



*For immediate release*

## **Voters want new hospital inside Charity building. They disagree with mayor, City Council on planning.**

New Renwick poll also finds voters believe reusing Charity would speed recovery and economic development of Central Business District.

*August 5, 2009* -- New Orleans voters prefer building a new hospital inside Charity Hospital by a margin of 2-to-1 over an alternative plan to locate the new hospital in the Lower Mid-City neighborhood, according to a new poll.

By a similarly wide margin, the voters who were interviewed also believe that building a new modern hospital inside Charity would cause faster recovery and economic development in the Central Business District.

About 500 registered voters in the public opinion survey conducted by political scientist Edward F. Renwick were asked if they favored one of the two hospital locations. Sixty percent said they favored the Charity location, while 30 percent chose the Lower Mid-City location being proposed by Louisiana State University. (Four percent favored neither, and 7 percent said they didn't know or declined to answer.)

Dr. Renwick, the recently retired executive director of Loyola University's Institute of Politics, said the respondents' choice of the Charity location over Lower Mid-City was pronounced.

"The voters' clear preference for putting the new hospital at the old site is more interesting in the light of their strong awareness of the competing plans," he said.

Indicating that strong awareness is that 90 percent of those surveyed said they had heard about the plan by state government and LSU to replace Charity with a new medical center in Lower Mid-City. Of these, 57 percent reported they had heard a lot, and 33 percent a little, about the LSU plan.

And 81 percent said they had heard about an alternative plan by some doctors, architects and neighborhood leaders to build a new modern hospital inside the shell of the old Charity building. Of the 81 percent, 45 percent said they had heard a lot, and 36 percent said they had heard a little.

Asked which of the two alternatives would cause faster recovery and economic development of the CBD, 59 percent chose the location inside Charity, while 28 percent chose LSU's proposed Lower Mid-City location. This 2-to-1 margin matches the strength of the overall preference for the Charity site.

Dr. Renwick's survey was conducted July 20-27 for Smart Growth for Louisiana, a non-profit New Orleans-based organization that supports citizen participation and transparency in planning. The poll analyzed a sample of 504 registered voters in Orleans Parish who were contacted over land phone lines. The results have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

The poll – the first publicly released survey measuring voter attitudes on the hospital controversy -- also indicated disagreement with current policies of Mayor C. Ray Nagin and the City Council.

The voters were told that the mayor has committed City Hall to support the LSU hospital in Lower Mid-City. They were then asked, "Would you prefer a candidate for mayor who continued Nagin's approach or a candidate who would consider alternatives, including reusing Charity as a hospital." While 20 percent said they would continue Mayor Nagin's approach, more than three times as many – 64 percent – said they would support a candidate who considered alternatives.

Eighty-three percent of the poll respondents called on the New Orleans City Council to conduct public hearings to give citizens a voice in planning the new hospital. Only 14 percent opposed such hearings. The City Council has declined to hold hearings on the hospital plans, saying it has no authority over a state building project.

LSU's proposed \$1.2 billion medical center, along with a similarly large medical complex planned by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, would demolish homes and businesses and close public streets on 25 blocks, covering about 70 acres, of the Lower Mid-City neighborhood. They constitute the largest post-Katrina recovery project in the city, other than levee protection. Opponents of the LSU plan say that the two hospitals can be built more quickly and less expensively by reusing the Charity building, which they say would avoid unnecessary destruction to Lower Mid-City and weakening of the CBD.

The survey did not include questions about the VA hospital.

The poll also found strong support for a proposal for an objective analysis of the competing hospital plans, to determine which will do more good for New Orleans: 71 percent favored such an analysis, while 20 percent opposed the idea.

This supports a request to Gov. Bobby Jindal by more than 60 neighborhood, professional and healthcare groups. They have asked him to commission an independent study of both the LSU plan for the Lower Mid-City site and the alternative design for a modern hospital inside Charity, by the international architecture firm RMJM Hillier under a commission from the Foundation for Historical

Louisiana. The groups argue that such a study would resolve conflicting claims over which hospital plan is less expensive and quicker to build, and which would bring greater benefits to New Orleans.

*For further information, contact:*

Jack Davis

Board member

Smart Growth for Louisiana

504-309-0525 land line

773-818-6449 cell

[jacdav@aol.com](mailto:jacdav@aol.com)