



FEMA

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment Alternative Housing Pilot Program Hidden Cove Group Housing Site Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Background

Under the authority of Section 408 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administers the Individual Assistance Program to provide temporary housing for disaster victims in affected areas whose homes are uninhabitable or destroyed. Although FEMA's traditional temporary housing options are sufficient to address the unmet housing needs of residents in most disasters; the catastrophic dimensions of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita challenged the efficacy of these traditional methods. Recognizing the extensive and complex housing challenges facing victims and communities as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and acknowledging the limitations on FEMA's ordinary statutory authority to provide non-temporary housing solutions, Congress appropriated funds to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to support alternative housing pilot programs (Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2006, Public Law 109-234).

The Alternative Housing Pilot Program (AHPP) represents a one-time exception to FEMA's existing authority under the Stafford Act. The Stafford Act legally binds FEMA to a temporary housing mission, by providing an opportunity to explore, implement, and evaluate innovative approaches to housing solutions, and to address ongoing housing challenges created by the 2005 hurricane season in the states of the Gulf Coast region, including the State of Louisiana, especially the southernmost parishes. The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) has applied for FEMA funding under the AHPP to provide both temporary and permanent housing solutions for eligible applicant families displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In accordance with 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for FEMA, Subpart B, Agency Implementing Procedures, Part 10.9, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared pursuant to Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the regulations promulgated by the President's Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). The purpose of the EA is to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the proposed group housing project, and to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). In the EA process, FEMA considered two alternatives, the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.

The Proposed Action Alternative consists of the construction of permanent AHPP housing in a previously developed residential neighborhood called Hidden Cove in south Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. The Proposed Action includes the construction of 42 permanent AHPP housing units or single-family residences (Louisiana Cottages). The AHPP cottages would be constructed on piers and would include the construction of driveways and walkways. The project site would be cleared of all vegetation and debris and then grubbed. Contouring and grading would be done, if necessary. The houses would tie into existing water and sewer infrastructure previously developed.

The LRA will notify the public of the availability of the draft EA through publication of a public notice in *The Advocate* on December 29, 2008 and January 5, 2009. FEMA will conduct a 15-day public comment period commencing on the initial date of publication on December 29, 2008 and ending on January 12, 2009. The draft EA will be available for public viewing at the East Baton Rouge Main Library, 771 Goodwood Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806, and the Bluebonnet Regional Branch Library, 9200 Bluebonnet Boulevard, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70810. In addition, the draft EA may be viewed and downloaded on FEMA's website at <http://www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/envdocuments/ea-region6.shtm>.

Findings

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, as described in the EA, impacts to geology, floodplains, wetlands, cultural resources, and biological resources, are not anticipated. Positive impacts to socioeconomics are expected. During the construction period, short-term impacts to soils, water quality, transportation, air quality, and noise are anticipated. Minor, but insignificant, water quality and transportation impacts would occur during occupation of the AHPP cottages. The proposed action does not constitute impacts on any hazardous material or wastes; however, due to the adjacent oil and gas production facility, there is a risk of spills, leaks, or rupture of the oil and gas storage tanks which could cause indirect impacts to the proposed project site. All short-term and minor impacts require conditions to minimize and mitigate impacts to the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) will be required to minimize the program's potential to affect cultural resources.

Conditions

The LRA shall comply with all prescribed conditions set forth in the draft EA, including but not limited to the following conditions. Failure to comply with these conditions may jeopardize the receipt of Federal funding.

1. In the event that archaeological deposits, including but not limited to any Native American pottery, stone tools, historic artifacts or human remains, are uncovered, project activities will be halted. The contractor will stop all work immediately in the vicinity of the discovery and take reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to the finds. All archaeological findings will be secured and access to the sensitive area restricted. The contractor would inform FEMA immediately and FEMA would consult with the SHPO or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and interested tribes. Work in sensitive areas would not resume until consultation is completed and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that the project is in compliance with the NHPA. As a result no impacts to cultural resources would be expected.
2. To minimize the noise impacts to nearby sensitive noise receptors, construction activity will be limited to daylight hours during the work week, between 7:00 am to 5:00 pm on Monday through Friday.
3. To minimize any future environmental, health, and safety risks associated with the oil and gas facility, the LRA will coordinate with the current owner or operating company of the facility, Lamar Oil and Gas Company, in developing an emergency response plan to ensure public health and safety in the event of a off-normal or emergency event.

Conclusion

Based upon the information contained in the EA, the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed action, and in accordance with FEMA's regulations in 44 CFR Part 10, a FONSI is concluded. Therefore, an EIS process will not be required, based on the fact that there would be no long-term adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on the natural environment resulting from FEMA actions, as identified in the EA, taken to establish permanent housing under the AHPP.

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