U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Capital Grants Under the Grant and Per Diem Program
Final Programmatic Environmental Assessment

December 2021

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Construction and Facilities Management

Executive Summary

This programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions (38 CFR Part 26). This PEA is required to determine if the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) proposed action would have significant environmental impacts. Federal agencies are required to consider the environmental effects of their proposed actions. This PEA has been prepared in accordance with relevant guidance from VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects dated September 2010.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to continue to provide grants to support acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of real property used for GPD transitional housing facilities. The proposed action is needed to increase safety and reduce risk to Veterans in GPD transitional housing who otherwise would be experiencing homelessness. The grants would allow GPD grantees to improve the transitional housing they offer to Veterans resulting in less congregate housing and more individual unit style housing. The funding would allow GPD grantees to continue to transform programs and to meet the challenges local communities face when providing safe spaces for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Proposed Action

The proposed action for this programmatic EA is to provide capital grants to public or nonprofit private entities so they can assist Veterans experiencing homelessness by helping to ensure the availability of supportive housing and service centers to furnish outreach rehabilitative services, and vocational counseling and training. VA provides capital grants for the cost to construct structures and purchase land for new supportive housing facilities or service centers, acquire structures to establish supportive housing facilities or service centers, renovate existing structures to establish or expand supportive housing or service centers, and to procure a van for transportation.

Alternatives

Under the no action alternative, the proposed action would not be implemented. The no action would be that funds would not continue to be disbursed via grants to public or nonprofit private entities. These organizations would have to find alternative funding sources for projects, or the projects would have to be cancelled. The no action alternative does not meet the purpose and need and would be inconsistent with Congress's intent and funding of such a program. However, analysis of the no action alternative is required by CEQ regulations. It also provides a benchmark for comparing and analyzing the effects of the proposed action.

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

The CEQ regulations direct that the Affected Environment discussion should describe baseline conditions for each resource that may be affected by the Proposed Action. However, given the programmatic nature of this analysis, site-specific information is not available. GPD funded projects may occur in a wide variety of environments including urban areas, rural areas, and tribal lands, and the specific locations are not identified or prescribed at the programmatic level. Therefore, the affected environment is portrayed as a general overview of each resource.

The impact analyses presented in the Environmental Consequences sections for each resource have been developed by gathering data on the affected resources from environmental assessments completed during the 2020 and 2021 calendar years for a similar grant program, VA's State Home Construction Grant Program (SHCGP). Resources considered in this EA are aesthetics; air quality; cultural and historic

resources; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; wildlife and habitat; noise; land use; floodplains, wetlands, and coastal zone management; socioeconomics; community services; solid waste and hazardous materials; traffic, transportation, and parking; utilities; and environmental justice. Table ES-1 summarizes the findings of the impact analysis.

Table ES-1. Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Aesthetics	Temporary impact from presence of heavy equipment and during construction, resulting in less than significant impacts.	None
Air Quality	Construction activities would have short-term minor impacts related to emissions and fugitive dust. Long-term minor emissions from the operation of transitional housing, service centers, and vehicle emissions would result in less than significant impacts.	None
Cultural and Historic Resources	Implementing best management practices (BMPs) and actions arising from consultation would minimize impacts resulting in less than significant impacts to cultural and historic resources.	None
Geology and Soils	Construction activities would include ground disturbance. Disturbances would be stabilized during operation and permit requirements would be met, resulting in less than significant impacts.	None
Hydrology and Water Quality	Implementing BMPs and groundwater control measures, and following permit requirements, would result in less than significant impacts.	None
Wildlife and Habitat	Implementing BMPs and actions arising from consultation would minimize impacts resulting in less than significant impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitats.	None
Noise	Construction activities would have noticeably higher noise levels than current levels. Operation of transitional housing and service centers would have a minor long-term increase in noise levels from traffic. These impacts would be less than significant.	None
Land Use	Rezoning may be necessary to be compatible with surrounding land uses. Less than significant impacts.	None
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Management	No construction in floodplains would occur. Compliance with CZMA requirements and wetland evaluation and permitting would result in impacts that would be less than significant.	None

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Socioeconomics	Short- and long-term beneficial impacts to local employment. Transitional housing and service centers would benefit Veterans experiencing homelessness.	Long-term adverse impact due to absence of program resources supporting services for Veterans experiencing homelessness.
Community Services	Minor increase in demand for fire protection, police services, and emergency services. Less than significant impacts.	None
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Potential for unintentional releases of petroleum and hazardous materials during construction activities. Waste generated during operation transitional housing and service centers would be collected and disposed of properly. Less than significant impacts.	None
Traffic, Transportation, and Parking	Minor short-and long-term impacts to traffic. Less than significant impacts.	None
Utilities	Increased demand for utilities. May require the extension of utility connections. Less than significant impacts.	None
Environmental Justice	No disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations. Less than significant impacts.	None

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
ACM	asbestos-containing materials
APE	area of potential effects
BMP	best management practice
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZMA	Coastal Zone Management Act
dB	decibel
dBA	A-weighted decibel
EA	environmental assessment
EO	Executive Order
ESA	environmental site assessment
GPD	Grant and Per Diem
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NHL	National Historic Landmark
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PEA	programmatic environmental assessment
REC	recognized environmental condition
SHCGP	State Home Construction Grant Program
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
SWPPP	stormwater pollution prevention plan
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VA	U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

1.0 Introduction

This programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Actions (38 CFR Part 26), and relevant guidance from VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects dated, September 2010. Federal agencies are required to consider the environmental effects of their proposed actions.

In accordance with the cited regulations, this PEA provides for public input into the federal decision-making process, provides federal decision-makers with an understanding of potential environmental effects of their decisions before making these decisions, identifies the measures the federal decision-maker could implement to reduce potential environmental effects, and documents the NEPA process.

1.1 Background

VA offers grants annually in accordance with 38 CFR Part 61, "Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program," subject to the availability of appropriations, to fund public or nonprofit private entities providing services to Veterans experiencing homelessness. The purpose is to promote the development and provision of supportive housing and supportive services with the goal of helping Veterans experiencing homelessness achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income, and obtain greater self-determination. The capital grants awarded from this program fund the costs of construction, renovation, or acquisition of a building for use as service centers or transitional housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness. Grants may not be used for operational costs, including salaries.

Because the disbursement of VA funds is a federal action, VA must comply with all applicable federal environmental laws, executive orders (EO), and regulations, including review of potential environmental impacts in accordance with NEPA. This PEA evaluates, at the programmatic level, the potential environmental effects of GPD-funded projects involving construction, renovation, and acquisition of buildings. This PEA identifies, analyzes, and documents the potential environmental impacts associated with the grant component of the GPD program. This PEA will also facilitate VA's compliance with other environmental and historic preservation requirements by providing a framework to address the impacts of actions funded through the GPD program.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to continue to provide grants to support acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of real property used for GPD transitional housing facilities. The proposed action is needed to increase safety and reduce risk to Veterans in GPD transitional housing who otherwise would be experiencing homelessness. The grants would allow GPD grantees to improve the transitional housing they offer to Veterans resulting in less congregate housing and more individual unit style housing. The funding would allow GPD grantees to continue to transform programs and to meet the challenges local communities face when providing safe spaces for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

2.0 Alternatives

This section describes the proposed action and alternatives considered by VA, including those alternatives eliminated from further analysis. NEPA and VA regulations for implementing NEPA require reasonable alternatives to be explored and objectively evaluated.

2.1 Proposed Action

As described in Section 1.1, above, and implemented by 38 CFR part 61, VA's GPD Program provides partial funding for the costs of construction, renovation, or acquisition of a building for use as service centers or transitional housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness. The proposed action for this PEA is to provide capital grants to public or nonprofit private entities so they can assist Veterans experiencing homelessness by helping to ensure the availability of supportive housing and service centers to furnish outreach rehabilitative services, and vocational counseling and training. Specifically, VA provides capital grants for the cost to:

- Construct structures and purchase the underlying land to establish new supportive housing facilities or service centers;
- Acquire structures to establish new supportive housing facilities or service centers, or to expand existing supportive housing facilities or service centers;
- Renovate existing structures to establish new supportive housing facilities or service centers, or to expand existing supportive housing facilities or service centers; and
- Procure a van in accordance with Capital grants for vans.

To ensure the PEA adequately addresses all issues for each grant awarded under this program, grantees would be required to submit adequate information for VA review and approval of each application. The information would identify any issues that require protective or compliance measures. No VA funds would be disbursed to a grantee until determination of consistency with the proposed action, as described in this PEA, can be made. Any projects deemed not to be fully covered by the proposed action evaluated in this PEA would need to have a separate NEPA review which would entail preparation of either a project-specific EA tiered from this PEA or an environmental impact statement.

2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the proposed action would not be implemented. No action would be that funds would not continue to be disbursed via grants to public or nonprofit private entities. These organizations would have to find alternative funding sources for projects, or the projects would have to be cancelled. The no action alternative does not meet the purpose and need and would be inconsistent with Congress's intent and funding of such a program. However, analysis of the no action alternative is required by CEQ regulations. It also provides a benchmark for comparing and analyzing the effects of the proposed action.

2.3 Alternatives Eliminated from Further Consideration

There are no alternatives that have been considered and dismissed.

3.0 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This section provides a description of the environmental resources that could potentially be impacted by projects implemented using GPD grant funding. It serves as a baseline from which to identify and evaluate potential impacts. Resources considered in this PEA are aesthetics; air quality; cultural and historic resources; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; wildlife and habitat; noise; land use; floodplains, wetlands, and coastal management; socioeconomics; community services; solid waste and hazardous materials; traffic, transportation, and parking; utilities; and environmental justice. This section also addresses cumulative impacts and the potential for generating substantial controversy.

The GPD program provides capital grants for the construction of new facilities; acquisition of facilities such as hotels, motels, apartment buildings, single-family houses; renovation of existing facilities, and purchase of vans. Most renovations and purchase of vans are among the classes of actions that would normally be categorically excluded from further NEPA review under the VA NEPA implementing regulations (38 CFR Part 26), and thus have less than significant environmental impacts. Acquisition and construction of facilities are the actions with the greatest potential for impacts, and thus is the focus of the evaluation in this section.

The CEQ regulations and guidance allow for programmatic reviews and direct that the Affected Environment discussion should describe baseline conditions for each resource that may be affected by the Proposed Action. Given the programmatic nature of this analysis, site-specific information is not available. GPD funded projects may occur in a wide variety of environments including urban areas, rural areas, and tribal lands, and the specific locations are not identified or prescribed at the programmatic level. Therefore, the affected environment is portrayed as a general overview of each resource.

Impacts are identified as either significant or less than significant. The terms "effects" and "impacts" are synonymous in this PEA. Where possible, impacts are identified as short-term, temporary, or long-term in relation to the length of the effect of the impact.

The impact analyses presented in the Environmental Consequences sections for each resource have been developed by gathering data on the affected resources from environmental assessments completed during the 2020 and 2021 calendar years for a similar grant program, VA's State Home Construction Grant Program (SHCGP). The SHCGP, regulated under 38 CFR Part 59, is a partnership between VA and the states to construct, renovate, or repair state-owned and -operated nursing homes, domiciliary, and adult day health care facilities. This discussion includes analysis of potential impacts and methods to avoid, reduce, or mitigate potential impacts.

The State Homes are generally larger than the facilities proposed under the GPD program. Over the last 2 years, VA has completed twelve environmental assessments analyzing the potential impacts of the constructing new State Homes. As construction of a new State Home is the action within the SHCGP with the highest potential for significant impact, using the analyses developed in the SHCGP EAs to estimate impacts from the GPD program will demonstrate a likely upper bound for potential impacts from actions under the GPD program. Each of the twelve SHCGP EAs resulted in a finding of no significant impact.

Table 3-1. VA's State Home Construction Grant Program Environmental Assessments Completed in 2020 & 2021

Grant ID #	Location	Number of Beds	Building Area (square feet)	Site Area (acres)	Date EA Completed
01-013	Enterprise, AL	174	187,000	25	July 2021
06-071	Yountsville, CA	240	285,000	615 (existing campus)	June 2020
17-051	Quincy, IL	210 + 80-bed domiciliary	210,000 + 80,000	220 (existing campus)	July 2021
21-022	Bowling Green, KY	60	80,000	25	August 2021
27-051	Bemidji, MN	72	81,000	17	June 2021
27-052	Montevideo, MN	72	95,000	13.5	May 2021
27-053	Preston, MN	54	68,000	16.6	June 2021
28-010	Tradition, MS	100	132,000	25	March 2021
40-062	Sallisaw, OK	180	200,000	40	May 2020
45-009	Sumter, SC	104	126,000	78	July 2021
47-018	Arlington, TN	126	125,000	28.7	November 2020
48-033	Fort Worth, TX	120	110,000	12	December 2020

Based on the data in Table 3-1, acquisition of facilities and construction of new facilities within the GPD program that are under 120,000 square feet and less than 100 beds, as well as additions less than 120,000 square feet to existing facilities and renovations to existing facilities, would be considered within the scope of this PEA, unless site- or project-specific conditions exist that could lead to potentially significant impacts. Facilities that are marginally larger in area or capacity could be considered be within scope of the PEA on a case-by-case basis.

3.1 Aesthetics

3.1.1 Affected Environment

The term aesthetics refers to the subjective visual perception of an area's natural beauty based on some qualitative scenic qualities. Factors typically included in a determination of aesthetic values include site characteristics such as topographic relief, prominence of water in the viewscape, type of vegetation present; diversity of scenery, level of human development or disturbance in the area, and presence or absence of any unique scenic features compared with surrounding land. Often, landscapes with greater diversity of features are considered to be of higher scenic quality.

The aesthetic characteristics of a project area depend on whether the area is a remote, rural, or urban setting. In a remote or rural setting, the visual aesthetics tend to be dominated by naturally occurring landforms and vegetation. Examples include natural landscapes, mountains, undulating land, valleys, cliffs, lakes, streams, beaches, and natural vegetation. Although naturally occurring visual resources dominate rural areas, some signs of human activity are likely to be present and may also contribute to the

visual aesthetics. Examples include farmhouses, agricultural fields, fences, barns, silos, scenic highways, and lighthouses. Vegetation in rural areas is primarily crops grown in tilled fields, grassland, and lawns around farmhouses. Remote areas may have no visible structures.

The natural features present in rural/remote settings may also be present in an urban environment. However, unlike the remote or rural settings, constructed features are normally the dominant visual element in an urban setting. Examples of these features include houses, office buildings, warehouses, rail yards, utility plants, historic buildings, landmarks, parking areas, storage yards, billboards, and signage. Vegetation in an urban setting is primarily lawns, shrubs, and ornamental trees.

3.1.2 Environmental Consequences

3.1.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to aesthetics from the construction and operation of the facilities. Most State Homes were proposed for undeveloped, often rural, areas and are generally much larger than the facilities covered by the GPD program. Construction would involve heavy grading equipment, as well as heavy equipment for initial building construction. The EAs described construction activities such as site preparation, grading, excavation, vehicle traffic, movement of heavy equipment, and paving roadways and parking areas. These activities would have short-term and minor impacts on aesthetics. Although these activities may not be aesthetically consistent with the surrounding area, they would end once construction is complete.

The appearance of facilities would fit within local norms and comply with local ordinances. Landscaping would be aesthetically attractive and be compatible with surrounding properties and land use.

3.1.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to aesthetics would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to aesthetics specific to that potential development.

3.2 Air Quality

3.2.1 Affected Environment

Ambient air quality in an area is characterized by compliance with the primary and secondary National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) sets standards for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. Areas are then classified as attainment, non-attainment, or maintenance with respect to compliance with NAAQS.

Air quality is affected by both stationary sources (for example, urban and industrial developments) and mobile sources (for example, automobiles and trains). In general, urban environments are characterized by elevated levels of criteria pollutants, which can potentially reach unhealthy levels. Rural environments, in contrast, are typically characterized by good air quality for most criteria pollutants due to the lack of pollution- emitting sources. However, due to the migratory nature of air pollutants, emissions from urban areas can negatively impact the air quality of a rural area. Land use practices in rural areas can affect air quality when wind erosion raises dust from tilled fields, and when agricultural burning and fires caused by vegetation management practices adversely affect air quality with smoke and wind-blown ashes.

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

3.2.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to air quality from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction activities and emissions from construction vehicles would have the potential for short-term and minor impacts to air quality. Construction activities such as site preparation, grading, and movement of heavy equipment could generate fugitive dust. There could be short-term health effects and nuisances such as reduced visibility. The amount of fugitive dust would depend on the soil type, wind speed, size and intensity of the activity, and the type of dust suppression measure implemented. These measures could include applying suppressants or palliatives such as water, clay additives, or polymers, stabilizing disturbed areas with vegetation or mulch or limiting earth moving construction activities during high wind conditions.

Exhaust from the operating construction equipment would generate emissions that would have short-term and minor impacts to air quality. Examples of construction equipment that may be used include excavators, bulldozers, backhoes, graders, front-end loaders, dump trucks, roller compactors, water trucks, pump trucks, cranes, paving machines, and concrete mixer trucks. Measures such as using newer construction equipment with emissions controls and reducing idling of construction equipment would minimize emissions.

Operation of transitional housing or service centers would have long-term minor impacts to air quality. Emissions from equipment, such as boilers and generators, and exhaust from vehicles used by Veterans and staff would generate emissions. These emissions would be expected to have a minor impact to air quality.

A Title V operating permit is not anticipated to be required for any of the facilities receiving GPD grants due to the *de minimis* emissions emitted from a housing facility. However, grantees would secure any required air emissions permits and operate within any permit requirements.

Construction and operation of transitional housing or service centers would result in less than significant impacts to air quality.

3.2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to air quality would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to air quality specific to that potential development.

3.3 Cultural and Historic Resources

3.3.1 Affected Environment

Cultural resources are defined by VA Handbook 7545 as "all aspects of the human environment that have historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance, including, but not limited to, historic properties, archaeological resources and data, Native American ancestral remains and cultural items, religious places and practices, historical objects and artifacts, historical documents, and community identity." Cultural resources are protected through several federal laws and associated regulations, including the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

Section 106 of the NHPA and its implementing regulations, 36 CFR Part 800, require an assessment of the potential impact of an undertaking on historic properties that are within the proposed project's area of

potential effect (APE), which is defined as the geographic area(s) "within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly cause alterations in the character or use of historic properties, if any such properties exist."

This PEA does not analyze the potential impacts to cultural and historic resources for individual projects. Instead, the PEA lays out the process that VA would use to comply with Section 106 of the NHPA for each project and ensure there will be no significant impacts to cultural and historic resources.

Section 106 of NHPA directs the federal government to consider the effects of its undertakings on historic properties through a four-step decision-making and compliance process. It is noteworthy that the law does not mandate preservation of historic properties; rather, it mandates that federal agencies follow the decision-making process. The four steps of the Section 106 compliance process are as follows:

1. **Initiate the Section 106 Process.** VA determines whether an undertaking exists, engages the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), identifies potential consulting parties, and develops an appropriate plan for public involvement in consultation with the SHPO/THPO.

On October 15, 2021, pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(c)(4) the GPD program issued a program-wide authorization to grant applicants to initiate consultation on behalf of VA to accelerate the process. On November 5, 2021, VA issued a program-wide consultation package to federally recognized tribes, to determine if any tribe had interests in a project funded by a GPD grant. If any tribe expresses significant interest in a grant, VA will continue the consultation process (steps 2, 3, and 4) directly with the tribe.

For the initial round of GPD capital grants, VA did not receive any responses from tribes with interest in continuing NHPA consultation for a specific grant. VA will issue program-wide consultation packages which will follow the same process for any future rounds of GPD capital grants.

2. **Identify historic properties.** The grant applicant, in consultation with the SHPO/THPO, determines the APE for the undertaking and reviews existing information on historic properties within the APE. The APE is the geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly affect historic properties, if any such properties exist. The APE is determined by the scope of the project, the characteristics of the project area (for example. topography, building density, land use), and the type of historic property being considered, and may be different for different kinds of effects caused by the undertaking. Also, the APE for historic properties may be different from the area studied for other resource types under NEPA. Once the APE is established, the grant applicant gathers information from the SHPO/THPO, federally recognized tribes, consulting parties, and other individuals or organizations likely to have knowledge of historic properties in the area, defines the undertaking's potential effects on historic properties. This step also involves the grant applicant determining whether a property is listed on or eligible for listing on the NRHP in consultation with the SHPO/THPO.

3. **Assess adverse effects of undertaking on historic properties.** If the grant applicant determines that no historic properties would be affected by the undertaking or that there would be no adverse effect to historic properties, the grant applicant must seek the concurrence of the SHPO/THPO and notify other consulting parties. If the SHPO/THPO concur, the consultation process ends at this step. However, if the grant applicant, through consultation, determines that the undertaking may adversely affect historic properties, then VA must join the consultation and must notify the SHPO/THPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and any other consulting parties. Federal agencies must consider possible direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on historic properties. Direct effects include physical impacts, while indirect effects may include visual, atmospheric, and audible impacts on historic properties.

4. Resolve adverse effects to historic properties. VA must resolve adverse effects by seeking ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the undertaking's adverse effect through consultation with the SHPO/THPO, other identified consulting parties, including the grantee and subgrantee, and ACHP, if participating. If avoiding or minimizing the adverse effect through re-design or other alternative means is not possible, VA, the SHPO/THPO, the grantee and subgrantee, and other consulting parties may enter into a Memorandum of Agreement or Programmatic Agreement that outlines appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect(s) to historic properties. In cases where VA and the other consulting parties fail to agree on appropriate measures to resolve the adverse effect(s), VA or the other consulting parties may decide to terminate consultation, in which case the ACHP issues comments to VA. VA must take these comments into consideration before notifying ACHP of its final decision, after which the project may proceed.

A higher standard is applicable to federal agencies when their actions may affect historic properties that are designated as National Historic Landmarks (NHLs). In accordance with Section 110 of NHPA, federal agencies must, to the maximum extent possible, minimize harm to National Historic Landmarks directly and adversely affected by their undertakings prior to their approval. Additionally, federal agencies must notify and formally invite the Secretary of the Interior (via the National Park Service) to the consultation process and invite the ACHP to participate in the consultation process to resolve adverse effects. VA will follow these procedures for any GPD grants that may affect NHLs.

3.3.2 Environmental Consequences

3.3.2.1 Proposed Action

VA will follow the Section 106 review process described above to properly identify all historic properties, determine the effect of undertakings on identified historic properties, and resolve adverse effects of its undertakings to historic properties. This process was applied to each of the twelve VA State Home Construction Grant Program projects that were analyzed in 2020 and 2021 and resulted in no significant impacts to cultural and historic resources.

Activities under this program that could have adverse effects on cultural and historic resources include demolition, modification of historic buildings and structures, ground disturbance, and activities within the APE of a listed or eligible historic property. Types of adverse effects may include the loss of the historic property, abandonment of the historic property, alteration of historic-defining features or components, and diminishment of viewsheds. Construction and renovation projects involving ground disturbance in previously undisturbed areas can have the potential to result in impacts to archaeological resources. Projects would ideally be planned to avoid adverse effects to historic properties including undocumented archaeological resources.

Proposed interior modification of existing structures and facilities that are not considered historic properties would have no effect on historic or cultural resources. Proposed modification of existing structures and facilities that are historic properties or exterior work on structures and facilities near a historic property may have adverse effects on historic properties. During the renovation and/or construction process, buried cultural artifacts may be found.

Consultation with applicable agencies and other consulting parties is required under Section 106 of the NHPA. Consultation and evaluation of the project must take place prior to carrying out any proposed actions. Through the consultation process, mitigation measures and contingency plans may be developed. Common mitigation measures for projects involving land disturbance include archaeological monitoring in areas of high probability for buried resources during initial excavation activities and implementation of a contingency plan in the event that any culturally or historically significant

materials are unearthed, which would include such steps as halting all activities immediately upon discovery.

If historic properties are discovered or unanticipated effects on historic properties found, the applicant will notify VA, and VA shall consult with the SHPO immediately and make reasonable efforts to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to such properties. In the event of an unanticipated discovery of human remains or burials, the applicant will notify VA and will immediately stop work within the area of discovery and notify local law enforcement. VA will consult with the SHPO/THPO.

3.3.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to cultural and historic resources would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to cultural or historic resources specific to that potential development.

3.4 Geology and Soils

3.4.1 Affected Environment

The geology of an area refers specifically to the surface and near-surface materials of the earth and to how those materials were formed. These resources are typically described in terms of regional or local geology, including mineral resources, earth materials, soil resources, and topography.

Descriptions of these resources include bedrock or sediment type and structure, unique geologic features, depositional or erosional environment, and age or history. Mineral resources include usable geological materials that have some economic or academic value. Soil is the unconsolidated loose covering of broken rock particles and decaying organic matter overlying the bedrock or parent material. Soils are typically described by their complex type, slope, and physical characteristics.

Soil characteristics within an area depend on the parent material in that area. Soil characteristics vary across the U.S. and its territories. Areas with similar soils are grouped and labeled as soil series because of their similar origins and chemical and physical properties, which cause the soils to perform similarly for land use purposes.

Geologic, topographic, and soil characteristics may impose limitations on the potential suitability of a particular site for use as transitional housing or service centers. Areas characterized by susceptibility to flooding, seismic or volcanic activity, tsunamis, landslides, mudslides, structural instability, excessive erodibility, steep slopes or karst landscapes may entirely preclude the implementation of a proposed project at a particular location, require the use of certain engineering technologies, or require consultation with state or federal agencies before the proposed project may proceed.

3.4.2 Environmental Consequences

3.4.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to geology and soils from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction activities would cause short-term impacts on soils due to removal of topsoil for site leveling and grading. Grading and leveling would also result in minor changes to site topography. Disturbed and exposed soils would be prone to erosion by wind and stormwater. Potential adverse effects from erosion or sedimentation would be mitigated through appropriate best management practices (BMPs) and

adherence to a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, and other relevant permits

The construction and operation of transitional housing or service centers would have less than significant impacts to geology and soils.

3.4.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to geology or soils would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to geology and soils specific to that potential development.

3.5 Hydrology and Water Quality

3.5.1 Affected Environment

Water is a central component of any community for both the natural and human inhabitants. The availability of water, including surface water and groundwater, and the quality of those waters, play a critical role in determining the natural community structure and in supporting human activity. There are numerous laws and regulations that protect both hydrology and water quality on the federal level and on the state and regional levels. On the federal level, the primary law protecting the "chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters" is the Clean Water Act (CWA). Section 401 certifications issued by states or authorized tribes protect water quality, and Section 404 permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) protect waters of the U.S., including wetlands. The Safe Drinking Water Act protects the quality of the nation's drinking water and provides limited protection of groundwater resources. The River and Harbor Act and the Water Resources Development Act assign to USACE the responsibility for ensuring the navigability of the nation's rivers and harbors and providing flood protection. The Water Resources Development Act also provides funding for various water resource development projects that meet those objectives as well as for coastal erosion and levee construction projects. The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), and numerous fish and wildlife protection, federal land management, and energy laws, also protect water resources. Though the above-mentioned laws and regulations are by no means exhaustive, they are some of the more commonly cited requirements protecting water resources.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.) to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection.

3.5.2 Environmental Consequences

3.5.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to hydrology and water quality from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction activities, such as site preparation, grading, movement of heavy equipment, and paving of parking areas could temporarily increase sedimentation and erosion. These activities would expose soil surfaces and could increase the potential for sedimentation and surface runoff. Potential impacts would be minimized with the implementation of a SWPPP and associated erosion and sediment

control BMPs for soil stabilization. For projects over one acre, an NPDES permit would be required. The NPDES permit and SWPPP identify potential stormwater contaminants and address how to minimize stormwater pollution. The SWPPP would specify BMPs designed to prevent stormwater pollution such as temporary construction entrances, silt fences, inlet protection, ditch checks, slope protection, and sediment barriers.

During operation of facilities, impervious and hardened surfaces such as parking areas, and other paved areas, would increase surface runoff with the potential for erosion and sedimentation. However, landscaping and vegetation cover and a stormwater system could be included in the design of the facilities to reduce these effects. Landscaping and vegetation cover would stabilize soil and prevent erosion and sedimentation. A stormwater system would capture runoff from storm events and reduce the potential risk of contaminants entering a watershed.

If shallow groundwater is encountered during construction, appropriate groundwater control and dewatering measures such as sump pumps, wellpoint systems, or deep well systems, would be implemented.

Operation of the transitional facilities and service centers is not anticipated to impact groundwater resources. There would not be any actions that would disturb groundwater sources. As a result, impacts to groundwater would be minor and temporary.

The construction and operation of the transitional housing and service centers would have less than significant impacts to hydrology and water quality.

3.5.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to hydrology and water quality would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to hydrology and water quality specific to that potential development.

3.6 Wildlife and Habitat

3.6.1 Affected Environment

The Endangered Species Act establishes a national program for the conservation of threatened and endangered species of fish, wildlife, and plants, and the ecosystems upon which they depend. It is administered by the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The USFWS has primary responsibility for terrestrial and freshwater organisms, while the responsibilities of NMFS are mainly marine species such as salmon and whales.

Under the Endangered Species Act, species may be listed as either "endangered" or "threatened." Endangered means a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Threatened means a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The Endangered Species Act makes it unlawful for a person to take a listed animal without a permit. Take is defined as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct." The term "harm" is defined as "an act which actually kills or injures wildlife. Such an act may include significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering." Listed plants are not protected from take, although it is illegal to collect or maliciously harm them on federal lands.

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires federal agencies to consult with the USFWS or NMFS to ensure that actions they authorize, fund, or carry out will not jeopardize listed species or destroy

or adversely modify the critical habitat of a listed species. Critical habitat is specific, formally designated geographic areas that contain the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species and that need special management or protection. Critical habitat designations affect only federal agency actions or federally funded or permitted activities. Critical habitat may include areas not occupied by the species at the time of listing but that are essential to its conservation.

If a proposed action "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" a listed species, consultation with USFWS or NMFS can be initiated informally by the federal agency or their designated non-federal representative. If adverse effects are likely or informal consultation results in a determination that it is required, formal consultation with USFWS or NMFS is undertaken. In formal consultation, the agency or representative submits a biological assessment evaluating the potential effects of the proposed project, and USFWS or NMFS develops a biological opinion on the likelihood that the proposed activity will or will not jeopardize the continued existence of the resource and on the effect of the proposed activity on the endangered species. The biological opinion may include recommendations for modification of the proposed activity. The USFWS or NMFS may require the federal agency to provide additional information or conduct appropriate biological studies if there is insufficient information to conclude that the proposed activity is not likely to jeopardize the species or its habitat. In the relatively few cases where USFWS or NMFS determines that the proposed action will jeopardize the species, they must offer "reasonable and prudent alternatives" about how the proposed action could be modified to avoid jeopardy.

3.6.2 Environmental Consequences

3.6.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to wildlife and habitat from the construction and operation of the facilities, although all required biological studies and/or some level of consultation with USFWS, as well as actions to avoid or mitigate potential impacts to species. Common actions to minimize impacts include:

- Replace vegetation that is damaged or removed during construction with native, noninvasive, varieties prior to the conclusion of the construction phase.
- Tree clearing would be limited to days outside of the summer maternity roosting season to avoid potential impacts to listed species of bats.

The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers have the potential to disturb terrestrial wildlife and their habitat however, VA will not be able to determine whether the impacts of the specific activity to the listed species or designated critical habitat are significant without an appropriate site-specific evaluation. If the site-specific evaluation, which may include a biological study, results in something other than a No Effect determination, then an appropriate level of consultation with USFWS or NMFS will be necessary

Construction of transitional housing or service centers would have less than significant impacts to wildlife and habitat.

3.6.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to wildlife and habitat would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to wildlife and habitat specific to that potential development.

3.7 Noise

3.7.1 Affected Environment

Noise is defined as unwanted sound that interferes with normal human activities or wildlife behavior or may otherwise diminish environmental quality. Sound is most commonly measured in decibels (dB) on the A-weighted scale (dBA), which is the scale most similar to the range of sounds that the human ear can hear. The day-night average sound level is an average measure of sound. The day-night average sound level descriptor is accepted by federal agencies as a standard for estimating sound impacts and establishing guidelines for compatible land uses. In a typical day, most people are exposed to sound levels of 50 to 55 dB or higher.

Typical quiet daytime noise levels in rural areas with no substantial noise sources might be 30 to 40 dBA, while quiet daytime noise levels in suburban areas might be 40 to 50 dB(A) (Federal Highway Administration, 2018). For comparison purposes, Table 3-2 lists typical noise levels from construction equipment that could likely be used in construction of the outpatient facility.

Table 3-2. Construction Equipment Noise Emission Levels

Equipment	Typical Noise Level 50 Feet from Source (dBA)
Air compressor	80
Backhoe	80
Concrete pump	82
Dozer	85
Generator	82
Grader	85
Loader	80
Paver	85
Pneumatic tool	85
Pump	77
Roller	85
Saw	85
Scraper	85
Truck	84

(Federal Highway Administration, 2017)

For evaluation of impacts in this PEA VA applied the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration standards for noise abatement found in 23 CFR Part 772 – Table 1. These establish, for example, the need to consider noise abatement measures for actions that produce sound levels that 10 percent of the time exceed 70 dB in areas with sensitive receptors (such as playgrounds, parks, schools, libraries, residences, and hospitals) and exceed 75 dB in developed lands.

3.7.2 Environmental Consequences

3.7.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant noise impacts from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction of the transitional housing or service centers would cause an increase in ambient noise in the areas surrounding the site. Increases in noise levels would occur from the operation of heavy equipment, haul/dump/concrete trucks, construction activities (for example, saws, drills, hammers) and sawing for tree removal. Peak noise levels associated with construction would be noticeably higher than current noise levels. Based on the noise levels in Table 3-2, construction noise could be in the 77 to 85 dBA range compared to current noise levels of 40 to 50 dBA. The impact of these levels would depend on the time of day, duration, and frequency of the noise event. The noise level would depend on the distance from the noise source to the receptor, topography, structures, and vegetative cover. If a sensitive receptor is shielded from the noise source by topography, structures, or vegetation, then noise levels would be lower than by distance alone. Construction activities would comply with local noise ordinances and would result in temporary and less than significant impacts.

Operation of transitional housing and service centers would result in increases in noise compared to existing conditions. Noises would include sounds from an increase in traffic on nearby roadways and at the project site including worker, visitor, and delivery vehicles. Stationary sources of noise would primarily be the equipment associated with HVAC units. Long-term increases in noise levels from operation of the transitional housing and service centers are not expected to result in significant adverse impacts.

3.7.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no noise impacts would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for noise impacts specific to that potential development.

3.8 Land Use

3.8.1 Affected Environment

The term "land use" refers to real property classifications that indicate either natural conditions or the types of human activity occurring on a parcel, or within the structures that occupy the parcel. Types of land uses may include residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, vacant land, and parks. In many cases, land use descriptions are codified in local zoning laws. Zoning focuses on how land is currently being used and how it will be used in the future. The goal is to provide for public safety and protect the character of neighborhoods and special districts. An important factor affecting a Proposed Action in terms of land use is its compliance with applicable land use or zoning regulations. Other relevant factors include existing land use at the Project Site, the types of land uses on adjacent properties, their proximity to the Proposed Action, and the duration of a proposed activity and its permanence. The significance of potential land use effects is based on the level of land use sensitivity in areas affected by the Proposed Action and the compatibility of a proposed project with existing conditions.

3.8.2 Environmental Consequences

3.8.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to land use from the construction and operation of the facilities. Proposed

new construction projects on undeveloped or undisturbed sites that are consistent with existing land use/ zoning designations and do not affect important farmlands would not have significant impacts on land use.

Some proposed new construction projects on undeveloped or undisturbed sites may involve land use/zoning changes. Construction of a new facility may require a change in land use or zoning, depending on the location chosen for construction. Any proposed projects involving structural changes to the existing facility require a construction permit from local authorities prior to construction. Conditions of the permit normally specify that the proposed facility be constructed and operated in compliance with local zoning ordinances, or that a zoning variance be obtained. The grantee or subgrantee is responsible for obtaining the necessary construction permits.

If a proposed new construction project will convert prime or unique farmland to non-agricultural use, VA will conduct the required assessment (Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form AD-1006) and consult with the Natural Resources Conservation Service when necessary. If a proposed project scores greater than 160 points on Form AD-1006, requiring consideration of appropriate alternative actions that could reduce adverse impacts (such as alternative sites, modifications, or mitigation), a project-specific EA tiered from this PEA will be required.

3.8.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to land use would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to land use specific to that potential development.

3.9 Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Management

3.9.1 Affected Environment

Floodplains are the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including, at a minimum, that area subject to a 0.2 percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year. Floodplains perform a variety of essential functions including floodwater conveyance and storage, groundwater recharge, wave attenuation, streambank erosion, reduction in sedimentation rates, water quality maintenance, and support of highly productive ecosystems.

Most floodplains are adjacent to streams, lakes, or oceans. Beaches and small river valleys are usually easily recognizable as floodplains, but less obvious floodplains occur in dry washes and on alluvial fans in arid parts of the western United States, around prairie potholes, in areas subject to high groundwater levels, and in low lying areas where water may accumulate. Sheet flooding and ponding occur in areas where there is no clearly defined channel, and the path of flooding is unpredictable.

EO 11988, Floodplain Management, as amended by EO 13690, aims to eliminate the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains, and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative for locating a project outside of the floodplain. EO 11988 applies to federally funded projects and directs agencies to consider alternatives to siting projects within a floodplain.

Wetlands are areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support, or that under normal hydrological conditions does or would support, a prevalence of vegetation or aquatic life typically adapted for these soil conditions. Examples of wetlands include swamps, marshes, estuaries, bogs, beaches, wet meadows, sloughs, and mud flats, among others. Wetlands have important ecological functions and are biologically diverse. They assimilate nutrients in

surrounding surface waters, remove suspended solids and pollutants from stormwater, and protect shorelines from wind and wave action and storm-generated forces.

EO 11990, Protection of Wetlands, directs federal agencies to "avoid to the extent possible the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands whenever there is a practicable alternative." Federal agencies shall minimize impacts to wetlands and preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands in carrying out their responsibilities for the use, management, or development of federal lands.

The CZMA was enacted in 1972 to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore and enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone. Coastal states are encouraged to develop state coastal management programs, and comprehensively manage and balance competing uses of, and impacts to, coastal resources. The United States Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration approves states' coastal management programs. The CZMA requires that any federal actions affecting any land or water use, or natural resource of the coast be consistent with the enforceable policies of a state's federally approved coastal management program.

3.9.2 Environmental Consequences

3.9.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to floodplains, wetlands and coastal management from the construction and operation of the facilities. The primary factor responsible for less than significant impacts in the twelve State Home EAs was avoiding siting facilities in locations within the designated floodplain or where wetlands were present.

The GPD grant program will not fund acquisition of land or existing facilities or new construction within the 100-yr floodplain.

Development in a designated coastal zone would have to comply with the CZMA as administered by each state. CZMA compliance would ensure impacts to the coastal zone would be less than significant.

GPD-funded projects affecting wetlands may require site-specific evaluation and coordination with USACE to determine if jurisdictional wetlands are present and development of mitigation measures. Projects that only minimally affect wetlands may meet the conditions of one of USACE's existing Nationwide Permits, which authorize activities that meet certain conditions and have minimal individual and cumulative adverse environmental effects. Projects that would have substantial impacts to wetlands may require an Individual Permit, potentially with a mitigation requirement. A Water Quality Certification or waiver pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA is required for Section 404 permit actions.

If jurisdictional wetlands are filled under either type of USACE permit, meeting all permit conditions would ensure the impact would be less than significant.

3.9.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to floodplains, wetlands, and coastal management would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to floodplains, wetlands, and coastal management specific to that potential development.

3.10 Socioeconomics

3.10.1 Affected Environment

The purpose of the socioeconomic impact analysis in this PEA is to assess the potential impact of the Proposed Action on local economic and social conditions. Socioeconomic indicators, such as population, housing, and regional economic activity inform the assessment of socioeconomics and are utilized to understand the community potentially affected by the Proposed Action.

3.10.2 Environmental Consequences

3.10.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to socioeconomics from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction of new transitional housing or service centers would make a slight contribution to the local economy by using local construction labor and through the possible use of local construction materials and supplies. Once constructed, operation of a facility would likely provide long-term employment opportunities for residents in the surrounding community. Indirect benefits to local businesses would occur from spending by employees, Veterans, and visitors to a new facility. There would also be benefits to Veterans experiencing homelessness by providing transitional housing from a facility dedicated to Veterans.

Adverse health and safety risks to child populations would not likely result from the construction and operation of transitional housing or service centers. Securing construction areas, fencing service areas and equipment pads, and using landscaping around the perimeter of the property would prevent unauthorized access and associated public safety risks during construction.

The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers would have an overall beneficial impact on socioeconomics.

3.10.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to socioeconomics would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to socioeconomics specific to that potential development.

The availability of alternative funding sources to completely replace VA grant funds is unlikely and would likely vary across locations and projects. Not providing the GPD program's financial support for constructing and operating the transitional housing and service centers would limit VA's ability to ensure adequate facilities are available to meet anticipated future needs of Veterans. This would be a long-term adverse impact to Veterans experiencing homelessness in local areas and across the country in general.

3.11 Community Services

3.11.1 Affected Environment

Community services include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, and recreational areas. Transitional housing and service centers would be located in areas where these community services are present.

3.11.2 Environmental Consequences

3.11.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to community services from the construction and operation of the facilities. The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers would have a minor increase in the demand for fire protection, police services, and emergency medical services. During construction, there could be an increase in the potential for workplace accidents related to construction activities. The implementation of best construction practices and health and safety procedures by the construction and work crews would minimize such hazards. Construction and work crews would be required to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety and health regulations for construction detailed in 29 CFR Part 1926. The operation of transitional housing and service centers could slightly increase the number of calls for fire protection, police services, or emergency medical services, but is not expected to increase the demand to service levels that would require additional fire, police or emergency staff, equipment, or facilities.

The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers would have less than significant adverse impacts on community services.

3.11.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to community services would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to community services specific to that potential development.

3.12 Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials

3.12.1 Affected Environment

Waste is generated by virtually all activities and is a standard consideration in managing resources. Waste is defined as any byproduct of an action, including chemicals and other hazardous materials and construction debris. Hazardous waste is defined as liquid, solid, contained gas, or sludge wastes that contain properties that are dangerous or potentially harmful to human health or the environment. Hazardous materials may be classified in a number of different categories based on laws and regulations that define their characteristics and use.

Applicable laws and regulations include the following:

- Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) (42 U.S.C. 9601, et seq.)
- Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6901, et seq.)
- Toxics Substances Control Act (15 U.S.C. 2601-2629)

Grantees that propose property acquisition, construction of new facilities, or large additions that involve ground-disturbing activities will need to provide a Phase I environmental site assessment (ESA) conducted in accordance with ASTM Standard E1527-13 (or the most recent update), *Standard for Environmental Site Assessments: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Process.* The purpose of a Phase I ESA is to identify, to the extent feasible, recognized environmental conditions (RECs) at the property being investigated. A REC is the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substances, with respect to the range of contaminants within the scope of CERCLA or petroleum products, in, on, or at a property due to any release to the environment; under conditions that indicate a release to the environment, or

under conditions that pose a material threat of a future release to the environment. RECs do not include *de minimis* conditions that generally do not represent a threat to human health or the environment and that generally would not be the subject of an enforcement action if brought to the attention of appropriate governmental agencies.

3.12.2 Environmental Consequences

3.12.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant solid waste and hazardous materials impacts from the construction and operation of the facilities. If a Phase I ESA identifies a REC, a Phase II ESA may be required. A Phase II ESA would obtain data concerning actual property conditions, often by sampling and laboratory analysis. Information gathered from Phase I and Phase II ESAs would guide potential remedial actions and mitigations to protect workers and the public during construction, and staff, Veterans, and visitors during operation of transitional housing and service centers.

Acquisition or renovation of existing structures for transitional housing and service centers may need to be evaluated for the presence of asbestos-containing materials (ACM), lead-based paint, and polychlorinated biphenyls. ACM and lead-based paint in an existing structure are not within the scope of the ASTM Phase I ESA standard, and therefore may not always be noted in a Phase I ESA report.

Asbestos-Containing Materials
The rehabilitation of asbestos-containing building materials is regulated under the USEPA National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants and the OSHA Asbestos Construction Standard (29 CFR 1926.1101).

Lead-Based Paint
The disturbance of lead-based paint is regulated by OSHA and the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants statute for general dust control. The disposal of commercial waste materials containing lead from rehabilitation, abatement, and/or demolition is regulated by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Painted surfaces scheduled for disturbance are required to be tested and abated.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)
Building materials "coated or serviced" with PCB bulk product waste (for example, caulk, paint, mastics, sealants) at concentrations equal to or greater than 50 ppm at the time of designation for disposal are to be managed as PCB bulk product waste in accordance with 40 CFR 761.3 and the USEPA "PCB Bulk Product Waste Reinterpretation" memorandum dated October 24, 2012.

Construction of the transitional housing or service centers would increase the presence and use of petroleum and hazardous materials and would result in a short-term potential for minor impacts from spills or accidents. The operation of construction equipment requires petroleum and hazardous materials such as oil, diesel, gasoline, hydraulic fluids, and lubricants. BMPs such as proper storage and labeling of these substances in approved containers, storage of the containers on a level and impervious surface and providing a secondary containment system around fuel storage containers and during refueling activities would reduce the potential for unintentional releases.

Wastes generated as part of construction activities would be properly managed and disposed of according to federal, state, and local regulations. Wastes would be collected and properly disposed of by a waste disposal company at an approved disposal facility.

Operation of the transitional housing and service centers would generate solid waste, hazardous materials, and medical waste. These wastes would be managed and disposed of in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations. The wastes would be collected and properly disposed of by approved waste disposal companies at approved disposal facilities.

Acquisition, construction, and operation waste handling would comply with all applicable requirements. As a result, impacts related to solid waste and hazardous materials would be less than significant.

3.12.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no solid waste and hazardous materials impacts would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for solid waste and hazardous materials impacts specific to that potential development.

3.13 Traffic, Transportation, and Parking

3.13.1 Affected Environment

A local transportation network provides the means for moving throughout a community. This network includes major roads such as freeways and highways, as well as local roads in neighborhoods. Analysis of transportation includes traffic and parking. Traffic is affected by the size, and location of the transitional housing facility or service center. Other factors that can be considered in an analysis are public transportation and pedestrian routes, which often alleviate impacts on roads from automobiles through providing alternate means of moving around an area.

Large transitional housing facilities or service centers may require a traffic study to evaluate the potential impacts. The traffic studies describe the current capacity of the roads and the existing levels of service for intersections, and project future impacts using based on traffic data, site access configurations, site trip generation and distribution, and incorporation of mitigation.

3.13.2 Environmental Consequences

3.13.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to traffic, transportation, and parking from the construction and operation of the facilities. Construction of transitional housing or service centers would increase traffic associated with construction equipment, construction crews' personal vehicles, and trucks. The short-term increased traffic volumes could cause delays if they occur during morning and afternoon peak times and would contribute to congestion of the roadways and intersections. The operation of transitional housing and service centers would contribute to higher traffic volumes, congestion, and delays. Large transitional housing facilities (greater than 100 beds) or services centers would be evaluated for the need to prepare a traffic study based on site-specific conditions. Traffic studies prepared for large transitional housing facilities or service centers would guide potential designs and mitigations to limit impacts to local traffic. Smaller facilities would have no discernible impact to traffic.

The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers would result in less than significant impacts to traffic, transportation, and parking.

3.13.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to traffic, transportation, and parking would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to traffic, transportation, and parking specific to that potential development.

3.14 Utilities

3.14.1 Affected Environment

Utilities include municipal water, sanitary sewer, electricity, gas, stormwater, and telecommunication services. Utilities may be provided by public utilities or private service providers. In some situations, supplemental electricity may be generated onsite (wind turbine or solar panels), water could be provided by an onsite well, or a septic system could be utilized instead of municipal sewer.

3.14.2 Environmental Consequences

3.14.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to utilities from the construction and operation of the facilities. The construction and operation of the transitional housing and service centers would increase consumption of utilities such as domestic water, electricity, and natural gas, would increase generation of wastewater. The capacity of existing utilities would be reviewed when site plans, construction plans, and loads are finalized. Grantees would be responsible for working with local utilities to connect to services.

These utilities are generally available in the vicinity of proposed transitional housing facilities and service centers but could require extending service to the facilities. Extending and connecting utility services could result in ground-disturbing activities in adjacent easements and rights-of way. It is anticipated that these impacts would be short-term and minor.

Stormwater from transitional housing and service centers may discharge to a municipal sewer system, underground stormwater basins, or to stormwater retention ponds.

The construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers would result in less than significant impacts to utilities.

3.14.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to utilities would occur as a result of VA's actions. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to utilities specific to that potential development.

3.15 Environmental Justice

3.15.1 Affected Environment

The goal of environmental justice review from a federal perspective is to ensure fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and economic situations with regard to the implementation and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, and federal policies and programs. EO 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (and the February 11, 1994, Presidential Memorandum providing additional guidance for this EO requires federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, "disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations."

Grantees propose potential sites for transitional housing or service centers to best serve Veterans experiencing homelessness. Tools such as EJSCREEN, a USEPA-developed environmental justice screening and mapping tool, can assist with identifying minority and low-income populations in the vicinity of projects.

3.15.2 Environmental Consequences

3.15.2.1 Proposed Action

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 all found less than significant impacts to minority or low-income groups from the construction and operation of the facilities. Transitional housing and service centers could have minor impacts to minority or low-income groups. During construction, there would be minor impacts from noise, fugitive dust, and traffic to nearby populations. The operation of the transitional housing and service centers could have a minor effect due to increased noise and traffic. These impacts would affect nearby populations, which for some project locations may be primarily low-income or minority populations. However, the impacts are not expected to be high (using the terminology from EO 12898, and defined in this PEA as significant), thus would not constitute disproportionately "high and adverse human health or environmental effects" on minority and low-income populations. In addition, Veterans who are members of minority or low-income populations would have the beneficial effect of greater access to transitional housing and service centers.

The construction and operation of the transitional housing and service centers would result in less than significant impacts to environmental justice.

3.15.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no impacts to environmental justice would occur as a result of VA's actions. The capacity of transitional housing facilities and service centers for Veterans experiencing homelessness may be inadequate. However, the grantees could obtain funding from other sources with the potential for impacts to environmental justice specific to that potential development.

3.16 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are the incremental impacts of the proposed action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions.

It was not feasible to evaluate cumulative impacts in every location where a project funded by the GPD program may occur. It is difficult to ascertain potential impacts caused by past, present or future actions when the affected environment is not well defined, such as in this PEA.

The twelve EAs for VA's State Home Construction Grant Program prepared in 2020 and 2021 found that there would be cumulative impacts to some resources, but all cumulative impacts would be less than significant from the construction and operation of the facilities. As the State Homes are generally larger than the facilities proposed under the GPD program, it is expected that transitional housing and services centers would not have significant cumulative environmental impacts.

4.0 Mitigation and Minimization Measures

Table 4-1 summarizes the mitigation and minimization measures identified in Section 3.0. Mitigation measures are typically project-specific requirements, not routinely implemented as part of a development project, that are necessary to reduce potentially adverse environmental impacts.

The table does not include BMPs that are regularly implemented as part of proposed activities, as appropriate. In addition, regulatory compliance is not considered mitigation, but generally greatly contributes to reducing or preventing environmental impacts.

The measures listed in Table 4-1 would be implemented by grantees during construction and operation of transitional housing and service centers.

Table 4-1. Description and Type of Mitigation and Minimization Measures by Resource

Resource	Description
Cultural and Historic Resources	Should previously unidentified historic or culturally significant items be discovered during project construction, the construction contractor would immediately cease work in the area of the discovery until appropriate SHPO/THPO, and Tribes are contacted to properly identify and appropriately treat discovered items in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal law(s).
	Should human remains be identified during ground-disturbing activities, all work in the vicinity of the discovery would cease immediately and local law enforcement contacted. The need for further consultation would be based on age and type of discovery as determined by initial assessment (i.e., likely crime scene, recent, historic, or prehistoric).
	Mitigation and minimization measures developed during NHPA Section 106 consultation to address potential adverse effects to cultural and historic resources will be implemented.
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	A Phase I ESA will be prepared for all property acquisitions and construction of new facilities.
Wildlife and Habitat	Mitigation and minimization measures developed during Section 7 consultation to address potential adverse effects to threatened and endangered species will be implemented.
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management	Projects will not include new development within 100-year floodplain.
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	A Phase I ESA will be prepared for all property acquisitions and construction of new facilities.
Traffic, Transportation, and Parking	A traffic study will be conducted for new construction of large facilities and mitigation and minimization measures in the study will be implemented.

5.0 Public Participation

VA invites public participation in decision-making on new proposals through the NEPA process. Public participation is guided by the VA NEPA regulations (38 CFR Part 26) and with additional guidance provided in VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects. Because of the positive care aspect for Veterans experiencing homelessness, VA expected there to be low potential for generating controversy. Agencies, organizations, and members of the public with a potential interest in the proposed action were encouraged to participate during the 30-day public comment period.

5.1 Agency Coordination and Consultation

On October 15, 2021, the GPD program issued a memorandum providing program-wide authorization for grant applicants to initiate NHPA consultation with SHPOs and other parties. VA provided the PEA to USEPA. Further coordination with applicable agencies will occur on a project-specific basis, as necessary for individual grants.

5.2 Native American Consultation

VA initiated consultation with federally recognized Native American Tribes in accordance with 36 CFR 800.2 and EO 13175, *Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments*, November 6, 2000. On November 5, 2021, VA issued a program-wide consultation package to federally recognized tribes, to determine if any tribe had interests in a project funded by a GPD grant. For the initial round of GPD capital grants, VA did not receive any responses from tribes with interest in continuing NHPA consultation for a specific grant. VA will initiate consultation with federally recognized Native American Tribes for each round of future capital improvement grants.

5.3 Public and Agency Review

On November 18, 2021, VA published and distributed the Draft PEA for a 30-day public comment period as announced by a Notice of Availability published on the GPD program website and emailed to over 1,200 GPD interested parties. The Draft PEA was made available on the webpage of the VA Office of Construction & Facilities Management – Environmental Program Office, https://www.cfm.va.gov/environmental/. USEPA provided a response stating the agency had no comments. No other responses or comments were received from agencies or the public.

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7.0 Glossary

Aesthetics—Pertaining to the quality of human perception of natural beauty.

Ambient Air Quality Standards—Those standards established according to the Clean Air Act to protect health and welfare.

Attainment area—Region that meets the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for a criteria pollutant under the Clean Air Act.

Best management practices (BMPs)—Methods, measures, or practices to prevent or reduce environmental impacts.

Contaminants—Any physical, chemical, biological, or radiological substances that have an adverse effect on air, water, or soil.

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)—An agency in the Executive Office of the President composed of three members appointed by the President, subject to approval by the Senate. Each member shall be exceptionally qualified to analyze and interpret environmental trends, and to appraise programs and activities of the federal government. Members are to be conscious of and responsive to the scientific, economic, social, aesthetic, and cultural needs of the Nation; and to formulate and recommend national policies to promote the improvement of the quality of the environment. Develop and issue guidance for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act.

Cultural and historic resources—The physical evidence of our Nation's heritage. Includes archaeological sites; historic buildings, structures, and districts; and localities with social significance to the human community. Cultural resources are defined by VA Handbook 7545 as "all aspects of the human environment that have historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance, including, but not limited to, historic properties, archaeological resources and data, Native American ancestral remains and cultural items, religious places and practices, historical objects and artifacts, historical documents, and community identity."

Cumulative impact—The impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to the other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

Decibel (dB)—A unit of measurement of sound pressure level.

Direct impact—A direct impact is caused by a proposed action and occurs at the same time and place.

Emission—A release of a pollutant.

Endangered species—Any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Environmental assessment (EA)—A concise public document prepared by a federal agency to aid an agency's compliance with NEPA and support its determination of whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.

Erosion—The wearing away of the land surface by detachment and movement of soil and rock fragments through the action of moving water and geological agents.

Floodplain—The relatively flat area or lowlands adjoining a river, stream, ocean, lake, or other body of water that is susceptible to being inundated by floodwaters.

Fugitive dust—Particles light enough to be suspended in air, but not captured by a filtering system. For this document, this refers to particles put in the air by moving vehicles and air movement over disturbed soils at construction sites.

Geology—Science that deals with the physical history of the earth, the rocks of which it is composed, and physical changes in the earth.

Groundwater—Water found below the ground surface. Groundwater may be geologic in origin and as pristine as it was when it was entrapped by the surrounding rock or it may be subject to daily or seasonal effects depending on the local hydrologic cycle. Groundwater may be pumped from wells and used for drinking water, irrigation, and other purposes. It is recharged by precipitation or irrigation water soaking into the ground. Thus, any contaminant in precipitation or irrigation water may be carried into groundwater.

Hazardous materials—Defined within several laws and regulations to have certain meanings. For this document, a hazardous material is any one of the following:

> Any substance designated pursuant to section 311 (b)(2)(A) of the Clean Water Act.
>
> Any element, compound, mixture, solution, or substance designated pursuant to Section 102 of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, as listed in 40 CFR 302.4.
>
> Any hazardous substance as defined under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.
>
> Any toxic pollutant listed under TSCA.
>
> Any hazardous air pollutant listed under Section 112 of the Clean Air Act.
>
> Any imminently hazardous chemical substance or mixture with respect to which the USEPA Administrator has taken action pursuant to Subsection 7 of TSCA.
>
> The term does not include: 1) Petroleum, including crude oil or any thereof, which is not otherwise specifically listed or designated as a hazardous substance in a above. 2) Natural gas, natural gas liquids, liquefied natural gas, or synthetic gas usable for fuel (or mixtures of natural gas and such synthetic gas).

Indirect impact—An indirect impact occurs later in time or farther removed in distance from the action causing it but is still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect impacts may include induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and related effects on air, water, and other natural and social systems.

Listed species—Any plant or animal designated by a state or the federal government as a threatened, endangered.

Mitigation—Program- or project-specific measures taken to reduce adverse impacts on the environment.

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)—Nationwide standards set up by the USEPA for widespread air pollutants, as required by Section 109 of the Clean Air Act. Currently, six pollutants are regulated by primary and secondary NAAQS: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

Non-attainment area—An area that has been designated by the USEPA or the authorized state air quality agency as exceeding one or more national or state ambient air quality standards.

Parcel—A plot of land, usually a division of a larger area.

Sensitive receptors—Include, but are not limited to children, and the elderly, as well as specific facilities, such as long-term health care facilities, rehabilitation centers, convalescent centers, retirement homes, residences, schools, playgrounds, and childcare centers.

Soil—The mixture of altered mineral and organic material at the earth's surface that supports plant life.

Solid waste—Any discarded material that is not excluded by 40 CFR 261.4(a) or that is not excluded by variance granted under 40 CFR 260.30 and 40 CFR 260.31.

Threatened species—Any species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Topography—The relief features or surface configuration of an area.

Watershed—The region draining into a particular stream, river, or entire river system.

Wetlands—Areas that are regularly saturated by surface or groundwater and, thus, are characterized by a prevalence of vegetation that is adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Examples include swamps, bogs, fens, marshes, and estuaries.

Wildlife habitat—Set of living communities in which a wildlife population lives.