

**Scoping for
Site-Specific Environmental Assessment for
Disposition of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center,
1601 Perdido Street, New Orleans, Louisiana**

12 September 2010

1.0 Introduction

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for development of the Site-Specific Environmental Assessment (SEA) for Disposition of the existing Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) located at 1601 Perdido Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana. Public participation is a significant part of VA's NEPA compliance process. Scoping at the beginning of a NEPA effort affords the opportunity for the public to submit comments, questions, and new information to help ensure the completeness of the environmental review. With initiation of scoping for the Disposition SEA, VA invites veterans, general public, local businesses, associations, stakeholders, affected governmental agencies and other interested parties to contribute to the environmental review process by submitting comments, questions, and relevant information to assist in the decision-making process.

2.0 Project Background

The federal government's involvement in this effort triggers the requirements of NEPA, which requires federal agencies to evaluate the potential impact of proposed major federal actions and consider such impacts during the decision making process. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations encourage agencies to prepare "tiered" environmental analyses to assist in the evaluation of a large-scale program or project involving a series of related decisions. The following NEPA evaluations and documents have already been completed:

A. Tier I – Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA)

1. In November 2008, VA, in partnership with the City of New Orleans, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the State of Louisiana, completed the *Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for Site Selection of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and Louisiana State University Academic Medical Center (LSU AMC)*. [Note: In August 2009, the LSU AMC was re-designated as the University Medical Center (UMC) following completion and approval of a governance plan for administration of the new facility.]
2. In a concurrent effort to develop mitigation measures to reduce potential adverse impacts to historic properties, the same agencies executed the *Programmatic Agreement (PA)* in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Policy Act (NHPA) of 1966 as amended.
3. Following completion of the public comment period on the draft PEA and incorporation of the comments received, VA and FEMA published the final PEA

and Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) were issued by each of the two federal Agencies involved, as well as the City of New Orleans. The site selected for the replacement VAMC was the 30-acre Tulane/Gravier site bounded by Canal Street to the northeast, South Galvez Street to the southeast, Tulane Avenue to the southwest, and South Rocheblave Street to the northwest, Alternative # 1 in the PEA.

- i. VA issued a FONSI on 24 November 2008 for the site selection of the replacement VAMC;
- ii. FEMA issued a FONSI on the same date for the site section of the LSU AMC; and
- iii. The City of New Orleans, issued a FONSI on 29 December 2008 adopting the findings of the PEA. The City of New Orleans, though not a federal agency, is the “Responsible Entity” under the HUD regulations as the recipient of CDBG funds which are being used to acquire and prepare the Tulane/Gravier site.

B. Tier II – Site-Specific Actions

1. Building # 2 SEA

- i. In September 2009, VA completed the Site-Specific Environmental Assessment for Building # 2 of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center. This SEA incorporated and built upon the findings of the PEA to evaluate the environmental impacts of establishing temporary medical support facilities for supply, processing, and distribution (SPD) functions at the existing VAMC campus to expedite quality healthcare for veterans in Southeast Louisiana during construction of the replacement VAMC. (The existing SPD functions were inadequate and out of compliance with VA regulations.)
- ii. In a concurrent effort to develop mitigation measures to reduce potential adverse impacts to the surrounding New Orleans Medical Historic District, VA executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Policy Act (NHPA) of 1966 as amended, which requires documentation and an expanded determination of eligibility for all the buildings included in the VAMC campus, as they relate to the New Orleans Medical Historic District.
- iii. Upon completion of the SEA, VA issued a FONSI for the Proposed Action (Alternative #1 in the SEA), demolition of Building # 2 and mobilization, installation, and setup of mobile support units.

2. Replacement VAMC SEA

- i. In April 2010 VA completed the *Site-Specific Environmental Assessment for the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC SEA)*. This SEA incorporated and built upon the findings of the PEA to evaluate the

environmental impacts of the design, construction, and operation of the replacement VAMC facility.

- ii. Following the conclusion of the public comment period on the draft SEA and incorporation of comments received, VA published the Final SEA and issued a FONSI for the Proposed Action (Alternative # 4 – Hybrid Infrastructure Concourse and Pavilions). This design evolved over the course of the project through input received from veterans groups, VAMC staff, focus groups, consulting parties, the general public and others.

3. Disposition SEA (subject of current Scoping Process)

- i. VA is initiating the development of the *Site-Specific Environmental Assessment for Disposition of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 1601 Perdido Street, New Orleans, Louisiana*. This SEA will also incorporate and builds upon the findings of the PEA to evaluate the environmental impacts associated with the disposition of the existing VAMC property and facilities.

3.0 Scoping for the Disposition SEA

VA invites comments with respect to development of the Disposition SEA. VA encourages comments and questions or presentation of information related to the proposed resource areas to be evaluated in the SEA and the project alternatives as presented below. At the end of each section, questions for consideration are presented. VA invites your feedback on these questions or any other questions, comments, or sharing of new information as you feel appropriate.

A. Resource Areas Adopted By Reference

1. Resource areas evaluated in the PEA intended to be adopted by reference and therefore not discussed in detail in the Disposition SEA:
 - i. Physical & Biological Environment
 - ii. Water & Coastal Resources
 - iii. Floodplain Management
 - iv. Socioeconomics
 - v. Air Quality
 - vi. Noise and Vibration
 - vii. Infrastructure
 - viii. Transportation
 - ix. Cultural Resources (Archaeology)
2. Questions for Consideration
 - i. Do you agree these resource areas were appropriately addressed in the PEA? If not, what additional information would you like to see included?

- ii. Is there any new or pertinent information which would suggest any of these resource areas should be updated in the Disposition SEA? Please provide details if relevant.

B. Resource Areas Included

1. Resource areas intended to be updated and or newly evaluated in the Disposition SEA:
 - i. Land Use - updated
 - ii. Aesthetics, Visual Quality, Wind, and Light and Glare - new
 - iii. Human Health & Safety - updated
 - iv. Cultural Resources (Historic Properties) – updated
2. Questions for consideration:
 - i. Do you agree these resource areas are appropriate for consideration in the Disposition SEA? If not, what information suggests they should be excluded?
 - ii. Is there any new or pertinent information on any of these resource areas that VA should consider during development of the Disposition SEA? Please provide details if relevant.
 - iii. What additional resource areas not included in either list above should be included in the Disposition SEA?

C. Project Alternatives

1. VA is currently considering three potential alternatives with respect to future disposition of the existing VAMC property and facilities:
 - i. No Action Alternative: VA retains control of the existing facilities and continues to secure and ventilate in accordance with the stipulations in the PA
 - ii. Transfer to the City of New Orleans: Transfer ownership (possession and title) in direct exchange for the Tulane/Gravier site
 - a. VA would continue to operate the Outpatient Clinic on-site until completion of the replacement VAMC
 - iii. Enhanced-Use Lease (EUL): VA would retain ownership of the site while allowing a third party to re-use the site in exchange for consideration to VA.
 - a. VA would continue to operate the Outpatient Clinic on-site until completion of the replacement VAMC
2. Questions for Consideration
 - i. Do you agree these alternatives are appropriate for consideration in the Disposition SEA? If not, what information suggests they are inappropriate?

- ii. Are there other alternatives that should be considered in the Disposition SEA? Please provide details if relevant.

D. Comment Period

1. VA welcomes comments on the Disposition SEA with the respect to the questions for consideration and/or any other additional questions, comments, or presentation of new information relevant to this phase of the project.
2. Comments will be accepted through **11 October 2010**
3. Comments may be submitted by in person, by mail, by email:
 - i. By mail or in person:

Carol Freeman
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1555 Poydras Street, Suite 1860
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 - ii. Electronically to public.comments@aecom.com
4. For additional project information (including the PEA and previous SEAs) visit <http://valsumedcenters.com>