



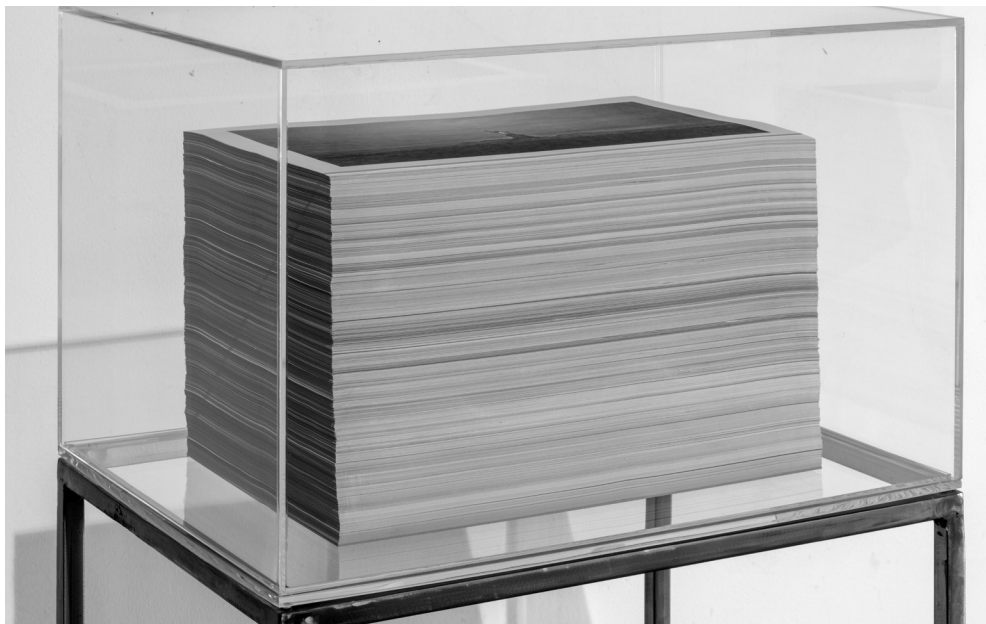
## REP. TAKANO VISITS METABOLIC STUDIO

Congressman Mark Takano (D-Riverside) visited with artist Lauren Bon at the Metabolic Studio on June 2 to discuss topics ranging from Rep. Takano's rising arc within the House Veterans Affairs Committee to the future of VA medicine and care of veterans.

(Ms. Bon and the Metabolic Studio installed and maintained the *StrawberryFlag* art project at the West L.A. VA in 2009/2010 and published the *Strawberry Bulletin* newspaper; they now offer a series of one-shot, one-sheet *Strawberry Bullets*, including this issue in celebration of Independence Day 2017.)

The June 2 meeting was in a room that contained pieces of Bon's 2010 LACMA installation of *Garden Folly: Indexical Bldg. 209*, created from extracted architectural salvaged materials from Bldg. 209 pre-renovation. Rep. Takano was interested in finding out more about therapeutic work programs such as Compensated Work Therapy, and about Bon's experience engaging veterans and reactivating fallow space at the West L.A. VA during her *StrawberryFlag* project.

Rep. Takano gained a valuable perspective on the West L.A. VA campus, obtaining insights and inside observations on the potential for a home for veterans once again on the property.



The center spread from the Sept. 2011 issue of the *Strawberry Bulletin*, featuring a photograph of Liberty Island in Upper New York Bay by the Optics Division of the Metabolic Studio to mark the ten-year anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, *Selfie, Bulletin Volume 1, No 5*. <http://www.metabolicstudio.org/sites/default/files/files/strawberrybulletin5.pdf>

## VA Updates on Master Plan

The VA and the private contractor it has engaged for master plan implementation, Course Federal Group, have made a series of reports on the progress of the plan, including a February 22 written report, an April 20 Project Information Session at Wadsworth Theatre, and three "public scoping meetings" June 7-9 to consider the plan's environmental impact.

The general upshot is that the plan is moving forward, but more slowly than was originally envisioned. With respect to permanent supportive housing, a key element of the master plan, the VA now projects a timeline, running from last August, as follows:

- 12 months: 54 units (Bldg. 209)
- 24-30 months: 100 more units (Bldgs. 205 and 208 on the quad with Bldg. 209)
- 30-48 months: 330 more units (Bldgs. 156, 157, and 158 across the street from the 209 quad, plus new construction on MacArthur Field)
- 4-5 years: 280 more units (Bldgs. 206, 207, 210, 256, and 257)
- 6-10 years: 440 more units (in buildings or new construction to be announced).

With respect to the land use deals declared void in the *Valentini* lawsuit, the VA has made new deals with UCLA for its baseball stadium (10-year lease), Brentwood School for its athletic complex (10-year lease), and City of Los Angeles for its now-renamed Veteran Barrington Park (three-year revocable license), but with increased rents and/or more direct veteran benefits including access to the properties.

The VA also reports that Sodexo Marriott

## Vets Advocacy Report Card

A week after the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) announced a 57 percent rise in veteran homelessness per its 2017 count, Vets Advocacy on June 7 issued a "report card" on the VA West Los Angeles master plan. Vets Advocacy is the nonprofit created out of the 2015 *Valentini* lawsuit settlement to represent veterans' interests in implementing the settlement and the master plan it provides for.

"Since entering into [the settlement] over two years ago," the report said, "the VA has made some progress on its promise of change and revitalization. ...But change at the West L.A. VA campus is moving too slowly, and the

pace of change is slowing as well, with unjustified delays and inadequate staffing."

The report card used a scale of four "grades": Excellent, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement, and Failing. It then assigned and explained the following grades to these "key areas":

- Illegal Leases: Needs Improvement
  - Master Plan Implementation: Failing
  - Building 209: Needs Improvement
  - Federal Advisory Committee Act: Satisfactory
  - HUD-VASH Program: Needs Improvement
- Vets Advocacy explained that the "Draft Master Plan established a phasing schedule

# Our Town

The National Soldiers Home held in trust as a home for veterans in perpetuity is currently managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the second largest cabinet department in the United States, smaller only than the Department of Defense. The West Los Angeles property is the most valuable real estate in the VA network, one which has regarded its health care responsibilities as its main, even sole, function. The *Strawberry Bullet* is communicating to the constituents for whom the property is a home not a hospital. The passages listed here occur in the lives of some of the citizens of this place we claim as Our Town.

**April 2017:** The 1887 Fund, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring historic structures at the VA West L.A. campus, meets with VA officials and architecture/engineering firm Leo A Daly and learns that plans for the Wadsworth Chapel have been approved by the State Historic Preservation Office. Daly will assemble total costs for the approved restoration plans. Also, the Fund is approved for a revocable license to use the 1893 Superintendent's House (Building 33) as its HQ so it will have a presence on the campus for the Chapel restoration.

**April:** Veteran activist Robert Rosebrock is acquitted in federal court on misdemeanor charges for displaying American flags on Memorial Day 2016 on a fence adjacent to the Grand Lawn at Wilshire and San Vicente where he and fellow veterans have been assembling weekly for the past nine years to protest the VA's misuse of the property.

**May:** Anthony Bravo Esparza, better known as The Dreamer, is featured on the PBS SoCal (KOCE) program "Angeleno," depicting his days at the Freedom Barber Shop on the VA campus and his nights on the streets amid the homeless of Los Angeles.

**May:** National Military Appreciation Month is marked by a guest column in the *Hollywood Reporter* by David Gale, CEO and co-founder of We Are the Mighty who previously ran MTV Films. Gale calls for realistic portrayals of vets rather than "resorting to stereotypes and common tropes [that] portray veterans as either dysfunctional misfits or larger-than-life heroes."

**June:** Salvation Army programs, including the Haven, Naomi House, and Exodus Lodge, will be leaving the West L.A. VA in September. *Los Angeles Times* reports VA Medical Center Director Ann Brown says Salvation Army was asked to leave because of poor performance—not "taking care of our veterans in the way we think they should be taken care of."

## Strawberry Bullet

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## VA Updates

Laundry Services, Twentieth Century Fox, Veterans Park Conservancy, the farmers' market, and Richmark Entertainment have "exited the Campus." Other users are still in the process of completing an "exit strategy," including Westside Breakers Soccer Club, Westside Services (parking lots), American Red Cross, and Breitburn Oil & Gas (oil wells).

Vets Advocacy CEO Dan Garcia, speaking on NPR May 23, said of the implementation process: "[The VA is] a slow-moving bureaucracy, and so they're making progress in their own mind."

The *Los Angeles Times* editorialized on May 29 that the process is going: "Sluggishly, in some ways. Encouragingly in others." It said "the accumulation of delays holding back the master plan's implementation is disturbing," and called upon VA officials to "enlist the help of Vets Advocacy, which has dedicated so much of its energy and brainpower to this plan."

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## Vets Advocacy Report

that included an initial phase of development, with 490 units within 30 months after the passage of requisite federal legislation." The VA now projects only 154 units in that time frame.

The report is particularly critical of the VA for its lack of transparency—its failure to include veterans in the master plan implementation and its failure then even to share information and documents regarding decisions made without veteran participation.



Congressman Mark Takano (left) and his field representative Justin Cavin meet with artist Lauren Bon and *Strawberry Flag* staff at the Metabolic Studio.

## Building



On May 2 the VA, teaming up with service provider Step Up on Second and Shangri-La Construction, took one step closer to providing the first permanent supportive housing units on the VA campus. On a pleasant Spring day, the rose garden behind Bldg. 220 was the site of a historic event that harkened back to the site's beginnings. (This tract of land now the VA campus was originally gifted to be a Soldiers Home.)

As many of the 54 veterans who will live in Building 209 entered through a flowered trellis gate, they were greeted and welcomed with gifts of household items, baskets of linens, microwave ovens, etc. They filed past various VA dignitaries, government officials, service providers, and neighboring Brentwood businesses and individuals. The veterans were treated to a fine catered lunch, complete with tablecloths, waitstaff, and a beautiful sheet cake which read, "Welcome to the Neighborhood from the Brentwood Village and the Community."

This was truly an extraordinary event. These 54 veterans are the first occupants of the "new" veterans home. While these veterans have access to VA care and Step Up's array of services, their real reason for being in Bldg. 209 is simply to live there. It is to be home in every sense of the word.

The odd thing is that when the VA sponsored this "Welcome to the Neighborhood" luncheon for the lucky 54 veterans, it didn't tell anybody. An opportunity to showcase the VA taking a step in the right direction of solving a long-standing problem went largely unnoticed. Since the VA characteristically carefully choreographs all of its events, the motives are curious. Could it be that the VA knows it wouldn't be taken seriously to expect the public to believe that by housing 54 veterans, the VA is doing its part?

Or maybe it was the fact that none of the 54 vets actually moved in that day—Building 209 still wasn't ready yet. We are told that the vets did move in June 9. And as the *Strawberry Bullet* goes to press, the VA has scheduled (and publicized) a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Friday morning, June 16.

