

# Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home Program Statement

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## I. Introduction

### A. Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the indispensable guidance and assistance afforded to the Architect/Engineer Consultant Team by the dedicated members of the Governor's Task Force, as noted below:

Mr. Floyd Ladegard, Architect  
DAS/State Building Division

Mr. John Hilgert, Director  
Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs

Mr. Jim Mays, Administrator  
Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home

Mr. Walter Burr, President  
Member Council  
Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home

Mr. Jim Cada

Mr. Sonny Foster  
Senator Ben Nelson's Office

Mr. Glenn Freeman  
Senator Chuck Hagel's Office

Ms. Anne Hackbart  
Special Project Manager  
Nebraska Health and Human Services System

Ms. Lauren Hill, Director  
Governor's Policy Research

Mr. Ken Fougeron  
Administrator  
State Building Division

Senator Jim Jensen  
District #20

Ms. Kathleen Kelley  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Douglas County

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Mr. John R. Liebsack  
County Service Officer  
Douglas County Veterans Service Offices

Ms. Molly Lloyd  
Congressman Lee Terry's Office

Mr. Dennis Loose  
Health and Human Services

Senator Don Preister  
District #5

Mr. Frank K. Salvas, Sr. (unconfirmed)  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Gene Twiford, Chairman  
Nebraska Veterans Council

Senator Roger Wehrbein  
District #2

Also noteworthy are professional State staff employees, who rendered valuable service, as noted below:

Mr. Fred Hiatt  
DAS/State Building Division

Mr. Roger L. Hill  
Facility Operations Officer  
Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home

Ms. Melissa Harris  
Nurse Executive  
Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home

Mr. Brian Daehling  
Facility Maintenance Supervisor  
Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home

### **B. Consultant Team**

1. Architect /Engineer: The Schemmer Associates Inc.  
Omaha, Nebraska
2. Demand Study: Health Dimensions Group  
Minneapolis, MN
3. Site Selection: Investors Realty, Inc.  
Omaha, NE
4. Food Service/Laundry: Thomas Ricca Associates  
Englewood, CO
5. Cost Estimate: CPMI  
Des Moines, IA
6. Furniture/Fixtures: JB Interiors, Ltd.  
Omaha, NE

### **C. Background and History**

In January of 2002, Nebraska Governor Michael Johanns created a Task Force to study options for the future of the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home, and to make recommendations regarding the Homes' facilities. In April 2002, the Health and Human Services System received funding from the Legislature to pay for the development of a Program Statement for the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home, with the expectation that the Program Statement would be submitted in September 2002. The consultant selection process was initiated with the release of a Request for Proposals on May 7, 2002. Evaluations of proposals, interviews with shortlisted firms, and selection of The Schemmer Associates Inc. was completed on June 3, 2002. A kick-off meeting was held on June 7, 2002.

### **D. Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the consulting effort is to evaluate options for the renovation, expansion or replacement of the existing Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home facility, and complete a Program Statement.

### E. Executive Summary

The Nebraska Health and Human Services System and the State of Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs is responsible for honoring the promise and sacred trust made to provide benefits for the State's Veterans and their dependents by virtue of their service in defense of The United States of America. This commitment transcends the physical attributes associated with providing medical, social and statutory benefits prescribed by law. These eligible individuals are members of a special fraternity embodying Americanism, patriotism and sacrifice that encompasses much more than the care, welfare, support, maintenance and treatment of individuals. Embodied in this trust and promise is the establishment, administration and maintenance of State Veterans' Homes to provide care, shelter and services for the Veteran, Veterans' family members or survivors of Veterans. These Homes honor members for service with a special character that recognizes the great contributions that our State's Veterans have made in service to our country and reflects their unique, shared experience.

A Task Force appointed in January of 2002, by Governor Johanns was charged with completing a comprehensive assessment of facilities, programs and staffing at the existing Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home in Douglas County, Nebraska. Built in 1930, this is currently home to approximately 110 Veterans. Specifically, the Task Force was directed to assess existing conditions, determine eligible Veterans' (also called Members) needs, identify and evaluate the options to serve these needs, including renovating and/or adding to the existing Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home; or developing a new facility including site selection options. This analysis is presented in the form of a Program Statement. The Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home has been serving members at this location since 1980. Over 65 percent of the State's Veterans population resides in southeast Nebraska (101,820), and over 50% of those Veterans reside in Douglas and Sarpy counties (53,377). Omaha is also the location of the Federal Veterans Medical Center accessed by these members for acute care, ambulatory, therapeutic and rehabilitative services. During the next twenty years and beyond, substantive and objective demographic data shows that an estimated 68,400 Veterans and their families or survivors could seek or require support provided by the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home. The demand and program recommendations for the future show a need for 30 skilled nursing, 30 dementia or memory impaired, 30 domiciliary and 60 intermediate care, for a total of 150 beds. In addition, demand for an Adult Day Health Care program with 15 participants is projected.

The considerations for renovation, addition or replacement of the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home are founded in the fact that it is a seventy year old, leased facility, not state owned and not designed, configured or adequate for its current use. The structure was initially created as a "poor farm", then became a domiciliary for the criminally insane, then an Annex for the Douglas County Hospital, and prior to its current use, surplus property. The lease is due to expire in 2005, and the facility may lose its nursing facility licensure waivers. Although the

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Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home is licensed for 180 beds, these are not all quality beds. Currently, 132 beds meet livability, sanitary, dignity and support criteria prescribed or stipulated for Veteran member care. Because of its age, construction and building systems, the facility has limited capability to be adapted to meet the changing profile of member needs. Additionally, the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home has a number of adverse regulatory deficiencies, and citations, such as a lack of hand washing facilities and toilets adjoining bedrooms. A Facility Assessment was conducted as part of the Program Statement to identify, quantify and place an order of magnitude cost on the physical deficiencies at Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home. The five year capital needs total over \$9 million dollars.

In order to objectively describe and characterize the facility requirements, Department of Veterans' Affairs space criteria, State of Nebraska regulatory standards and contemporary health care industry and association standards were used. The projected facility needs were compared to and predicated on these criteria. This space program analysis results in a facility containing 145,260 square feet.

The Program Statement examined the effect of renovating and expanding the existing leased Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home to meet the space program requirements while attempting to mitigate the physical deficiencies, utilization inefficiencies and programmatic service needs. The resultant renovation and expansion still yields functionality (odd sized rooms and units) compromises, staffing inefficiencies, security impacts, historical preservation mandates, multi-level building concerns, and energy efficiency and infrastructure inadequacies.

The estimated costs of correcting current deficiencies, renovating and expanding the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home are \$18,558,500. The total project cost to develop a new single level replacement facility on an urban or suburban site is estimated at \$22,914,400.

Based on these comparisons and the detailed supporting data contained in the Program Statement, the recommendations are as follows:

1. Construct a new facility with contemporary features to meet the projected demand for the population and profile of Veterans that will serve members for the next fifty years and beyond.
2. Construct it in the vicinity of Wenninghoff Road and Sorensen Parkway as illustrated in the site analysis. The features and benefits of this site are adequate land area (26 acres) for a replacement facility with associated outdoor space plus room for future expansion, easy vehicular and transit access to the site, quick access to emergency care, and compatible residential surroundings.

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3. Secure funding for the replacement Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home with 65% secured from the Federal Department of Veterans' Affairs Grants to States for Construction or Acquisition of State Homes and 35% from State Funding.
4. Commence with requesting State authorization and appropriation, grant application, design and construction to yield occupancy by 2007.