

\$1.5M SHOT IN ARM

'God has spoken' vs. 'false hope'

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An 11th hour pledge by Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy to invest \$1.5 million of city money in financially failing Greenville Hospital has spared the 100-year-old facility from extinction — for now.

In light of Healy's surprise promise, the state Health Planning Board voted 6-0 yesterday to postpone for up to six months a vote on shutting the facility.

At a hearing in a hotel ballroom in Princeton, the board gave Healy and the city 90 days to come up with the money.

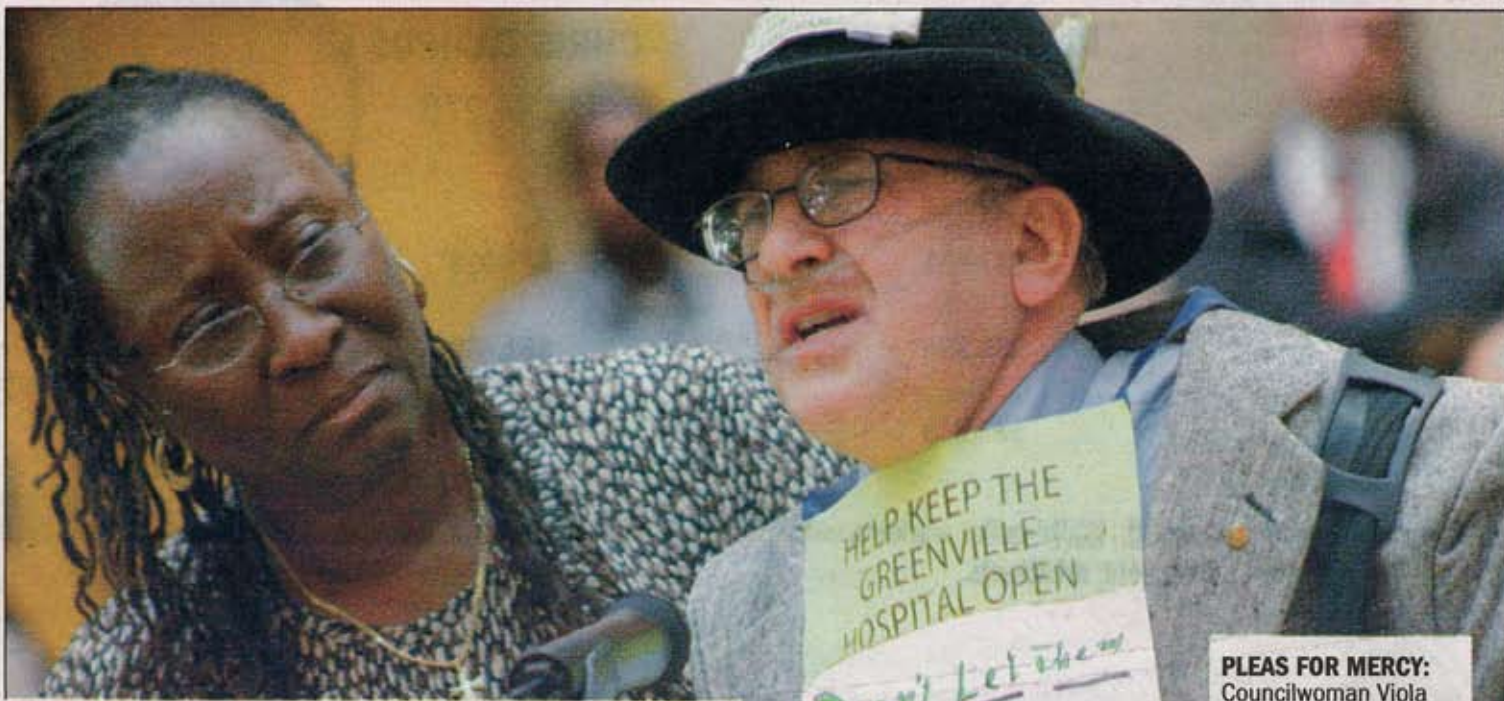
If the money isn't secured by then, LibertyHealth Systems Inc., the hospital's parent company, can ask the board to move ahead with the shutdown, board members said.

"Today's decision buys us extra time," Healy said after the vote. "Now we must work with the business administrator and the City Council to locate additional funds to try to keep Greenville Hospital open."

LibertyHealth President and CEO Steve Kirby said he could "live with" the board's decision, but it didn't represent a "long-term solution" for the problems confronting Greenville Hospital.

As of June 30, the hospital had a \$3.7 million deficit, Kirby said.

"I don't know what the end game is," Kirby told the board.



PLEAS FOR MERCY: Councilwoman Viola Richardson comforts Sayed Elebyary as he begs the State Health Planning Board, inset, to keep Greenville Hospital open.



"I don't think false hope is the right way to go."

But for the 100 or so Jersey City residents and politicians who braved rush-hour traffic along Route 1 to attend the 9:30 a.m. meeting, any kind of hope is better than the alternative.

"I feel God has spoken," said Ward F Councilwoman Viola Richardson, who has led the drive to keep the hospital open.

"He has given us another chance to put things together."

Sayed Elebyary, an asthma patient, addressed the board with an oxygen tank strapped across his shoulder. "We have good doctors, good nursing, good love (at Greenville Hospital)," Elebyary said. "Please, please, please, leave Greenville Hospital open."

The long-term prognosis for

Greenville Hospital is still up in the air.

Three federally qualified health centers have made inquiries about the property, Kirby said. LibertyHealth, which also owns the Jersey City Medical Center and Meadowlands Hospital, is willing to lease the Kennedy Boulevard building to one of these centers, Kirby said.

An idea to establish a veterans clinic at the facility is moving slowly. Federal representatives said yesterday it has taken them six weeks just to schedule a meeting with VA

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brass.

Former Mayor Gerald McCann challenged Healy and the City Council to spend city money to save the hospital at a hearing on the hospital's fate two weeks ago. At the time, Healy said the most the city could spend was \$250,000.