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Plans to House Homeless on VA Property Dropped

By Sheldon Ito

A proposal to house homeless veterans and their families in trailers on the grounds of the Veterans Administration Medical Center near Westwood has been dropped because of opposition from area homeowners and veterans groups, a hospital spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Instead, the homeless veterans may be housed in vacant homes or apartments spread around the area, spokeswoman Sara M. Hammond said.

A federal judge last month proposed placing 15 city-owned trailers on the 442-acre site, and neighborhood activists and leaders of various veterans groups agreed to join a task force with hospital executives, government officials and Salvation Army representatives to discuss the plan.

Plans Moved Ahead

Although the task force had not yet decided whether it approved of the proposal, VA Administrator Thomas K. Turnage last week ordered the panel to plan by April 8 details for placement of the trailers. Community and veterans representatives were enraged.

The order from Turnage "made them think their efforts were futile, that a decision was already made and that it was being crammed down the throats of the hospital and the community," Hammond said.

Several homeowners' groups held emergency meetings over the weekend to mobilize letter writing and advertising campaigns against the plan, said Sue Young, president of the Brentwood Homeowners Assn.

Judge Harry Pregerson of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals met Tuesday with Hammond and VA Medical Center Director William K. Anderson and agreed to support an alternative plan to handle homeless veterans.

Alternative Steps

The plan includes an outreach program, expansion of the VA's live-in program for elderly and mentally ill veterans, placing homeless veterans and their families in vacant apartments and houses, and consideration of locating the trailers on General Services Administration-controlled property adjacent to the VA site, Pregerson said.

The neighborhood groups will organize the program to house veterans' families in the community, Young said.

"We know there is a homeless problem out there, but the Veterans Administration property is not the place to solve it," she said.