



## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

### **For the Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) Freedom's Path at Fort Harrison Project, Montana**

An Environmental Assessment (EA), incorporated herein by reference, was prepared to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the development of the Freedom's Path at Fort Harrison. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ([NEPA]; 42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508), VA's NEPA implementing regulations, 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions), and VA's "NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects" (VA 2010).

#### **SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

VA is pursuing the development of the Proposed Action at the Fort Harrison VA Medical Center (Fort Harrison VAMC) near Helena, Montana as part of the Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) program. The EUL program combines the goals of reducing veteran homelessness with improving the management of VA real estate assets.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide new residential opportunities for homeless, at-risk, and disabled veterans by renovating eleven existing historic buildings and constructing two new buildings for a combined total of 42 housing units. The existing buildings were constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as officer and staff quarters when Fort Harrison VAMC served as a military post. All eleven buildings are within, and contributing structures to, the Fort Harrison Veterans Hospital Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016. The Proposed Action encompasses approximately 6 acres of land within the Fort Harrison VAMC campus and is within walking distance to the VA hospital and affiliated care facilities immediately east of the Proposed Action. The housing units will include standard and special amenities, as well as convenient access to medical and community services.

The EUL program is one of several of housing assistance programs provided by the VA. EUL projects provide safe, affordable housing for veterans near VA health care providers. The combination of underused VA property adjacent to a VA medical facility in an area with a considerable at-risk veteran population fulfilled the objectives of the EUL program, and as such, no alternatives to the Proposed Action were considered.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

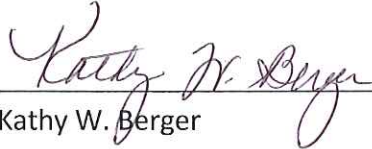
The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to analyze the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action, on a range of resources. A detailed assessment of the effect of the Proposed Action compared to the option of not developing the Project, i.e. the No Action Alternative, was provided. The EA concluded that there would be no significant adverse effect to the human or natural environment, provided the Proposed Action adheres to the Monitoring Plan as outlined for the cultural resources as part of the final Section 106 NHPA consultation. The Montana State Historical Preservation Officer concurred with the finding of no significant adverse effect on August 29, 2017.

## **PUBLIC REVIEW**

A Draft EA was prepared and published for a 30-day public comment period on July 31, 2017. The document was made available electronically as a digital download on the Montana VA Health Care System website. The public was invited to comment on the Draft EA through a Notice of Availability published in the Montana VA Health Care System website (<https://www.montana.va.gov>). The VA received one comment from the Montana VA Health Care System regarding public transportation. VA's response to this comment can be found in Attachment A to the EA. The response was prepared to provide clarification. There were no comments from the public or other agencies.

## **DETERMINATION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

As a result of the analysis of impacts in the EA, summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of VA that with the implementation of appropriate minimization and management measures and regulatory compliance measures, the Proposed Action would not cause a significant impact of an adverse nature on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Action is not warranted or required.

  
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Kathy W. Berger 8/30/2017  
Director  
Montana VA Health Care System

  
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Leslie B. Holz 8/30/2017  
GEMS Program Manager  
Montana VA Health Care System