



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Institute of Standards and Technology
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899

September 29, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

From: Michael Blackmon
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National Institute of Standards and Technology

Subject: Categorical Exclusion

Project: Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Design and Renovation

Location: 1861 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and associated implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) require that all major federal actions be reviewed with respect to their environmental consequences. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has selected the project: Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Design and Renovation for a federal funding grant. Consequently, NEPA and the associated implementing regulations apply to this project.

This memorandum summarizes NIST's environmental review of this project and the determination that this project is categorically excluded from further environmental review under NEPA.

Description of the Action

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS) is a science-based, operation that delivers two distinct forensic services for Harris County, TX as well as other neighboring counties - Medical Examiner Services and Crime Laboratory Services. These services are jointly dedicated to supporting the criminal justice system.

The existing 9-story HCIFS building, located at 1861 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054, is approximately 208,000 GSF, which includes a laboratory tower and one story morgue. The proposed federal funding will be applied to planning and design, construction, materials testing and other project-related expenses for renovating and equipping the HCIFS Building. This includes the build-out of three existing shell floors currently unoccupied in the main HCIFS building.

The project will provide for renovation and technological updates of the Medical Examiner morgue area and autopsy suites, relocation and expansion of the Forensic Genetics (DNA) Laboratory, expansion of Evidence Intake and storage as well as Information Technology, addition of centralized breakroom and staff wellness / exercise area, replacement of morgue and toxicology storage coolers, and replacement of the building HVAC system.

Impacts of the Action and any Extraordinary Circumstances

NIST has determined that no significant environmental impacts are expected from the renovation of the HCIFS Building.

The project has been reviewed for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and has been determined to have no adverse impacts.

The project is located within the 500-year flood plain; however, the current renovations are not related to the flood resilience of the facility.

Energy saving measures (i.e., more efficient HVAC, LED lighting, improved insulation) will be taken to reduce the overall energy consumption of the facility and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the building operations. The NIST Grant requires, where feasible, that sustainable energy efficient design principles be implemented for the purpose of reducing pollution and energy costs.

Categorical Exclusion

The activities associated with this project fall under the following Department of Commerce Categorical Exclusions:

A-1 Minor renovations and additions to buildings, roads, airfields, grounds, equipment, and other facilities that do not result in a change in the functional use of the real property, and

A-7 Acquisition, installation, operation, and removal of communications systems, data processing equipment, and similar electronic equipment.

Since this grant will only fund the interior renovation of the existing HCIFS Building with no change in the functional use of the building and the purchase of equipment, the project meets the conditions specified in categorical exclusions A-1 and A-7

The proposed project, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Design and Renovation is categorically excluded from the need for further environmental review under NEPA. Any changes to the above project will require additional NEPA review.

Michael Blackmon
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Date

R.C. Vaughn
NIST Chief Facilities Management Officer

Date