

MILWAUKEE SOLDIERS HOME COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL CONSENSUS REPORT

Revised October 2022

The Milwaukee VA National Soldiers Home Historic District Community Advisory Council is a diverse group of community representatives and stakeholders first convened in November 2011 by the Chicago Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance. The Council includes representation from the veteran, preservation and historical communities as well as representatives of neighborhoods, associations and organizations that have a vested interest in the District. The Council's purpose is to assist and advise stakeholders in the protection, repair and rehabilitation of the District by identifying and capitalizing upon opportunities to motivate the greater community and the VA to take steps to put the District, a National Historic Landmark, back into the service of veterans.

We, the members of the Council, believe that:

- The District is a national treasure of vital importance to Milwaukee, the state and the nation;
- A number of the District's most important assets – Ward Memorial Theater, the Chapel and Governor's Mansion – are currently unused and in grave danger of being rendered unusable;
- These buildings should be restored to their original purpose – the service of veterans – through adaptive reuse of the buildings; and
- The Council is committed to working with the VA and other interested parties to identify, implement and support such an adaptive reuse.

Furthermore, the Council has reached consensus on the following **unmet needs of the veteran community**:

- Mental Health: Additional / expanded PTSD and mental healthcare options
- Social: Social opportunities, including with other veterans and within the broader 'civilian' community
- Housing: Housing options for veterans and their families
- Education and Training: Easy-to-access veteran resources for information, aid and opportunity
- Centralization: Centralization of veteran services

The Council remains committed to identifying reuses that are first and foremost for veterans, but understands the value of welcoming community members to the grounds as additional users and a secondary audience.

The Council puts forward the following **potential reuses of the currently unoccupied District buildings** (Ward Memorial Hall, the Chapel and Governor's Mansion) that would first and foremost serve veterans - especially those who live on or receive services in the district - that could directly address the unmet needs outlined above:

- Fitness / adaptive sports facility
- Cafe / coffee shop
- Office and meeting space for veteran organizations
- Convenience store
- Flexible event / event rental space
- Museum space
- Nondenominational worship / spiritual space
- Performance space (art, theatrical, musical)
- Conference / training space
- Movie theater / entertainment space
- Mental health resource / session space
- Childcare for VA workers / residents on the grounds

Commitment

The Community Advisory Council: (1) Agrees that these unmet needs and the suggested building reuses should be considered by the VA, local, state and national decision makers as a Request for Proposals is prepared for the District's vacant buildings. (2) The Council is committed to working together with these decision-makers and stakeholders to help make this vision for the District a reality.