

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE SOLDIERS HOME  
COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
JUNE 5, 2018, 5:30 – 7:30 PM  
MEETING HELD AT VETERANS MANOR

**ATTENDEES:**

First	Last	Organization/Company
Jon	Beck	Alexander & Co.
Joe	Bova	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Tim	Carpenter	Wisconsin State Senate
Bob	Cocroft	CVI, Ltd.
Melissa	Cook	Hank Aaron Trail
Jeff "Doc"	Dentice	Veterans Community Relations Team
Carlan	Hatala	City of Milwaukee
Dan	Hereth	Congresswoman Gwen Moore's Office
Howard	Hinterthuer	Vietnam Veteran
Elizabeth	Hummitzsch	Mueller Communications
Jaclyn	Jecha	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Alec	Knutson	Alderman Michael Murphy's Office
George	Koerner	Veterans Community Relations Team
James	Madlom	Mueller Communications
Dawn	McCarthy	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Jennifer	Morton	Mueller Communications
Mary	Panzer	Soldiers Home Foundation
Daina	Penkiunas	Wisconsin historical Society
Laura	Rinaldi	Reclaiming our Heritage/VA Medical Center Library
Dean	Schwaller	Milwaukee VAMC
Jill	Zahn	VA Medical Center Library
Peter	Zanghi	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Claire	Zellner	Veterans Community Relations Team

**MATERIALS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:**

- [Agenda](#)
- [Consensus Report](#)
- [PPT Presentation](#)

**I. Every Hero Deserves a Home Campaign – Fundraising Update**

*Dawn McCarthy provided an update on the fundraising campaign.*

- Because of changes in tax credits and financing our fundraising goal went from \$4.2 million to \$3 million.
- To date, the campaign has raised just under \$2 million dollars.
- The deadline to raise the remaining \$1 million is the end of September.
- The fundraising committee is continuing outreach to major donors and will also be launching a social media challenge grant in the coming weeks.

## II. EUL Project Update

*CAC Member Jonathan Beck provided an update on the EUL project.*

- In 2016, an RFP was awarded to The Alexander Company for the rehabilitation of six buildings on the Soldiers Home grounds under an Enhanced Use Lease (EUL). As part of the EUL, the buildings are required to be used for homeless veteran housing.
- Since being awarded the RFP, The Alexander Company has made significant progress, including:
  - Completion of environmental surveys;
  - Section 106 consultation;
  - Securing key financing, including Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Federal and State Tax Credits and grants from major foundations; and
  - Construction documents are currently being drafted now.
- The September 30 fundraising deadline is of critical importance because the LIHTC funds will be lost if construction doesn't begin this fall.

## III. Historic Overview

*CAC Member Daina Penkiunas provided an overview of the historic importance of the Milwaukee Soldiers Home.*

- Formally known as the Northwest Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the Milwaukee Soldiers Home was one of three original Soldiers Homes built to serve veterans returning from the Civil War.
- Established in 1867, the Northwestern Branch was the second of the three branches established by the newly formed Board of Managers and the first designed and built by the Board.
- Homes were built all over the nation, and at one point in time there were a total of 11 Soldiers Homes, from Maine to California.
- Old Main serves as the main focal point of the Milwaukee Soldiers Home. It was built in two phases 1867-1869 and 1876-1877 and was designed to house most functions of the Home.
- Old Main was strategically positioned on the highest point in the district, enhancing the building's and the landscape's picturesque charm.
- It was designed by prominent Milwaukee architect Edward Townsend Mix. Mix also designed other prominent Milwaukee buildings you may recognize, including the Grain Exchange Building and the Mitchell Building.
- The National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was initially open to any Union soldier who could prove a connection between service and his injury.
- Congress loosened the eligibility requirements for the National Home branches in 1871 to include veterans of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, so long as they did not fight against the Union in the Civil War.
- In 1884, membership at the National Home branches was expanded again to include any honorably discharged soldier or sailor, who could not support himself due to a disability. The disability did not have to be a service related injury.
- In 1900, Spanish-American War veterans became eligible.

- During its first year of operation, 212 veterans lived at the Home. By 1877, 1307 veterans resided here. Later, housing was set aside for female veterans who had served as nurses during World War 1.
- Today, nearly 64,000 veterans use Zablocki's services.
- The Soldiers Home also served as Milwaukee's first major public park.
- Milwaukee residents would make the trip out to the grounds down National Avenue (Named for the home) for picnics, entertainment and to enjoy the ground's serenity.
- Over the years, some aspects of the Soldiers Home have changed. For example, at one time the District contained farmland, greenhouses and four lakes.
- Despite these changes, one of the many things that make the Milwaukee Soldiers Home unique is that it is the only Soldiers Home to still include most of its original buildings and village-like feel.
- There are about 50 historic resources, including large institutional buildings, a theater, chapel, homes and garages.
- In recognition on the unique and intact historic nature of the campus, The Soldiers Home was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2011.

#### IV. **Section 111 Overview and Recent RFI**

*Dean Schwaller, of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, provided an update on the use of Section 111 and the recent Request for Information.*

- We have an opportunity to use Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) to restore and redevelop three historic buildings – Ward Memorial Theater, The Governor's Mansion and the Chapel - that are not part of the ongoing Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) agreement, allowing them to be put back into productive use.
- Recently, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a Request for Information (RFI) from qualified development teams for [an opportunity to redevelop/renovate three key buildings](#) at the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center: The Soldiers Home Chapel (Building 12), Ward Memorial Theater (Building 41) and The Governor's Mansion (Building 39).
- The VA is seeking interest from the development community in redeveloping these buildings using the [Section 111 historic outlease authority under the VA's Historic Reuse Program](#) (HRP).
- Unlike the Enhanced Use Leasing (EUL) authority being used to rehabilitate Old Main, the Administration Building and various duplexes on the grounds, Section 111 does not necessitate that the buildings be used for homeless veteran housing.
- While Section 111 allows uses outside of homeless veteran housing, it does not dictate that reuses of historic buildings on VA grounds be for veterans. Ms. Shahidat A. Abbas with the VA Office of Real Property believes that veteran services make sense because these buildings are on the Soldiers Home campus.
- The RFI was designed to measure developer interest in rehabilitating these specific Soldiers Home buildings. The original deadline for the RFI was April 2018, however the VA did not receive any actionable responses from developers.
- Though the official RFI submission date has passed, the VA will continue to collect information from interested developers. A credible expression of interest

in this project is necessary for the VA to issue an official Request for Proposals (RFP).

*Following Dean's presentation, Dawn McCarthy invited Dan Hereth to give an update on expanded Enhanced Use Lease Authority*

- Dan indicated that while he is still working to identify the right piece of legislation to tie the expanded EUL authority to, at this time there are no updates.

*Following Dean's presentation, Dawn McCarthy provided a wrap up and summary*

- We believe there would be developer interest in these buildings, but that notice of the RFI wasn't spread as well as it could have been.
- The VA is open to getting additional expressions of interest from developers. MPA and the CAC will be working to get the word out about the RFI.
- The Consensus Report developed by the CAC remains a great resource for identifying and prioritizing potential reuses for these buildings.

## **V. Feedback and Q&A**

*Dawn, Daina and Dean opened the meeting up. Here is a summary of the Q&A discussion and general feedback.*

### **Q&A:**

**QUESTION:** Does this proposal (for the Sec. 111 rehab projects) have to come from a developer or could it come from a private organization that pledges to raise funds to have the work done?

- The RFI requires it comes from a qualified developer; organization can partner with a developer to express interest.

**QUESTION:** What about parking? How would parking for activities located in these buildings be handled?

- Parking is always a challenge. The VA is always looking for places / opportunities to find parking, it would have to be part of the process in working through an RFP.
- For the EUL project, The Alexander Company is creating a new parking lot and had to work through the section 106 process.

**QUESTION:** Would the Power Plant footprint be available for parking?

- The VA is looking into that. If the Power Plant was removed, it could result in a lot of parking that could be used by the Ward Theater. It would likely become a surface lot.

**QUESTION:** What is the benefit to any developer to doing those buildings, where's the money for the developer / ROI for a developer?

- A nonprofit that has an interest, needs to partner with a developer / consultant to help them cross the finish line.
- It has to be a public / private partnership.
- The best approach is to get someone from for-profit development world to consult or sit on the board of an interested organization.
- However, a developer would make money on this project, that would all be included in the financing package they develop.

**QUESTION:** The deadline for the RFI was April 30, and this is the first I heard of it. Can the deadline be extended so we can work to create synergies with other organizations?

- Yes. Though the official deadline has passed, the VA will still accept expressions of interest from developers.

**Other Feedback:**

- One of the principles we all hit on was that the buildings should be returned to the purpose they were initially intended. I think we should keep in mind that that's the goal – it's about therapeutic / reintegration for veterans, so they can learn how not to be soldiers anymore.
- We should make a list of organizations that might be interested in reuse of these buildings and engage with them around this RFI.
- The Governor's Mansion could be a good place to house archives for the VA.
- The CAC and MPA need to work with the State Historic Preservation Office and the VA to promote the RFI and to match developers and veteran groups to develop a plan.
- For the Chapel, we should reach out to Foundations / Charitable Arms of key religious organizations.
- We need to remember there will be about 125 residents living on the grounds, thanks to the EUL project. However these buildings are reused, it can help serve these veterans.
- We should create a virtual tour video of each building to help spur interest.
- We should arrange a meeting with developers and talk through what they view as obstacles / challenges to pursuing rehabilitation of these buildings. We need to show them what can be done and the ROI.
- For the Theater, a lot of work has already been done – roughly \$3 million has been spent on the exterior. That's a great selling point to a developer.

**VI. Adjourn**

*The next meeting will be called pending next steps and progress.*