



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Office of Construction & Facilities Management
Washington DC 20420

March 27, 2023

Sent via email

SUBJECT: Scoping Notice for an Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Seismic Upgrade and Specialty Care Improvements Projects, Fort Harrison VA Medical Center, 3687 Veterans Drive, Fort Harrison, Montana

Dear Valued Stakeholder:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed Seismic Upgrade and Specialty Care Improvements projects at the Fort Harrison VA Medical Center (Fort Harrison VAMC) located at 3687 Veterans Drive in Fort Harrison, Montana. The Fort Harrison VAMC is a 34-bed acute care medical-surgical facility that provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services to Veterans living in western Montana. The location of the Fort Harrison VAMC campus is shown on Figures 1 and 2. Figure 3 provides an aerial photograph of the campus.

The Fort Harrison VAMC campus is located within a seismically active area, classified as a “moderate high” seismic zone. A seismic study of the primary facilities of the VAMC found that four buildings at the campus, including the main hospital building (Building 154), Buildings 141, 150, 154A, and the corridor connecting Buildings 141, 150 and 154, do not meet current seismic building code standards. VA is planning the proposed Seismic Upgrade and Specialty Care Improvements projects (Proposed Action) to correct seismic deficiencies at the VAMC and to remodel the retrofitted facility to accommodate the projected future operational needs of the medical center.

The primary components of the Proposed Action include:

- Constructing a three-story, approximately 82,600-square-foot (SF) addition on the south side of the main hospital building (Building 154). Existing acute inpatient care services and associated functions would be relocated to the new space.
- Structurally retrofitting the administration building (Building 141), dietetics building (Building 150), main hospital building (Building 154) and the outpatient building (Building 154A) to correct seismic building code deficiencies. Retrofitting would include the selective demolition of the interiors of the buildings and the installation of the structural upgrades and new mechanical systems to the building interiors. Following the completion of the upgrades, the building interiors would be redesigned and constructed to meet the current and future anticipated operational needs of the buildings. Approximately 221,800 SF of space would be seismically corrected and renovated.
- Relocating three off-campus, Helena-area leased VA facilities totally approximately 21,600 SF into the renovated space.

- Bracing/securing mechanical, electrical, and plumbing utilities within the connecting corridor between Buildings 141, 150, 154 and 154A.
- Constructing a new, approximately 15,700 SF, two-story, central utility plant (CUP) located north of Building 154. The new CUP would include upgraded steam boilers and a chilled water plant, and would be properly sized to meet forecasted heating and cooling demands of the expanded facility.
- Constructing an approximately four-story, 660-space parking garage located north of Building 154A. The new parking garage would correct current parking deficiencies at the campus and replace parking spaces lost from the Proposed Action.
- Razing three small, vacant buildings in the northwestern portion of the campus, including a former boiler plant (Building 142), a generator shed (Building 159), and a gas meter house (Building 151).
- Infrastructure upgrades to support the proposed development, including the installation, relocation, and removal of campus utilities and roads, as necessary, based on the final design.

The proposed project locations are mostly paved parking lots, maintained grassy areas, and areas near existing buildings. All of the projects are located entirely within the Fort Harrison VAMC campus on land owned by the Federal Government. Figure 4 illustrates the primary Proposed Action construction areas.

The Proposed Action construction activities would be conducted in phases over a period of approximately 10 years to minimize campus disruption, support continued campus operations, and minimize the need for temporary swing space during construction. VA plans to construct the new CUP and parking garage in the first phase of construction. The second phase of construction would include the construction of the acute inpatient care building addition, followed by the sequential seismic retrofitting and renovation of Buildings 141, 150, 154 and 154A. VA is currently in the pre-design phase for the Proposed Action projects. No project design details are available at this time.

VA will prepare the Draft EA according to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S. Code 4321-4370h), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and VA Implementing Regulations (38 CFR Part 26). The Draft EA will evaluate the potential direct and indirect impacts to the environment resulting from the Proposed Action, as well as cumulative impacts with other actions and projects, including the proposed approximately 18,000 SF mental health clinic (Building 173) to be located east of the parking garage. The environmental impacts associated with Building 173 were previously assessed during a 2018 NEPA analysis

VA recognizes that you or your organization may have relevant comments or information for consideration in the Draft EA. Please submit your comments/information via email by **May 1, 2023** to vacoenvironment@va.gov with the subject line “Fort Harrison VAMC Seismic Upgrade NEPA Scoping”.

Through this notice, VA is also providing the public with information about the undertaking and seeking public comment and input about the undertaking’s effects on historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, (54 USC § 306108), and its implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800 – Protection of Historic Properties). VA is using its procedures for public involvement under NEPA in lieu of public involvement

requirements in subpart B of the Section 106 regulations per 36 CFR § 800.2(d)(3). This notice does not serve as an invitation to consult under Section 106, it is solely to seek and consider the views of the public. VA will initiate its Section 106 review and send invitations to consulting parties separately.

VA anticipates publishing the Draft EA for a 30-day public review and comment period in the Spring of 2023. VA will announce the start of this review period by publishing a notice of availability (NOA) of the Draft EA in the Helena Independent Record. VA will concurrently notify stakeholders via email and include instructions on how to submit comments. The Draft EA will be available for review at the Lewis & Clark Library and via the VA CFM Environmental Program Office website at <https://www.cfm.va.gov/environmental>.

For additional information or questions, please contact Bruce Mack, Environmental Engineer at bruce.mack@va.gov with the subject line “Fort Harrison VAMC Seismic Upgrade NEPA Scoping”.

Respectfully,

Patrick Read
Acting Director, Environmental Program Office
Office of Construction and Facilities Management

Figure 1: Fort Harrison VAMC Location Map



Figure 2: Topographic Location Map

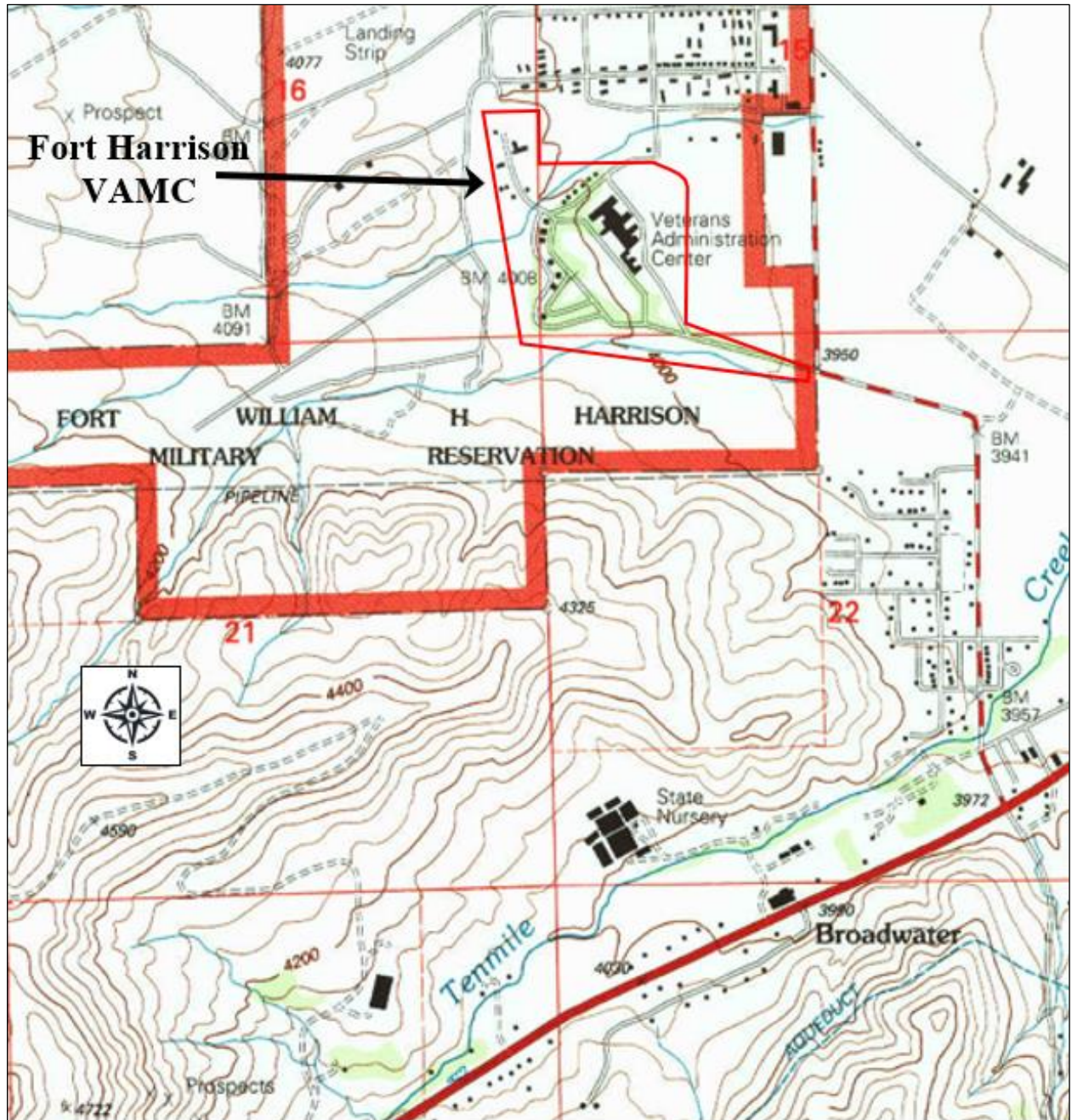


Figure 3: Aerial Photograph of Fort Harrison VAMC Campus

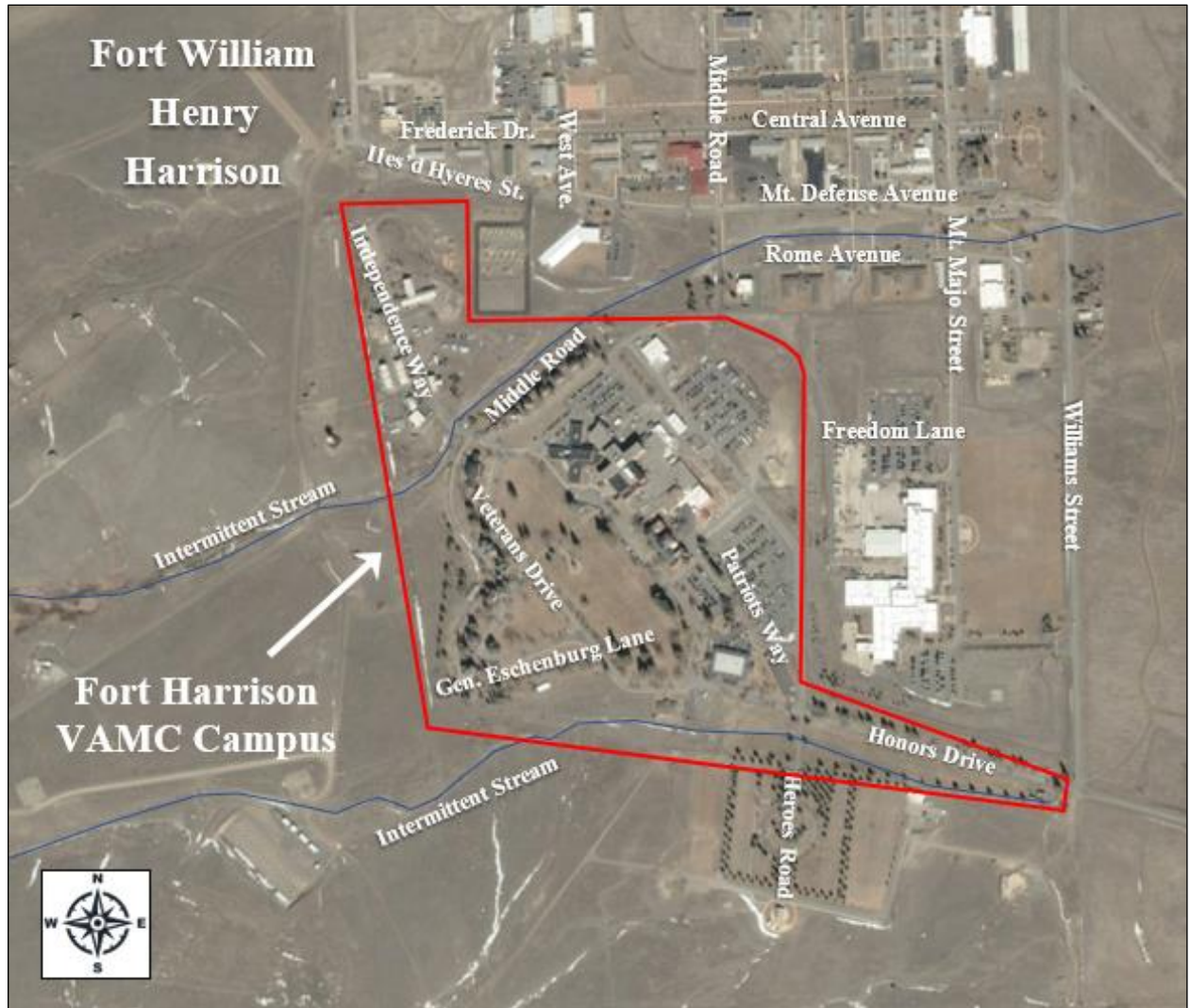


Figure 4: Primary Proposed Action Construction Areas

