

**Coordinating Draft  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
(FONSI)**

**Master Plan St. Albans Columbarium  
National Cemetery Administration  
St. Albans, Queens County, New York**

**May 2020**

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Michael Roth, Director  
Design and Construction Services  
National Cemetery Administration

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Date

## **SITE-SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ABSTRACT**

**LEAD AGENCY:** Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

**COOPERATING AGENCIES:** None

**TITLE OF PROPOSED ACTION:** Final Environmental Assessment for the Construction of a Columbarium, National Cemetery Administration, St. Albans, Queens County, New York

**AFFECTED JURISDICTION:** Queens County, New York

**PROPONENTS:** National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs

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**DOCUMENT DESIGNATION:** Final Environmental Assessment (EA)

**ABSTRACT:** The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has obtained approximately 5.25 acres of land from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) located at the VHA's St. Albans Community Living Center in St. Albans, Queens County, New York. The site is situated in the southeast corner of the St. Albans facility and consists of an area that is occupied by two buildings and an associated parking lot, a grassy undeveloped area and an outbuilding belonging to the VHA. This EA evaluates the plan for the creation of a columbaria on the site. This EA also analyzes the No Action Alternative; no cemetery would occur with the implementation of the No Action Alternative. The purpose of the Proposed Action for the EA is to continue to enable the VA to provide eligible veterans and their families in the New York City (NYC) area with a national cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected needs in this region over the next ten years. Furthermore, this cemetery helps the VA comply with the Service Members Civil Relief Act.

This EA represents a re-assessment, revisions of sections to reflect new concerns and the re-affirmation and re-signing of the FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI). Master Plan St. Albans Columbarium National Cemetery Administration St. Albans, Queens County, New York dated November 2019.

In December 2019, subsequent to the signing of the previous EA/FONSI, the NCA began to receive letters and e-mails raising an issue with the site architecture and construction plans. This concern was hyper-local, originating from a neighborhood association across Baisley Boulevard from the site frontage. These concerned groups were on the mailing list for the draft EA in July 2019, but did not return comments. In February 2020, the NCA attended a meeting of NYC Community Board (CB) 12. At that meeting a very specific local issue was brought up; concerning the site plan's vehicle entrance/exit design and the supporting traffic study.

In a responsive accommodation, the NCA determined that it was in the public and agency interest to undertake a FONSI reevaluation process to determine if the local concerns would affect NCA's FONSI determination. It also represented an opportunity for additional on-the-record public involvement for the EA. This EA has been supplemented to reflect the public concerns and document the site constraints and site purposes. A refined final traffic study was prepared and provided within as part of the revised EA and also included as an appendix.

The EA identifies, analyzes, and documents the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic effects associated with the VA's proposed design, construction and operation of a columbaria. Additional resource areas that are evaluated in further detail in the EA include: aesthetics; air quality; community services; cultural resources; environmental justice; floodplains, wetlands and coastal zone; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; land use; noise; socioeconomics; solid and hazardous materials; transportation, traffic and parking; threatened and endangered species; utilities; vegetation, wildlife and habitat, public comments and cumulative impacts.

This EA concludes that no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effects on the human environment would result from implementing the Preferred Alternative. The refined traffic study does not indicate significant environmental impacts to the immediate local community. Therefore, this EA concludes a FONSI is appropriate and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This EA has been prepared to analyze and evaluate the potential effects of the design, construction and operation of a columbarium located on 5.25 acres of land located on the St. Albans Community Living Center, St. Albans, and Queens County, New York. This is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 United States Code [U.S.C] 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), 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions), and the Veterans Association (VA) NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects (VA 2010).

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide a National Veterans Burial Ground of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected needs of Veterans and their families in New York City. The Proposed Action would provide burial facilities for eligible veterans in New York currently not served by a National Cemetery or State Veterans Cemetery. The new cemetery would provide additional capacity, as well as improved access to Veterans and their families (i.e., reduced travel time to a National Cemetery), and would help balance the current unequal geographic distribution of National Cemeteries in this region. There are currently no open National Cemeteries located within New York City, New York.

The VA has established three objectives that define outcomes for VA burial programs. One of these objectives is to ensure that burial needs of Veterans and eligible family members are met. The NCA further defines this objective on the assumption that the burial needs of a Veteran are met if they have reasonable access to burial option, where reasonable access to a burial option is defined as "...a first interment option (whether for casketed remains or cremated remains, either in-ground or in columbaria) in a National or State Veterans Cemetery...available within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence." The VA established a 75-mile service area standard because NCA data show that more than 80 percent of persons interred in National Cemeteries resided within 75 miles of the cemetery at the time of death. The VA has also developed unserved Veteran population thresholds for eligibility to establish a new National Cemetery or a National Veterans Burial Ground.

As part of an evaluation of the VA Burial Benefits Program (August 2008), the NCA reviewed future burial strategy to continue meeting the needs of our Nation's Veterans. This evaluation also noted that there is a gap between the size of population centers served by a National Cemetery and State Veteran cemeteries. Hence, based upon that study, the NCA established a new Veteran population threshold to increase access to a burial option where the unserved Veteran population is at least 80,000.

The NCA created an initiative to bring burial options closer to Veterans by developing columbaria-only sites in five urban areas across the country. The program, called the Urban Initiative, will provide burial options for Veterans and their families who choose cremation close to the city core. This initiative seeks to establish columbaria-only

national cemeteries in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Indianapolis, and San Francisco/Oakland (Alameda).

The Proposed Action is needed to meet the NCA's goal of increasing burial options in areas with an unserved veteran population in the New York City area, as specified by Congress, in response to the Evaluation of the VA Burial Benefits Program (August 2008) of at least 80,000, in accordance with the Service Members Civil Relief Act, also known as the Veteran's Benefit Act of 2010. It also meets the goal of the NCA's Urban Initiative. The proposed facility will accommodate cremated remains in columbaria and will be a satellite facility to the Long Island National Cemetery on Long Island. Over several phases of expansion within the current 5.25 acres, the site will be developed to accommodate up to 34,000 niches over a 100-year period.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

**Preferred Alternative.** The Proposed Action would construct a columbarium within the 5.25 acres to consist of an eventual total of approximately 35,920 niches, an administration/public information center building with accessible restrooms, and locator kiosk, an open-air committal shelter, access roads and walkways, an ossuary, a storm water management system, utility lines and site security measures. Vegetation, including trees, lawn areas and an open meadow along the west and north side of the site are proposed to be implemented.

Phase I of the plan will consist of the construction of maximum of 3,760 niches, depending on availability of funds; utility infrastructure; paved pedestrian and vehicular pathways; administration building; committal shelter; and perimeter fencing. Areas for future development will be initially planted with manicured lawn and natural meadow grass along the west and north portion of the site. The perimeters of the natural meadows will be framed by cut lawn. Phase 1 columbaria will be positioned on the south east quadrant of the facility near the administration building/public information center, main concourse and committal shelter. It is anticipated there will be approximately 400 inurnments per year leading to full capacity in approximately 100 years. Future phases would result in the construction of 3,000-6,000 niches in subsequent years until full build-out

The small size and large expansion potential of this site require efficient, balanced design. The St. Albans VA Hospital is a fenced secure area and VA National Cemeteries are always open to the public. Due to the security concerns, the conditions of the land transfer from the St. Albans Veterans Hospital do not allow for public access/egress to/from the retained VA Hospital property. This constrains the access design to the site boundaries.

The current and future design of the small-sized site must maximize the space for Columbarium niches, not expansive drives and parking. National cemeteries are also public monuments that contain aesthetic and contemplative elements. Internal traffic should not interfere with the aesthetic elements of the contemplative design/landscaping

of the front entrance by crossing in front of it on-site. This necessitates few, secluded and narrow roadway footprints making only one-way traffic feasible.

**No Action Alternative.** Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. Based on NCA projections, veterans and their families residing New York City are underserved and will continue to be so without adequate burial capacity at St. Albans. Veterans and their families would need to travel further to the closest available national cemetery, or to a private cemetery for burials. The distribution of national cemeteries in the region would continue to be unequal, and the VA would not be in compliance with the requirements of the Service Members Civil Relief Act. Furthermore; the No Action Alternative would create hardships for the survivors of deceased veterans for attending the funerals and for grave visitations, because of the distances between homes and the burial sites. If veterans and their families must resort to private burials, they are deprived of the honor and privilege bestowed upon them by a grateful nation for their service to their country.

Although the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose of and need of the project, this alternative was retained, because it reflects the status quo and serves as a benchmark against which the effects of the Proposed Action can be evaluated, as required under the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR Part 1502.14).

### **Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**

The Affected Environment of the Proposed Action or the Region of Influence, is discussed in Section 3 of this EA as it pertains to respective environmental and cultural resources. The Preferred Alternative, the No Action Alternative and dismissed Alternatives 2 and 3 are evaluated in this EA in sections 2 and 3 to determine their potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effect(s) on the physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects of the Region of Influence.

Sections 1 and 3 contains analyses of the Proposed Action's potential effects on the following resource areas:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Community Services
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management
- Geology and Soils
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Noise
- Socioeconomics
- Solid and Hazardous Materials
- Transportation and Parking
- Threatened and Endangered Species

- Utilities
- Vegetation, Wildlife and Habitat
- Cumulative Impacts
- Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy

The Preferred Alternative would result in no significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on these resources as identified below and detailed in Section 3 of this EA. Potential benefits would occur with the development and maintenance of the site as a designed landscape with managed, secure access in place of an unused lot with minimal maintenance. In addition, any potential adverse effects on the resource areas discussed below would be further reduced or avoided through the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP) or optional management measures, as discussed in Sections 1 and 3 of this EA.

- **Aesthetics:** There will be minor, short-term adverse temporary impacts to the visual quality of the site for St Albans Campus and the surrounding Baisley Boulevard and Addisleigh Park neighborhoods during construction. Each completed phase as well as the final facility will result in a long term benefit with formal designed and maintained landscape with trees and vegetation providing screening from the public sides along Baisley Boulevard and the Roy Wilkins Park. Areas not built as part of the first phase of construction will be managed as meadows framed with lawn.
- **Air Quality:** Estimated construction and operational emissions are well below de minimis for criteria pollutants. A Record of Non Applicability (RONA) of Clean Air Act General Compliance Conformance was prepared. Fugitive dust emissions will be controlled primarily by limiting the area of ground disturbance and will be mitigated by spraying water to dampen surfaces of dry work areas as needed.
- **Community Services:** There will be no impacts or disruption of community services as part of the construction and operation of this facility.
- **Cultural Resources:** There will be no adverse effect to the St. Albans facility historic property with the construction of the columbarium. No archaeological remains of the temporary buildings that once were built in this area or remains of any historic or prehistoric activities in this area were identified by an archaeological survey. There will be no archaeological properties affected by the construction, operation and maintenance of the columbarium.
- **Environmental Justice:** This plan will not contribute any environmentally deleterious effects to the community. Continuous community coordination has taken place since 2018. This include a previous Draft EA and comment period in Jul /Aug 2019 (no community comments received). The community, (CB 13), was provided with an additional briefing at their public meeting regarding the preliminary plan to construct columbaria on the site in Feb 2020. Additional coordination with CB 13 land use committee occurred in Mar 2020. All

coordination through April 2020 has been shared with Congressman Gregory Meeks and his staff. They have been notified of the previous draft EA, public reviews, proposed project elements and coordination with the community. During this coordination process, there have been no Environmental Justice items/comments.

- **Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management:** The study area is outside the New York State Coastal Zone. There are no wetlands or floodplains within the site or adjacent to the site that would be affected by the proposed action.
- **Geology and Soils:** Minor, short-term adverse erosion and sedimentation impacts are anticipated with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative. Implementation of storm water management BMPs will substantially reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts to minimal or none. Although soils will be permanently as well as temporarily impacted by the construction of the Preferred Alternative, this would not affect the subsurface geology of the site. The construction of a permanent storm water management system for the operation and maintenance of the Preferred Alternative will result in no effect to these systems. The operation of the facility should have no impact on these resources.
- **Hydrology and Water Quality:** There is no surface water present in the area of the Preferred Alternative. There will be no impact to this resource. Construction and operation of the facility will not impact adjacent surface water. The Preferred Alternative construction and operation would result in no impacts to groundwater.
- **Land Use:** The current land use for the area is primarily residential (R3-2) with public facilities and institutions. The use of this site as a cemetery is an open use of this zoning district. There would be no adverse effect on land use. This plan does not conflict with zoning use. The site is being constructed and operated on Federal property by a Federal Agency; NYC zoning and land use process are non-applicable. NYC permits for temporary/permanent construction activities that impact city property or roadways would be obtained by the construction contractor IAW.
- **Noise:** Short-term, minor adverse impacts from general construction noise would potentially occur due to construction vehicles' entering and exiting the columbarium, as well as land preparation, grading, and other construction work. As part of the operation of the columbarium, there would be intermittent, short-term, minor adverse impacts resulting from any ceremonies held at the site. The landscape design will baffle the cemetery from the surrounding noise. The construction and maintenance equipment will use properly maintained and muffled vehicles and equipment. Heavy equipment and other noise emitters will be shut down when not in use. Existing traffic noise will not be increase by cemetery operations.



- **Socioeconomics:** This alternative will have a negligible positive effect on the socioeconomic environment. Construction of the cemetery may temporarily support jobs, a minor economic benefit. The project will replace derelict, blighted buildings, with a perpetual, aesthetic and landscaped site.
- **Solid and Hazardous Materials:** There are no known contaminated sites or sources of contamination within the area of the Preferred Alternative. During construction or operation activities, fuel associated with equipment would be the only likely source of contaminants. There also may be asbestos containing material (ACM) associated with the steam tunnels that will be removed. BMPs, including cleaning and disposing of any spills or ACM in accordance with local, state and federal requirements would ensure there would be no adverse effects. Any abatement of ACM, if identified, will be accomplished in accordance with the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Occupation Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and other applicable federal regulations. Any material generated, if identified, will be disposed at a facility able to handle this material.
- **Transportation, Traffic and Parking:** Short-term, minor adverse impacts may occur from general the movement of workers, equipment and supplies on and off the site during construction. Worker/funeral/visitor parking would be on site to avoid interference with street parking as well as normal/festival uses of the adjacent Roy Wilkins Park facilities. There will be on-site parking and short-term cortege parking within the facility and it is anticipated that this will accommodate most of the ceremonies and visitation to the site. The parking would be used only for cemetery business, funerals and visitors. A traffic study of the access plan and cemetery operations, was conducted in 2018 to inform the design plan. This study was refined in March 2020. The study showed that construction/operations of the facility will not have significant adverse impacts on traffic safety, speed or volume on Baisley Boulevard (Appendix E).
- **Threatened and Endangered Species:** The US Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) indicate that there are no threatened or endangered species within the St. Albans campus, to include the area of the Preferred Alternative. There will be no effect from the construction and operation of the Preferred Alternative to these resources.
- **Utilities:** Existing utilities will be used and some will be realigned across the site. There will be non-substantive long-term effects as the operation of the columbarium will increase the neighborhood's use of water, electric and gas but no new utilities will be required to be constructed or brought into the neighborhood. Hook ups to the existing NYC infrastructure would require permits to be included in the construction contract and obtained by the contractor. All of the electrical, plumbing and mechanical equipment will be high-efficiency to reduce waste.

- **Vegetation, Wildlife, and Habitat:** Construction of the Preferred Alternative would have short-term to long-term, minor adverse impacts from the permanent and temporary loss of habitats. The operation and maintenance of the Preferred Alternative will have no impact to these resources.
- **Cumulative Impacts:** Construction and operation of the Preferred Alternative should not increase or compound effects of recent and ongoing infrastructure and development projects.
- **Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy:** The NCA has undertaken public engagement regarding the preferred action. Early in the process, the immediately adjacent neighborhood community groups indicated they would prefer the extension of community health and other services on the site rather than a columbarium or cemetery.

Continuous community coordination has taken place since 2017 (Appendix F). This includes a previous Draft EA and comment period in July-August 2019 (no community comments received). The community, through CB 12, was provided with an additional briefing at their public meeting regarding the design plan to construct columbaria on the site in February 2020. At this meeting there was local resident opposition to the site plan element of constructing an additional vehicle access point to the site. This objection came from homeowners living directly across from the site on Baisley Boulevard (a two-way street with double yellow lines separating two traffic lanes and parking on both sides).

In a responsive accommodation the NCA determined that it was in the public and agency interest to reopen NEPA to determine if the local traffic concerns would represent NEPA significant impacts. A refined final traffic study is assessed in the EA body and available in Appendix E. This accommodation also represents an opportunity for additional on-the-record public involvement for the Final EA.

The additional vehicle access was designed IAW a traffic study and is still supported by the refined traffic study. The study finds that no traffic safety, speed or volume nuisances would occur on Baisley Boulevard as a result of the vehicle access point construction. Existing double yellow lines would remain and prohibit turns across traffic and opposite lane traffic mixing. Air quality and noise will not be substantially changed from existing urban conditions. There is no apparent, or anticipated, NEPA significant impact from this additional vehicle access point element.

Additional coordination with CB 12 land use committee occurred in March 2020. All coordination through April 2020 has been shared with Congressman Gregory Meeks and his staff. They have been notified of the previous draft EA, public reviews, proposed project elements and coordination with the community. IAW NEPA Public Involvement Coordination will continue with the release of

Draft EA for public comment. Any comments received will be addressed incorporated in the Final EA

## **AGENCY AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The VA, as the Federal proponent of the Proposed Action, offered the draft EA for a 30-day public review between July 19 and August 24, 2019. A Notice of Availability containing information on accessing the draft EA and the process for providing comments was distributed to the agencies and individuals identified in Section 9 below and Appendix D. It was also published in the *Caribbean Life* newspaper for a week. The draft EA and its appendices were posted to the US Army Corps of Engineers project website (<http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Remediation/St-Albans/>). Copies of the draft EA were available for review at the Queens Library of St. Albans and the Veterans Affairs, St. Albans Healthcare Campus. No comments were received from the public. Several agencies sent no comment letters.

Potential substantive public comments were received via letter and e-mail beginning in in December 2019. NCA attended a public meeting of CB 12 in February 2020 where verbal comments were heard. In a responsive accommodation, the NCA determined that it was in the public and agency interest to reevaluate the original FONSI determination and determine if the local concerns would represent change in the FONSI. It also represented an opportunity for additional on-the-record public involvement for the EA.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As a result of the analysis and re-analysis of impacts in this EA, summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of the VA that, with the implementation of appropriate BMPs and avoidance measures included in Section 3, the Proposed Action would not generate significant public controversy nor have a significant adverse impact the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2c) of the NEPA. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required based on the initial findings of this EA and assuming no significant issues are identified during the EA review process.

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## **1. Introduction**

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has obtained approximately 5.25 acres of land from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) located at the VHA's St. Albans Community Living Center in St. Albans, Queens County, New York (Appendix A, Figure 1). The site is situated in the southwest corner of the existing St. Albans facility. Two sides of the site are bordered by a chain link fence separating the property from the surrounding neighborhood to the south and the Roy Wilkins Park, with the Black Spectrum Theater, to the west (Appendix A, Figure 2). The remainder of the property is within the St. Albans Community Living Center campus. The entire St. Albans VA complex is located on 55 acres surrounded by residential neighborhoods, consisting of two- and three-story single and multiple family homes. Most of the buildings within the facility were built as part of the Naval Hospital after World War II, although a number of buildings, were built in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The main facility of the St. Albans Community Living Center was determined to be eligible for the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places as a historic district. The District includes the central hospital buildings, the guardhouse and entry drives, and associated landscaping. The NCA's property is located outside but adjacent to this historic district.

The NCA proposes to construct a columbaria consisting of, when fully built out, 35,920 niches, a committal shelter, administration/ public information center building, walkways and roads, parking, an ossuary and landscaping (Appendix A; Figure 3). Phase I of construction and operation would consist of the construction of up to 3,760 niches, should funds be available; the committal shelter, administration/public information center building, ossuary, pedestrian and vehicular pathways, site lighting, security and utility infrastructure and a storm water management system (Appendix A, Figure 4). The eastern portion of the site, which would remain unbuilt, would be maintained as lawn, until the future construction phases were implemented. The western and northern portions of the site, surrounding the storm water management system will be maintained as meadow bordered by lawn.

### **1.1 Background**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, NCA services our nation by providing final resting sites to active duty members and veterans of the U.S. military and their families. Veterans and their families are honored with lasting tributes that commemorate the sacrifice and service that veterans have provided to the nation in Queens, New York at St. Albans.

The entire St. Albans campus is located on 55 acres surrounded by a park and residential neighborhood, consisting of two- and three-story single and multiple family homes. Most of the buildings within the facility were built as part of the Naval Hospital after World War II, although a number of buildings were built in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The central facility of the St. Albans was determined to be eligible for the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places as a historic district. The District

includes the central hospital buildings, the guardhouse and entry drives, and associated landscaping. The NCA property is located outside but adjacent to this historic district.

This EA has been prepared to identify, analyze and evaluate the potential effects of the construction and operation of the columbarium. This EA is prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 United States Code [U.S.C] 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), 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions), and the VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects (VA 2010)

This section presents introductory and background information concerning the Proposed Action for proper analytical context; identifies the purpose of, and need for, the Proposed Action; describes the federal decision to be made concerning the Proposed Action; identifies relevant environmental documents; and identifies federal, state, and local regulations and permits that are applicable to the Proposed Action.

## **1.2 Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide a National Veterans Burial Ground of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected needs of Veterans in New York City. There are currently no open National Cemeteries located within New York City, New York. In the independent evaluation of the VA Burial Benefits Program (August 2008), NCA reviewed where it has been and reflected on future burial strategy to continue meeting the needs of our Nation's Veterans. This evaluation also noted that there is a gap between the size of population centers served by a National Cemetery and State Veteran cemeteries. Hence, based upon that study, NCA established a new Veteran population threshold to increase access to a burial option where the unserved Veteran population is at least 80,000. In addition and to account for areas where Veteran populations do not exceed the threshold for a National Cemetery, the NCA Performance Plan of the 2013 VA Budget established a Rural Initiatives program which is intended to establish a cemetery presence in rural areas where unserved Veterans populations are less than 25,000 Veterans within a 75-mile radius. The goal is to build small National Veterans Burial Grounds in certain rural areas where the Veteran population has been identified by VA to be underserved. The Rural Initiatives program targets states with no National Cemeteries open for first interments, and areas within those states that are not currently served by a State Veterans Cemetery or a National Cemetery in another state. As part of the VA's Rural Initiatives Program, there are objectives that define outcomes for VA burial programs. One of these objectives is to ensure that burial needs of Veterans and their family members are met.

The NCA further defines this objective on the assumption that the burial needs of a Veteran are met if they have reasonable access to burial option, where reasonable access to a burial option is defined as "...a first interment option (whether for casketed remains or cremated remains, either in-ground or in columbaria) in a National or State Veterans Cemetery available within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence." The VA established a 75-mile service area standard because NCA data show that more than

80 percent of persons interred in National Cemeteries resided within 75 miles of the cemetery at the time of death. VA has also developed unserved Veteran population thresholds for eligibility to establish a new National Cemetery or a National Veterans Burial Ground.

The Proposed Action would provide burial facilities for eligible Veterans in New York City currently not served by a National Cemetery or State Veterans Cemetery. The National Veterans Burial Ground is needed to better serve the needs of Veterans and their families. The new cemetery would provide additional capacity, as well as improved access to Veterans and their families (i.e., reduced travel time to a National Cemetery), and would help balance the current unequal geographic distribution of National Cemeteries in this region.

### **1.3 Scope of the Analysis**

The CEQ Regulations require NEPA documents to be “analytic rather than encyclopedic” (40 CFR Part 1502.2a). In addition, the level of analysis should be commensurate with the anticipated level of environmental impact. In consideration of these regulations and guidance, the following topics, described in Table 1-1 were dismissed from further consideration as environmental impacts were determined to be negligible or not relevant to the analysis: Resource topic areas that will be considered in further detail in Section 3 of the EA include aesthetics; air quality; cultural resources, environmental justice, geology and soils; hydrology and water quality, land use, noise, socioeconomics, solid and hazardous materials, transportation and parking, and utilities. In addition, cumulative impacts and potential to cause controversy will also be addressed.

### **1.4 Decision Making**

The VA, as a federal agency, is required to incorporate environmental considerations into its decision-making process for the actions it proposes to undertake.

The purpose of this EA is to inform federal decision makers and the public of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action and its considered alternatives, prior to making a federal decision to implement the Proposed Action. In this manner, the federal decision makers can make a fully informed decision, aware of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action. Overall, the EA’s purpose is to:

- inform decision-makers and the public of the anticipated environmental effects of the Proposed Action and its considered alternatives, as well as methods to reduce these effects;
- document the NEPA process;
- allow for federal, state, and local agency, tribal government, and public input to the decision-making process; and
- allow for informed decision-making by the federal government.

This federal decision making includes identifying the actions that the federal government would commit to undertake to minimize environmental effects, as required under the NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 38 CFR Part 26.



**Table 1-1. Impact Topics Eliminated from Further Analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA).**

<b>Impact Topic</b>	<b>Reason for Dismissal from Detailed Analysis</b>
<b>Community Services</b>	This topic is not relevant as there are no anticipated impacts to community services, including recreation in the adjacent park or the services associated with the St. Albans Community Living Center, anticipated with implementation of the Preferred Alternative.
<b>Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management</b>	This topic is not relevant as there are no wetlands or floodplains within the site or anticipated impacts to adjacent or nearby floodplains. The area of the Proposed Action is outside of the New York State Coastal Zone.
<b>Threatened and Endangered Species</b>	No threatened and endangered species are present on the site. Although information from the US Fish and Wildlife list the piping plover, red knot, least tern and sea beach amaranth, there is no shoreline within the study area for these species to exploit. (USFWS 2019). The New York Natural Heritage Program and the New York State Department of Conservation did not identify any State-listed species listed in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

The decision to be made is whether, having taken into account potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic effects the VA should implement the Proposed Action, and as appropriate, carry out measures to reduce its effects on resources. Implementation of BMPs identified throughout the EA, as described in Section 3 and incorporated into the Proposed Action, would ensure that direct, indirect, and significant cumulative effects would not occur.

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

This section provides the reader with necessary background information and a description of the Proposed Action, and alternatives considered by the VA for this EA, including the Preferred Alternative and the No Action Alternative and Alternatives 2 and 3.

### **2.1 Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action would construct a columbaria within the 5.25 acres to consist of an eventual total of approximately 35,920 above ground, columbaria niches for the placement of cremains, an administration/public information center building with accessible restrooms, and locator kiosk, an open-air committal shelter, access roads and walkways, an ossuary or underground vault for the placement of cremated remains,

a storm water management system, utility lines and site security measures. Vegetation, including trees, a garden, lawn areas and an open meadow along the north side of the site will also be implemented (see Appendix A, Figures 3 through 6 and Appendix B).

Phase I of the plan will consist of the construction of a maximum of 3,760 niches depending on availability of funds; utility infrastructure, including an irrigation system; paved pedestrian/vehicular pathways; administration building; committal shelter maintenance facilities; and perimeter fencing. Areas for future development will be initially planted with manicured lawn and natural meadow grass along the north portion of the site (see Appendix A, Figure 3). The perimeters of the natural meadows will be framed by cut lawn. Phase 1 columbaria will be positioned on the south east quadrant of the facility near the administration/public information center building, main concourse and committal shelter. It is anticipated there will be approximately 400 inurnments per year leading to full capacity in approximately 100 years. Future phases would result in the construction of 3,000-6,000 niches in subsequent years until full build-out (see Appendix B).

The small size and large expansion potential of this site require efficient, balanced design. The St. Albans VA Hospital is a fenced secure area and VA National Cemeteries are always open to the public. Due to the security concerns, the conditions of the land transfer from the St. Albans Veterans Hospital do not allow for public access/egress to/from the retained VA Hospital property. This constrains the access design to the site boundaries.

The current and future design of the small-sized site must maximize the space for Columbarium niches, not expansive drives and parking. National cemeteries are also public monuments that contain aesthetic and contemplative elements. No traffic should interfere with the aesthetic elements of the contemplative design/landscaping of the front entrance by crossing in front of it on-site. This necessitates few, secluded and narrow roadway footprints making only one-way traffic feasible.

Primary vehicle access to the columbarium will be from Baisley Boulevard and consist of a one-way drive through the site with separate entry and exit drives to minimize traffic disruption along Baisley Boulevard during inurnment ceremonies. It is anticipated that a number of visitors would be pedestrians traveling to the columbarium by train (via St. Albans Station), bus, taxi or bicycle. There will be a central, separate pedestrian entry with secure bicycle parking. Signage and views from Baisley Boulevard will provide adequate way finding to the facility (see Appendix B).

The entry will be secured by a sliding gate and flanked by the administration building, which will house the administrative offices and restrooms. The main road will be paved in asphalt with concrete curbs. Pedestrian pathways will be in concrete and accented with granite to coordinate with the columbaria. Pedestrian areas will be provided with granite slab benches. All pathways will be universally accessible for all visitors (see Appendix B).

Parking will be provided on site with approximately 12 spaces adjacent to the administration/public information center and parallel parking along the access road. The administration will have one employee parking spot and two handicap parking spots. There will also be parking (36 spaces) provided along the access road for cortege parking during inurnments and visitors (Shumaker 2018).

The site perimeter will be protected on the north east and west (Roy Wilkins Park) property limits with a 10 foot vinyl coated chain-link fence. The fence on the west side will be setback approximately 10 feet from the existing fence on the property line. Gates will be located on the north and south ends for maintenance access. The north perimeter fence will have an automatic vehicular gate for use by security personnel as direct access to the adjacent facility (see Appendix B).

The east perimeter fence, along Baisley Boulevard, will be eight feet tall, aluminum ornamental type with an arched anti-climb feature at the top. The east fence will be set atop a granite masonry base with granite columns. Separate pedestrian and vehicular gates will be included in this fence and all gates will have motorized electronic access. The system controlling the gates will be managed out of the administration building. A closed circuit IP-based security camera system will be installed (see Appendix B).

Security lighting will illuminate all site and building entrances and will be on an automatic timing system. The columbaria layout provides visual connections between Baisley Boulevard and the inner roadway. Access control to the administration/public information center would be accomplished with card readers and electronic locks on exterior doors (see Appendix B).

The design of the columbarium aligns the columbaria in parallel lines to a central court, which are perpendicular to the rear property line. The central court bisects the site and is anchored on the east end to the main pedestrian entry by the American flag. The central location provides access to the full extent of the columbaria. The central court is flanked by an avenue of flags bordering to the north and south to create a grand avenue supporting memorial ceremonies and events. The committal shelter will be located in the central court, adjacent to the mid-point of the vehicular drive to provide access to cortege parking (see Appendix B)

Building materials will utilize granite and bluestone for the columbarium walls, administration building and perimeter fencing along Baisley Boulevard. New York State granite will be used to clad columbaria walls, the committal shelter, the administration building and fence columns along Baisley Boulevard. Roofs for the administration building and shelter are proposed to be asphalt shingle (see Appendix B).

Plantings will include native and indigenous evergreens, deciduous trees, grasses, shrubs and flowers to provide year-round interest and adhere to the "Native Species Planting Guide for New York City and Vicinity" (prepared by the Natural Resources Group and adopted by the City of New York Parks and Recreation Division). The site

will also have a formal entry garden and two planted islands, with low-growing perennials (see Appendix B).

Storm water runoff will be handled by a series of surface and subsurface storm water management systems to reduce storm water volume from existing and proposed impervious surface runoff and address water quality. Hardscape areas will initially drain to surface gravel beds that will capture and convey storm water to the storm system. Both the administration building and committal shelter will collect site and roof runoff via downspouts and convey it to the storm system. The driveway will utilize inlets to collect storm water runoff. Storm water runoff will be cleaned by hydrodynamic devices before going into an underground infiltration basin near the northwest corner and/or the northeast corner of the site (see Appendix B). This portion of the storm water system will be constructed as part of Phase I.

The site storm water management system will comply with the regulations of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, New York City Green Infrastructure Plan, and NYC MS4 permitting requirements as well as other state and federal regulations. A site storm water pollution prevention plan will be developed for this project (see Appendix B).

Construction of Phase 1 will include the relocation of underground utilities (water line, sanitary sewer line, telephone and electrical service conduits) to a corridor on the east side of the site. There are two existing underground steam lines located in the middle of the site that serve buildings located off the columbarium site. The steam lines may need to be relocated to a location off the west side of the site (see Appendix B).

### **2.1.1 Environmental Best Management Practices, Permits and Approvals**

Prior to constructing any component of the Proposed Action, the VA would obtain all required federal, state, and local permits and approvals necessary to comply with applicable laws. Applicable environmental permits required for the Proposed Action are described in Section 9. In addition, the VA would implement the BMPs listed in Section 3 as part of the Proposed Action. These include design measures that serve to proactively minimize adverse environmental effects, as identified through the EA NEPA process.

### **2.2 Alternatives Analysis**

The NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 38 CFR Part 26 require that all reasonable project alternatives be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated. Alternatives that are eliminated from detailed study must be identified along with a brief discussion of the reasons for eliminating them. For the purposes of this analysis, an alternative was considered “reasonable” only if it would enable the VA to accomplish the primary mission of providing additional burial sites and supporting services to veterans and their families in the region, thus meeting the stated purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. “Unreasonable” alternatives would not enable the VA to meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. Further, although the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, this alternative was retained, because it

reflects the status quo and serves as a benchmark against which the effects of the Proposed Action can be evaluated, as required under the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR Part 1502.14).

## **2.2.1 Evaluated Alternatives**

### **Preferred Alternative.**

The Proposed Action would construct a columbarium consisting of 35,920 niches, an administration building, an open-air committal shelter, access roads and walkways, an ossuary, and utility lines. Vegetation, including trees, a memorial garden, lawn areas and an open meadow boarded by lawn, where future phases will be built.

Phase I of the plan will consist of the construction of a maximum of 3,760 niches depending on availability of funds; utility infrastructure; paved pedestrian/vehicular pathways; administration building; committal shelter maintenance facilities; and perimeter fencing. Areas for future development will be initially planted with manicured lawn and natural meadow grass along the north portion of the site (see Figure 1). The perimeters of the natural meadows will be framed by cut lawn. Phase 1 columbaria will be positioned on the south west quadrant of the facility near the administration building, main concourse and committal shelter. It is anticipated there will be approximately 400 inurnments per year leading to full capacity in approximately 10 years. Future phases would result in the construction of 3,000-6,000 niches in subsequent years until full build-out

As part of its analysis regarding burial options, the VA considered other properties within the New York City area. Based on the analyses conducted by the VA, the St. Albans location was the only location within the New York City area that meets the criteria for the size and location to accommodate the projected requirements for veterans within the New York City area.

The small size and large expansion potential of this site require efficient, balanced design. The St. Albans VA Hospital is a fenced secure area and VA National Cemeteries are always open to the public. Due to the security concerns, the conditions of the land transfer from the St. Albans Veterans Hospital do not allow for public access/egress to/from the retained VA Hospital property. This constrains the access design to the site boundaries.

The current and future design of the small-sized site must maximize the space for Columbarium niches, not expansive drives and parking. National cemeteries are also public monuments that contain aesthetic and contemplative elements. No traffic should interfere with the aesthetic elements of the contemplative design/landscaping of the front entrance by crossing in front of it on-site. This necessitates few, secluded and narrow roadway footprints making only one-way traffic feasible.

In developing the proposed action, two alternative configurations, Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, for the St. Albans site were also considered. The configurations altered the location of the various elements to accommodate either approximately 2,000 more

or less inurnments. Because of the specific requirement for columbaria and consideration of other factors such as security, aesthetics and operation, these alternatives were dismissed and the preferred alternative configuration was selected.

### **No Action Alternative.**

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented and no columbarium would be constructed. There is no plan for other use of this property by either the St. Albans Community Living Center or the NCA. Under the no action alternative, the area would remain unused. Veterans in the New York City area would be underserved starting in the year 2017; without adequate burial capacity in Queens, veterans and their families would need to travel further to the closest available national cemetery, Calverton National Cemetery or to a private cemetery for burials. The distribution of national cemeteries in the region would continue to be unequal, and the VA would not be in compliance with the requirements of the Service Members Civil Relief Act.

Furthermore, the No Action Alternative would create a hardship for the survivors of deceased veterans for attending the funerals and for grave visitations, because of the distances between homes and the burial sites. If veterans and their families must resort to private burials, they are deprived of the honor and privilege bestowed upon them by a grateful nation for their service to their country.

Although the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose of and need of the project, this alternative was retained, because it reflects the status quo and serves as a benchmark against which the effects of the Proposed Action can be evaluated, as required under the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR Part 1502.14).

### **3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have no or negligible impacts on the natural and human environments such as air quality, solid and hazardous materials), cultural resources, noise, transportation and parking and wildlife with the implementation of best management practices (BPMs), adherence to seasonal windows, and other controls. No impacts are anticipated to: floodplains, wetlands, and coastal zones; geology and soils; land use and hydrology and water quality; and wildlife and habit. Potential benefits would occur with the change of this area to a formal landscape with regular operation and maintenance.

This section describes the baseline (existing) environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions of the site and its general vicinity, with emphasis on those resources potentially affected by implementation of the Preferred Alternative. In this EA, effects are identified as either “insignificant” (i.e., common effects that would not be of the context or intensity to be considered significant under the NEPA or CEQ Regulations), “minor effect” (an effect that is detectable but would not significantly impact the resource), “negligible effect” (an effect that is not easily detectable and would have little effect to the resource), or “no effect.” Where appropriate and clearly discernible, each effect is identified as either adverse or beneficial. CEQ Regulations

specify that in determining the significance of effects, consideration must be given to both “context” and “intensity” (40 CFR Part 1508.27). Context means the geographic, social, and environmental contexts within which the project may have effects. The regulations refer to:

- society as a whole, defined as including all human society and the society of the nation;
- the affected region;
- affected interests, such as those of a community, Indian tribe, or other group; and the immediate locality.

Intensity is the severity of the potential impact considered in context. The regulations direct agencies to consider:

- both beneficial and adverse impacts;
- impacts on human health and safety; and
- impacts on an area's unique characteristics, such as cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas. In this EA, the significance of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects has been determined through a systematic evaluation of each considered alternative in terms of its effects on each individual resource area.

Significance criteria for resource areas considered in depth in this EA are as follows:

- **Aesthetics** – A project could have a significant aesthetics impact if it would result in a substantial shift in the planned architectural or landscaping Master Plan for the cemetery; the project would not be in visual accordance with adjacent developed areas of the cemetery. Visitor perception would substantially shift.
- **Air Quality** – A project could have a significant air quality effect if it would result in emissions that exceed applicability thresholds, be regionally significant, or contribute to a violation of any federal, state, or local air regulation.
- **Cultural Resources** – An adverse effect on historic properties occurs when an undertaking alters (directly or indirectly) any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify the property for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that diminishes the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association. An adverse effect is not considered significant, if the federal agency, in consultation with the SHPO, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other consulting parties mitigates the adverse effect.
- **Geology, and Soils** – If a project would result in an increased geologic hazard or a substantial change in the availability of a geologic resource, it could have a significant effect. If a project would cause a substantial shift in the regional topography or soil type in an area it could have a significant effect.
- **Hydrology and water quality** – If a project would result in a substantial reduction in the quantity of water for existing or potential future use; if the project resulted in the violation of federal or state water quality standards or permits; if the demand exceeded the capacity of the potable water system; if it would cause substantial flooding or erosion; if it would subject people or property to flooding or

erosion; if it would adversely affect a significant water body, such as a stream, lake, floodplain, or coastal zone; or if it would cause unavoidable impacts to wetlands that could not be mitigated, it could have a significant effect.

- **Land Use** - A project that would introduce an incompatible use with the surrounding area and would require special permitting or zoning to implement may be considered to be an adverse impact to land use.
- **Noise** – If a project could result in significantly adverse increases in ambient noise levels at sensitive receptors, or result in excessive ground-borne vibration to persons, property, or natural resources it could have a significant effect.
- **Socioeconomics** – An adverse, significant effect on socioeconomics could result if a project resulted in a substantial negative impact to local, regional, national, and/or economies.
- **Solid and Hazardous Materials** – A significant, adverse effect could occur if a project resulted in a spill or release of a hazardous, toxic, or radioactive material to the natural environment that could not be readily mitigated.
- **Transportation and Parking** – Significant adverse effects to transportation and/or parking would result from the disruption of transportation services or an increase in those using transportation corridors. Road traffic is considered as transportation service. Similarly, significant adverse effects on parking would result in loss of parking with no associated reduction in parking need or need for additional parking with no addition of spaces.
- **Utilities** - Use of existing utility lines that add requirements for service that does not increase the capability of the utilities to meet those requirements would have a significant adverse effect on utilities.
- **Vegetation, Wildlife and Habitat** –The loss of a substantial number of individuals of any plant or animal species (sensitive or non-sensitive species) or its habitat that could affect the abundance or diversity of a population beyond normal variability could have a significant effect.

### 3.1 Aesthetics

#### 3.1.1 Affected Environment

The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas visible to the public. The affected environment for aesthetic and visual resources includes all areas visible to the public that will be affected by the construction and operation of the columbarium. The area of the Proposed Action consists of both undeveloped and previously disturbed landscape with several trees and ornamental plantings, The St. Albans Campus, with its numerous medical, administrative and support buildings, including the National Register-eligible historic district. A significant impact on aesthetic and visual resources would result if any of the following were to occur from the construction or operation of the proposed action:

- Visual changes in the landscape that can be seen from locations with special scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archaeological, and/or natural qualities that have been recognized through legislation or some other official declaration; and/or



- Changes in traffic patterns that result in hazardous situations for motorists or pedestrians.

### **3.1.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

During construction, the site would be visually unsightly with construction equipment, areas undergoing excavation and project materials on site, resulting in short term, temporary aesthetic impacts to the neighborhood.

The construction of the columbarium would result in the creation of a formal designed landscape consisting of paved walkways and roads, gardens and lawns. For those areas not yet built out, meadow grass will be used, which will be bordered by lawn. The columbarium will be maintained as a designed landscape and will have a beneficial effect on the surrounding community.

The cemetery design will be an aesthetic upgrade to existing conditions of fenced off derelict, disused buildings. To manage vehicle and pedestrian traffic, additional vehicle and pedestrian access points will be designed and landscaped along Baisley Boulevard. These elements are designed based on input from traffic studies and will not cause changes in traffic patterns that result in hazardous situations for motorists or pedestrians.

### **3.1.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

There would be no changes to the St. Albans campus visual character with implementation of the No Action Alternative. The current site is not maintained and would continue as no other use is projected for the site. This would continue to have a long-term, minor effect on the St. Albans campus by remaining in its current unused state.

### **3.1.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

During construction, the overall appearance of the site will be maintained, with property contained trash, orderly control of materials and equipment, and where necessary, using the placement of screening to mask the construction from the surrounding neighborhood.

## **3.2 Air Quality**

### **3.2.1 Affected Environment**

Based on the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established by the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Queens County is designated as “unclassifiable/attainment” for the NAAQS of CO, lead, NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and SO<sub>2</sub>. Queens County is designated as moderate nonattainment for ozone (8-hr NAAQS). Queens County is also classified as a maintenance area for PM<sub>2.5</sub> due to a previous nonattainment designation.

The General Conformity Rule of the Clean Air Act applies to all Federal actions in nonattainment and/or maintenance areas and requires that any Federal action meeting

the requirements of a State Implementation Plan or Federal Implementation Plan. Compliance with the Clean Air Act is achieved when a Federal action will not cause a violation of the NAAQS or contribute to an increase in severity of air quality. The *de minimis* thresholds for General Conformity have been identified by regulated pollutant. The *de minimis* thresholds for NO<sub>x</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> are 100 tons per year. The threshold for VOC is 50 tons per year

Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are emissions that trap heat in the atmosphere. While GHGs occur naturally in the atmosphere, increases in their concentration result from human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels. Current guidance includes presumptive effects threshold of 27,563 tons per year of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from a Federal action (CEQ 2010).

### **3.2.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

#### **Construction Activities**

Construction impacts on air quality, due to the project, may occur because of fugitive dust emitted by construction activities, exhaust and emissions from construction equipment or increased vehicle traffic to and from the construction site on local roadways. In general, the fugitive dust and exhaust emissions from construction activities occur at the project site (on-site) while emissions from increased vehicle traffic occurs off-site on roads throughout the New York City metropolitan area.

The quantity of fugitive dust generated by construction-related activities depends on several factors including the size of area disturbed, the intensity of construction activity, and surface soil properties. Fugitive dust emissions were estimated using the USEPA emission factors. These emissions are summarized in Table 3-1 (GHD 2018).

The emission estimates for the non-road vehicle and equipment engines are based on the construction equipment that will be expected to be used. Emission factors in grams per horsepower hour for CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM, SO<sub>2</sub>, VOC and CO<sub>2</sub> for non-road equipment engines were obtained using USEPA non-road engine emission documents. The emission estimates for the on-road vehicles were based on vehicle and on-road vehicle emission factors, which were obtained from USEPA on-road vehicle emission manuals. Emission factors in grams per vehicle mile traveled (g/VMT) for CO, NO<sub>x</sub>, PM, SO<sub>2</sub>, VOC and CO<sub>2</sub>. These emissions are also summarized in Table 3-1 (GHD 2018).

The construction emissions are well below the General Conformity thresholds (100 tons per year for each pollutant and 27,563 tons per year for CO<sub>2</sub> [greenhouse gas]). The emissions are assumed to conform to the applicable state implementation plan and not considered significant. All construction emissions are temporary and expected to last less than one year. Fugitive dust emissions will be controlled primarily by limiting the area of ground disturbance and will be mitigated by spraying water to dampen surfaces of dry work areas as needed (GHD 2018).

**Table 3-1: Construction Emission Estimate (GHD 2018)**

<b>Pollutant</b>	<b>On-Site Fugitive Dust Emissions (tons per year)</b>	<b>On-Site Equipment Emissions (tons per year)</b>	<b>Off-Site Vehicle Emissions (tons per year)</b>	<b>Total Construction Emissions (tons per year)</b>
CO	-	1.8	2.6	4.4
NO <sub>x</sub>	-	1.5	1.1	2.6
PM <sub>10</sub>	0.23	0.06	0.30	0.59
PM <sub>2.5</sub>	0.02	0.06	0.09	0.18
SO <sub>2</sub>	-	0.001	0.02	0.003
VOC	-	0.14	0.30	0.44
CO <sub>2</sub>	-	177	206	383

**Operational Activities**

Operational impacts on air quality may occur because of mobile sources (exhaust and emissions from vehicle traffic), emissions from ground maintenance equipment, or stationery sources, such as gas heaters. Most of the operational emissions are associated with increased vehicle traffic with smaller amounts of on-site emissions generated by maintenance activities and heating sources. Estimates of emissions is presented in Table 3-2.

The operational emissions are well below the General Conformity thresholds discussed above. The emissions are assumed to conform to the applicable state implementation plan and not considered significant. The on-site and greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions are expected to be minimal or minor and no mitigation measures are being proposed (GHD 2018). A record of non-applicability is included in Appendix C.

**Table 3-2: Operational Emission Estimates (GHD 2018)**

<b>Pollutant</b>	<b>Maintenance Emissions (tons per year)</b>
CO	12.1
NO <sub>x</sub>	1.3
PM <sub>10</sub>	1.1
PM <sub>2.5</sub>	0.29
SO <sub>2</sub>	0.007
VOC	1.3
CO <sub>2</sub>	725

### **3.2.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

With no construction or operation of the columbarium, there would be no impact on air quality.

### **3.2.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

Fugitive dust associated with construction could be greatly minimized by using appropriate dust control measures such as applying water, dust palliative, soil stabilizers, enclosures, covers, and silt fences, and re-vegetating disturbed areas as soon as possible.

## **3.3 Cultural Resources**

### **3.3.1 Affected Environment**

The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas disturbed by construction activities including all areas of temporary and permanent impact including the staging area.

Cultural resources are defined by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as historic properties including prehistoric and historic sites, structures, buildings, objects, districts, or any other physical evidence of human activity associated with important historic events, with persons important in history, representing the work of a master or exemplary as a type, or have or may yield information important to history or prehistory. Several federal laws and regulations protect these resources, including the NHPA of 1966, 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, requires 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." The areas of direct and indirect potential effects of the proposed project are the grounds of proposed site of the columbarium.

St. Albans was originally part of Jamaica, Queens, and consisted primarily of farmland throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the construction of the Long Island Railroad in the 1870s, roads, such as Linden Boulevard, were built and by the First World War, St. Albans was developed beginning with the St. Albans Golf Course, and the subsequent residential neighborhoods, consisting of English-style Tudors, Colonial Revivals and others in brick, stucco and stone.

During World War II, the St. Albans campus was occupied by a temporary Naval Hospital built to house the wounded naval personnel returning from the War. One of nine throughout the country, it carried the largest patient load by the end of the War. When originally constructed, the hospital was built to accommodate 1,500 patients, 235 civilian employees, 73 officers, 71 nurses and 317 members of the Naval Hospital

Corps in 1,000 wooden buildings (Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation 2008).

After the War, the Veterans Administration made the decision to build a 1,000 bed hospital at St. Albans to replace the Brooklyn Naval Hospital located at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The Navy determined a portion of the new hospital would be dedicated to the treatment of cancer. Other elements of the hospital included wards, treatment and clinic buildings, an administration building, kitchen, mess hall and patient recreational facilities. The general hospital was designed to handle special treatment in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, neurosurgery, tuberculosis, and tumors. Construction of the new hospital involved the demolition and removal of a number of the World War II-era structures. With the closure of the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, St. Albans became the only naval hospital in the New York City area available to all service branches (Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation 2008).

By 1972, a portion of the hospital was given to the Veterans Administration for use as a Veterans Administration Hospital. In 1973, the Government was proposing to close the military hospital, which still included a number of wooden, barrack-like buildings that were being used for storage. The Veterans Administration transitioned the hospital to a nursing home facility in 1974 and upgraded and modernized the facility in 1977. In the same year, the Veterans Administration transferred 53 acres, with several buildings and a swimming pool, to the City of New York for use as a park (Roy Wilkins Park) (Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation 2008).

### **3.3.2 Architectural Resources**

The main facility of the St. Albans was determined to be eligible for the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places as a historic district. The District includes the central hospital buildings, the guardhouse and entry drives, and associated landscaping and connecting corridors. (Buildings 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, and 93), Buildings 165 and 166, along with Buildings 60, 64, 65, 173, 176 and Structures 95, 154, and 175 are all non-contributing buildings to the historic district.

The New York City Landmarks Commission Addisleigh Park Historic District is adjacent to the St. Albans campus on its north and west sides, directly opposite of the project area. This historic district consists of 422 buildings that were built between the 1910s and 1930s, as a planned residential neighborhood with St. Albans Park as its anchor. Most of the homes were built in the English Tudor Revival style, with others built in either Colonial Revival or Arts and Crafts styles. Many of the homes were owned by prominent African-American artists such as Fats Waller, John Coltrane, and Lena Horne, as well as sports figures Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson. The neighborhood was also recognized as an example of the “African-American struggle for and achievement of the basic civil right of home ownership” (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission 2011).

No historic architectural resources, historic (or current) structures or other historic or prehistoric cultural resources (i.e. “historic properties”) are located within the site or Area of Potential Effects.

### **3.3.3 Archaeological Resources**

Native American occupation of Queens County, in general and the Jamaica area, to the west of the area of the Proposed Action, is well documented. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a village site (New York State Museum #4531) was documented south of the “Village of Jamaica”, adjacent to Baisley Pond Park, just southwest of the Proposed Action. A second site (New York State Museum #4546) exhibited “traces of occupation”, would have been located to the north west of the Proposed Action (Historical Perspectives 1998).

Much of the historic development in occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the construction of the St. Albans Golf Club and the surrounding neighborhood, followed by the Naval Hospital. Map research identified two 19<sup>th</sup> century structures within the Area of Potential Effect. The construction of the temporary buildings followed by Buildings 165 and 166, with their associated water and sanitary lines, likely destroyed any archaeological remains within the area of the proposed action.

A Phase I field investigation was conducted in areas not previously disturbed by construction or the installation of utilities. Fifty-two shovel tests were placed outside of the underground utilities and paved areas. Four additional tests were excavated in the southeast part of the Area of Potential Effect in the vicinity of two 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings identified on maps. The northwestern portion of the Area of Potential Effect had modern and twentieth-century artifacts (e.g. wire nails, slag, Styrofoam, whiteware and ironstone sherds, flat glass, plastic, and rubble such as brick fragments, asphalt and concrete) in the shovel tests. The southeastern portion of the Area of Potential Effect consisted of sandy fill with modern and recent cultural materials were found in the uppermost strata. No pre-contact artifacts were identified. No additional archaeological work is recommended (Panamerican Consultants, Inc. 2017).

Both the New York State Historic Preservation Office and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission concurred with the determination that no historic properties will be affected by the proposed action (see Appendix D).

### **3.3.4 Native American Consultation / Coordination**

The VA maintains a VA Cultural Resource management Checklist, dated December 2009. The checklist was developed by the VA to determine the likelihood that a given cultural resource legal requirement applies to a proposed project or other activity. Based on judicial interpretation, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) requires the federal agency to consult with Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian about agency actions that might interfere with religious practices and to make efforts to avoid or minimize such interference (Religious Freedom Restoration Act, Executive Order 13007). According to the VA Cultural Resource Management Checklist, if the ground surface will not be disturbed as part of the Proposed Action, consultation under

NAGPRA and Section 106 of NHPA with tribes is not necessary as long as the project does not interfere with tribal practices.

With the ground disturbance proposed, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe and the Shinnecock Nation were contacted by letter regarding the proposed action. No comments or requests for additional consultation were received.

### **3.3.5 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

Based on the results of the archaeological investigations, no additional investigations are required. In addition, although portions of the St. Albans Community Living Center are eligible for the National Register, these buildings are outside of the Area of Potential Effect for the construction and operation of the columbarium. Similarly, the Addisleigh Park Neighborhood historic district is well outside the Area of Potential Effect for the columbarium. In addition, the columbarium is out the Area of Potential Effect for viewshed impacts to these historic properties. The Preferred Alternative would have no adverse effect on historic properties.

If archaeological features or human remains are inadvertently discovered during construction activities, all work would be halted in that area and the New York State Historic Preservation Office would be contacted. Work would be stopped in the vicinity of the find until appropriate measures would be coordinated and implemented to mitigate any adverse effect.

### **3.3.6 No Action Alternative**

There would be no impact to cultural resources.

### **3.3.7 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

If archaeological features or human remains are inadvertently discovered during construction activities, all work would be halted in that area and the New York State Historic Preservation Office would be contacted. Work would be stopped in the vicinity of the find until appropriate measures would be coordinated and implemented to mitigate any adverse effect.

## **3.4 Environmental Justice**

The proposed action is within a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation potential environmental justice area (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation 2019). This plan will not contribute any environmentally deleterious effects to the community. Since the planning of the proposed action started through Dec 2019, the NCA has had 8 outreach activities with the local community , which included representatives for Congressman Gregory Meeks (NY-5<sup>th</sup> District) to ensure the preliminary plans for the site considered the community (Appendix F). This include a previous Draft EA and comment period in Jul /Aug 2019 (no community comments received).

The community, (CB 12), was provided with an additional briefing at their public meeting regarding the preliminary plan to construct columbaria on the site in Feb 2020.

Additional coordination with CB 12 land use committee occurred in Mar 2020. All coordination through Apr 2020 has been shared with Congressman Gregory Meeks and his staff. They have been notified of the previous draft EA, public reviews, proposed project elements and coordination with the community. During this coordination process, there have been no Environmental Justice items/comments. Landscaping and the arrangement of the columbarium was designed to maximize the aesthetics and shield the view of columbaria walls, providing privacy to the site's visitors as well as minimize the site's impact on the residences on Baisley Boulevard.

### **3.5 Geology, and Soils**

#### **3.5.1 Affected Environment**

The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas where soil will be physically disturbed by construction activities or otherwise disturbed indirectly by erosional impacts and includes all areas of temporary and permanent impact including the staging area as well as the limits of construction and delivery vehicle egress/ingress to St. Albans campus.

#### **Geology**

Unconsolidated strata of clay, silt, sand and gravel of Late Cretaceous and pre-Wisconsin Pleistocene ages lies between crystalline basement rocks (bedrock) of Precambrian age and unconsolidated deposits of late Pleistocene Wisconsin and Holocene ages in Queens County, Long Island. Bedrock, generally absent from Long Island and only slightly evident on Staten Island, is buried under glacial deposits. Data from wells indicate that bedrock is unconsolidated sand, gravel and clay of Cretaceous age. Topography on Long Island is the result of two moraines and their associated outwash aprons. The moraines are hilly areas and the outwash areas are flat and slope south to the sea. The soils are sandy with varying amounts of gravel. In the glacial tills on the moraines, the granular soils are somewhat more compact and less stratified than on the outwash.

Queens County, situated on the western end of Long Island is within the Atlantic Coastal Plain physiographic province of the United States, which includes Pleistocene glacial and terrace deposits resulting from the advance and retreat of the glaciers as part of the Wisconsin Ice Age and Laurentide Ice Sheet, approximately 10,000 years ago. Glacial advances caused the island to be covered with glacial till, stratified drift and outwash deposits consisting of clay, silt, sand, gravel and boulders. The north shore of Long Island is comprised of stratified glacial drift and till while the south shore is covered by outwash deposits. These deposits lie atop metamorphic Paleozoic or Precambrian-age rocks (USACE 2016; USGS 2003).

Soils within this area include Bigapple sandy loam (iAn) and Urban land, Flatbush complex with low impervious surface (UFB10; both soils fine sandy loams with in urban settings (Natural Resources Conservation Service 2016).

#### **3.5.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

The majority of the soils have not been previously graded so there will be some new soil disturbance throughout this site. However, grading in the remaining project site areas



would be minimized because construction will occur on sites that have been already been previously disturbed and graded. Construction of the Preferred Alternative would include vegetative clearing, re-grading and stabilization of exposed soil surfaces. Construction will result in the temporary disturbed of approximately five acres of soil. Construction activities would remove vegetative cover and disturb soils, increasing susceptibility to wind and surface runoff. However, implementation of storm water management BMPs will be used to largely control potential erosion and sedimentation issues during construction and following construction. Exposed soils would be susceptible to wind erosion, temporarily increasing particulate matter in the area, creating short-term visibility, and aesthetic impacts. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative is not anticipated to affect the subsurface geology of the site.

The use of construction BMPs described in Section 3.5.4 and adherence to the New York Stormwater Management Handbook will reduce adverse soil impacts. Soil erosion and sedimentation impacts would be a minor, adverse impact as a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and an erosion and sedimentation plan will be developed as required per the NYPDES General Construction Permit. The use of construction BMPs will ensure compliance with state and federal water quality standards and minimize short- and long-term adverse impacts to soils and water quality.

### **3.5.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

The No Action Alternative would result in no new impacts to geology, topography, or soils, because new cemetery construction would not occur.

### **3.5.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

The use of storm water management BMPs to reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts will help minimize short-term and long-term impacts to soils as well as water quality. Prior to construction, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention approved by the NYDEC as authorized under the New York Stormwater Management Program that includes erosion control practices, inspection procedures, and other BMPs will be required. An erosion and sediment control plan approved by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation shall be developed that minimizes soil exposure and compaction during construction and controls storm water discharges to minimize soil erosion.

Specific measures to minimize soil exposure and compaction and reduce potential impacts to storm water that the contractor will be required to follow during construction will consist of the following:

- Install and monitor erosion-prevention BMPs, such as silt fences, sediment berms, and/or other equivalent sediment control measures as appropriate and in accordance with the approved Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan;
- Apply permanent or temporary soil stabilization to denuded areas within seven days after final grade is reached on any portion of the site;
- Apply nutrients shall to landscaping areas in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations or on an approved nutrient management plan and do not apply nutrient during rainfall events;

- Inspect storm water BMPs and potential risks to storm water (e.g. material stockpiles, silt fences, etc.) (i) at least once every four business days or (ii) at least once every five business days and no later than 48 hours following a measurable storm event. In the event that a measurable storm event occurs when there are more than 48 hours between business days, the inspection shall be conducted on the next business day; and
- Stabilize disturbed areas immediately whenever any clearing, grading, excavating, or other land-disturbing activities have permanently ceased on any portion of the site, or temporarily ceased on any portion of the site and will not resume for a period exceeding 14 days.

### **3.6 Hydrology and Water Quality**

#### **3.6.1 Affected Environment**

**Surface Waters and Wetlands.** The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas physically disturbed by construction activities or otherwise disturbed indirectly by erosional impacts and includes all areas of temporary and permanent impact including the staging area as well as the limits of construction and delivery vehicle egress/ingress to St. Albans.

There are no surface waters or jurisdictional wetlands within or adjacent to the construction or operational area.

#### **3.6.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

**Surface Waters, Wetlands, and Groundwater.** Implementation of the Preferred Alternative is anticipated to have no adverse impacts on wetlands as no jurisdictional wetlands are located within the area of effect for the Preferred Alternative. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would have minor, short-term adverse effects to surface waters from discharge of storm water because removal of vegetation for site preparation would increase overland flow. Adherence to the conditions of the NPDES permit, discussed in Section 3.5.2, would help reduce storm water impacts associated with new construction. Implementation of the storm water management structures and other storm water BMPs will ensure that post-development storm water discharge would not exceed current conditions. Several relevant BMPs are discussed in Section 3.5.4.

Overall, construction of proposed expansion and improvements coupled with BMPs and adherence to local, state, and applicable federal permitting requirements precludes major disruption of the site's surface water resources. Therefore, overall impacts on water resources resulting from the Preferred Alternative would be adverse, minor, and short-term.

#### **Groundwater**

There are three aquifers, separated by clay layers, which run through Kings and Queens Counties eastward along the length of Long Island. Queens County is served

by the New York City Water Distribution System from the Catskill/Delaware water supply. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 1990's, a portion of southeastern Queens and Nassau Counties was served by the Jamaica Water Supply Company using a groundwater supply system of 68 wells, 44 well stations and several water storage tanks. New York City purchased the system in 1996 and supplied drinking water to these communities. The groundwater supply system continued to provide water to a limited portion of Queens until 2007. None of the wells are currently used for drinking water.

The Preferred Alternative is anticipated to have no adverse impacts on groundwater. Appropriate groundwater engineering controls would be necessary, were excavation to occur in shallow groundwater areas. The increased use of cremains interment or columbaria would further decrease the risk of adverse impacts on groundwater. Therefore, any potential impacts to groundwater are anticipated to be negligible.

### **3.6.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

The No Action Alternative would result in no impact on water resources, because no cemetery would occur.

### **3.6.4 Effects of Minimization and Best Management Practices**

Please refer to Section 3.5.4 for an applicable listing of storm water BMPs.

## **3.7 Land Use**

### **3.7.1 Affected Environment**

The area of the St. Albans Community Living Center and the area of the proposed action are within the R3-2 district. R3-2 districts are general residence districts that allow a variety of housing types, including one- and two-family attached, detached and semi-detached residences (New York City Planning 2019). The current property is unused having formerly been used for military housing and, later, for a drug treatment center and other community service programs.

### **3.7.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative.**

The Preferred Alternative will have a long term effect on the land use, however, this effect will not be adverse. Cemeteries are a permitted open use within an R3-2 zone without requiring any additional special permitting or zoning changes (New York City Planning Commission 2016). Under the preferred alternative, the property would be developed as a columbarium with landscaped grounds as well as regular maintenance and security. This plan does not conflict with zoning use. The site is being constructed and operated on Federal property by a Federal Agency; NYC zoning and land use process are non-applicable. NYC permits for temporary/permanent construction activities that impact city property or roadways would be obtained by the construction contractor IAW the construction contract.

### **3.7.3 Effects of the No Action Plan**

The No Action Plan would not affect the current land use as the property is unused with no other planned use.

### **3.7.4 Effects of Minimization and Best Management Practices**

As the potential effects of the Preferred Alternative on land use to the socioeconomic environment would be negligible, no minimization, mitigation, or BMP's are recommended

## **3.8 Noise**

### **3.8.1 Affected Environment**

Sound is defined as a particular auditory effect produced by a given source, for example the sound of rain on a rooftop. Noise and sound share the same physical aspects, but noise is considered a disturbance while sound is defined as an auditory effect. Noise is defined as any sound that is undesirable because it interferes with communication, is intense enough to damage hearing, or is otherwise annoying. Noise can be intermittent or continuous, steady or impulsive, and can involve any number of sources and frequencies. It can be readily identifiable or generally nondescript. Human response to increased sound levels varies according to the source type, characteristics of the sound source, distance between source and receptor, receptor sensitivity, and time of day. How an individual responds to the sound source determines if the sound is viewed as music to one's ears or as an annoying noise. Affected receptors are specific (e.g., schools, churches, or hospitals) or broad areas (e.g., nature preserves or designated districts) in which occasional or persistent sensitivity to noise above ambient levels exists.

### **Noise Metrics and Regulations**

Although human response to noise varies, measurements can be calculated with instruments that record instantaneous sound levels in decibels. "A-weighted" denotes the adjustment of the frequency range to what the average human ear can sense when experiencing an audible event. The threshold of audibility is generally within the range of 10 to 25 dBA for normal hearing. The threshold of pain occurs at the upper boundary of audibility, which is normally in the region of 135 dBA (USEPA 1981). A whisper is normally 30 dBA and considered to be very quiet while an air conditioning unit 20 feet away is considered an intrusive noise at 60 dBA. Noise levels can become annoying at 90 dBA. To the human ear, a change in noise levels of 5 dBA is generally discernible while a change of 10 dBA is perceived by the human ear as either a doubling or halving of noise levels (USEPA 1981).

### **Federal Regulations**

Sound levels, resulting from the multiple single events, are used to characterize noise effects from vehicle activity and are measured in Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL). The DNL noise metric incorporates a "penalty" for nighttime noise events to account for increased annoyance. DNL is the energy-averaged sound level measured over a 24-hour period, with a 10-dBA penalty assigned to noise events occurring between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. DNL values are obtained by averaging sound exposure levels over a given 24-hour period. DNL is the designated metric of the Federal government for measuring noise and its impacts on humans. According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development criteria, residential units and other noise-sensitive land uses are “clearly unacceptable” in areas where the noise exposure exceeds 75 dBA DNL, “normally unacceptable” in regions exposed to noise between 65 and 75 dBA DNL, and “normally acceptable” in areas exposed to noise of 65 dBA DNL or less. The Federal Interagency Committee on Noise developed land use compatibility guidelines for noise in terms of DNL (FICON 1992). For outdoor activities, the USEPA recommends 55 dBA DNL as the sound level below which there is no reason to suspect that the general population would be at risk from any of the effects of noise (USEPA 1974).

### **State Regulations**

On October 6, 2000, NYSDEC issued a program guidance document: Assessing and Mitigating Noise Impacts. The guidance document discusses noise generation and propagation, offers methodology for performing noise assessments, and suggests ways to evaluate whether increases in noise levels are environmentally significant. An increase in noise levels of 10 dBA is perceived by most individuals to be twice as loud. The guidance document recommends that for non-industrial settings, the noise level should not exceed existing ambient noise levels by more than 6 dBA at a given receptor; however, this limit should be used as a general guideline as opposed to a regulatory limit. For example, in rural settings with low existing ambient noise levels, an increase of more than 6 dBA could be deemed acceptable because the baseline ambient noise level is low. However, the addition of any new noise source in a non-industrial setting should not raise the noise level above a maximum of 65 dBA, as 65 dBA allows for undisturbed speech at a distance of approximately 3 feet (0.9 meters) and is considered the “upper end” non-industrial ambient limit. Ambient noise levels in industrial or commercial areas should not exceed 79 dBA (NYDEC 2001).

### **City Regulations**

The New York City Noise Control Code (NYC Code 24-232), which was revised in 2005 and went into effect in July 2007, regulates noise emissions in New York City. The code limits construction activities to weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. The code also contains sound-level standards for various sources of ambient noise and construction noise, and prohibits unnecessary noise near hospitals, schools, and courthouses. The sound-level standards limit noise levels, as they would be measured in the interior of buildings, not outdoors.

### **Construction Sound Levels**

Demolition and construction work can cause an increase in sound that is well above the ambient level. A variety of sounds are emitted from loaders, trucks, saws, and other work equipment. Table below lists noise levels associated with common types of construction equipment. Construction equipment usually exceeds the ambient sound levels by 20 to 35 dBA in an urban environment and up to 30 to 35 dBA in a quiet suburban area. However, the New York City Noise Control Code also provides noise limits for specific construction equipment within the city. Guidance on quieter available construction equipment and quieter construction procedures are provided in the NYCDEP Notice of Adoption of Rules for Citywide Construction Noise Mitigation.

(NYCDEP 2007)

**Table 3-3 Predicted Noise Levels for Construction Equipment**

<b>Construction Category and Equipment</b>	<b>Predicted Noise Level at 50 Feet (dBA)</b>	<b>New York City Maximum noise Levels at 50 Feet (dBA)</b>
<b>Clearing and Grading</b>		
Bulldozer	80	85
Grader	80-93	85
Truck	83-94	84
Roller	73-75	85
<b>Excavation</b>		
Backhoe	72-93	
Jackhammer	81-98	
<b>Construction</b>		
Concrete Mixer	74-88	85
Welding Generator	71-82	73
Crane	75-87	85
Paver	86-88	85

Sources NYCDEP 2007, USEPA 1971

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

Noise impact analyses typically evaluate potential changes to the existing noise environment that would result from implementation of a proposed project. Potential changes in the acoustical environment can be beneficial (i.e., if they reduce the number of sensitive receptors exposed to unacceptable noise levels or reduce the ambient sound level), negligible (i.e., if the total number of sensitive receptors to unacceptable noise levels is essentially unchanged), or adverse (i.e., if they result in increased sound exposure to unacceptable noise levels or ultimately increase the ambient sound level). Projected noise effects were evaluated qualitatively for the alternatives considered and calculated based on proposed construction equipment.

### **Construction Equipment Noise**

The proposed project would consist of demolition and construction activities for the proposed demolition of the buildings at St. Albans. Noise from these activities would vary depending on the type of equipment being used, the area the action would occur in, and the distance from the noise source. To predict how construction activities would impact adjacent populations, noise from the probable work areas was estimated. Additionally, construction usually involves several pieces of equipment in use simultaneously. The cumulative noise from the construction equipment, during the busiest day, was estimated to determine the total impact of noise from construction

activities at a given distance based on typical construction equipment. Examples of expected construction noise, during daytime hours, at specified distances as shown in Table 3-4. These sound levels were predicted at 100, 200, 400, 800, 1000, and 1,500 feet from the source of the noise. These sound levels were estimated by calculating the noise from several pieces of equipment and then estimating the decrease in noise levels at various distances from the source of the noise.

Noise is a logarithmic function and is not calculated as simply an additive function. Short-term, minimal-to-moderate, adverse effects on the ambient noise environment would be expected during construction of the proposed project; however, the effects would not be significant. The noise from construction equipment would be localized, short-term, and intermittent during machinery operations. Heavy construction equipment would be used periodically during construction; therefore, noise levels from the equipment would fluctuate throughout the day. The proposed construction would be expected to result in noise levels comparable to those indicated in Table 3-4 below. Populations potentially affected by increased noise levels from the proposed construction activities would include St. Albans patients and personnel and the general public accessing buildings and areas in the immediate vicinity of the demolition of the buildings. These individuals would be expected to experience noise levels comparable to those indicated by Table 1 below, depending on their proximity to construction activities. It is anticipated that residents outside the area of Baisley Boulevard and Roy Wilkins Park could experience noise levels of approximately 82 to 87 dBA during construction activities.

Typical construction techniques used provide a minimum of approximately 20 dBA of noise reduction from outdoor to indoor areas. However, noise generation would last only for the duration of construction activities and would be isolated to normal working hours (between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 pm). Construction noise would diminish as the distance between the receptor and the construction activities increased. Generally, noise levels decrease by approximately 6 dBA for every doubling of distance for point sources (such as a single piece of construction equipment), and approximately 3 dBA for every doubling of distance for line sources (such as a stream of motor vehicles on a busy road at a distance). In addition, construction equipment would be equipped with appropriate sound-muffling devices (i.e., from the original equipment manufacturer or better), and would be maintained in good operating condition at all times. Construction workers would be working in close proximity to construction equipment and could be exposed to noise levels above 90 dBA. This is above the permissible noise exposure level defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). These levels would be reduced to permissible levels through feasible administrative or engineering controls, or the use of BMPs such as the use of hearing protection equipment. Therefore, noise effects on construction workers would be in compliance with applicable OSHA standards.

### **Construction Vehicle and Traffic Noise**

Short-term, minimal-to-moderate, and adverse effects from construction vehicle noise would be expected from implementation of the proposed project; however, the effects would not be significant. Increases in ambient noise levels would occur intermittently

during the construction period. The additional traffic resulting from construction vehicles would likely cause minor increases in noise levels on noise-sensitive populations adjacent to the roadways; however, these effects would not be considered significant.

The most common sources of noise in the St. Albans are generated from vehicles, and lawn maintenance activities. Building and infrastructure maintenance activities are a source of potential noise at the cemetery. Based on activities and land use in St. Albans, ambient noise levels in the St. Albans locale are anticipated to be typically at a cemetery or park-level at an estimated 67 decibels A (dBA) (23 CFR, Part 772, Table 1 Noise Abatement Criteria). However, noise levels from infrastructure and building maintenance within the Affected Area are estimated to peak at approximately 86 dBA (Federal Highway Administration 2015).

The operation of the cemetery would not noticeably increase traffic and associated noises from current levels. Traffic studies indicated that funerals would be limited to between 9:00AM and 2:00PM with approximately ten funerals a week anticipated. This traffic is not significant based on the existing flow of traffic on Baisley Boulevard.

### **3.8.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

The ambient noise environment for the project site is mainly affected by a high population density and high traffic volumes. Natural sounds from wind, the movement of vegetation, birds, and other natural sources of sound are present but do not have substantial effect on existing noise environment; transportation noise sources and fixed-equipment noise sources are the dominant noise sources. Existing noise sources in this area include noise originating from traffic using Baisley Boulevard, and Linden Boulevard. In an urban environment, noise levels change from moment to moment. Transportation sources, such as automobiles, trucks, trains, and aircraft, are the principal sources of noise in the urban environment. Along major transportation corridors, noise levels can reach 80 dBA DNL, while along arterial streets, noise levels typically range from 65 to 70 dBA DNL (USEPA 1974).

The noise study completed for this Preferred Alternative indicates that the road traffic noise along Baisley Boulevard was the predominant environmental noise source at the site and the potential noise impact from roadways may be above the CEQR limits. The operation of the cemetery would not noticeably increase traffic and associated noises from current levels. Traffic studies indicated that funerals would be limited to between 9:00AM and 2:00PM with approximately ten funerals a week anticipated. This traffic is not significant based on the existing flow of traffic on Baisley Boulevard. Construction noise levels will be comparable to those typically experienced near similar construction sites and will not exceed New York City established limits. The study also indicates that noise impacts from the proposed roof-top units of the administration building and the on-site traffic are below the applicable CEQR limits based on modeling at the site and the nearby residences.

Construction of Preferred Alternative would result in minor, short-term adverse noise impacts. Table 3-5 provides the estimated distance the construction noise will reach



during the construction phase. During construction, noise from construction vehicles' entering and exiting the cemetery is likely to temporarily increase noise levels. Land preparation, grading, and other construction activities will further contribute to temporary noise impacts above existing ambient noise levels. We would anticipate construction activities to have an average approximate noise level of 86 dBA. Based on a sound dissipation rate of five dBA per doubling of distance, construction noise impacts were estimated to extend to an estimated distance of 0.1 – 0.2 mile from the construction sites (see Table 3-4).

Noise from normal cemetery operations, which include noises associated with the operation, to include generated traffic, and maintenance of the cemetery as well as regular committal services and other ceremonial activities, would not change significantly from current conditions.

**Table 3-4. Estimated distance of construction noise resulting from implementation of the Preferred Alternative**

<b>Distance from noise (ft)</b>	<b>dBA<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Distance from noise (mile)</b>
50	86	0.009
100	81	0.019
200	76	0.038
400	71	0.1
800	66	0.2
1,600	61	0.3
3,200	56	0.6
6,400	51	1.2
12,800	46	2.4
25,600	41	4.8
51,200	36	9.7
102,400	31	19.4
204,800	26	38.8
409,600	21	77.6
819,200	16	155.2
1,638,400	11	310.3
3,276,800	6	620.6

Distance from noise (ft)	dBA <sup>1</sup>	Distance from noise (mile)
6,553,600	1	1,241.2
13,107,200	-4	2,482.4

### 3.8.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative

With implementation of the No Action Alternative there would be no impact on noise relative to current St. Albans construction and operational conditions because a new cemetery would not be built.

### 3.8.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices

The following minimization measures will be used to reduce the impacts associated with the implementation of the Preferred Alternative:

- Designing the landscape to baffle the cemetery from surrounding uses and minimize noise impacts on neighboring properties;
- Creating visual buffers along Baisley Boulevard and Roy Wilkins Park
- Using properly maintained and muffled vehicles and equipment;
- Complying with the Queens County Noise Control Ordinance at all times; and
- Shutting down heavy equipment and other noise emitters when they are not in use.
- Parking equipment and vehicles within the area of the Preferred Alternative

## 3.9 Socioeconomics

### 3.9.1 Affected Environment

The neighborhood of St. Albans surrounds the portion of the Farmers Boulevard corridor included in this environmental assessment. The neighborhood at the 2010 Census had a population of 48,593, down 2.9 percent from the 2000 census population count of 50,046 (Table 3-5). Losses were counted among the White non-Hispanic and Black/African American non-Hispanic population, while population gains were made most significantly among the Asian and Hispanic populations.

**Table 3-5: US 2010 Census for St. Albans in the vicinity of the Preferred Alternative**

Race/Hispanic Origin among residents in St. Albans and NYC	Number	Percent	NYC Number	Percent
Total Population	48,593	100.0%	8,175,133	100.0%
White non-Hispanic	469	1.0%	2,722,904	33.3%
Black/African American Non-Hispanic	43,073	88.6%	1,861,295	22.8%
Asian Non-Hispanic	417	0.9%	1,028,119	12.6%

Some other race Non-Hispanic	403	0.8%	78,063	1.0%
Non-Hispanic of two or more races	1,085	2.2%	148,676	1.8%
Hispanic origin	3,146	6.5%	2,336,076	28.6%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Census, SF1  
Population Division- New York City Department of City Planning

### 3.9.2 Employment

At 10.2 percent in 2008, the unemployment rate in St. Albans is higher than the rate for Queens (8.5 percent) and the city as a whole (8.8 percent) according to the 2006-2010 ACS for St. Albans and the 2008-2010 ACS for Queens and NYC. The unemployment rate is defined by the Census as “All civilian 16 years old who” were neither ‘at work’ nor ‘with job but not at work’ during the reference week, were looking for work during the last 4 weeks, and were available to start a job.”

Among those employed a greater share of workers living in St. Albans work in Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities and in Social Services than workers living in Queens and New York City as a whole. This is likely due to the presence of two major employment generators in these sectors located in close proximity to the neighborhood: JFK Airport and the St. Albans Community Living Center (St. Albans Veterans Administration Hospital.) Correspondingly, a higher percentage of St. Albans residents are government workers than in the borough and the city.

### 3.9.3 Effects of the Preferred Alternative

This alternative will have a negligible, somewhat positive effect on the socioeconomic environment. Construction and operation of the columbarium may provide temporary support jobs or bring workers into Queens County resulting in a minor economic benefit. The project will replace derelict, blighted buildings, with a perpetual, aesthetic and landscaped site.

### 3.9.4 Effects of the No Action Alternative

There will be no impacts as there would be no facility to construct or operate and no opportunity for temporary jobs or other potential economic benefit.

### 3.9.5 Minimization and Best Management Practices

As the potential effects of the Preferred Alternative to the socioeconomic environment would be negligible, no minimization, mitigation, or BMP’s are recommended.

## 3.10 Solid and Hazardous Materials

### 3.10.1 Affected Environment

The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas physically disturbed by construction activities including all areas of temporary and permanent impact including any staging areas.

The site of the Preferred Alternative, which was the site of two buildings with asbestos-containing materials (ACM), lead-based paint and florescent lights whose ballast have

the potential to contain hazardous materials, does not have any solid and hazardous materials or known contaminated sites. The previous buildings demolition and removal would have removed the contamination in accordance with local, state and federal regulations. During construction the only contaminated material would be fuel for the construction equipment. The steam tunnels that will be removed may have asbestos coverings or coatings. Similarly, during operations, the only contaminated material would be the fuel to operate maintenance equipment on site.

### **3.10.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

There will be no adverse impact. Solid and hazardous materials are not anticipated to be generated nor stored onsite with implementation of the Preferred Alternative. Should a spill of gasoline occur from a fuel tank in construction equipment, the spill will be contained and any gasoline and contaminated soil will be placed into a labeled, approved container and be transported to an approved disposal facility. If the steam tunnels have asbestos, the asbestos will be removed and disposed in accordance with all federal, state and/or local requirements. Therefore, while a gasoline spill could result in minor, temporary, adverse impacts, there should be no long-term adverse impacts resulting from solid and hazardous materials within the Study Area with implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

### **3.10.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, there is the no impacts.

### **3.10.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

Any abatement of ACM will be accomplished in accordance with USEPA, OSHA, and other relevant federal regulations. Any material generated will be disposed at a facility able to handle this material

If a spill of gasoline occurs from a fuel tank in construction equipment, the spill will be contained and any gasoline and contaminated soil will be placed into a labeled, approved container and be transported to an approved disposal facility.

## **3.11 Transportation and Parking**

### **3.11.1 Affected Environment**

Queens is the largest and second most populous borough of New York City with over 2.2 million people, about 27 percent of all New York City residents at the 2010 Census. The borough is bounded to the east by Nassau County on Long Island, and by Kings County, or the borough of Brooklyn, NYC to the southwest. The East River and the Atlantic Ocean form the borough's north and south boundaries. Queens is home to both of New York City's major airports, John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia.

The neighborhood of St. Albans encompasses approximately 3 square miles in south eastern Queens, between Downtown Jamaica and Cambria Heights, and is in Queens Community District 132. Residential development began in this area near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a post- World War I housing boom consequently established this area as a low density middle-income area. Through the 1940's, the neighborhood was

home to several Jazz greats, including John Coltrane, Count Basie, and Ella Fitzgerald, and later evolved into a birthplace of hip hop and rap music. The neighborhood remains largely residential and low-scale, with detached single and two-family homes lining most streets. The St. Albans facility is bounded by Linden Boulevard to the north, Baisley Boulevard and Roy Wilkins Park to the south, 115<sup>th</sup> and 116<sup>th</sup> Avenues along its east side, and the Long Island Railroad on its west. Linden Boulevard, a two-lane street with east- and westbound lanes with on-street parking, provides access to the Van Wyck Expressway to the west and the Cross Island Parkway to the east. Both provide access to the Belt Parkway to the south and the Grand Central and Long Island Expressways to the north.

While there is an extensive subway access in Jamaica, Queens just north of the project area, there is no direct subway service within the proposed project. The Long Island Railroad's West Hempstead Branch, St. Albans stop, is located within walking distance of the Proposed Action. There is no direct air or water access within the project area; however, JFK airport is only a few miles to the south. This proposed columbarium is in close proximity to both JFK and the subway and rail network in Downtown Jamaica. Downtown Jamaica, just west of St. Albans, serves as a local transportation hub. The Jamaica Long Island Railroad station serves as a significant transfer point for trains between Long Island, Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn, and Penn Station in Manhattan; ten of the LIRR's eleven commuter trains pass through the Jamaica station.

The E, F, J and Z MTA subway lines terminate in or near downtown Jamaica and are used by over 50,000 passengers daily. Over a dozen local and express busses connect Jamaica to St. Albans and the rest of the city. One spur of the JFK Air Train connects Jamaica to JFK airport. Close by the proposed site, the Q3 and Q83 local buses and the X64 express bus run down the Boulevard. The Q83 travels from Jamaica to Cambria Heights, Queens, the X64, running on weekdays only, travels between Cambria Heights to Midtown Manhattan. It takes about 40 minutes from Baisley Boulevard to Midtown on the express bus.

Farmers Boulevard is designated a Queen Local Truck Route Network with no restrictions and is subject to NYC DOT traffic rules outlined in Section 4-13-(b)(2). The NYC DOT defines a local truck route network as "designated for trucks with an origin and destination within a borough. This includes trucks that are traveling to make a delivery or for loading or servicing. Trucks should only use non-designated routes for the purposes at the beginning or end of a trip when traveling between their origin/destination and a truck route". <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/motorist/truckrouting.shtml>

Parking and equipment staging is available within the bounds of the current project area, which includes existing paved areas for both employee and equipment parking.

### **3.11.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

Public access to the site will be from an existing gated entrance off of Baisley Boulevard with an internal one way loop access road allowing traffic to exit on to Baisley Boulevard

at a separate gated access point to the north of the entrance. The additional vehicle access point was designed IAW a traffic study and is still supported by the refined traffic study from Mar 2020. The study finds that no traffic safety, speed or volume nuisances would occur on Baisley Boulevard as a result of the additional vehicle access point construction. Existing double yellow lines would remain and prohibit turns across traffic and opposite lane traffic mixing. Existing speed tables would remain to calm traffic. A pre-cautionary no left turn sign is recommended for the internal cemetery exit.

During operations, parking will be provided on site with approximately 12 spaces adjacent to the administration building and parallel parking along the access road. The administration/public information center building will require one employee parking spot and two handicap parking spots. There will also be parking (36 spaces) provided along the access road (cortege parking) for inurnments and visitors (Appendix E). On-site parking will only be for cemetery business, funerals, ceremonies and visitors.

During construction there would be temporary adverse effects to transportation and parking. All vehicles will be required to park within the property. Truck traffic will be limited to work hours, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

A traffic study of the access plan and cemetery operations, was conducted to inform the design plan. This study was refined in Mar 2020 (Appendix E). The study showed that construction/operations of the facility will not have significant adverse impacts on traffic safety, speed or volume on Baisley Boulevard.

It is not anticipated that there will be adverse effects from the operation of the columbarium, including the conduct of inurnments and other ceremonies.

### **3.11.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

No adverse effects on transportation and parking would occur.

### **3.11.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

It is recommended that funeral processions be encouraged to enter the columbarium from the north to allow unopposed right turns into the facility. Access from the south via Baisley Boulevard, northbound, will require the Baisley Boulevard southbound through traffic to stop. It is not anticipated that if this were to occur that the delay and likely queue would be more than a minor inconvenience.

For large funeral processions, it is recommended that a police officer be present to facilitate operational efficiency and safety.

## **3.12 Utilities**

### **3.12.1 Affected Environment**

The site currently has sanitary sewer, water, and telephone and electrical lines that served the buildings used for the military barracks and later community service

programs. A water line and sanitary sewer line that serves the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York section of the St. Albans Community Living Center. Two underground steam lines are located in the middle of the site. These steam lines were confirmed to be abandoned.

### **3.12.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

Activities associated with the preferred alternative include moving the water, sanitary sewer and electrical lines to the east side of the columbarium site. The site will access water for the administration/public information center restrooms, general irrigation and for watering stations within the niche areas.

During construction, the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York building will require uninterrupted water and sanitary sewer service until the new lines are installed. To accommodate this need, the new water and sanitary services will be installed and provide service to the building before the old lines are removed. Utilities may remain in place after phase one and be relocated to the new utility corridor in subsequent phases.

Power and telephone service will be provided to the administration/public information center building and the committal shelter along a similar route as the existing service using the existing power company utility vault. Power will be needed for security and access control systems, interior and exterior lighting, mechanical equipment, fire alarm, and building telephone and data.

Underground natural gas will tap off of the existing gas main on Baisley Boulevard and will be routed underground to enter the administration/public information building mechanical room. The abandoned steam lines will be removed.

There will be long-term effects to existing utilities with the preferred alternative, which represents an increase in the water, power, sewer and electrical requirements of the neighborhood. The preferred alternative will use existing lines and facilities as much as possible. The preferred alternative does not require the extension of utilities into the site or area.

### **3.12.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

The no action alternative would in no effect to the existing neighborhood electrical, water and sewer requirements. The abandoned steam lines will remain under the site.

### **3.12.4 Minimization and Best Management Practices**

All of the utilities will be installed in accordance with the relevant city, state and/or federal regulations. Lighting will be LED and utilize sensors. The heating and cooling systems as well as the plumbing fixtures will all be high-efficiency to reduce waste. Site plantings will utilize native, indigenous species that will be compatible with site conditions. The undeveloped areas will be planted with meadow grass requiring no irrigation.

## **3.13 Vegetation, Wildlife and Habitat**

### **3.13.1 Affected Environment**

The Region of Influence for the Affected Environment consists of all areas physically disturbed by construction activities or otherwise disturbed indirectly by erosional impacts and includes all areas of temporary and permanent impact including the staging area as well as the limits of construction and delivery vehicle egress/ingress to the columbarium.

Because of the relatively undisturbed and its location nearby Roy Wilkins Park, a variety of urban wildlife is present at the St. Albans site. Birds found throughout the project area would include rock pigeon (*Columba livia*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), American tree sparrow (*Spizelloides arborea*), and black-capped chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*). Acorns provide a food source for a variety of wildlife including eastern gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), and eastern chipmunks (*Tamias striatus*). A variety of mammals that would typically occur in the area include raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), and opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*). A listing of wildlife species with the potential to occur in and/or near the Study Area was compiled from the US Fish and Wildlife and is provided in Appendix D. The species listed (i.e. piping plover, red knot, etc.) would not likely be located in the area of the Proposed Action as there is no suitable habitat (sandy beach, shoreline, etc.) is found within area. Other migratory species might make use of the area.

Based on the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program, the property is outside of the coastal zone boundary (<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/applicants/wrp/wrp-2016/nyc-wrp-partill.pdf> 2016; Appendix D).

### **3.13.2 Effects of the Preferred Alternative**

The construction will result in temporary to permanent, adverse, minor effects to wildlife and wildlife habitat in the Study Area. Most motile wildlife will be disturbed and flushed by construction noise and disturbance and will move away from the construction sites. Mobile species such as raccoons and squirrels would move away from the construction impacts and utilize other comparable habitats at the St. Albans. However, impacts to these species would be minor as ample amounts of comparable habitats are found nearby at the St. Albans.

After the completion of the facility, the site would have open spaces and some habitat that would be useful and beneficial to local wildlife. Any species that avoided the area during construction would likely return to utilize the area.

### **3.13.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative**

With implementation of the No Action Alternative there would be no impacts to wildlife or wildlife habitat.

### **3.13.4 Effects of Minimization and Best Management Practices**

To avoid the adverse impacts to migratory birds, removal of vegetation would be accomplished from 1 August through 1 March, outside the migratory bird nesting season. If tree-cutting and other vegetation removal cannot be accomplished in this window, surveys for nesting birds' prior vegetation removal would be required. If active nests are encountered, the nests would be protected until the young have fledged.



### **3.14 Cumulative Impacts**

As defined by CEQ Regulations in 40 CFR Part 1508.7 cumulative impacts are those which result from the incremental impact of the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, without regard to the agency (Federal or non-Federal) or individual who undertakes such other actions.” Cumulative impact analysis captures the effects that result from the Proposed Action in combination with the effects of other actions taken during the duration of the Proposed Action in the same geographic area. Because of extensive influences of multiple forces cumulative effects are the most difficult to analyze.

NEPA and CEQ Regulations require the analysis of cumulative environmental effects of a Proposed Action, or set of actions, on resources that may often be manifested only at the cumulative level, such as traffic congestion, air quality, noise, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, and others.

#### **3.14.1 Considered Cumulative Actions**

Beyond the Proposed Action, some other actions within the region could result in cumulative impacts. Within the same timeframe as the next phase of construction and operation of the cemetery, other actions that may have cumulative impacts on the environment include:

- past, present, and potential future expansions and operations within St. Albans
- general construction and development within Queens County due to the high level of growth and development characteristic of Queens County.

#### **3.14.2 Effects of Cumulative Actions on Preferred Alternative**

There are several large construction actions in the surrounding neighborhood as well as the action that will remove the deteriorated buildings from the site, which was analyzed under a separate environmental assessment in 2017.

- 15 development projects consisting of high-rise residential buildings, hotels, smaller mixed-use developments are being proposed and/or built replacing used car dealerships, low rise commercial buildings and vacant lots in the Jamaica section of Queens to the northwest of the Addisleigh Park neighborhood.
- The New York City Department of Environmental Protection is completing an infrastructure project to install new storm water sewers and repair local streets to the southwest of the proposed action that will reduce local street flooding.
- In St. Albans, a 58 unit housing complex was built nearby the LIRR station
- Buildings 165 and 166 located on the site will be demolished. This action removes deteriorated, empty buildings from the site, on which the proposed columbarium will be constructed.

Cumulatively, the effects of the preferred alternative will not intensify or be intensified by the projects either recently completed, ongoing or proposed in the vicinity of the project

area. Environmental resources affected by the Preferred Alternative that may contribute to potential cumulative impacts with the NCA's planning for a proposed columbarium include temporary and permanent impacts to aesthetics/visual resources as well as temporary- and long-term impacts to noise and transportation and parking. The Any potential alternative would have to take into account the views from the residential neighborhood and Roy Wilkins Park and use vegetation to provide buffers to create privacy for the columbarium. Any proposed design would have to take into account effects to the St. Albans historic district to avoid causing an adverse effect. Noise impacts would persist after the completion of the Proposed Action with the construction activities should a future project be proposed. The operation of a columbarium would change the type of noise and periodic noise level during its operation with the conduct of ceremonies. Any proposed columbarium would continue to utilize the Baisley Boulevard gates, bringing additional construction traffic to the site as well as traffic associated with the operation of the facility. Traffic impacts have been studied and show no cumulative impacts on Baisley Boulevard. Cumulative impacts resulting from the Proposed Action and the reasonably foreseeable future action could be reduced with the implementation of controls and efforts to provide visual and sound buffers to the neighborhood.

The area surrounding the St. Albans Community Living Center, St. Albans, Queens, New York is highly developed. In the vicinity of the NCA property are occupied by medical facilities and clinics and outside the campus is neighborhoods with residential housing. The environment in which the NCA proposed project columbarium is located is best characterized as urban in nature. The proposed development, including housing, are being constructed to replace existing houses and other developments. The projects are located far enough apart to avoid compounding effects on public transportation and traffic or on utility usage or other services.

Any future development within the boundaries of the NCA land would be consistent with existing uses within the NCA property. Proposed future Federal actions at the NCA also would undergo future, appropriate NEPA analysis to ensure potential environmental effects are proactively identified and minimized to the extent possible.

The vicinity of the VAMC has been developed over the years. This development has been associated with the growth of other Medical facilities and City of New York. There is little open space in the vicinity of the VAMC.

### **3.14.3 Effects of Cumulative Actions on the No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, St. Albans would not be adequate to meet veterans' burial needs in the region and would require veterans to find other burial options and drive farther to other cemetery locations. Furthermore, the projects planned in the vicinity of the Proposed Action are likely to affect transportation, air quality, and noise in the region, and in a much more substantial way than the current operations at St. Albans, as previously discussed.

### **3.15 Potential for Generating Substantial Public Controversy**

Previous engagements with local community groups have indicated a preference and desire for additional medical care and services for area Veterans rather than a columbarium. These engagements have resulted in the involvement and attention of Congressman Meeks and his staff to ensure the community understands the decision-making process for the selection of a columbarium and its design. Continuous community coordination and outreach has taken place since 2017 (Appendix F). This includes a previous Draft EA and comment period in July-August 2019 (no community comments received). Potential substantive public comments were initially received via letter and e-mail beginning in December 2019. The community, through New York City Community Board (CB) 12, was provided with an additional briefing at the CB 12 Feb public meeting regarding the design plan to construct columbaria on the site in February 2020. At this meeting there was local resident opposition to the site plan element of constructing an additional vehicle access point to the site. This objection came from homeowners living directly across from the site on Baisley Boulevard (a two way street with double yellow lines, two traffic lanes and curbside parking on both sides).

In a responsive accommodation, the NCA determined that it was in the public and agency interest to reevaluate the original Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) determination NEPA to determine if the local traffic concerns would represent NEPA significant impacts. A refined final traffic study is assessed in the EA body and available in an appendix. It also represented an opportunity for additional on-the-record public involvement for the Final EA.

An additional vehicle access is necessary to allow one way traffic flow through the site, to maximize the space available for current and future columbaria, minimize the roadway footprint and respect the aesthetics and contemplative nature of the memorial.

The additional vehicle access was designed IAW a traffic study and is supported by the refined traffic study. The study finds that no traffic safety, speed or volume nuisances would occur on Baisley Boulevard as a result of the vehicle access point construction. Existing double yellow lines would remain and prohibit turns across traffic and opposite lane traffic mixing. Air quality and noise will not be substantially changed from existing urban conditions. There are no NEPA significant impacts from this additional vehicle access point design.

Additional coordination with CB 12 land use committee occurred in March 2020. All coordination through April 2020 has been shared with Congressman Gregory Meeks and his staff. They have been notified of the EA with FONSI, public reviews, proposed project elements and coordination with the community. Any comments received will be addressed incorporated in the Final EA

## **4.0 Public Involvement**

This section describes the public, agency and Native American consultation process associated with development of this EA.

### **4.1 Public and Agency Involvement**

The VA invites public participation in decision-making on new proposals through the NEPA process. Public participation with respect to decision-making on the Proposed Action is guided by 38 CFR Part 26, the VA's policy for implementing the NEPA.

Additional guidance is provided in the VA's Environmental Compliance Manual (VA 1998). Consideration of the views and information of all interested persons promotes open communication and enables better Federal decision-making. Agencies, organizations, and members of the public with a potential interest in the proposed Action, including federally recognized Native American tribes and minority, low-income, and disadvantaged persons, are urged to participate.

Public participation is important in the NEPA process. Consideration of the views and information of all interested parties promotes open communication and enables better decision-making. All agencies, organizations, and members of the public having a potential interest in the Proposed Action, including minority, low-income, disadvantaged, and Native American groups, are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process.

#### **4.1.1 Agency Coordination**

Interagency and Intergovernmental Coordination for Environmental Planning (IICEP) is a federally mandated process for informing and coordinating with other governmental agencies regarding Federal Proposed Actions. CEQ Regulations require intergovernmental notifications prior to making any detailed statements of environmental impacts.

Through the IICEP process, the VA modifies relevant Federal, State and local agencies and allows them sufficient time to make known their environmental concerns specific to a proposed Action. Comments and concerns submitted by these agencies during the IICEP process are subsequently incorporated into the analysis of potential environmental impacts conducted as part of the EA. This coordination fulfills requirements under EO 12372 which requires Federal agencies to cooperate with and consider State and local view in implementing a Federal proposal. It also constitutes the IICEP process for this EA.

A full listing of agencies consulted during the preparation of this EA can be found in Section 9 and Appendix D.

#### **4.1.2 Public Review**

The VA, as the Federal proponent of the Proposed Action, offered a draft EA for a 30-day public review between July 19 and August 24, 2019. A Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the *Caribbean Life* for a week starting on July 19, 2019. The NOA, which identified how to access the EA and the process for submitting comments, was also distributed via email/mail (see Appendix D). Copies of the EA were available for review at the Queens Library, St. Albans, and the Veterans Affairs, St. Albans Healthcare Campus. The draft EA and its appendices were posted to the US Army Corps of Engineers project website ([http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/ Environmental - Remediation/St-Albans/](http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental_Remediation/St-Albans/)). No public comments on the EA were received. Several agencies sent no comment letters.

Potential substantive public comments were received via letter and e-mail beginning in December 2019. NCA attended a public meeting of CB 12 in February 2020 where verbal comments were heard. In a responsive accommodation, the NCA determined that it was in the public and agency interest to reevaluate the FONSI determination to determine if the local concerns would represent NEPA significant impacts. It also represented an opportunity for additional on-the-record public involvement for the EA.

Additional coordination with CB 12 land use committee occurred in March 2020. All coordination through April 2020 has been shared with Congressman Gregory Meeks and his staff.

Appendix D contains the agency distribution list, copies of coordination letters and agency correspondence. Appendix F shows Public Outreach.

#### **4.1.3 Native American Consultation**

For federal proposed actions, federal agencies are required to consult with federally recognized Native American tribes in accordance with the NEPA, the NHPA, the NAGPRA, and EO 13175. The Stockbridge-Munsee Community, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe, and the Shinnecock Nation are identified as Native American tribes with having possible ancestral ties to the Proposed Action's ROI (i.e., Queens County, New York). A copy of the NOA was sent to each group. No comments or request for additional consultation was received.

#### **5.0 Conclusions**

This EA analyzed the potential environmental effects of the VA's Proposed Action to demo two buildings in St. Albans, NY for preparation of a new initiative to create a National Cemetery.

This EA considered alternatives: (1) the Preferred Alternative, to construct a columbarium on the site; and (2) the No Action Alternative, to do nothing. An additional alternative, to construct the columbarium in another location in the city did not meet the objective as there were no other suitable locations. As part of the design, there were three alternative configurations of the columbarium. The design chosen maximizes the use of the site yet maintains privacy for the ceremonies and visitation that would occur as well as provide a maintained landscaped area for the neighborhood.

This EA evaluated possible effects on aesthetics; air quality; community services; cultural resources; environmental justice; floodplains, wetlands, and coastal zone management; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; land use; noise; socioeconomics; solid and hazardous materials; transportation and parking; threatened and endangered species; utilities; and vegetation, wildlife and habitat. Implementation of the BMPs/environmental protection measures discussed in Section 3 will reduce the minor adverse effects identified in the EA. Table 5-1 presents a summary of impacts expected to occur under each alternative.

As a result of the analysis of impacts in the EA summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of the VA that, with the implementation of

appropriate management and avoidance measures described in Section 3, the Proposed Action would not generate significant public controversy nor have a significant adverse impact on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the NEPA of 1969. The Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse impacts on the human environment with the construction of the columbarium. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required.

**Table 5-1 Summary of Effects**

<b>Resource</b>	<b>No Action Alternative</b>	<b>Alternative 1: Preferred Alternative</b>
Aesthetics	There would be long term, adverse effects as the site would remain undeveloped and minimally maintained.	There will be minor, short-term, temporary impacts to the visual quality of the site during construction. Each completed phase as well as the final facility will result in a long term benefit with the forma designed and maintained landscape with trees, shrubs and other vegetation providing screening. Areas not built as part of the first phase of construction will be managed as meadows framed with lawn.
Air Quality	No adverse effects on air quality would occur.	No adverse effects on air quality would occur. All criteria pollutants are below thresholds, to include greenhouse gases. Fugitive dust emissions would be controlled via spraying or minimizing ground disturbance.
Community Services	No adverse effects on community services would occur.	There will be no effects or disruption of community services as part of the construction and operation of this facility.
Cultural Resources	No adverse effects to historic properties would occur.	There will be no adverse effect to the St. Albans Hospital historic properties with the construction and operation of the preferred alternative. There will be no archaeological properties affected by the preferred alternative.
Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management	No adverse effects to floodplains, wetlands and coastal zone management would occur.	This area is outside the New York State Coastal Zone. There are no wetlands or floodplains within the site or adjacent to the site that would be affected by the proposed action.
Geology, and Soil	No adverse effect would occur.	Short-term temporary adverse effects during construction that will utilize BMPs to minimize impacts. The operation of this facility will have no effect on these resources.
Hydrology and Water Resources	No adverse effect would occur.	No adverse effects would occur.

Land Use	No adverse effect would occur as the land would remain unused.	There will be long-term effect with the construction and operation of the columbarium. The property, which is currently unused, will be developed as a formal landscaped columbarium. This use is compatible with the current R3-2 zoning and will not require any special permit for zoning. The site is being constructed and operated on Federal property by a Federal Agency
<b>Resource</b>	<b>No Action Alternative</b>	<b>Alternative 1: Preferred Alternative</b>
Noise	No adverse effect on noise would occur.	There would be temporary adverse effects during construction that would be mitigated through the use of BMPs, including no equipment idling and other controls. No noise increase due to cemetery traffic.
Socioeconomics	No adverse effects would occur.	No adverse impact would occur.
Solid and Hazardous Materials	No adverse impact.	During construction or operation activities, fuel associated with equipment would be the only likely source of contaminants. BMPs, including cleaning and disposing of any spills in accordance with local, state and federal requirements would ensure there would be no adverse effects.
Transportation and Parking	No adverse effects on transportation and parking would occur.	Short-term, minor adverse effects may occur from the general movement of workers and equipment on and off the site. Worker parking would be site to avoid interference with current street parking and use of the Roy Wilkins part facilities. Operation of the facility may have intermittent, short-term minor adverse effects resulting from ceremonies held at the site. There will be on-site parking and short-term cortege parking within the facility and that this will accommodate most of the ceremonies and visitation to the site. Traffic studies show that no traffic safety, speed or volume nuisances would occur on Baisley Boulevard
Threatened and Endangered Species	There will be no adverse effects on threatened and endangered species.	There will be no effect to threatened and endangered species as there are no threatened and endangered species in this area.
Utilities	Utilities lines from the former use of the site would remain underground and potentially deteriorate.	Existing utilities lines will be used and some will be relocated to different areas of the site. There should be no adverse effect to existing users as the new lines will be constructed and working before the old lines are disconnected. The additional water, electrical and other resources need should not overtax the existing system. Electrical equipment, plumbing, etc., will be high-efficiency to avoid waste.

Vegetation, Wildlife and Habitat	No adverse effects on wildlife or habitat would occur.	Any Tree and vegetation (shrub) clearing will be accomplished outside the nesting season to avoid adverse effects to migratory birds.
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## 6.0 List of Preparers

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## 8.0 List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACM	Asbestos Containing Material
BMPs	Best Management Practices
CB	Community Board
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
IAW	In Accordance With
NCA	National Cemetery Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historical Preservation Act
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
US	United States
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USGS	US Geological Survey
USEPA	US Environmental Protection Agency
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VHA	Veterans Health Administration

## 9.0 Agency Coordination

Public participation opportunities with respect to this EA, as well as decision-making on the Proposed Action, are guided by 38 CFR Part 26. Coordination letters will be sent to various stakeholders including, but not limited to, the following:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- New York State Department of State, Coastal Zone Management
- New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- NYC Department of Transportation
- NYC Department of Environmental Protection
- NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
- Shinnecock Indian Nation
- Stockbridge Munsee Community
- Delaware Tribe
- Delaware Nation

Appendix D contains the distribution list for the draft re-evaluated FONSI and EA public review.