

Community Engagement Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
November 16, 2011

The November 16th meeting of the Community Engagement Subcommittee was held in the offices at 86 Pryor Street, Atlanta, GA 30303

Attendees:

Subcommittee Members

Councilmember Joyce Sheperd – Committee Chair
Daniel Blackman – Sylvan Hills
Dustin Drabot – Colonial Hills, City of East Point
Dianese Howard – Venetian Hills, Sandtown, Willowbrook
Glenda Knight – MACC Coalition
Day Ramphal- Frog Hollow
Sybil Robinson – City of East Point – Ward A
Lev Sterling – NPU S Vice Chariman CES

McPherson Implementing Local Redevelopment Authority

Staff – Jack Sprott, Darlene Hawksley, Michael Lusk

Jack Sprott welcomed the group and introductions were made. Several interested community members were present as well as the committee representatives.

Guest speaker for the program was Thomas Grace, Assistant Director, Atlanta VA Medical Center. He provided an update on the plans for the VA to relocate their clinical services from East Point to the property. The main clinic building is 75,000 sq. ft and will be known as the Lawrence Joel VA Medical Center.

He informed the group that \$47 million had been set aside for the rehabilitation of the buildings and stated that the contractors were ready to go but they were still waiting on the Army and the VA to work out some of the details.

This will be a phased approach with part of the clinic opening in June or July 2012. The out-patient services should be fully operational by November 2012. The design/build project will be in phases and will start with demolition in the interior of the clinic and two of the four adjacent buildings. When complete, the clinic will provide primary care, mental health services, audiology and dental services.

Two of the four historic buildings will house a “Center of Excellence” for men. There will also be a residential mental health rehabilitation center. It will work with individuals on a short term basis to reintegrate them into the community with jobs. There will be a community referral and resource center that will provide services for homeless veterans.

Mr. Burney asked about services for female as well as male veterans. Mr. Grace responded that these services would be segregated but would be offered to women veterans. He noted, however, that this program cannot take children or family members

but is provided only to the veteran. Also, there are plans to develop a program supported by Morehouse Medical that would provide additional services for women. There are plans for expansion not only at Fort McPherson but at the facility in Decatur. They are a large number of females returning from the war. The numbers are close to 12,000.

CM Sheperd asked if the homeless would be coming off the area streets. Mr. Grace stated that there were referral sources, screening criteria, candidates deemed ready to go into this type of program and to be able to complete the program. There is a follow-up service and case managers for those who get housing vouchers.

He added that unfortunately there are Veterans on the street and others that are in danger of becoming homeless. He explained the CRRC (Community Resource Referral Center) to prevent homelessness. There are vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as those that served in other previous wars in need assistance.

There is currently a homeless services group in East Point close to the existing clinic. This program will continue to be managed through the HUD Voucher Program for veterans who are homeless or in danger of losing their homes.

Councilmember Sheperd talked about the MILRA position of addressing the homeless components through HUD and the VA perspective. The community wants to continue to create a relationship with the VA and at the same time to have a quality development and not have a fear of what the VA would bring.

Mr. Grace commented that they are not providing a homeless shelter but that they will be bringing our vets into the program to get the assistance they need and to leave with jobs and homes. He emphasized that the VA wants what is best for our community and for our vets.

Thomas Grace talked about job opportunities. Most of the employees will be professional, social workers, dietitians, counselors, and dental assistants. Some will come from the East Point clinic with additional medical staff being added in the future. Veterans will have the first opportunity to fill any available positions. These could include janitorial, maintenance, receptionists, etc.

He stated that 38% of the employees at the VA Medical Centers are veterans. Their goal is to get that up to 40%. The VA has a specific website to post jobs available.

The group thanked Mr. Grace for giving up his evening to spend time with our committee and community leaders. He continued to talk one-on-one to several attendees, listening to their comments and answering individual questions.

The next committee meeting was scheduled for January 18, 2012.

Meeting was adjourned.