

News Release

For Immediate Release

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41 ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON GOVERNOR AND CITY LEADERS FOR OPEN PROCESS IN DECISION-MAKING FOR MAJOR HOSPITALS

They ask Gov. Jindal for cost-benefit analysis of two competing LSU plans, and ask City Council and Planning Commission to include hospitals in the New Orleans master plan.

New Orleans, La. (Wednesday, March 25, 2009)—With the debate over locating new LSU and VA hospitals in Mid-City continuing, 41 local and national organizations—including a diverse range of community groups, professional organizations and planning associations—are asking state and city leaders to engage the public more directly in the search for a solution.

At a press conference held today, the organizations asked Gov. Jindal to commission an independent, third-party comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the two LSU hospital plans--proposed new construction in Lower Mid-City and an alternative proposal to gut and rebuild a new 21st century hospital inside the shell of Charity Hospital. The organizations argue that a rigorous, side-by-side financial analysis will both clear up contradictory claims about construction costs of the two plans and will also measure the impact of different timelines on job creation, related economic development and health care delivery to the community.

In addition, the groups called on the City Council and the City Planning Commission to hold public hearings to receive information about the hospital designs and plans for a biomedical research district, and to give members of the public their first City-Hall-sponsored opportunity to respond to the plans. The groups want the hearings to be part of a process in which the council and planning commission take responsibility for making sure that the locations and designs for the huge hospital complex are best for the citizens, neighborhoods and the medical industry.

A third recommendation by the groups is to include the hospitals and the new biosciences economic development district in the city's new master planning process. Goody Clancy, the city's planning contractor, has stated that the Planning Commission excluded the hospitals and medical district from the scope of the master plan, which was released Friday in draft form.

“Despite the profound and lasting impact these projects will have on the city of New Orleans, the City Council and the City Planning Commission have been sitting on the sidelines of the debate, doing nothing, and the people of New Orleans have been kept largely in the dark,” said William Borah, New Orleans land use attorney. “This decision is far too important to be made in a backroom deal, without citizen input. This coalition is calling for a more transparent, open decision making process—one that has citizens at the table to help decide which hospital plan is in the best long-term interests of the people of New Orleans.”

Louisiana State University's proposed \$1.2 billion teaching hospital and medical center and a new \$600-plus million hospital for the Department of Veterans Affairs constitute the largest single economic-development project in the city's history. LSU and VA propose to locate the hospitals in a 70-acre section of the Mid-City neighborhood, after removing residents and small businesses from hundreds of buildings, many of them historic structures. The LSU plan for moving the hospitals to Mid-City would also affect the Central Business District, since the university proposes to abandon the landmark Charity Hospital building. A plan by RMJM Hillier proposes reusing the shell of the Charity building to house the state-of-the-art hospital that would serve as the core of LSU's academic medical center, an approach the nationally-recognized architects say will produce a world-class hospital with savings of hundreds of millions of dollars over new construction and will be completed at least two years sooner.

Last week at the Senate District 9 Health Care Reform Forum, Louisiana Secretary of Health and Hospitals Alan Levine—the state's point person on the hospital issue—said that no final decisions have been made and that both the LSU and the RMJM Hillier approaches are still on the table.

"Every neighborhood in New Orleans should be concerned that the plans for the replacement of Charity and the VA hospitals are not a part of the city's master planning process which is going on right now," said Charles E. Allen, III, president of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association. "What is happening in Lower Mid-City could happen in any neighborhood of the city. We need to make sure that City Planning and the City Council insist that the process applies to our entire city. We can't leave anything out."

"Health care is in critical condition here in New Orleans," said Dr. Sissy Sartor. "I am appealing to Governor Jindal to come forward and show the citizens of New Orleans and of the state that he is serious about returning health care to our city and that he will do it in a fiscally responsible way. The governor has it in his power to order a cost-benefit analysis that would answer the questions about alternative plans for rebuilding the LSU medical center."

"At this point, what we need is a clear factual basis from which a decision can be reached," said Sandra Stokes, Executive Vice Chair of the Foundation for Historical Louisiana. "We need to move forward, and the best way to do that is for the state to conduct an independent, side-by-side analysis of the two plans. That process would provide answers to fundamental questions of time, efficiency and cost. Which plan would provide 21st century medical care faster? Which would cost less? We need an independent voice to provide answers to these basic questions."

ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COALITION ARE CALLING FOR:

1. Governor Jindal to order an independent, comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the two hospital plans.
2. The City Planning Commission and the City Council to hold public hearings on these critical planning issues.
3. The City Planning Commission and the City Council to include the hospitals in the current master-planning process.

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