

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0529

HENRY A. WAXMAN
29TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
June 15, 2001

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Principi,

I wanted to share with you concerns I have about the twenty-five-year master plan you recently received from the VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System (West LA VA).

I fully support the development of a long-term land use plan for the West LA VA. I was pleased my staff was able to attend meetings held to discuss the master plan, and found that they clarified important issues. Accordingly, I want to raise some concerns in an effort to be helpful to ensure that the master plan reflects the best interests of veterans and the neighbors who live in the surrounding communities.

First, the report recommends additional future development on the West LA VA property of 4.5 million square feet of density. As you know, however, many of the existing buildings on the property are currently being underutilized. Moreover, Phil Thomas, CEO of the West LA VA, has estimated that his needs for future development on the property include 1.1 million square feet. The plan's figure of 4.5 million square feet represents nearly three times the current development and surely points to a commercialization of the property.

The West LA VA is located in an already dense, traffic-congested area in Los Angeles. In addition, there has been strong historic opposition by veterans organizations and local community groups to over-commercialization of the property. The plan's recommended density is simply unrealistic.

In addition, the plan fails to include vital information on the preferred future uses of the property. While Mr. Thomas had the benefit of many veterans sitting on the LUAC, the group did not explore in any detail the current and future needs of our local veterans and the corresponding services and buildings that would complement them. Unfortunately, as a result, the plan is an abstract and theoretical report that does not accurately reflect the needs and wishes

of the veteran community.

Since the completion of the master planning process, I have been contacted by stakeholders who said they had wanted to participate but were excluded. The VA's unique location and vast acreage require that planning be as inclusive as possible. While three nearby community groups were asked to participate on the Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC), several adjacent and nearby homeowner and community groups were not. In addition, local elected officials who requested that they be included in the process were not, and they believe that their views on land use planning, local community plans, environmental, traffic and other concerns have not been sufficiently taken into account. Concerns have also been raised that public comments from the two workshops were not considered in detail by the LUAC, nor were the public's suggestions and concerns incorporated in the final report.

I am particularly concerned about a recommendation in the report that calls for the retraction of the Cranston Act (P.L. 100-322, section 421(b)(2)). This recommendation was not disclosed to the LUAC, but was made by senior VA staff and incorporated into the report without the consent of the LUAC. Not only is this lack of notification a cause for great concern, but the Cranston Act itself offers important, strongly supported protections to the land and limits certain development. I oppose any attempt by the VA to weaken the Cranston Act, and urge you to delete this language from the report.

Finally, as you know, the LUAC did not reach a consensus on the report. The members of the LUAC did not receive a copy of it until their final meeting on April 19, 2001, which effectively precluded them from reviewing or approving it before the committee disbanded. The LUAC wrote its own statement highlighting many of the areas where a consensus was not achieved. I have enclosed a copy of this statement for your convenience and request that you consider the important issues it raises.

For the reasons I've outlined above, I urge you to reject the master plan in its current form and to direct the West LA VA to continue to work cooperatively with veterans, community representatives, and elected officials on a plan that can achieve broad support.

I appreciate your consideration of my concerns and look forward to your response.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely,

HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress