

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE SOLDIERS HOME
COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL**
FEBRUARY 11, 2020, 5:30 – 7:00 PM
MEETING HELD AT VETERANS MANOR

ATTENDEES:

First	Last	Organization/Company
Jon	Beck	Alexander & Co.
Charlotte	Cannon-Sain	Center for Veterans Issues
Tim	Carpenter	Wisconsin State Senate
Jeff "Doc"	Dentice	Veterans Community Relations Team
Michael	Dwyer	The Home Depot
Eduardo	Garza	Center for Veterans Issues
Carlen	Hatala	City of Milwaukee
Howard	Hinterthuer	Vietnam Veteran
Tyler	Howe	Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office
Edwin	Huertas	State of Wisconsin, Office of the Governor
Elizabeth	Hummitzsch	Mueller Communications
Stephen	Lancaste	Center for Veterans Issues
James	Madlom	Mueller Communications
Dawn	McCarthy	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Michael	Mullen	Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center
Daina	Penkiunas	Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office
Hannah	Seeman	Mueller Communications
David	Uihlein	
Deborah	Unger	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Peter	Zanghi	Milwaukee Preservation Alliance
Claire	Zellner	Veterans Community Relations Team

MATERIALS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

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

I. Introduction of Milwaukee VA Medical Center Historic Liaison

Michael Mullen, Program Specialist, Historic Liaison in the Community Engagement and Relations Division of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center.

- Michael is a veteran, who retired from service in 2016. He is responsible for the oversight of anything occurring in the National Historic District. He has been in the position since June 2019.
- He thanked the CAC for its dedication to the Soldiers Home District and the progress that has been accomplished to-date and expressed his excitement to continue to work with the group moving forward.

II. Rehabilitation Project Update

Jonathan Beck of The Alexander Group provided an update on the rehabilitation project.

- The official groundbreaking for the rehabilitation of Old Main and five other historic buildings on the grounds was held on September 20, 2019. Abatement and demolition work is occurring right now, as well as tuckpointing and window and wood floor restoration. The entire building is surrounded by scaffolding.
- Currently, no one can be inside of the properties without going through OSHA training.
- The work has been going well, with few surprises or unplanned expenses.
- Work will be completed in Spring of 2021.
- Jonathan also showed the Council a video created by the Harley-Davidson Foundation regarding their support for the Soldiers Home. You can view the video [here](#).

III. Update on Additional Vacant Buildings

Michael Mullen provided an update on the Request for Proposals (RFP) that was issued for three key vacant buildings: The Soldiers Home Chapel, Ward Memorial Theater and the Governor's Mansion.

- A proposal was submitted in early 2018.
- The VA Central Office assessed the proposal and found that it was roughly \$20 million short of the necessary financing.
- The VA has plans to issue a new RFP for these buildings.

Dawn McCarthy shared that MPA has been in contact with the VA regarding a new RFP and has indicated we will help promote the RFP with qualified developers and work together with the VA to ensure a quality response is received.

- Dawn shared that preferably, the new RFP will be more flexible and allow a developer to propose a planned reuse for a single building and not be required to reuse all three vacant buildings.

Daina Penkiunas shared that Michael Mullen took State Historic Preservation Office officials on a tour of the three vacant buildings so they could assess the current state of the historic buildings.

- Chapel:
 - Daina shared that the Chapel is in the most threatened condition. However, while it will need significant investment, it is not deteriorated past the point of reuse. In fact, Daina and her colleagues on the tour were encouraged by the state of the building and had anticipated it would be in worse condition.
 - Daina showed a photo of the interior of the Chapel as it stands today. Everything has been removed from the interior, creating a large open space which could be used for a variety of functions.
 - It will not be difficult to maintain the character of the space while adapting it for reuse.
- Ward Memorial Theater:
 - Daina recapped the work that has been done by the VA to stabilize the theater including the restoration of the exterior envelope, porch work and window work. Daina shared that the exterior of the building is in near-pristine condition.
 - There is interior work needed, but it is definitely reusable.
 - Daina did share that theaters can present some challenges for reuse, as finding a use that would keep the sloped floor would be preferred. She did

- share that floors can be leveled while still maintaining the historic character of the building.
 - She also shared that the “fly space” behind the stage is large and open and could have floors inserted for a use such as office space.
- Governor’s Mansion:
 - Daina shared that the Governor’s Mansion is in the best condition of the three buildings, as it was in use most recently.
 - It will likely need a new HVAC system.
 - It is currently being heated and maintained.
 - It would likely see reuse as housing / office space.

Dawn shared that the rehabilitation and reuse of these three buildings would utilize Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act under the VA’s Historic Reuse Program.

- Unlike the Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) program that governs the current rehabilitation of Old Main and five other historic buildings, Section 111 does not require that the buildings are used for housing.
- The VA has assured MPA that it will show preference to development proposals that fit with the VA’s mission. If, however, viable proposals submitted are not solely for veteran uses, the VA will still consider them as a last resort for saving these buildings.
- MPA’s priority is to find interested developers who share the CAC’s commitment to ensuring veterans are served by these buildings.

IV. Discussion and Q&A

Dawn McCarthy recapped the CAC’s consensus report and led a discussion of potential reuses of the Soldiers Home Chapel, Ward Memorial Theater and the Governor’s Mansion.

- The group agreed that the Chapel is the most urgent need, and discussed the deterioration of the building’s exterior, including the loss of its ornate scalloped shingles.
 - The group discussed the need to invest in immediate stabilization work, even before a proposal for reuse is submitted and approved, pointing to the stabilization work The Alexander Company completed on Old Main before construction began.
 - The group discussed the fact that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation now has the ability to accept donations that can be used by federal agencies. However, it has only been done once.
 - The VA has tarped the back part of Chapel and has indicated that the main roof is not leaking.
- The group discussed the potential for incorporating volunteer labor and / or utilizing rehabilitation projects as training opportunities for veterans and the trades.
 - This possibility will need to be explored with the VA given some contracting requirements often tied to these projects.
- The group stressed the need for the reuse of these buildings to serve veterans, especially the 100+ veterans who will be living on the grounds once the current rehabilitation project is complete.
 - The group discussed the need for gathering space, restaurants and entertainment options for these veterans.

- There was discussion of the challenge of parking. Any rehabilitation proposal for one of these buildings would need to consider the parking needs tied to the reuse.

V. Adjourn

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