

MITCHELL J. LANDRIEU, MAYOR  
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

August 22, 2011

Mr. Reid Nelson, Director  
Office of Federal Agency Programs  
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 803  
Washington DC 20004

Dear Mr. Reid,

In reference to your letter of August 4, 2011, we offer the following information on the recent house move of affected properties in the VA Hospital footprint. First, let me state that the effort to relocate 73 structures from the Mid-City National Register District chosen as the site of the VA Medical Center in New Orleans was unprecedented and became the largest house moving project in US history. My administration led the charge to save these structures from the landfill and created an innovative program to accomplish it. Without this effort, these houses would not even be the subject of a letter of inquiry as their ill fate was sealed almost a year before this program was created. Additionally:

1. The house move procedures that you reference per Stipulation V.B. 3 of the *Programmatic Agreement Among the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Emergency management Agency, the City of New Orleans the Louisiana State historic preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Funding to Repair or Replace Healthcare Facilities Comprising the VA Medical Center and the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans*, are **NOT** the same program as was used by the City of New Orleans to move the houses in the VA footprint reference by your letter. Stipulation V.B. 3 of the November 2008 agreement outlines a program that would have been implemented by the Louisiana's SHPO. That program was offered by SHPO to the owners of the affected properties in late 2009 and early 2010, but only 7 owners took them up on the offer and then that number dwindled to 0 after reviewing the procedures and costs of such moves. The protocol outlined in the PA was not undertaken by SHPO or the other partners nor were any of the specified funds used. **Therefore, Stipulation V.B.3 does not apply to this effort.**
2. Since these houses were purchased or acquired in some other method by the State, they were slated for demolition and removal per the PA. The structures moved in the effort referred to in your letter were considered "debris" after consultation with the State and in accordance with the PA. **In negotiations with the State, funding was reallocated from the original sum granted by the City to the State for site acquisition, to address the removal of this "debris" which in turn became the relocation process you cite in your letter.** So it was not "house relocation" as such, but was viewed in light of the Programmatic Agreement as "debris removal."
3. The house move program that the City of New Orleans undertook was **funded by the reallocation of City D-CDBG dollars** that were part of the original payment to the State to clear the land for the new VA Hospital. Approximately \$3.2 of the \$75 million allocated by the City was re-programmed for this effort. **There were no VA or FEMA dollars used to relocate the structures.**
4. **All structures will undergo Section 106 review with SHPO and NEPA review from the City when rehabilitation begins.** Additionally, all structures were documented in written and photographic detail in cooperation with SHPO so that these structures maintained any contributing status to historic districts prior to their relocation. This process was not required and was an additional effort to honor the historic nature of the structures. SHPO has been kept in the loop on the entire process.


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5. **Houses were moved in partnership with existing non-profit housing providers including Providence Community Housing, Builders of Hope, Jericho Road Housing, Habitat for Humanity, New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, and Neighborhood Housing Services.** These partnerships were imperative to the success of such a move given the scale of the effort. These providers had existing stock of lots for relocation and an infrastructure/capacity to address the needs of the rehabilitation. They had existing relationships with neighborhoods and locations where the VA structures would fit in architecturally. The lead moving and relocation partner was Builders of Hope (BOH). BOH signed agreements with each of the other partners that set a timeline for relocation and renovation (9 months) so that everyone was clear on the process. All partners are required to rehabilitate the houses.
6. **The City has established a \$6 million revolving fund that the non-profit partners will access to secure bridge loans for the house renovations.** The City has worked very closely with the State to reallocate existing D-CDBG funds for this effort. This has been a long, detailed, and complicated process that has taken several months to complete and has pushed the timeline a bit, which is not unexpected given the complex issues involved. We expect these funds to be available by October 1 and full interior and exterior renovations will begin in earnest at that time. In the meantime, all structures will have roofs replaced and all openings boarded up by the end of September.
7. The non-profit partners have monitored all of the structures to keep tabs on any issues resulting from the move. **The partners have not reported any structural damage that would not be addressed in the rehabilitation. There is no lasting damage nor has any structure been lost due to the relocation or move.**
8. **All structures will be reevaluated for historic significance after they are restored.**

One of the overriding facts of this effort, and one that needs to be vehemently underscored, is that each of these houses will be renovated into a viable property. The structures are sited, the funds will be in place in the coming weeks, and the partners are skilled and willing. This is not a speculative effort regardless of the lengthened timeline needed to accomplish the complicated structuring of the program. We appreciate the work of the ACHP and hope this correspondence provides the information you requested.

Sincerely,



Mitchell J. Landrieu  
Mayor, City of New Orleans

cc: Mr. Robert L. Neary, Jr.  
Mr. John V. Ketchum