

NATIONAL
TRUST
FOR
HISTORIC
PRESERVATION®

Richard Moe
PRESIDENT

November 17, 2008

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin
Mayor
City of New Orleans
City Hall
1300 Perdido Street-Suite 2E04
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Mayor Nagin:

Your determination to move New Orleans' recovery forward at a steady pace has been evident over the last three years, and thus, on behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, I hope that you will be open to supporting modifications to the current plans regarding the LSU and Veterans Administration medical facilities in New Orleans, which could bring health care and medical education facilities on-line in less time and at lower cost.

With regard to LSU's plans, you are no doubt aware of the study of the Charity Hospital building commissioned by the Foundation for Historical Louisiana, at the direction of the state legislature, and completed by the nationally respected architectural and medical planning firm RMJM Hillier. The study concludes that the **basic** structural systems of the Charity Hospital building are sound, and that they can fully support the projected medical facilities. The study recommends the total gutting of the building to its basic structural system, floor plates, and exterior skin and in effect constructing a new hospital within the shell. It concludes that this rehabilitation of Charity Hospital can be accomplished for a projected **22 percent (\$136 million) less** than plans for land acquisition and new construction of equivalent facilities, and within a time period **at least two years faster** than the current LSU proposal. Moreover, the reuse of Charity Hospital by LSU would keep these facilities within the Central Business District (CBD), rather than moving them out of the CBD. They can thus provide first-class medical care while being an engine for economic revitalization of the CBD.

Attempts have been made to challenge the conclusions of the RMJM Hillier report, and RMJM has prepared a full rebuttal to these challenges. I believe an objective review will confirm that full rehabilitation of Charity Hospital, with VA facilities nearby, is the more responsible alternative for developing the first-class medical facilities that New Orleans needs, while strengthening the economic vigor of the CBD.

With regard to the new VA Medical Center in New Orleans, I urge you to weigh carefully the various options under consideration. The "Lindy Boggs" site, one of the two VA alternatives in the City of New Orleans under formal review, is

clearly the least harmful historic preservation alternative, by an enormous margin. Supporting the Lindy Boggs site would not only avoid the destruction of a historic neighborhood, but would also enable the VA to return health care to veterans in New Orleans much more quickly and cost-effectively. Even though the Lindy Boggs site would not be immediately adjacent to the proposed new LSU medical center, we believe the proximity of about one mile would be adequate to take advantage of a great deal of synergy between the two facilities and would be consistent with the proximity that VA medical centers have with teaching hospitals in other cities.

By contrast, the selection of the "RPC" site, together with the proposed new construction of the LSU academic medical center, would involve the demolition of at least 165 historic homes, and 15 square blocks in the Mid-City Historic District. The two facilities would be immediately adjacent to each other—but at an enormous cost in terms of historic properties and neighborhood destruction. In addition, the pace at which health care for veterans would return to New Orleans would likely be much slower if this site were chosen over the Lindy Boggs site.

I am well aware that there is tremendous determination in some quarters to locate the VA medical center at the RPC site in the Mid-City neighborhood, even though the RPC site has many disadvantages. For the sake of the public interest as a whole, I hope you will step forward and support the "win-win" opportunity presented by the Lindy Boggs site. Clearly, this choice would not only benefit the New Orleans area veterans, but it would also signal your respect and support for the New Orleans residents who are working so hard to rebuild their historic communities.

If there is a middle ground to be found in these difficult deliberations, which at least would minimize harm, I believe you may find it if you would consider combinations of the alternatives that are currently on the table. For example, if the new VA Medical Center were shifted in whole or in part into the proposed LSU site (with LSU reusing Charity Hospital and/or reducing its footprint), the destruction of historic properties could be greatly reduced, because the LSU site is at the edge of the historic district and much of the site is outside the district altogether. This hybrid option could spare a host of other historic buildings at the RPC site, while achieving the goal of adjacency with the proposed LSU and existing Tulane facilities. Earlier plans, you may know, called for VA and LSU to share the site. While this hybrid approach is not the best of the lot from a purely historic preservation standpoint, it would certainly be less harmful to the Mid-City Historic District than the RPC site. Environmental and historic preservation reviews now underway have addressed all of these sites, and thus additional reviews would not be required.

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin
November 17, 2008
Page 3

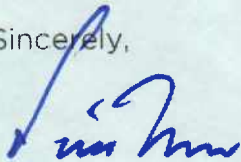
The National Trust for Historic Preservation has been deeply engaged in the post-Katrina recovery efforts in New Orleans for the last three years, working closely with our partner the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans. We established a field office in the city soon after Katrina; we drew nearly a thousand volunteers to assist in the city's recovery; we were key in obtaining fifty million dollars for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in federal preservation grants; we have completed 15 demonstration rehabilitation projects with low-income home owners; and we have made the case nationally that New Orleans is an irreplaceable part of our country's heritage and culture, and must be saved with its landmarks and historic neighborhoods restored.

As part of our efforts to assist New Orleans' recovery, you can see that the National Trust has been significantly involved in advocating for first-class health care and medical training facilities in the city, including our active participation in the review process for the proposed medical centers under the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

I know that you will consider all of the facts carefully, and I hope that you will agree with us that a winning strategy can emerge for both of these fine medical institutions, which will meet the city's goals, move these plans along more quickly and at less expense, and cause less destruction to a historic neighborhood.

Warmest regards.

Sincerely,



Richard Moe

RM:em

cc: Edward Blakely, Director, Office of Recovery and Development Administration,
City of New Orleans