
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
FOR THE PROPOSED MISSISSIPPI VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITY AT TRADITION

Introduction

A Final Environmental Assessment (EA), included herein by reference, was prepared to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with a proposed grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the Mississippi Veterans Affairs Board (MSVA) that would partially fund construction of a new Veterans Home within the Tradition Master Planned Community in Biloxi, Harrison County, Mississippi (Proposed Action). Because MSVA plans to seek funding from VA, the EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ([NEPA]; 42 United States Code 4321 *et seq.*), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and *Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions* (38 CFR Part 26).

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, VA would award a grant to MSVA supporting construction of a new 100-private bed residential care facility to provide skilled nursing, Alzheimer's/memory care, and short-term rehabilitative care to veterans. The Veterans Home at Tradition would provide dining, physical activity and physical therapy, entertainment, and social event services to veterans in both indoor and outdoor spaces. The proposed facility would feature all private rooms organized into household and neighborhoods that surround a central community center. The campus would also include parking lots, walking trails, landscaped areas, and open space comprised of forest and lawn.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to construct a state-of-the-art residential care facility to help meet the current and projected future residential skilled nursing, Alzheimer's/memory, and short-term care needs of veterans living along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The MSVA currently operates four veterans' homes: the Veterans Home-Collins, MS, the Veterans Home-Jackson, MS, the Veterans Home-Kosciusko, MS, and the Veterans Home-Oxford, MS. The four existing veterans care facilities in Mississippi do not currently have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for veterans' medical programs and services, and they are geographically too far from the target area of south Mississippi. Over 26% of the Mississippi veterans live within the three coastal counties and the Veterans Home-Collins is the closest facility for veterans living along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This location is a 2-hour drive from the coast and this distance limits opportunities to visit and care for family at the Collins facility.

The Proposed Action is needed because the four existing veterans care facilities in Mississippi do not currently have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for veterans' medical programs and services, and they are geographically too far from the target area of south Mississippi.

Alternatives Considered

Proposed Action. Under the Proposed Action, MSVA would construct a new 132,000-square-foot 100-bed residential care facility to provide skilled nursing, Alzheimer's/memory care, and short-term rehabilitative care to veterans. The proposed facility would feature all private rooms organized into households and neighborhoods that surround a central community center. All proposed buildings would be no more than one and ½ stories tall and would include exterior lighting. The Veterans Home would be built on an approximately 25-acre campus in the Tradition master planned community in central Harrison County, located on the south side of Tradition Parkway East and approximately 1.5 miles northwest of the intersection of Highway 67 and Highway 605. The campus would also include parking lots, walking trails, landscaped areas, and open space comprised of forest and meadow.

The Veterans Home would be operated by MSVA and would employ approximately 120 staff. MSVA anticipates that traffic associated with the Veterans Home would include approximately one ambulance per day, vehicles associated with 120 employees arriving and departing each day, an average of approximately 50 visitor vehicles a day, and approximately three delivery trucks per week. The facility would include a single 2-megawatt emergency generator to provide backup to the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system during power outages. Sustainable design principles would be incorporated as significant factors in the design of the facility.

No additional alternative locations for the proposed facility were evaluated in detail, as described in the Final EA.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, VA would not provide a grant to assist MSVA in constructing a new veterans' care facility in south Mississippi. The MSVA goal of providing safe, economical, and high-quality integrated healthcare services to veterans on the Mississippi Gulf Coast would not occur. The proposed project site in the Tradition community would likely be developed by others. Although the No Action Alternative would not satisfy the purpose of or need for the Proposed Action, this alternative provides a comparative benchmark against which the effects of the action alternative can be evaluated, as required under the CEQ Regulations. The No Action Alternative reflects the *status quo*.

Potential Environmental Effects

The MSVA evaluated the potential effects on the physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects of implementing the Proposed Action. The Final EA concluded that the Proposed Action would result in short-term and/or long-term potential adverse impacts to aesthetics, air quality, cultural resources, soils, hydrology and water quality, wildlife and habitat, noise, land use, wetlands, solid waste and hazardous materials, transportation, and utilities.

All of these impacts are less than significant and would be further reduced through implementation of best management practices (BMPs), management measures, minimization measures, and compliance with regulatory requirements, as identified in Appendix A. The Proposed Action would also provide a number of beneficial short-term and long-term impacts to the local socioeconomic environment.

The potential environmental effects associated with implementing the Proposed Action as analyzed in the EA are summarized in the following sections.

Aesthetics. Temporary adverse impacts to viewshed during construction. Long-term changes to viewshed from new Veterans Home and from the Veterans Boulevard; however, land use and anticipated viewshed changes are consistent with the Tradition master planned community.

Land Use. No impacts on land use; change in land use from vacant undeveloped land to a government/commercial facility is consistent with development activities at Tradition.

Air Quality. Negligible adverse impacts from emissions during construction and operation. Impacts during construction would be temporary. No long-term impacts to air quality from operations or transportation to and from the facility are anticipated.

Cultural Resources. No impacts during construction anticipated. According to MDAH, the project will have no negative impacts on historic resources.

Geology, Soils, and Topography. Temporary, minor adverse impacts on soils and topography during construction, no impacts from operation. No impacts on geology.

Water Resources. Temporary, minor adverse impacts to water quality during construction that would be minimized by implementing BMPs in construction stormwater permits and SWPPP. No impacts on groundwater.

Wildlife, Habitat, and Threatened and Endangered Species. Temporary adverse impacts on wildlife and habitat during construction due to removal of vegetation during clearing and grading, and from construction noise and increased human presence. Permanent removal of habitat and additional human presence would have minor, long-term adverse impacts. No impacts to threatened and endangered species.

Noise. Temporary adverse impacts from construction-related noise; long-term increases in noise from traffic, ambulances and human presence would be minor.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice. Minor beneficial impacts to local economy from construction and operation. No impacts on low-income or minority populations.

Community Services. No impacts during construction; long-term beneficial impacts on veteran population in the region.

Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials. No adverse impacts anticipated with implementation of appropriate spill prevention, hazardous materials storage and handling, and waste management BMPs and adherence to regulations.

Transportation and Parking. Potential for temporary disruptions to local traffic during construction; impacts would be on the order of minutes and therefore negligible. Long-term increases in traffic on nearby roads would have negligible adverse impacts on local traffic.

Utilities. No impacts. Utilities would be designed in accordance with applicable industry standards and regulations and would achieve sustainable design standards and minimize energy consumption. All existing utilities/systems have sufficient capacity to meet the demands from operation of the Veterans Home.

Management Measures

The general BMPs summarized in Table 3 of the Final EA (attached herein as Appendix A) will minimize and maintain adverse effects at less-than-significant levels. No additional project specific mitigation measures are proposed.

Agency and Public Comment

The Draft EA was made available for a 30-day public comment period beginning January 27, 2021. A Notice of Availability for the Draft EA was published in the Clarion-Ledger of Jackson, Mississippi, a daily newspaper of statewide circulation and the Sun-Herald of Biloxi, Mississippi, a daily newspaper which serves readers along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, on January 27, 2021.

A copy of the Draft EA was also made available on the MSVA website (<http://www.msva.ms.gov/general-inquiries>) from January 27 through February 26, 2021. No public comments were received.

VA has consulted with appropriate federal, state, and local regulatory agencies, and federally recognized Native American Tribes identified as having possible ancestral ties to the Harrison County, Mississippi, area. This consultation is documented in the Final EA. Comments and input submitted by regulatory agencies and Tribes have been addressed in the Final EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After careful review of the Final EA, VA has concluded that implementing the Proposed Action would not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, provided that MSVA implements the BMPs identified in Appendix A to this FONSI. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA and is consistent with the VA and CEQ regulations implementing the Act. An environmental impact statement is not required.

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Appendix A. Best Management Practices

Resource Area	Best Management Practices
Aesthetics	Where possible, construction activities will be limited to daylight hours to minimize impacts from nighttime lighting at the construction site and from construction equipment lights. All areas disturbed during construction, including temporary staging and disturbance areas, would be restored to their pre-existing condition or better.
Air Quality	Construction contractor will be required to implement dust control measures such as application of water to suppress dust and washing down construction vehicles and paved roadways immediately adjacent to the construction site. To the extent practical, the construction contractor would be encouraged to minimize idling of construction and delivery vehicles to the extent practicable to minimize impacts.
Cultural Resources	The proposed Veterans Home would be designed to maintain the aesthetics and character of the surrounding area.
Geology, Soils and Topography	Construction contractor will be required to minimize potentially adverse impacts from erosion by implementing a site-specific SWPPP. Contractor will be required to follow the SWPPP, including erosion control BMPs, during and after construction to stabilize soils. Excavated soil would be managed in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations
Hydrology and Water Resources	Potential impacts to water resources would be minimized by implementation of a SWPPP and associated and sediment control BMPs. Overland flow of stormwater is currently a north to south flow and stormwater management features will be designed to continue that flow pattern. Post construction stormwater discharge would be managed through a new underground storm sewer system. The system will be designed to manage the volume and velocity of stormwater runoff and incorporate features such as earthen berms and grassed swales to reduce possible impacts related to erosion and sedimentation.
Wildlife, Habitat, and Threatened and Endangered Species	No BMPs proposed for the Wildlife, Habitat, and Threatened and Endangered Species Resource Area.
Noise	To the maximum extent practical, construction activities would be limited to normal business hours.

Resource Area	Best Management Practices
Land Use	No specific BMPs proposed for the Land Use Resource Area.
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management	The wetlands on the site will be impacted and care will be taken to avoid any indirect impacts to wetlands adjacent to the project site.
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	No specific BMPs proposed for the Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice Resource Area.
Community Services	No specific BMPs proposed for the Community Services Resource Area.
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Contractor will be required to utilize proper handling and storage of hazardous materials in order to minimize the risk of impacts from a spill. Solid waste generated during construction would be managed and disposed of in accordance with local, state, and federal regulations
Transportation and Parking	Potential for temporary disruptions to local traffic during construction; impacts would be on the order of minutes and therefore negligible. Long-term increases in traffic on nearby roads would have negligible adverse impacts on local traffic.
Utilities	Utility service from the utility source to the facility and the utility systems will be designed to achieve sustainable design and energy efficient standards to minimize maintenance and energy consumption costs.