FEMA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment
Alternative Housing Pilot Program
Fischer (Algiers) Group Housing Site, New Orleans, Louisiana

Background

Recognizing the extensive and complex housing challenges facing victims and communities as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and acknowledging the limitations on Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) ordinary statutory authority to provide non-temporary housing solutions, Congress appropriated funds to the Department of Homeland Security 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 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act which 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 in the southernmost parishes such as Orleans Parish. The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) has applied for FEMA funding under the AHPP to provide 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 approximately 124 permanent AHPP units on an approximate 20-acre parcel of previously developed land located in the New Orleans West Bank neighborhood of Algiers, Orleans Parish, Louisiana. The property has been utilized by the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) since the mid 1960s as high density multi-family government housing, which has since been demolished. The approximate 20-acre proposed site is part of a larger area that has been partially redeveloped by HANO in conjunction with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) assistance. The proposed project site is presently owned by HANO and comprised of approximately 128 lots of which 124 lots would be developed into AHPP housing and is a continuation of the larger overall HANO redevelopment of the property.

The proposed project site is bordered by Semmes Street to the north, General De Gaulle Drive to the south, US Highway 90 to the east, and Thayer Avenue to the west. The proposed group housing site would consist of 124 single family dwellings (Louisiana Cottages), with living areas ranging from 874 square feet (sq ft) to 1,200 sq ft, as well as several expanded units with living areas of 1,525 sq ft. The Louisiana Cottages would be built on piers to raise them to the required advisory base flood elevation (ABFE) of 3 feet above mean sea level, as necessary. The project site would be cleared of all vegetation and debris and then grubbed. Although contouring and grading has already been done additional contouring and grading would be done, as necessary. Driveways would be constructed to facilitate access and parking for the AHPP cottages. A fence would partially enclose the project area. The cottages would tie into existing water, and sewer infrastructure currently located near each lot site and utilities would then be installed to each individual cottage. However, installation of electrical power would be required for all housing units to the west of LB Landry Avenue and trenching would be used to install power to each individual housing unit lot.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, as described in the EA, impacts to geology, biological resources, wetlands, cultural resources and hazardous materials and wastes 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 floodplain impacts could occur with

the construction of the cottages. All short-term impacts require conditions to minimize and mitigate impacts to the proposed project site and surrounding areas.

Conditions

The LRA shall comply with all prescribed conditions set forth in the EA, including but not limited to the following conditions. Failure to comply with these conditions may jeopardize the receipt of Federal funding. LRA shall be responsible for completing all necessary consultations, permitting, and mitigation for the potential loss of resources prior to the commencement of construction activities.

1. If, during the course of AHPP construction, archaeological artifacts (prehistoric or historic) or human remains are discovered, LRA and its contractor shall stop work in the vicinity of the discovery and take all reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to the finds. All archaeological findings or remains would be secured and access to the sensitive area restricted. LRA or its contractors will immediately inform FEMA of the discovery. If unmarked graves are present, compliance with the Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act (R.S. 8:671 *et seq.*) is required. LRA or its contractor shall notify the law enforcement agency of the jurisdiction where the remains are located within 24 hours of the discovery. LRA or its contractor shall also notify FEMA and the Louisiana Division of Archaeology at 225-342-8170 within 72 hours of the discovery. The LRA and its contractor will not proceed with work until consultation with the SHPO and/or Federally recognized Indian Tribes is completed with assistance from FEMA.

2. The LRA construction contractors will employ a qualified laboratory and staff personnel to monitor the vibratory pile driving activities within 250 feet of any adjacent structure such as the nearby schools or homes. Seismographs will detect vibrations from the pile driving equipment and alert the field technicians if the vibrations were approaching 0.5 inches per second. If this threshold was approached the pile driving activities will be terminated and mitigation measures to reduce vibrations will be implemented. Mitigation measures which could be utilized to reduce vibrations include drilling a pilot hole for the pile or wetting the pile and hole to lubricate the downward insertion.

3. As the AHPP cottages are within the 100-year floodplain, the cottages would be constructed on piers, and the finished floor will be elevated to or above the digital flood insurance rate map (DFIRM) EL 3. Site elevation surveys will be performed to ensure that the AHPP housing will exceed the ABFE. FEMA has gone through the Eight-Step Planning Process to ensure that its actions are consistent with EO 11988 within Orleans Parish. An initial and final notice for the building of AHPP units within Louisiana has been previously publicized.

4. To minimize noise impacts, the construction contractors will utilize vibratory pile driving equipment for the installation of foundation piles similar to a small "KHP 135 II" vibratory compactor/driver by Kent, or its equivalent. In addition, to minimize noise impacts to nearby sensitive residential noise receptors, construction activity will be limited to daylight hours during the work week, between 8:00 am to 6:00 pm on Monday through Friday and construction traffic will avoid LB Landry Avenue and be re-routed from General DeGaulle Drive to Thayer Avenue and around the southwest end of the project site. To mitigate potential noise impacts to the schools, it is recommended that the construction plan include a noise barrier fence along the school property between the project area site and schools. Should the noise barrier not be utilized, construction of the foundations will be scheduled to occur during the summer months, during school holidays when students are not in classes, or after the school day ends but prior to 6:00 p.m..

5. Should LRA or its contractors encounter any explosive or flammable materials, toxic chemicals, and/or radioactive materials during site clearing and demolition, then LRA will follow the requirements of 24 CFR Part 51 to minimize any potential harm to human health or the natural environment. In addition, all debris associated with site clearing will be removed and disposed of in accordance with all Federal, state, and local regulations.

Finding

Based upon the information contained in the EA, the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts resulting from implementation of the alternative actions, 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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FEMA-1603/1607-DR-LA

4 Aug 09
Date

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FEMA-1603/1607-DR-LA

5/August/2009
Date