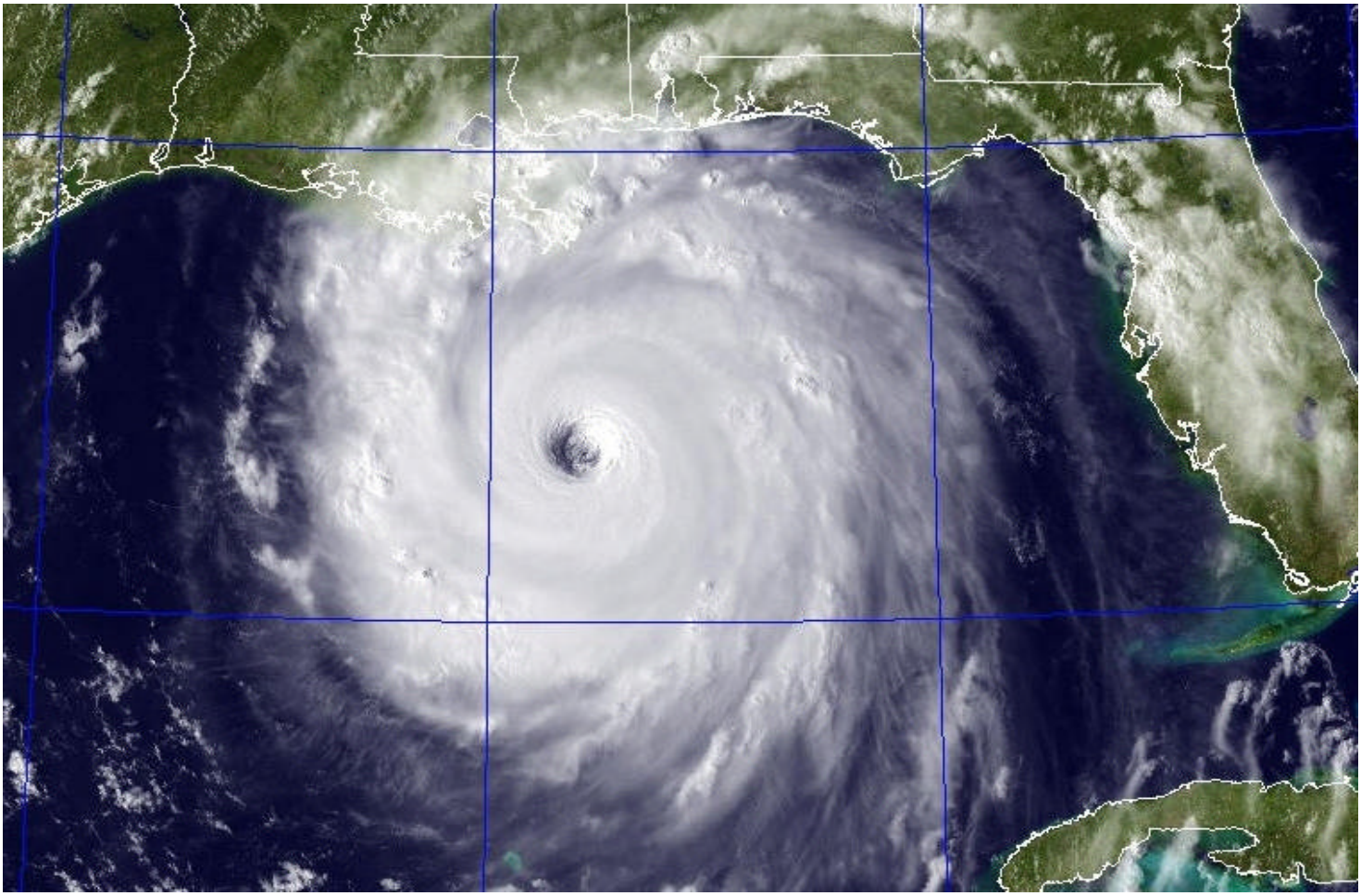

Final Environmental Assessment

Groom Road Emergency Temporary Housing Site

East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

FEMA-1603-DR-LA

September 2005

FEMA

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Baton Rouge Joint Field Office

Final Environmental Assessment
Emergency Temporary Housing
Hurricane Katrina
FEMA-1603-DR-LA

A. Project Name: Groom Road Emergency Temporary Housing Site

B. Purpose and Need:

Hurricane Katrina, a Category Four hurricane with a storm surge 25 feet above normal high-tide levels, moved across the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama gulf coasts on August 29, 2005. First landfall occurred near southern Plaquemines Parish, south of Buras, Louisiana. Maximum sustained winds at landfall were estimated at 140 miles per hour. Hurricane Katrina made subsequent landfalls at Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi.

President Bush declared a major disaster for Louisiana due to damages from Hurricane Katrina, and signed a disaster declaration (FEMA-1603-DR-LA) on August 29, 2005, authorizing FEMA to provide federal assistance in designated areas of Louisiana. As of September 9, 2005, the affected area was over 130,000 acres in size, over 330,000 families had been displaced, and over $690 million in expedited aid had been given to the victims. Displaced individuals and families are currently living in shelters during temporary housing identification; therefore, there is a need to expedite the selection and development process where temporary housing will be built to minimize their time spent in the shelters.

FEMA proposes to administer federal disaster assistance funds per the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC 5121-5206, as amended (Stafford Act). Section 408 of the Stafford Act authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance Program to provide emergency temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes are uninhabitable. FEMA has identified the need to provide temporary housing for residents in East Baton Rouge Parish, where the proposed project is located.

C. Project Location:

The proposed site is located south of the Groom Road and Hovey Avenue intersection in Baker, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana (Figures 1 and 2). The site is located about 10 miles north of Baton Rouge, and 91 miles northwest of New Orleans.

D. Site Description:

The site consists of approximately 62 acres of land owned by the Louisiana State Corrections Department. The site is bordered on the north by Groom Road, on the east by a church and private property, on the south by Baker Canal, and on the west by private property that is forested. The terrain is essentially flat and ground cover consists of approximately 90 percent non-native grasses and 10 percent tree cover (Figures 3 and 4). A ditch, approximately 12-feet deep and surrounded by trees, is located in the western one-third of the property and is not connected to Baker Canal or the ditch along Groom Road. A man-made agricultural pond is located near the middle of the site. The pond is approximately 80-feet by 90-feet and currently contains water. Overhead electrical lines border the site on the north.

E. Project Description:

This alternative would involve the construction of a travel trailer park (hereafter "the Park") which would accommodate approximately 600 travel trailers (Figure 4). At this time, Park occupancy is not expected to exceed 18 months.

All utilities would be installed, including connecting potable water and electricity from the existing infrastructure. A sanitary sewer system would be constructed for the Park, including buried piping and self-contained treatment plants. The treatment plants would have capacity for treating about 90,000 gallons per day (gpd) with discharge of treated water to the Baker Canal located along the southern boundary of the site. Two new access roads off Groom Road would be built for residents' ingress and egress. The site would be prepped by mowing the grass and then covering the area with geotechnical grade fabric. Rock would be laid over the top of the fabric to form the interior roadways and trailer pads. The existing treed areas within the site and along the perimeter would be left to maintain the visual aesthetics of the site. Surface water runoff would follow the natural drainageways of the site which drain to Baker Canal and a creek located within the site. A safety fence would also be installed and maintained around the Park perimeter. The Park management would provide 24-hour security services, maintenance, repair, and grounds keeping. Shuttle bus services would be provided to transport the Park residents to and from grocery stores, places of work, and schools until the City's public transportation system can be expanded to the area.

When the temporary housing need has ended, FEMA expects that the trailers would be hauled from the site, to suitable locations elsewhere (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). The Park would then be seeded and restored to previous conditions and/or used by the landowner in a manner consistent with county zoning classification.

F. Site Selection Process:

NEPA requires investigation and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives as part of the project environmental review process. In order to expedite the site selection process, FEMA's contractors review available aerial photos and maps, conduct site reconnaissance field surveys, and contact state and local officials to identify potential sites. Factors considered in choosing a site include: site topography, property owner willingness, past land use, if it is already planned for development, access to existing utilities, engineering feasibility, and ease of site lease/acquisition. The Groom Road site was selected for further analysis because it meets site selection criteria. Additionally, the property was donated by Louisiana Department of Corrections, and it can be restored to previous conditions once the need for temporary housing has ended.

G. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

In order to meet the proposed purpose and need of timely delivery of emergency temporary housing, FEMA conducted an expedited environmental review process to identify environmental issues that need addressing. The environmental review process included a field reconnaissance visit of the proposed project site, as well as background research, and expedited agency consultation. The field reconnaissance visit was conducted on September 12, 2005. Background research consisted of a review of wetlands maps, census statistics, FEMA floodplain maps, hazardous materials databases, archaeological and historic structures databases, threatened and endangered species information, soil surveys, and other available information. Expedited agency consultation consisted of establishing a programmatic agreement with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office and an expedited review process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The following matrix summarizes the results of the environmental review process (Table 1). Potential environmental impacts that were found to be negligible are not evaluated further. Resource areas that have the potential for impacts of minor, moderate, or major intensity are further developed in the following Section H. Definitions of the impact intensity are described below:

Negligible: The resource area (e.g., geology) would not be affected, or changes would be either non-detectable or if detected, would have effects that would be slight and local. Impacts would be well below regulatory standards, as applicable.

Minor: Changes to the resource would be measurable, although the changes would be small and localized. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, as applicable. Mitigation measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

Moderate: Changes to the resource would be measurable and have both localized and regional scale impacts. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, but historical conditions are being altered on a short-term basis. Mitigation measures would be necessary and the measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

Major: Changes would be readily measurable and would have substantial consequences on a local and regional level. Impacts would exceed regulatory standards. Mitigation measures to offset the adverse effects would be required to reduce impacts, though long-term changes to the resource would be expected.

Table 1. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences Matrix

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Geology and Soils	X				Potential for localized increase in soil erosion during construction.	Construction contractor would be required to obtain applicable LAPDES permit, and implement stormwater pollution prevention plan.	Implement construction BMPs, install silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation. Area soils would be covered and/or wetted during construction. If fill is stored on site as part of unit installation or removal, the contractor would be required to appropriately cover it.
Hydrology and Floodplains (Executive Order 11988)	X				Flood Insurance Rate Maps were reviewed on FEMA's web site. The site is located outside the 100-year floodplain.		
Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)	X				A riparian zone runs through the center of the project site, and has the potential to be considered jurisdictional under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.		Riparian zone through center of site would be protected and avoided. Silt fences and construction barriers would be put in place to protect riparian zone through center of site.
Water Quality		X			Potential for localized increase in sedimentation during construction. Potential impact to water quality (i.e., turbidity, biological oxygen demand) from the discharge of treated sanitary wastewater to the Baker Canal located behind the site. Also see Section H.	LADEQ, LAPDES wastewater permit to be obtained by construction contractor.	Contractor to implement requirements of LAPDES wastewater discharge permit. Wastewater would receive primary and secondary treatment in compliance with State standards. Implement construction BMPs, install silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation. Also see Section H.
Air Quality	X				During construction, potential localized increase in vehicle emissions and dust particles. Parish airshed is in attainment for criteria pollutants per the Clean Air Act.		Vehicle operation times would be kept to a minimum. Area soils would be covered and/or wetted during construction to minimize dust. Rock cover for roads and housing pads would be wetted and/or treated periodically to minimize dust particles.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Vegetation and Wildlife	X				Site is currently grazed pasture. Grasses would be mowed. A geotexile fabric and limestone rock would overlay project site. Several small diameter trees would be removed as part of site clearing.		A boundary fence would be placed around the riparian zone that runs through the center of the site. Once the temporary housing need has ended, the Park site would be seeded and restored to previous conditions and/or used by the landowner in a manner consistent with the county zoning.
Threatened and Endangered Species (Endangered Species Act Section 7)	X				No impact to federally listed threatened or endangered species is anticipated.	USFWS determination of no effect. (9/11/05).	
Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act Section 106)	X				No impact to historic properties or resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places is anticipated.	SHPO determination of no effect. (09/11/05).	In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, if unanticipated historic or cultural materials are discovered during construction, all construction activities shall immediately cease within 100 feet of the materials until their cultural affiliation and ultimate disposition are determined in consultation with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, FEMA Environmental Liaison Officer and other interested parties.
Socioeconomics		X			Park occupancy is expected to be about 1,500 people (600 units x estimated 2.5 people per unit). Parking spaces would be available adjacent to each unit. The local community would experience an increase in the need for public services, such as schools, fire, police, and medical care. Commercial facilities, such as grocery stores, would also experience an increase in customers during Park occupancy. Also see Section H.	The local government has been contacted regarding the need for additional community services.	Shopping centers are located in Baker and should have sufficient capacity to accommodate Park residents. Additionally, the Park management would be providing 3 meals a day during Park occupancy. A bus service would be provided for Park residents access to commercial stores. Also see Section H.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)	X				The proposed action is not expected to pose disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. Also see Section H.		See Section H.
Noise		X			During the construction period (approximately 14 days), residents immediately adjacent to the project site would experience an increase in noise levels. The vehicles from Park occupants would also increase the level of vehicular noise along Groom Road. Also see Section H.		If necessary, the following noise reduction measures should be considered: (1) restricting the 24-hour schedule to the first two weeks of construction; (2) using a 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. construction schedule; (3) completing construction closest to adjoining residents first; and (4) completing noisier activities during the day if a 24-hour schedule is used. Also see Section H.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Safety and Security	X				No impacts to safety and security are anticipated.		The contractor would place fencing around the site perimeter to protect residents from vehicular traffic on Groom Road, Baker Canal, and the surrounding undeveloped property. Contractor to provide 24-hour security services. To minimize worker and public health and safety risks from project construction and closure, all construction and closure work would be done using qualified personnel trained in the proper use of construction equipment, including all appropriate safety precautions. Additionally, all activities would be conducted in a safe manner in accordance with the standards specified in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OHSA) regulations and the USACE safety manual. The contractor would post appropriate signage and fencing to minimize potential adverse public safety concerns. Appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities in order to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities and traffic pattern changes.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Hazardous Materials and Toxic Wastes	X				No impacts related to hazardous materials and wastes are anticipated.		Hazardous materials database search queried per ASTM standards on September 11, 2005. No sites of concern were identified by the database search. No environmental conditions of concern observed during field reconnaissance.
Traffic and Transportation		X			Traffic volumes along Groom Road would increase during Park occupancy. Shuttle bus service would be provided for Park residents to facilitate access to local business and schools until public transportation can be expanded into the area.	The Acting Baker Parish Chief Traffic Engineer was contacted on 09/12/05.	Contractor would coordinate with Parish traffic engineer to ensure traffic infrastructure can service the increased traffic volume. The contractor would implement traffic control measures, as necessary.

H. Additional Impact Analysis

Water Quality

The project site is located in the Bayou Sara-Thompson watershed that drains into the Mississippi-Baton Rouge watershed. The Bayou Sara-Thompson watershed has several water bodies that have exceeded the total maximum daily load (TMDL) for a number of criteria pollutants, in particular, nutrients, pesticides, and siltation. As stated above, the site wastewater treatment plants would discharge treated wastewater to Baker Canal which outfalls to the Mississippi River about 4 miles west of the site. Two wastewater treatment plants would be installed with a combined total daily maximum load of 130,000 gallons per day. The wastewater would be treated to state standards using both primary and secondary treatment. The Baker Canal currently conveys the treated wastewater from the Jettson Correctional Facility located southwest of the project site. According to the construction contractor, the canal has adequate capacity to convey the additional treated sanitary wastewater. The contractor would be required to obtain a Louisiana wastewater quality permit (LAPDES) or waiver from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to discharge to the canal prior to the site being occupied.

Socioeconomics

The city of Baker has about 13,700 residents, and about 5,400 housing units. The project site is located in the rural community of Baker. The median household income is estimated at about $41,400 (based on 1999 Census adjusted for inflation). The primary employment sectors (about 30 percent of all jobs) are educational, health, and social services; retail trade; and manufacturing. According to the 2000 census, about 60 percent of Baker's residents are employed, and the percent of the civilian labor force that is unemployed is 4.9 percent.

With the establishment of the Park, up to about 1,500 residents would be temporarily relocating to the Baker area (600 units x estimated 2.5 people per unit). The local community would experience an increase in the need for public services, such as schools, fire and police services, child care, and medical services. Commercial facilities, such as grocery stores, would also experience an increase in customers during Park occupancy. Shopping centers are located about 3 miles from the project site and should have sufficient capacity to accommodate Park residents. Additionally, the Park management would be providing 3 meals per day during Park occupancy. A bus service would be provided for Park residents' access to commercial stores. The local government has also been contacted regarding the need for additional community services.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order (EO) 12898 requires that each Federal agency identify and address the effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. The function of the EO is to avoid disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental impacts to the target populations. Further, EO 12898 also tasks Federal agencies to ensure that public notifications regarding environmental issues are concise, understandable, and readily accessible.

All forms of FEMA disaster housing assistance are available to any affected household that meets the conditions of eligibility. No Federal entity or official (or their agent) may discriminate against any individual based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or economic status.

Within the city of Baker, the population is about 52 percent black or African American, 46 percent white, and 2 percent of other race. Approximately 13 percent of families are below the poverty level, and 15

percent of individuals are below the poverty level. In comparison to East Baton Rouge Parish and Louisiana, the Baker area has a higher percentage of minority residents and a lower percentage of families below poverty (Table 2).

Table 2: Minority and Low Income Populations Summary Statistics

Subject	City of Baker	East Baton Rouge Parish	Louisiana
Demographics			
White	46%	56%	64%
Minority (non-white)	54%	44%	36%
Families below poverty	13%	18%	20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

From the perspective of both prospective Park residents and residents of the adjacent community, the proposed action would not pose disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. The availability of Federal assistance, including temporary housing for displaced individuals, is consistent with EO 12898. The specific demographics of Park occupants is not available at this time. However, the availability of temporary housing would result in a positive impact to displaced individuals, regardless of whether they are minority and/or low income. The aforementioned Park amenities would reduce perceived negative effects to Park residents in terms of support services.

Residents of the adjacent community would experience short-term impacts during the expected 7 day construction period. In particular, there would be an increase in traffic and noise levels due to construction equipment. Construction related impacts would be short-term and would cease once the Park has been completed.

During Park occupancy, the local community would grow by about 1,500 people. This would result in an increase in the need for public services, such as schools, fire and police services, child care, and medical services. Commercial facilities, such as grocery stores, would also experience an increase in customers during Park occupancy. Shopping centers are located about 3 miles from the project site and should have sufficient capacity to accommodate Park residents. Park management would supply The local government has also been contacted regarding the need for additional community services.

Noise

Noise levels within the project area would increase during construction of the project due to construction equipment. Construction noise impacts would be short-term and limited to the duration of construction activities (about 15 days). Due to the urgency of the situation, construction would occur on a 24-hour schedule until the Park is completed. If necessary, noise reduction measures would be instituted. These measures could include: restricting the 24-hour construction schedule to the five days of construction, using a 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. construction schedule, completing construction closest to adjoining resident first, and/or completing noisier activities during the day if using a 24-hour schedule.

Traffic and Transportation

Currently, Groom Road is a paved two-lane roadway without paved shoulders. No traffic lights are located on any of the roadways within the project area. Traffic within the general project area would increase due to the ingress and egress of construction equipment. This traffic impact would be short-term and limited to the duration of construction. Traffic volumes would also increase due to the Park residents. These traffic impacts would short-term and limited to the duration of the need for temporary housing at the site. Due to

the increased traffic volume, the contractor would need to work with the City Traffic Engineer to assure that the local level of service on the roadway remains adequate. The contractor and Parish would implement traffic control measures, as necessary.

I. Public Involvement

Public involvement was performed in compliance with NEPA, FEMA's regulations implementing NEPA at 44 CFR 10.9(c), and Executive Order 12898. Given the emergency need for temporary housing and the expedited environmental review process, public involvement activities were implemented to the extent practicable under the circumstances. A Public Notice was published in the Baton Rouge Advocate from September 15 to 17, 2005. Approximately 2,200 flyers were also circulated to homes within a 2-mile radius of the proposed temporary group housing site on September 14, 2005. The public notice was also placed in grocery stores and other public facilities in the project area. The public comment period was brief, from September 15 to September 17, 2005. Written comments on the Draft EA were faxed to FEMA's Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge at (225) 346-5848; and verbal comments were accepted at (225) 376-5260 and TTY for hearing or speech-impaired at 800-462-7585; between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. The Draft EA could be viewed and downloaded from FEMA's website at http://www.fema.gov/ehp/docs.shtm and was also available for public review at the East Baton Rouge Library, 3501 Groom Road, Baker, Louisiana 70714. The library hours were Monday through Thursday from 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM; and Friday through Saturday from 9:00 AM to 6 PM; and Sunday from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM.

During the public review period, FEMA received comments from 32 members of the Baker community. These comments were evaluated for recurring themes. The common themes were then categorized, and the number of occurrences for each theme was identified as summarized in Table 3. Some individuals provided more than one comment. The majority of comments focused on security issues, the adequacy of existing services for new Park residents, and the site selection process. Table 3 shows how FEMA replied to the comments and how they were addressed in the context of the environmental review process.

Table 3: Comment Theme and FEMA Reply from Public Comment Period

Number of occurrences	Comment Theme	FEMA Reply	Changes made to Draft EA
15	Concern regarding an increase in crime.	As described in Section E of the Draft EA, a 24-hour security service would be provided by Park management.	Issue addressed in Draft EA. No change made.
8	Insufficient commercial stores (e.g. stores, post office)	Shopping centers are located in Baker and should have sufficient capacity to handle Park residents. Additionally, the Park management would be providing 3 meals a day during Park occupancy. A bus service would also be provided to provide Park residents access to commercial stores.	Section E and Table 1 have been updated to include this information.
7	Stress on public services (e.g. fire, police, public transportation).	The local government has been contacted regarding the need for additional community services. Additionally, as described in Section E of the Draft EA, Park management would be providing bus service to Park residents.	Table 1 has been updated to include this information.
7	Inadequate public involvement.	Given the emergency need for temporary housing and the expedited environmental review process, public involvement was implemented to the extent practicable under the circumstances. This included publication in a local newspaper, posting on the FEMA web page, and circulating 2,200 flyers.	No change. Section I has been updated to include the results of the public comment period.
7	Concerns regarding the availability of public transportation.	Shuttle bus service would be provided for Park residents to facilitate access to local business and schools until public transportation can be expanded to the area.	No change.
5	Concerns regarding influx of additional school children.	The local government has been contacted regarding the need for additional community services, including resources for school children.	Table 1 has been updated to include this information.

Number of occurrences	Comment Theme	FEMA Reply	Changes made to Draft EA
5	Site selection was unfair. It was focused on placing sites in low income and/or minority communities.	As described in Section F, the site selection factors include site topography, property owner willingness, past land use, if it is already planned for development, access to existing utilities, engineering feasibility, and ease of site lease/acquisition. Additionally, the site was selected because it was donated by the Louisiana Department of Corrections.	Section F has been updated to include this information.
4	Concerns regarding temporary housing duration	Park occupancy is expected not to exceed 18 months.	No change.
3	Suggests curfew for security	A 24-hour security service would be provided by Park management. Park management would assess the need for additional security measures.	No change.
3	Potential to increase traffic.	Contractor would coordinate with Parish traffic engineer to ensure traffic infrastructure can service the increased traffic volume. The contractor and Parish would implement traffic control measures, as necessary	Table 1 has been updated to include this information.
2	In favor of the proposed site.	None.	No change.
2	Type of governance structure that will be implemented in Park.	Governance structure has not yet been determined.	No change.
2	How will Park residents be transitioned into their new futures.	Comment noted.	No change.
2	Thinking about moving away from community.	Comment noted.	No change.
1	The demographics of construction and Park management contractors should reflect the communities ethnic makeup.	Comment noted.	No change.
1	Inadequate analysis of environmental justice issues	Comment noted.	No change.

J. Figures

Figure 1: Project Location

Figure 2: Site Location

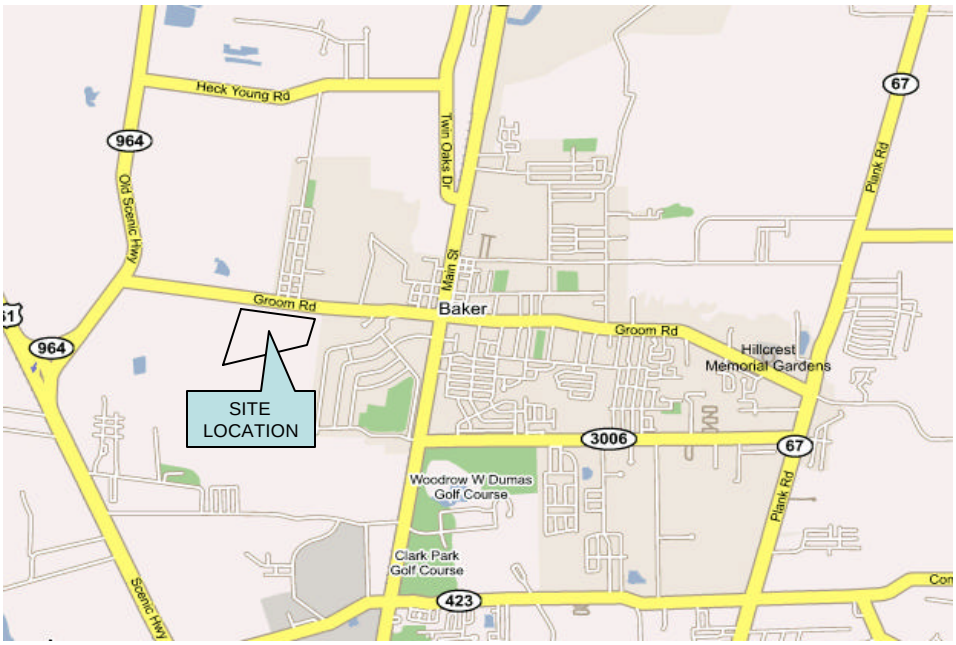

FIGURE 2:
SITE LOCATION
GROOM ROAD EMERGENCY TEMPORARY HOUSING SITE
BAKER, LOUISIANA

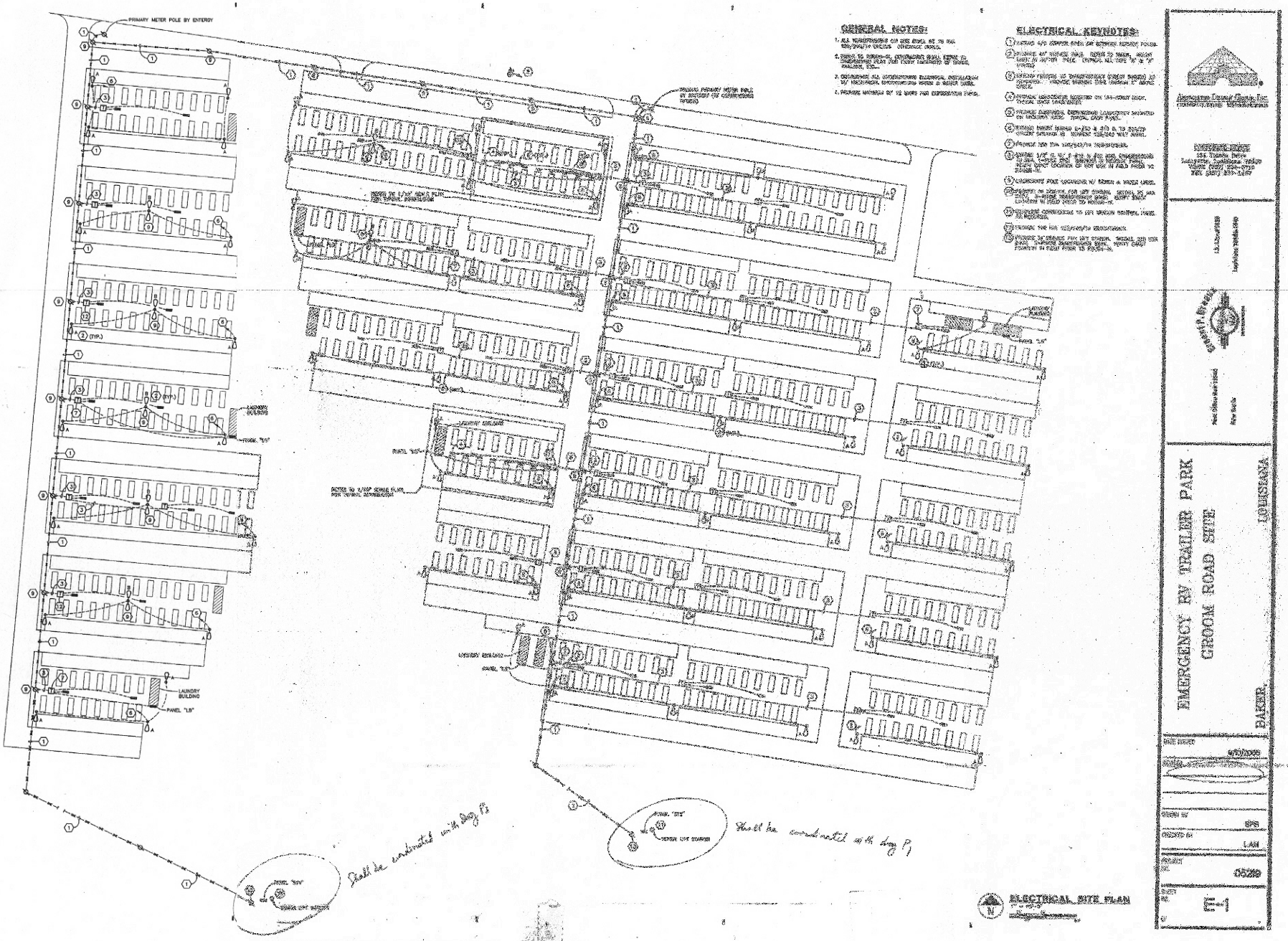

FIGURE 3
SITE PLAN
GROOM ROAD EMERGENCY TEMPORARY HOUSING SITE
BAKER, LOUISIANA