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# Why the 80 Acres of Veterans Administration Medical Center West Los Angeles Must Not Be Used for Temporary Homeless Shelters Program

## Introduction

The Veterans Memorial Gardens Foundation (VMGF) is a non-profit corporation comprised of homeowners, community leaders, Veterans Service Organizations and friends of the Veterans Administration Medical Center in West Los Angeles.

The mission of the VMGF is to serve veterans by protecting, enhancing and maintaining the open space of West Los Angeles Veterans Grounds to honor their memory and sacrifice.

The Veterans Memorial Gardens plans include the following tentative projects:

- Veterans of All Wars Memorial Monument
- Dedication of Six Memorial Gardens
- Restoration and regeneration of the 80 acres
- Restoration of existing gardens
- New facilities including a Hospitality Center and Child Care Center
- Restoration of the Chapel and Trolley Station

These projects will be developed in phases as dollars are raised through major capital fund raising efforts.

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## I. The Problem

Eighty (80) acres of the land at the VAMC West Los Angeles was listed in the Federal Register of March 6, 1989 as being available to HUD under the McKinney Act for homeless shelters. This land had previously been saved from sale by a moratorium and passed into law in July, 1988, through the efforts of the Veterans Memorial Gardens Foundation, Veterans Service Organizations and Senators Alan Cranston and Pete Wilson.

## II. Purpose of this Paper

To provide justification for not making the property available to the homeless for use on an interim basis based upon:

- A. The VMG project is currently underway.
- B. Permanent damage to historically and ecologically significant property.

## III. History

- 2/5/86 Acting Administrator of Veterans Affairs declares approximately 109 acres as excess to the needs of the Medical Center.
- 2/21/86 VAMC WLA Land Utilization Task Force established.

- 3/86 VACO Land Utilization Task Force visits VAMC WLA . Report stated that the remaining portions are topographically suitable for VA development.
- 7/27/86 Full page ad entitled "An Open Letter To The U.S. Senate" ran in the Sunday Los Angeles Times.
- 8/11/86 Senator Cranston and Representative S.C. "Sonny" Montgomery attended a community rally in the Brentwood Park.
- 10/25/86 Through the efforts of Senator Pete Wilson, a moratorium was passed to prevent the sale of the land.
- 4/87 Ten (10) acres of DOD land (former VA land at the corner of Wilshire and Federal) is considered excess.
- 4/16/87 Celebration of the Moratorium in the Wadsworth Theater with Senator Pete Wilson; Kip Cranston, son of Senator Cranston; Anthony Beilinson, son of Congressman Beilenson; Ed Edelman, County Supervisor; Marvin Braude, Councilman 11th District; Tom Harmon, celebrity and Brentwood homeowner, and representatives from American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and AMVETS. Announcement made to the public concerning the DOD land.
- 4/87 DOD land withdrawn from consideration through efforts of Senators Cranston, Nunn and Wilson.
- 2/18/88 [ Local VAMC - WLA Land Utilization Task Force approves the VMC conceptual plans for integration into the Master Plan. ]
- 2/25/88 Unveiling of the Master Plan to the community at Annual Meeting of the Brentwood Homeowners Association.
- 2/12/88 Federal Judge proposes 15 city owned trailers for homeless veterans and families on VA property. Emergency transitional Housing Task Force established.
- 2/26/88 Newspaper articles with full description of the VMG concepts and  
2/28/88 praise for the Community/VA relationship.
- 3/11/88 Homeless Task Force tours VA lands. 80 acre site is deemed unacceptable. First choice is Fiyaway property on Sepulveda Boulevard on former VA property.
- 3/88 VMGF invites the cast of the award winning series "St. Elsewhere" to participate in the opening of the new AIDS unit.
- 5/2/88 VMGF and community financially support 100th birthday celebration.
- 5/25/88 VMGF financially supports Brentwood Memorial Day parade dedicated to the Centennial of the Medical Center.

- 6/30/88 Senators Robert Dole and Pete Wilson visit Medical Center to announce expansion of Domiciliary program for homeless chronically ill veterans.
- 7/88 PL 100-322 passed by Congress and signed by President Reagan to prohibit sale of the land.
- 9/29/88 In letter to Grace Davis, Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles, VA declines city owned trailers for homeless veterans and families.
- 9/88 Darrell Kerher (professional staff of Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs) made a site visit to the VAMC then met with the VA and Veterans Memorial Gardens Foundation for an update of the Master Plan.
- 11/11/88 VMGF supports Gala Veterans Day Celebration for the Centennial. VMGF has a slide presentation of the proposed monument and gardens as a major part of the program.
- 12/6/88 Announcement in the Los Angeles Times that 14 trailers for homeless will be placed on Flyaway property (former VA property).
- 12/9/89 VMG project submitted for VA Management Innovation Forum.
- 1/89 VMGF and VAMC continue development of VMGF proposals.
- 1/19/89 Congressman Dymally enters Bill #H.R. 528 for extension of the National Cemetery into 55 acres of Medical Center land.
- 3/6/89 HUD lists 80 acres as available for use by homeless in Federal Register.

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IV. Why Land Should Not Be Developed

This land is the only large open space on the entire westside of urban Los Angeles that has plant and animal life indigenous to the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains which can still be restored to its natural habitat. (Preliminary studies indicate that the area may have some rare and endangered species that must be protected under environmental laws.)

In its present state, the land has no utilities — (electricity, sewers, telephones and water.) There is only one main water line going directly to the VA water tanks. The terrain is very irregular and unstable. Grading and development of this area to provide utilities, housing spaces would destroy the natural features of the property and destroy a significant piece of Los Angeles land with historical and ecological significance. The VMG project would be doomed!

At this stage of development of the VMG project, an alternate development of the land would constitute a breach of faith and commitment to the community and to the service organizations. This project must be stopped in the VA. If not, the VA has lost credibility with the VMGF and the community. Additionally, the VMGF has lost credibility with its supporters who are planning to provide the funds for a \$20-\$30,000,000 project. If the project goes to HUD and is stopped during the public response period, the VA's ability to work with the VMGF and the community on this and future needs is compromised.

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The land is in an isolated and remote section of the Medical Center. The property is locked from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. for security for the Medical Center and the community. The access is by one narrow service road that provides only limited access to the property. The ravine is a major gully that serves as a county flood control plain. Rubble, perhaps containing asbestos from the old Wadsworth Hospital, has been dumped into the ravine and along the slopes of the ravine. The slopes of the ravine are unstable and provide a major safety problem if the property is opened up for housing.

Cost of developing the property is prohibitive. Developing roadways, grading and providing utilities represents a large sum of money that would not be economically feasible for a short interim period of time. Developers, who looked at the property when it was offered for sale felt that they would have to require high density construction to make the development cost effective.

It would damage the fund raising efforts of the Veterans Memorial Gardens project because donors must feel the acres are committed to the intended purposes. People must have confidence that the VA and United States Government are committed to the VMGF project.

V. Status Of The Veterans Memorial Gardens Project

A. Two contracts totaling over \$22,000 have been signed with Netzel/Steinhaus & Associates (NS&A), a fund raising counsel and management firm, to develop a Business Plan and conduct a Development Study. The Business Plan will strengthen the Board, identify programs and services and clarify and prioritize the projects. The Development Study will test the goal and help identify major donors and fund raising leadership.

B. Sponsors and committee are planning for Concerts on the Green (June, July & August, 1989). Concept and underwriting has been established, and proceeds will benefit Veterans Memorial Gardens.

C. Capital Development Program Critical Path developed by NS&A and presented to the Founders of the VMG.

D. Campbell and Campbell internationally known landscape architects, specializing in resoration of historically and ecologically significant properties, is actively designing a proposal for the healing, regeneration and restoration of the 80 acres.

E. Carlos Diniz, internationally renowned landscape graphics designer, has been committed to preparing an architectural rendering of the project as designed by Campbell and Campbell.

F. VMG has moved into an office at the Medical Center and the Founders of VMG have raised seed money for development and maintenance costs to staff and equip an office.

Free office  
Why Free?

G. Formalization of VA written agreements are underway.

VI. Current Status Of HUD

- VACO is responding that the 80 acres should not be available even on an interim basis.
- VAMC WLA is responding that the 80 acres are not available even on an interim basis.
- Dr. Kenneth Orduna, Chief of Staff for Congressman Dymally, has met with local representatives and Congressional subcommittees regarding extension of the National Cemetery.

VII. Recommendations

Withdrawal by VACO of the 80 acres from the HUD listing with subsequent publishing in Federal Register that land is withdrawn because of Veterans Memorial Gardens Project.