



NOVEMBER 9, 2006

## Public meeting explains Fort Sam expansion

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SAN ANTONIO — The Fort Sam Houston Environmental and Natural Resource division presented the draft Environmental Impact Statement for on post Base Realignment and Closure actions Oct. 24 during a public meeting at St. Patrick's Church in San Antonio.

The presentation detailed the new missions and construction projects totaling \$1.5 billion, necessary for the more than 12,000 new members and 5,000 family members moving into the community in the next five years.

The public meeting was held in accordance with provisions from the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires federal agencies to analyze the potential environmental impacts of proposed actions and alternatives and consider the impacts before making a decision. It also requires public input.

“This meeting is one method of presenting information about the potential environmental impacts of a pending federal decision and provides a forum for receiving comments from individuals,” said Phil Reidinger, Fort Sam Houston public affairs officer.

According to Col. Wendy L. Martinson, U.S. Army Garrison commander, Fort Sam Houston will increase as a result of BRAC actions, not only in personnel numbers and expanded missions, but also in new construction, renovation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

“The next five years will be very exciting for us as new missions ... Army, Air Force and Navy begin, and traditional missions expand,” Martinson said.

Martinson said the NEPA process is a planning tool which incorporates comments provided during the comment period. This allows for community input in the final product, the Record of Decision.

Lt. Col. Barbara Holcomb, chief of the Base Transformation Office, described the focus of the environmental analysis, where they are in the analysis process and summarized the contents of the DEIS.

There are four sub-areas affected under the proposed alternative plan: Patient Care; Medical and Other Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation; Medical Training; and Headquarters and Administrative Support. Areas of analysis include land use, aesthetics and visual resources, air quality, noise, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics, transportation, utilities, hazardous materials and waste management, and cumulative effects.

Due to NEPA requirements, federal agencies must explore alternatives where possible with the objective of eliminating or lessening environmental impacts. It also requires the analysis of the no action alternative, which essentially provides a baseline of potential impacts of the status quo versus any changes.

According to Holcomb, the alternatives to accommodate the influx of people and missions are dependent on the availability of suitable land. Considerations include current use of the land, impacts on historic properties, relationships between activities and other factors.

“After spending considerable time and effort in developing a workable facilities-development plan, the preferred alternative is the only reasonable alternative,” Holcomb said.

The two alternatives included in the DEIS for analysis were the no action alternative and the preferred alternative that would accommodate the BRAC, Army Modular Force and other non-BRAC-related moves. Martinson’s hope was that attendees left with a better understanding of the proposed action and the focus of the environmental analysis.

“This action will invest billions in the local economy, create thousands of clean jobs and do so with no significant impact on the environment,” she said.

People can view or download an electronic version of the DEIS at [http://www.hqda.army.mil/acsim/brac/nepa\\_eis\\_docs.htm](http://www.hqda.army.mil/acsim/brac/nepa_eis_docs.htm).