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Veterans-Only Housing on Veterans' Land

Homes for Heroes will provide permanent, affordable housing for homeless and disabled veterans. Proposed for the campus of the VA Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center in North Hills, the project will rehabilitate two vacant, earthquake-damaged buildings into 147 studio apartments with community space to accommodate group activities, laundry facilities and offices. The apartments will be leased to veterans only.

- **Encouraging Independent Living**

- Homes for Heroes will integrate supportive services into the daily lives of residents, enhancing independent living.
- Examples of services planned include: case management, benefits advocacy, health and wellness programs, education and job training opportunities and assistance with money management.

- **Responding to an Immediate Need**

- Of the 300,000 homeless veterans in the United States, it is estimated that at least 21,000 are in Los Angeles County (according to a 2007 report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness).
- More than 2,700 homeless and disabled veterans are estimated to live in the San Fernando Valley alone.
- The local VA offers no permanent supportive housing for disabled veterans.

- **Keeping VA Land for Veterans**

- Homes for Heroes will operate in Buildings 4 & 5 on the Sepulveda VA campus under a 75-year, enhanced-use lease agreement.
- The VA has determined that the two buildings, damaged and vacated after the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, are no longer needed for medical purposes.
- The apartments are guaranteed for lease only to military veterans.
- Once the land lease expires, the VA will resume ownership of the two buildings. The lease prohibits the sale of the buildings.

- **An Award-Winning Team**

- Homes for Heroes is a partnership between two award-winning non-profit organizations - A Community of Friends (ACOF) and New Directions, Inc. (NDI).
- ACOF is the project developer. Founded in 1988, ACOF's core mission is to develop affordable housing for individuals and families with special needs and to collaborate with community-based service agencies in offering residents a variety of on-site supportive services.
- NDI will be the on-site service provider. Founded in 1992, NDI provides services and programs to assist U.S. veterans with the challenges of life after combat and military service.
- Independently, ACOF and NDI have won multiple awards for their work.



In April 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determined that tenancy to only military veterans at Homes for Heroes would not violate the Federal Fair Housing Act. Although originally proposed as a "veterans-preference" project, following HUD's determination Homes for Heroes is now fully designated as "veterans only."

Your Support Makes a Difference!

Let the decision-makers know you want to see Homes for Heroes built! It just takes a minute to lend your name to support this worthy project.

Go to www.ndvets.org to sign up online, or call (818) 276-3240 to voice your support.

Learn more: visit www.ndvets.org or call (818) 276-3240

Home for vets

IT shouldn't take seven years to develop housing for homeless veterans on Department of Veterans Affairs land. Yet it's taken that long and will probably take a couple more years before this worthy project at the Sepulveda VA is built.

Affordable housing developer A Community of Friends and veterans' services provider New Directions teamed up on a plan to convert two unused medical buildings at the Sepulveda VA in North Hills into Homes for Heroes, a 147-apartment complex where homeless veterans could live, access medical care and get training, counseling and care.

Unfortunately, government bureaucracy, justifiable frustration with the VA and thinly veiled NIMBY-ism have delayed this project too long.

Everybody supports veterans and everybody wants homeless veterans to get help. Yet, there has been fierce opposition to this project, which would provide apartments, counseling and treatment to homeless veterans - on land designated for veterans.

It's time to settle the last remaining issues and let Homes for Heroes proceed.

Veterans groups and community leaders have been understandably concerned that because the \$40 million project is using federal funds it could not limit its services to veterans, although veterans would get first crack at the units. With more than 20,000 homeless veterans in Los Angeles County, there are plenty of veterans to fill those 147 apartments. Still, it is essential to ensure that VA land is for preserved for veterans.

Last week, the federal government removed that major roadblock by saying that the developers could ignore fair-housing rules and restrict the project to veterans only. Now the developers are asking the VA to rewrite the lease to require the apartments be rented to just veterans. That should alleviate much of the opposition to the project.

Some people argue that the two buildings should be restored and used as medical offices so veterans don't have to travel to the Westwood clinic for certain services not offered at the Sepulveda facility anymore. They want Sepulveda to become the hospital and medical center it once was.

Unfortunately, the VA has slowly dismantled and decreased services at the Sepulveda VA, but denying this project will not reverse that trend. These two buildings were last used for medical purposes in 1998, and in recent years they have been rented out for television production and film equipment storage. It is better to use these buildings for homeless veteran housing than "Grey's Anatomy."

On the same day that the federal government allowed the veterans' bias, the Los Angeles Planning Department denied a zone variance that would have allowed the project to proceed. The zoning administrator said the city has no jurisdiction over federal land and wouldn't be able to enforce the conditions of approval. So staffing requirements, traffic improvements or any other mitigation measures to protect the community would not be enforceable by the city.

This is real issue, but it can and should be resolved by the VA and the city. The surrounding community deserves the assurance that the project will not have a detrimental effect on their neighborhood. City and federal leaders can surely come up with a solution to ensure the community is protected.

The men and women who serve in the armed forces often face enormous challenges when they return home, bearing the physical and emotional scars of war. For some, the struggle with drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, chronic medical problems or post-traumatic stress disorder is a losing battle and they end up homeless.

Homes for Heroes could be the safety net that catches these men and women and helps them get back on their feet. All we need to do is let it be built.