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OVER 3 MILLION CITIZEN OPPONENTS OF SEPULVEDA VA APARTMENT COMPLEX, IN NORTH HILLS, CA, TELL VA TO RESCIND THE 75-YEAR LEASES AND CANCEL THE PROJECT

North Hills, CA: The Coalition of Opponents to a proposed apartment complex at the Sepulveda VA in North Hills, CA has grown to over 3,128,000. Opponents who have issued resolutions in opposition to the project include California state and national American Legion representing 2.3 million Veterans, California State Disabled American Veterans (DAV) representing over 119,000 Veterans and fifteen San Fernando Valley Neighborhood Councils, representing over 705,000 stakeholders. .

At issue are two 75-year Enhanced Use Leases between the Veterans Administration (VA) and private sector developers, New Directions, Inc. and A Community of Friends. The leases allow conversion of two medical buildings, 4 and 5, into an apartment complex consisting of 147 efficiency units, 250 square feet each, and two managers units, 540 square feet each, at a cost of \$48 million.

The leases, which can be amended at any time, give the developers title to the buildings and all improvements on 7.05 acres of the Sepulveda campus. The developers also get 90% of the film revenue, estimated at over \$7 million in 2010. The leases can be reassigned to other developers, buildings can be mortgaged for any amount and there's no provision for the land and assets if the loans are foreclosed. Per Federal Law, the VA can also transfer all rights, title and interest in the land and assets to the developers at any time during the 75 years.

The developers get all this for nothing. Cost to taxpayers: \$48M. Cost to the Veterans: if the project goes forward, it will open up the entire 160 acres of the Sepulveda VA campus to further private sector development and the Veterans will lose not only the two buildings and 7.05 acres at issue but the entire 160 acres and their medical center forever.

“The project, marketed as ‘permanent supportive housing for Homeless Veterans,’ is a ruse to leverage Veterans property into the hands of private non-VA organizations” says Larry Van Kuran, Adjutant 20th District American Legion, which includes the Sepulveda VA. “In fact, it will not remove one truly homeless Veteran from the streets. They're not eligible. To qualify as ‘eligible’ Veterans must

- Have successfully completed a minimum six month inpatient drug and alcohol abuse program such as the one operated by New Directions at the VA West Los Angeles.
- Provide at their own expense, \$15, an “acceptable” Credit Report
- Pay in advance first and last months rent
- And only those approved by New Directions will be accepted

“So, to qualify Veterans must be receiving VA benefits, Federal, State or Local subsidies or have a job. Homeless Veterans have none of those, if they did they would not be homeless,” said Van Kuran.

Opponents demand the VA rescind the leases and immediately refurbish and staff buildings 4 and 5 for medical use. Formerly the psychiatric unit, the buildings are clean, well maintained and in good condition. Re-commissioned for medical use, they will house 300-350 Veterans undergoing treatment at any given time, while the apartments will house only 147 permanently. Opponents also want the hospital, which was demolished in 1996, rebuilt and Sepulveda restored to the full service medical center it was designated to be.

“The Sepulveda VA service area includes the entire San Fernando, Simi, Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys, home to over 310,000 Veterans. They will soon be joined by thousands more from Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans are entitled to receive medical care and treatment in their immediate area. However, all emergency and important medical services have been moved from Sepulveda to the VA West Los Angeles. Our aging and disabled Veterans must now travel 2 to 4 hours one way for medical care and that’s unacceptable. Refurbished and staffed for medical use, Buildings 4 and 5 can provide at least limited psychiatric and emergency services immediately, “says Van Kuran.

Federal Statutes specify the project must have the approval of all the Sepulveda service area Veterans and San Fernando Valley Neighborhood Councils. The project does not have the required approval and opposition is growing daily, so opponents are confident they will win the battle.

According to Nichan Kulukian, Chair North Hills West Neighborhood Council Land Use Committee, “Saving Sepulveda will have National significance. It will shine the spotlight on every Enhanced Use Lease and force the VA to stop using them as a tool to divest itself of Veterans land and urgently needed medical facilities throughout the U.S. It will assure that all Veterans receive medical care and treatment in their immediate areas, starting right here in the San Fernando Valley! “

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Peggy Burgess is a Stakeholder Member of the North Hills West Neighborhood Council Land Use Committee

Attached are six photos of Building 5 at the Sepulveda VA taken Feb. 19, 2009

Current list of Opponents to the Sepulveda project