



**May 21, 2007 Meeting Report
by
David DeVoss**

Veteran Housing: Noble Effort or Deceptive Giveaway?

Americans may disagree about apple pie and motherhood, but all of us believe veterans merit respect, health care and housing.

Last month, wording that would have prevented commercial development of the 388-acre VA campus in West Los Angeles was deleted from the \$120 billion emergency war spending bill. The Bush Administration does not propose to sell the land outright. Instead, it wants to sign "enhanced leases" with politically connected developers who then could build, operate and effectively control parcels of public land.

Some Valley leaders including U.S. Congressman Brad Sherman fear the 321-acre VA campus west of the 405 on Plummer St. in North Hills also is being targeted. To find out the truth Valley VOTE invited **Erin Prangley** from Sherman's SFV office to confront the leaders of two groups intent on developing a portion of the Valley VA facility.

John Keaveney is director of **New Directions**, a 15-year old organization that has provided job training and substance abuse counseling for veterans in West Los Angeles. Four years ago, he proposed renovating two existing structures at the Valley's Sepulveda campus to provide long term, therapeutic housing for vets. "The director of the VA came to us," says Keaveney, "because the buildings were empty and he wanted a safe and stable facility."

It wasn't long, however, before New Directions realized it lacked the \$40 million to renovate 115,000 sq. ft that included 140 apartments. Enter **Dora Gallo**, CEO of **A Community of Friends**, and a property developer working in under served communities. Gallo soon learned that the VA, its budget scrunched by OMB, didn't have the money to fund the housing. Construction funds and tax credits were available from HUD and the IRS, but could only be used if the resulting housing served the general public.

"When you use IRS tax credits they must be for general public use," Gallo explained. "Neither can you discriminate with HUD funds. But New Directions will have a veteran's preference with targeted marketing. New Directions had the intent to serve veterans only, but they couldn't find a way to fund it."

That a closely monitored facility for honorably discharged veterans down on their luck morphs into housing for the homeless disturbs Erin Prangley, who accuses Community of Friends of bad faith. Even more disturbing, she says, is that the proposed deal results from a sole-sourced contract that would allow the developer to do anything it wants with the property for the 75 years of its enhanced lease.

"Suddenly in November 2006 we are told in a letter that the housing no longer will be restricted to veterans and that alcohol will be allowed in the units," said Prangley. "The alcohol and substance abuse programs are dropped, along with most of the supervisory staff. And disabled veterans won't even be allowed to live there. Understand this is federal land with no fees, taxes or environmental impact report. This group never had to prove any of what they tell you tonight because no other developer was allowed to bid."

The lack of competition and the amount developers propose to spend bothered many at the meeting. Said North Hills resident **Lloyd Ray**, a retired appraiser: "You're going to spend \$40 million to rehab two buildings with 140 apartments? That's \$272,000 per unit! I'd estimate that this project would cost less than \$20 million."

New Directions and Community of Friends directly answered every question put to them. Gallo has entered into a dialogue with **Valley VOTE** that should insure greater community involvement.

Halfway Home - More Than TV comedy!

Sober living homes are halfway houses for recovering substance abusers. Unfortunately, they aren't required to have a

state license or undergo municipal oversight, at least in Los Angeles. Valley resident John Hegedes says these homes are increasing because of Proposition 36, the Crime Prevention Act of 2000, that allows nonviolent drug offenders to avoid prison if they agree to supervised rehabilitation. Some of the facilities are strictly monitored, says Hegedes, but others are not. Often these unlicensed facilities shelter 12 to 18 people, some of whom are parolees. Riverside requires sober living facilities to be identified and restricts their location and number of people they can shelter. Hegedes says Los Angeles should do the same. For additional information on this topic contact Hegedes at jhegedes@dslextreme.com.

Double Jeopardy?

Under current law, if the owner of a Los Angeles rent controlled apartment building wants to stop renting his units and go out of that business, a relocation assistance fee of up to \$17,080 has to be paid to the vacating tenant(s) from each unit. The fee must be assessed even if the owner's purpose is to clear the building in order to build new units. Under the current guideline, any new units that become rentals during the next five years also are subject to rent restrictions. This amounts to double jeopardy, says Valley VOTE treasurer **Vic Viereck**.

But, help is coming. In June of 2008 the public will finally be able to vote to protect their property rights against government seizure. "The California Property Owners & Farmland Protection Act," which will be a state Constitutional Amendment, will protect property owners from Eminent Domain seizures for the purpose of transferring property from one private owner to another. Eminent Domain acquisitions for freeways, parks, and schools would be exempted. Subject to paperwork being submitted, the petitions will soon be issued. "I look forward to collecting signatures and voting yes" says Viereck

Californians for Property Rights Protection is a coalition of homeowners, family farmers, small business owners, and other property owners (small and large) led by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, and the California Alliance to Protect Private Property Rights.

Prognosis: Continued Noise

At the recent LAX-Community Noise Roundtable, Valley VOTE's **Denny Schneider** learned that the new noise monitoring system implementation schedule for LAX, Van Nuys, and Ontario airports is about nine months to a year behind. The improved system will enable everyone to review noise impact information on-line for areas extending beyond the traditional "impacted" level of 65 CNEL.

A recent court case on fees charged to airlines at LAX found Los Angeles World Airports in violation of existing leases. In the court rebuke of LAWA it noted that their financial records did not substantiate the new, unilaterally imposed fee increases. Final action by the Department of Transportation is required to remove them, however. LAWA had stated two reasons for the lease restructuring; recovery of unreimbursed security costs and ability to restore LAWA control of gate assignments for several of the terminals where long term leases prohibited their interference. The latter is most important and disappointing because it would have allowed us to hold LAWA responsible for the imbalance of gate usage that causes congestion in the Central Terminal Areas. Right now there is a mix of responsibilities so that no one is truly accountable.

Evaluating Neighborhood Councils

The City charter was revised to create neighborhood councils with the understanding that their performance be reviewed after seven years. A review commission has been meeting since last July reports Valley VOTE's **Polly Ward**. In late June of this year the commission will issue a preliminary set of recommendations for review and comment by the public. A public hearing in the South Valley will be held on June 30,2007 and one in the North Valley on July 17,2007. At the time of our meeting the locations of these two meetings was undecided. Persons should attend the June 18 Valley VOTE meeting to learn where the meetings will occur or go to the Neighborhood Council Review Commission (NCRC) Web site at www.ncrcla.org.

Is One Way the Right Way?

One way streets. "Would they work for the San Fernando Valley?" asks **Bart Reed**, a Valley VOTE member and the Executive Director of **The Transit Coalition**, "The problem is it costs \$35 million per intersection (to change traffic flow) and we have 500 intersections in the Valley," says Reed. One-way streets work best when they are one block apart like in downtown Los Angeles. Main streets on the Valley grid are one-half mile apart. "This means that a driver on Vanowen wanting to stop at a store on Sherman Way would have to circle around through residential areas creating even more traffic," he says. One solution might be to create a bus lane going the opposite direction on a one-way street, but then you lose parking on the side of the road that has the bus lane.

Valley VOTE Wants You!

Membership is the lifeblood of **Valley VOTE**. On April 28, 2007, the Executive Committee held a special meeting where they updated how one becomes a member of Valley VOTE. According to **Richard Bort**, a member of Valley VOTE's Executive Committee, the processes for becoming a Board Member and a member of the Executive Committee are:

1. **How To Become a Member** – Fill out a simple application and pay the annual dues of \$25. The Membership Chair will acknowledge your membership by letter. Any Valley VOTE member may attend, and participate in, any meeting of any committee other than the Executive Committee.

Mail to: Valley VOTE
Membership Chair
14622 Ventura Blvd. #424
Sherman Oaks, Ca. 91403

2. **How To Become a Board Member** – Fill out an application and submit it to the Secretary, who will take the application to the Executive Committee for approval. Valley VOTE Board Members may vote on all Valley VOTE motions after approval by the Executive Committee, and the President may appoint any Board member as a Committee Chair. Annual dues for Board members are \$50.

3. **How To Become a Member of the Executive Committee** – Executive Committee members are elected by the Board, and have the following duties:

- * Establish policy for Valley VOTE operations
 - * Vote on all Valley VOTE motions
 - * Approve new Valley VOTE Board member applications
 - * Will chair at least one committee
 - * Appoint a Nominating Committee to nominate Executive Committee members
- Annual dues for Executive Committee members are \$100.

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on Monday evening June 18,2007 at Galpin.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE, a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists and organizations is committed to exploring and implementing programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, including opportunities to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters.

Please forward this email to interested individuals and organizations. If you would like to be removed from our distribution list please send an Email to javittisr@cs.com.

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