Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder Center and Parking Garage Project
James J. Peters VAMC, Bronx, NY

Finding of No Significant Impact
(FONSI)

Department of Veterans Affairs

Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder Center and Parking Garage Project

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BACKGROUND

Bronx VAMC is one of only 24 VA spinal cord injury centers in the U.S. The facility provides comprehensive treatment strategy for complex spinal cord injuries that includes surgery, medical treatment, rehabilitation, and re-training. Bronx VAMC 501 Patient Care Center is the referral point for VA’s Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISN) 2, 3, and 4, a geographic area including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. This Medical Center is also the referral point for new Department of Defense (DOD) 501 patients and a provider under the TRICARE Military Health Care Program which provides medical services to Active Duty service members and their families.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The Bronx VAMC facility is operating beyond capacity and does not meet the current Department of Veterans Affairs guidelines for Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder Centers (SCI/D). A review of alternatives was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of providing veterans care at a leased facility in New York City or having excess patients served by other facilities. These alternatives were determined to be inadequate due to the complex medical issues addressed by the SCI/D facility.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action is summarized below:

• Construct a new three-story SCI/D Center approximately 183,000 sq. ft. in size in a portion of the current parking lot. The new SCI/D Center will provide services for 46 Acute Care in-patients and 46 Long Term Care in-patients, therapy spaces, outpatient clinics, administrative areas and associated support spaces.

• Convert the existing heating plant to a gas fired combined heat power (CHP) facility which would heat and provide electricity to the VAMC and provide electricity to the grid.

• Construct a new stand-alone parking structure to accommodate 805 cars for staff. The parking garage consists of a two-bay wide 35,788 square foot parking structure that will have seven (7) parking levels visible on the west side and five (5) levels visible on the east side of the garage, with six (6) stories above grade and two (2) stories below grade. The garage will extend roughly 68 feet above grade and is set back where it would not be visible from Webb Avenue, nor block any view of the main facility from the entrance to the Bronx VAMC campus. The parking garage is intended to provide covered parking for all those vehicles that are at present parked on street or in open parking lots and to provide parking spaces for 83 additional employees who will be employed due to the proposed action.

• Incorporate a small photovoltaic (PV) array and solar heating system in roof areas associated with the SCI/D Center and Parking Garage. The PV array will produce 158,730 KWH with an installed estimated cost of $7.25/watt. A solar water heating system would be installed on the south facing wall of the SCI/D mechanical penthouse. The solar collector would cover 1,500 square feet of area and produce 270.2 MMBtu of heat annually. This heat collection would produce an estimated 30% of the anticipated annual domestic hot water load.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (Public Law 91-19042 USC 4321-4347 January 1, 1970), the Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations, (40 CFR 1500-1508), and the Veterans Affairs implementation requirements (38 CFR Part 26). The EA is incorporated into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by reference.
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Four alternatives were evaluated in the original screening process, two of which were considered feasible and are analyzed in this EA. Alternative 1 - the No Action Alternative, considers the effect of maintaining the status quo. Alternative 2 - New Construction represents the preferred action, which is detailed above as the “Proposed Action.”

Under the No Action Alternative, Bronx VAMC would continue to serve the increasing demands in the existing facilities. As a result, many inpatient SCI Services would need to be referred to other medical facilities. This may lead to the separation of veterans from families and create disruptions in care. This alternative also requires a series of complex Minor and Non-Recurring Maintenance (NRM) projects to mitigate the aging facility deficiencies. This alternative does not meet the needs of the veterans, CARES requirements, or VA performance measures. Alternative 2, New Construction, considered three separate design options for the development of a multi-level Parking Garage and for the SCI/D Center. The Parking Garage would address the existing parking shortfalls as well as replace the parking lots to be displaced by the proposed SCI/D and Parking Garage.

Environmental impacts may be either significant or not significant environmental impacts. The following environmental impacts are not significant environmental impacts. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required for these environmental impacts:

- Beneficial-and-not-significant;
- None-to-negligible;
- Minimal-to-moderate; and
- Significant-but-mitigated.

An Environmental Impact Statement is required when significant impacts that cannot be effectively mitigated are identified. A detailed assessment of the potential impacts presented in EA is summarized below:

**Impacts during Construction:**

- Beneficial and Not Significant Impacts – Socioeconomics
- None-to-Negligible Impact – Land use and Zoning; Cultural Resources; Topography, Geology and Soils; Hydrology and Water Resources; Wildlife and Habitat; Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management; Community Services; Utilities; and Environmental Justice
- Minimal-to-Moderate Impacts – Aesthetics; Air Quality; Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials; Traffic, Transportation and Parking; Alternative Energy Sources; Cumulative Impacts; and Potential to Generate Public Controversy
- Significant-but-Mitigated Impacts – None
- Significant Impacts – None

**Impacts during Operations:**

- Beneficial and Not Significant Impacts – Air Quality; Socioeconomics; Traffic, Transportation and Parking; Utilities; Alternative Energy Sources; Cumulative Impacts; Potential for Generate Public Controversy
- None-to-Negligible Impact – Aesthetics; Land Use and Zoning; Cultural Resources; Topography, Geology and Soils; Noise; Hydrology and Water Resources; Community Services; and Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials
- Minimal-to-Moderate Impacts – None
- Significant-but-Mitigated Impacts – None
- Significant – None
Short term construction impacts on aesthetics, air quality, traffic and noise are temporary and will be minimized to the greatest extent possible by construction management measures. Construction impacts related to Traffic, Transportation and Parking are based on the temporary condition of insufficient number of parking spaces due to construction of the proposed buildings and garage. During this initial phase, displaced parking will be minimized by encouraging the use of public transportation, and potentially utilizing offsite parking with shuttle transportation.

No significant archeological features or deposits were identified in the proposed SCI/D or Parking Structure areas on the VAMC property. No historic artifacts were encountered during the site sampling efforts, nor were any evidence of the Revolutionary War-era Fort Number Six or the c. 1872 L. Valentine structure.

The project will offer numerous beneficial impacts to both the neighborhood and the facility. The highest benefit will be resolving critical gaps for specialty and ancillary care to meet the rising need for healthcare of all area Veterans.

Impacts from energy conservation efforts and development of photovoltaic array are overall beneficial to the environment. The design team has taken a “whole building approach” in the optimal design for the site, water and energy conservation, material selection, and indoor environmental quality. The new SCI/D Center would be designed in accordance with the Leadership for Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building rating system with the goal of achieving a silver rating under the LEED for Healthcare rating system. The existing heating plant would be upgraded and converted to a cogeneration facility. This facility would be gas fired, which will lower air pollutant discharges and add electrical power to the site.

The project would have a short-term beneficial impact on employment by hiring of an estimated 160 construction workers, most of which are presumed to be from the NYC metropolitan area. Other direct positive impacts would include the purchase or leasing of construction equipment and construction materials. Once constructed and operational, approximately 83 additional personnel are expected to be required. These new workers would contribute directly and indirectly to the local economy and would boost the number of nurses, doctors, social workers, therapists and staff professional individuals involved in community services and activities. Based on the above information, the impact to socioeconomic conditions during operations would be beneficial.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

VA presented the project to the New York City (NYC) Mayor’s Office at a meeting of the City Wide Environmental Quality Review Task Force on April 30, 2015. VA provided the NYC Mayor’s Office a preliminary draft EA dated June 2015. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and the New York City Department of Transportation provided comments on this preliminary draft EA through the New York City Mayor’s Office. These comments were received during a 30-day public comment period.

A Notice of Availability (NOA) of draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) dated July 2015 was published in the Bronx Times on July 18 through 20, 2015. A public meeting was held on August 5, 2015 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at James J. Peters VAMC, Hospital Building 100, Room 1B-07. Hard copies of the DEA were made available at the VAMC Medical Library Room 5A-14. Electronic copies of the DEA were available at the Bronx VAMC website at: Bronx.va.gov and on the VA Facebook page at: facebook.com/Bronx VAMC. The NOA started a 30-day comment period.

Comments received from the NYC Mayor’s Office have been addressed in the EA dated August 2015. At the recommendation of NYC Department of Transportation, VA will develop a parking utilization study and a Level of Service (LOS) analysis at Webb Avenue and West Kingsbridge Road after the SCI/D
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Center and parking garage portion of the Proposed Action is funded by Congress. No other oral or written comments were received from the public during the 30-day comment period or at the public meeting held on August 5, 2015.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the analysis of impacts in the EA, summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of VA that the Proposed Action would not have a significant impact on human health or the environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.