In the St. Albans area, Veterans can travel to the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan or Brooklyn campuses within VHA's access standard.

While neither the Veteran population projections nor VA's access standards support the need for an acute care hospital at the St. Albans site, VA does project a need for an increase in geriatric and ambulatory care for the aging Veteran population. A modern, state-of-the-art nursing care facility is being planned to replace the current St. Albans Community Living Center. VA will continue to monitor Veterans' use of primary and specialty care clinics and will adjust the availability of services based on demand. Women Veterans currently receive primary and specialty care in the Ambulatory Care Clinic at the St. Albans facility and, should the demand for women's health services increase, additional specialty care will be added.

At this point in the enhanced-use lease (EUL) process, the preferred developer, St. Albans Village, LLC, is now required to provide a development plan as part of an effort to reach an acceptable agreement regarding the facilities the developer will provide VA and the type of private development that will be allowed on the remainder of the campus. Prior to submitting this plan, the preferred developer must independently

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The Honorable Gregory W. Meeks

pursue discussions with the appropriate State and local authorities regarding code compliance, design review clearance, building permits, and the required zoning variances for development on the EUL site. The preferred developer is also required to review the draft development plan with the community, Federal and locally elected officials, and Veterans groups and to seek and respond to feedback from these constituents.

As VA moves forward in the EUL negotiation phase, we will rely on input from Veterans, local government, and the surrounding community to ensure that the redevelopment of vacant land and buildings on the St. Albans Campus provides maximum benefit to Veterans and the community.

Thank you for your continuing support of our Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric K. Shinseki". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Eric K. Shinseki



THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY 12247

MALCOLM A. SMITH
NEW YORK STATE SENATE

January 21st, 2011
Testimony Presented at New York City Council Hearing:
St. Albans VA Hospital

Good Morning:

My name is Malcolm Smith.

I represent the 14th Senatorial District in South East Queens and Far Rockaway.

I would like to express my support for the renovation of the existing St. Albans Community Living Center.

I would like to urge the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and your committee respectfully, to completely renovate and utilize the existing St. Albans Community Living Center to provide a full-service V.A. Hospital with an emergency room, primary and extended care facility to accommodate female Veterans, and a comprehensive treatment facility that includes housing for displaced Veterans.

While I enthusiastically support a new Veterans Administration Hospital at the St. Albans site, I must also ask that certain stopgaps are put in place to protect the integrity of the surrounding neighborhood. For me this is a very sensitive issue, since I live just blocks away from the current facility.

The St. Albans Naval Hospital was first opened in 1943. And, while the community has certainly grown around it, there is a certain quaint feel to the neighborhood that we would like to have preserved at all costs.

Since that is the last large tract of land left in the area, there may be an urge by some outsiders to overdevelop it and expand the project to include amenities, and the traffic that comes along with them.

My neighbors and I are staunchly opposed to overdevelopment of the site and the neighborhood.

And I want to be clear: I am a strong supporter of our Veterans who need this new hospital.

I am in support of our Veterans who now are forced to travel from all parts of the state, city and Long Island to receive treatment.

And now approaching nearly seven decades of service, the Hospital needs a major overhaul, especially with the number of veterans in the region expected to increase in the coming years, according to the Veterans Advocacy groups I spoke with.

The facility was turned over to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) in 1974; and while it is not a full-service hospital, it is clear that a full-service hospital is needed with veterans from Queens and Nassau County being forced to travel to the V.A. Hospital in Brooklyn to access certain services.

Currently, there are more than 200,000 veterans in Queens and Nassau Counties, and an estimated 65,000 female Veterans in the state. Clearly, building a new hospital on 30 acres of the 55-acre site would be a great service to our Veterans.

But neighborhood concerns over proposals being floated to lease the remaining 25 acres to private developers to build commercial and residential buildings.

The community has been in strong opposition of such development. Local civic and community organizations nearby the St. Albans facility fully support the veterans in their quest for a full service hospital. But most importantly, agree that residential or commercial development on the site is neither appropriate nor supportable by the local infrastructure.

It should be noted that The State of New York has introduced resolutions in both the Senate and Assembly that call for the construction of a full-service hospital at the St. Albans Veterans facility.

Again, I would like to express my support and solidarity with the Veterans and their expressed need to have a full-service hospital.

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me the time to express my beliefs.

Thank you

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Javetta Humphrey

Address: 178-14 Baisley Blvd

I represent: Triangular Civic Assoc.

Address: 178-14 Baisley Blvd

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Nichols (Senator Malcolm Smith's Office)

Address: 205-19 Linden Blvd. St Albans, NY 11412

I represent: Senator Malcolm Smith's Office

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark McMillan

Address: 120-55 Queens Blvd

I represent: Queens Borough President Helen Marshall

Address: 120-55 Queens Blvd

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 422

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/2011

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JANE GREEN

Address: 21 VISTA DRIVE - GREAT NECK NY 11021

I represent: REACH OUT AMERICA - UCVCA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 422

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NELSON DAVIS

Address: 392 CENTRAL PARK WEST, NY

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 422

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN CAICHESTRA

Address: 114-10 133rd AVE

I represent: VETS HELPING VETS

Address: 114-10 133rd AVE

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 422

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/2010

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAT TONO, PRES. CHARTER 32

Address: 28-61 76th Ave Queens, NY

I represent: VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA

Address: A SAME

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 432

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STEVEN D. EPPS

Address: 186-12 FOCK BLVD.

I represent: UCVCR

Address: 200-23 LINDEN BLVD.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANDREW SCARBOROUGH

Address: 115-05 128th ST.

I represent: UCVCR

Address: 200-23 LINDEN BLVD.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rene Hill

Address: 200-23 Linden Blvd St Albans

I represent: Addisleigh Park + UCVCR

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DORIS SALZBERG

Address: 25 Chapel Place

I represent: Veterans Affairs POA

Address: Great Neck NY 11041

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PIERRE GRACE

Address: _____

I represent: U.C.V.C.R.

Address: _____