

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

PROPOSED INSTALLATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROJECTS AT LAUGHLIN AIR FORCE BASE, VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS

Pursuant to provisions of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), Title 42 *United States Code* (USC) §§ 4321–4347; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations at 40 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Parts 1500–1508; and 32 CFR Part 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP)*, the United States (US) Air Force (Air Force) prepared the attached Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with construction and demolition projects at Laughlin Air Force Base (AFB) in Texas.

Purpose and Need

The overall purpose of the Proposed Action is to support Laughlin AFB's current and future mission of training the next generation of Air Force pilots. The construction of new facilities, renovations and repair of existing facilities, demolition of obsolete facilities, and consolidation of mission support functions would address existing deficiencies in support facilities at Laughlin AFB. Left unchecked, deficiencies in facilities and infrastructure would degrade the Base's ability to meet Air Force current and future pilot training mission requirements. The Proposed Action is needed to provide facilities and infrastructure that are adequate to meet the training requirements of the 47th Flying Training Wing (47 FTW) at Laughlin AFB.

This EA evaluates short-term (1–5 years) installation development projects at Laughlin AFB identified through a collaborative planning process (Laughlin AFB, 2014, 2020a, 2020b).

Community and Services Planning District Projects

The purpose of the Proposed Action in the Community and Services Planning District is to provide modern, centralized, multi-use facilities that improve the living support amenities for those that work, live, and visit the Base, while providing for future development of the mission. The projects in the Community and Services District are needed to provide a connected, consolidated campus that supports the mission of the 47 FTW, as many of the existing facilities do not meet the current or future needs of the students and employees at Laughlin AFB. Students, staff, and visitors are currently required to use deteriorating buildings that are not large enough to support the current needs of the temporary and permanent populations on Base.

Training Planning District Projects

The facilities in the Training Planning District directly serve the pilot training mission of Laughlin AFB. The purpose of the Proposed Action in the Training District is to provide modern, accessible, multi-use facilities that directly support student pilots and their associated support personnel. The projects in the Training District are needed to provide well developed and connected operations and community areas that honor Air Force heritage. Currently, facilities in the Training District are in various states of disrepair and are inefficiently located based on current and future use. Implementation of projects in the Training District under the Proposed Action would meet the need by relocating functions, creating additional parking space, adding sidewalks and/or bike lanes to connect areas of the campus, and adding student areas.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

The installation development projects included as part of the Proposed Action were selected based on current and future needs at Laughlin AFB identified through the installation planning process, including the Installation and Area Development Plans for the Community and Services District and Training District, as required by Air Force Instruction 32-1015, *Integrated Installation Planning*.

The Proposed Action would incorporate the planning considerations addressed in Laughlin AFB planning documents. For example, the Proposed Action would adhere to project-specific development standards,

including land use constraints for siting the new facilities, and regulate design parameters such as height, scale, and orientation.

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative)

Under Alternative 1, the Proposed Action would include construction, renovation, demolition, and infrastructure development projects. Project 1 (Event Center) and Project 13 (Communications Building) would also involve building demolition. Under Alternative 1, the five new construction projects would add approximately 147,992 square feet (ft²) of building space. The demolition components would remove approximately 41,653 ft² of building space, for a net gain in building footprint of 106,339 ft². Because Ricks Hall is currently vacant and uninhabitable, its renovation would increase the useable building space by 52,859 ft². Under Alternative 1, 96,958 ft² of building space would be renovated, including Ricks Hall (B-255), the Main Exchange (B-450), and the Youth Center (B-390). Approximately 260,000 ft² of new parking lot and 52,000 ft² of non-turf surface (play surface for the school) would be constructed, for a total added 312,000 ft² of impervious surface. Infrastructure improvements would be implemented along approximately 2 miles of street. Approximately 318,511 ft² of useable outdoor space would be created. This area would include a new fueling station near the Main Exchange, additional recreational vehicle space at the Family Camp, student areas near the academic buildings, and an Event Field for large special events.

Under Alternative 1, the Pre-K–6 school would be constructed on Site A. Site A was determined to be the preferred location for the new school based on the screening criteria. Site A is located north of the residential housing along Bowling Street in the northwest part of Laughlin AFB. The parcel is located on Base, adjacent to the housing area within reasonable walking distance, and outside the 65-decibel noise contour. Additionally, Site A has sufficient area (greater than 6.5 acres) to accommodate the required school facilities. The site is located along Bowling Street, a residential street, and would avoid Base traffic. The size of the school facilities was based on published school development guidelines for classroom size reduction capacities. In addition to classroom space for Pre-K, a capacity of 300 students was assumed for Grades 1–6.

Alternative 2

Reasonable alternatives for the projects were determined to exist for the Child Development Center (CDC)/Youth Center (Project 6), Club XL (Project 7), and the Pre-K–6 school (Project 4). No other reasonable alternatives meeting the selection standards were identified for other projects. Therefore, the projects under Alternative 2 would remain the same as Alternative 1 with the following exceptions:

- A new CDC building and parking area would not be constructed near the Youth Center, but the Youth Center would still be renovated.
- The Events/Conference Center would not be constructed.
- Club XL would be renovated.
- The Pre-K–6 school would be constructed on Site B.

Under Alternative 2, the Pre-K–6 school would be constructed on Site B. Site B is located northwest of the Laughlin AFB running track between Patterson Street and 6th Street in the northwest part of the Base. To accommodate the approximately 6.5 acres required for the school facilities, the land along Patterson Street, southwest of the running track, would be needed in addition to the land on the northwest end of the running track. Site B is located on Base, is adjacent to the housing area within reasonable walking distance, and is outside the 65-decibel noise contour.

Under Alternative 2, three building construction projects would be completed, for an increase of 89,603 ft² of building space. A total of 118,592 ft² of building space would be renovated. Under Alternative 2, a total of 10,870 ft² of building space would be demolished. The net increase in building footprint under Alternative 2 would be about 78,733 ft². A total of 287,000 ft² of impervious surface would be constructed under Alternative 2, including 235,000 ft² of parking area and 52,000 ft² of play area for the school project. All

proposed projects would remedy facility deficiencies, be consistent with land use requirements, increase operational efficiencies and sustainable development, and improve the quality of life.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Air Force would not implement the proposed installation development projects, and Laughlin AFB would continue to operate under current conditions. The facility and infrastructure assets of Laughlin AFB would continue to degrade. In the short term, military training and operations would continue at Laughlin AFB in accordance with the status quo. Over time, the mission support capabilities of the Base would diminish along with its ability to support the future missions and requirements of its tenant activities.

Summary of Findings

Potentially affected environmental resources were identified through communications with state and federal agencies and review of past environmental documentation. Specific environmental resources with the potential for environmental consequences include land use; geological resources; air quality; water, biological, and cultural resources; infrastructure, transportation, and utilities; noise; hazardous materials and wastes; safety; socioeconomics; and environmental justice and protection of children.

In the summary of findings, the term Proposed Action Alternatives is used to refer to both Alternatives 1 and 2 when impacts are the same for both alternatives. Where differences occur between alternatives, potential impacts are summarized by each alternative.

Land Use

No significant adverse effects to land use would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. Under Alternative 1, all projects would occur within the Base boundaries. There would be a net gain of 90,541 ft² of building footprint and a net gain of 312,000 ft² of impervious parking surfaces. Except for the Pre-K-6 school, projects under Alternative 1 would occur in the Community and Services and Training Planning Districts, would be consistent with existing land use in these two districts, and would provide necessary improvements to outdated facilities. The Pre-K-6 school would be constructed on previously undisturbed land in the Flightline Planning District. The school would be developed north of the Residential Housing District near the Community and Services District. Although the school would be in the Flightline Planning District, the school would be compatible with existing surrounding land uses. The site is adjacent to residential housing on Bowling Street and is separated from both Base flight operations and support facilities.

Under Alternative 2, the net gain in building footprint and the amount of impervious surfaces are reduced by 27,606 ft² and 25,000 ft², respectively, compared to Alternative 1. The Pre-K-6 school would be constructed on Site B instead of Site A. Site B is adjacent to the Laughlin AFB running track, east of a residential area within the Community and Services Planning District. The land has been previously disturbed and is undeveloped. Site B is on the periphery of the Base support facilities in the Community and Services District. The Proposed Action under Alternative 2 aligns with the existing land use.

Geological Resources

No significant effects to geological resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. Soils on the Base are predominantly AcB and ZaC, which are suitable for development because they are relatively flat and well drained. Land disturbances during construction of new buildings and facilities would be managed under the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) (Laughlin AFB 2021; Section 7.2). Prescribed construction requirements and best management practices (BMPs) in the SWPPP would mitigate any potential soil erosion issues. All projects would occur within the developed portion of Laughlin AFB that is dedicated to the mission of training Air Force pilots. Therefore, no soils classified as prime or unique farmland would be affected by the Proposed Action. Laughlin AFB is highly developed, and adverse long-term impacts to geological resources would not occur.

Air Quality

No significant effects to air quality would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. The estimated total annual emissions of the Proposed Action Alternatives would not exceed the *de minimis* or Prevention of Significant Deterioration permitting thresholds or any criteria pollutant or precursor. Therefore, impacts from the Proposed Action Alternatives on regional air quality would be expected to be minor, and no adverse impacts would be expected to occur. Based on the Air Conformity Applicability Model, the net change in emissions associated with this project would be anticipated to be short term.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, in terms of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e), do not have a regulatory threshold; however, estimated emissions for CO₂e demonstrated that CO₂e emissions from the Proposed Action Alternatives would be low when compared to GHG emissions of 25,000 metric tons or more associated with large GHG sources.

Water Resources

No significant effects to water resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Surface Water and Stormwater – No surface waters are present on Laughlin AFB within the proposed project areas. Demolition and construction of buildings under the Proposed Action Alternatives would require a short-term use of additional water for dust control. Mitigation measures to control surface runoff from construction sites would minimize sedimentation in washes and opportunities for stormwater and groundwater contamination.

Groundwater – The demolition and construction projects under the Proposed Action Alternatives would have the potential to impact groundwater if stormwater runoff from demolition and construction sites contained contaminants and entered the underground aquifer. Stormwater is managed in accordance with the Base SWPPP BMPs. These controls would minimize the potential for groundwater contamination.

Floodplains – The construction, renovation, demolition, and infrastructure development projects included in Proposed Action Alternatives would not cross or encroach on a floodplain regulated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Therefore, the Proposed Action Alternatives would not result in impacts to the 100-year floodplain.

Biological Resources

No significant effects to biological resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Vegetation – The areas designated for the proposed projects under the Proposed Action Alternatives are highly disturbed or developed. Due to the lack of intact native vegetation in the areas proposed for development under the Proposed Action Alternatives and the minimal vegetation clearing associated with construction and demolition activities, no significant impacts to vegetation would occur.

Terrestrial Wildlife – There is limited suitable habitat for wildlife in the areas on Laughlin AFB within the proposed project locations. The developed portion of Laughlin AFB, in which the projects proposed under the Proposed Action Alternatives would be located, supports only common wildlife species adapted to developed areas.

Wetlands and Aquatic Resources – No wetlands are present in the region of influence on Laughlin AFB; therefore, no impacts to wetlands and aquatic resources would be anticipated to occur under the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Threatened or Endangered Species and Other Protected Species – No federally listed threatened or endangered species have been observed on Laughlin AFB, nor does critical habitat exist within Laughlin

AFB. The Air Force has determined that the Proposed Action Alternatives would have “No Effect” on Federally listed threatened or endangered species. In addition, no impacts to bald or golden eagles are expected because suitable habitat for these species does not exist on Laughlin AFB. Migratory birds would have the potential to nest in buildings proposed for demolition; however, all project areas would be checked for nesting birds prior to construction and demolition activities.

Invasive Species – Soil disturbance associated with either demolition or new construction could create seed beds conducive to the establishment of invasive plant species. However, most disturbed areas would be occupied by either new construction or landscaped to prevent establishment of invasive plants. If invasive plants do become established, the site would be managed under the Base’s Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan.

Cultural Resources

No significant effects to cultural resources would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Archaeological Sites – All construction, renovation, and ground-disturbing activity associated with the Proposed Action Alternatives would occur in the Community and Services District and Training District. The four archaeological sites on Laughlin AFB considered eligible for inclusion on the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP) do not occur near the projects in Alternative 1 or Alternative 2. The one archaeological site in the Community and Services District is not eligible for listing in the NRHP and would not be disturbed. The Proposed Action Alternatives would not affect any archaeological site on Laughlin AFB.

Historic Architectural Properties – None of the buildings evaluated by Laughlin AFB for historical significance were determined to be eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. Under Alternative 1, B-348, B-472, and B-476 would be demolished. All three buildings were evaluated in 2002. B-255, B-390, and B-540 would be renovated. These buildings were also evaluated for historical significance in 2002. Because no buildings or structures on Laughlin AFB have been determined eligible for inclusion in the NRHP, the Proposed Action under Alternative 1 would not affect any building or structure of historical significance.

Under Alternative 2, B-348 would be demolished. B-255, B-390, B-472, and B-540 would be renovated. These buildings have been evaluated and determined not to be eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. The Proposed Action under Alternative 2 would not affect any building or structure of historical significance.

Traditional Cultural Properties – No sacred sites, human remains, associated grave goods, unassociated grave goods, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony have been identified or recovered at Laughlin AFB. The Proposed Action Alternatives would not impact archaeological sites, historic properties, or Native American resources.

Infrastructure, Transportation, and Utilities

No significant adverse effects to infrastructure, transportation, or utilities would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Transportation – The improvement of approximately 2 miles of streets, including bike lanes and pedestrian walkways, and construction of new parking areas would benefit the movement of traffic, staff, and students on Base. The relocation of the fueling station to near the Main Exchange, a site more aligned with parking areas and the West Gate, would improve traffic flow. Short-term disruptions to traffic flows would be expected during construction activities around the Base. The new Pre-K–6 school would remove traffic congestion from student drop-off and parking areas at the existing modular school on Mitchell Boulevard, one of three main access routes for traffic entering through the West Gate entrance.

Electricity and Natural Gas – The Proposed Action Alternatives would have no long-term impacts to either the electrical or natural gas supply systems. Removing older buildings through demolition and replacing

them with larger, more energy-efficient buildings would result in a minor beneficial decrease in either electrical or natural gas demand. Both utility systems have the capacity to meet new demands from increases in building square footage. Any potential short-term disruptions to electrical or natural gas service within project areas during construction and demolition activities would be mitigated during project planning.

Potable Water Supply – Implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives would cause a minor increase in demand for potable water. The current capacity of the potable water supply has limitations for future growth and mission requirements because of the condition of the water distribution system. The Proposed Action under Alternative 1 would add 90,541 ft² of new building space and 52,859 ft² of new useable space with the renovation of Ricks Hall. These buildings may increase future water demand but would also improve the water distribution system by adding new distribution lines during construction. However, the existing inefficiencies of the water supply system at Laughlin AFB would remain. Short-term, negligible impacts on the potable water supply system could occur during construction and demolition when existing lines are disconnected from old buildings and new lines are constructed to serve new buildings. There would be a short-term increase in water use for dust control during demolition and construction.

Sanitary Sewer – The capacity of the sewer system is sufficient for future growth and mission requirements. However, with the addition of new construction and demolition of older buildings, sewer lines and systems would be improved and upgraded. Beneficial impacts to the sewer system through facility upgrades would be expected under Alternative 1.

Solid Waste – Construction, demolition, and renovation projects would generate approximately 4,175 and 1,718 tons of solid waste under Alternatives 1 and 2, respectively, assuming no recovery and diversion of waste from the landfill. No long-term impacts on solid waste management would be expected to occur because the projects would not exceed the capacity of the solid waste disposal system.

Liquid Fuel Storage – Moving the vehicle fueling station to align with the West Gate would provide a beneficial impact to the overall system on Base by centralizing the fueling station. Additionally, the existing above-ground storage tanks would be replaced by a below-ground storage tank and would reduce anti-terrorism and force protection safety concerns. The current capacity is sufficient for current mission requirements, though, with improvements, the fuel system would be expected to provide increased efficiencies and better service for Laughlin AFB staff. Long-term, beneficial impacts would be expected to occur under the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Noise

No significant effects to noise would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. The Proposed Action Alternatives would include construction and demolition activities that would occur entirely within the boundaries of Laughlin AFB. Noise associated with the proposed construction and demolition projects would not cause any significant direct or indirect impacts on noise-sensitive receptors. Operational noise at Laughlin AFB would not increase from implementation of the Project Action Alternatives.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes

No significant effects to hazardous materials (HAZMAT) and wastes would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes – Under the Proposed Action Alternatives, a limited use of certain hazardous materials would be required during construction and demolition. Associated HAZMAT could include paints, welding gases, solvents, preservatives, sealants, and pesticides. Additionally, hydraulic fluids and petroleum products, such as diesel and gasoline, would be used in construction and demolition equipment and vehicles. As such, the Proposed Action Alternatives would create the potential for the accidental discharge or spill of HAZMAT and wastes that could contaminate the environment or result in exposure of persons to such contaminants. With the applicable requirements and management plans in

place for construction of the Proposed Action Alternatives and no contaminants at concentrations that would pose a risk to construction workers, potential HAZMAT effects would be minor and short term.

Asbestos, Lead Based Paint, and Polychlorinated Biphenyls – Potential risk under the Proposed Action Alternatives would be associated with improper handling of construction and building materials. Improper handling of these materials has the potential to adversely affect HAZMAT and waste at Laughlin AFB. Concerns of asbestos-containing material (ACM), lead-based paint (LBP), and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are related to the age of a building. B-348 and B-472, which are proposed for demolition under the Proposed Action Alternatives, have the potential to contain ACM. B-348, B-472, and B-478 have the potential to contain LBP or PCBs. Procedures for managing ACM, LBP, and PCBs would be followed as necessary.

Perfluoroalkyl Substances and Aqueous Film Forming Foam – Perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) may be present in soil and/or groundwater at the three Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) release sites on Laughlin AFB. Construction of Project 11 in the Training District (Smart Street Sidewalks and Bike Lake Improvements) would be located within AFFF Release Area 2. Under the 2018 Site Inspection, this site was recommended for further assessment, as PFAS levels were above project action limits in subsurface soil. Ground-disturbance activities associated with this project would not be anticipated to significantly impact the release area, as these activities would be at or near surface level. Ground disturbance in the area would be managed in accordance with applicable Laughlin AFB and Air Force guidance, and potential impacts to water quality would be monitored under the SWPPP. There are no other release sites within the vicinity of the proposed projects. Significant impacts to PFAS and AFFF sites would not be anticipated under the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Environmental Restoration Program Sites – No significant effects to Installation Restoration Program (IRP) sites would be anticipated to occur under Alternative 1 of the Proposed Action. There is only one active IRP site at Laughlin AFB, ST003, and none of the proposed projects would occur in its vicinity. However, there is a former site in the vicinity of Project 11 in the Training District under the Proposed Action. Site SS015 (Storm Drainage Ditch) runs along the northern boundary of the Training District. However, this area has been designated “No Further Remedial Action Planned” since 2009 and has been approved for commercial and industrial use under the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Risk Reduction Program.

Safety

No significant adverse effects to safety would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. The construction and demolition projects would not change existing Flight Safety Clear Zones, Accident Protection Zones, or Explosive Safety Quantity Distance (ESQD) arcs; therefore, no adverse effects to Flight Safety or ESQD arcs would occur.

Short-term, negligible-to-minor impacts on contractor health and safety could occur during the proposed construction and demolition projects. To minimize health and safety risks, contractors would be required to use appropriate personal protective equipment and establish and maintain site-specific health and safety programs for their employees and follow all applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations.

Long-term impacts of the Proposed Action would include improvements to the health and safety of Laughlin AFB personnel and visitors. These improvements would occur as a result of the replacement of outdated facilities with new facilities, renovation of existing buildings, expansion of the CDC facilities, and construction of a new and larger Pre-K–6 school located away from main traffic routes, thus creating a safer environment for parents and students.

Socioeconomics

No significant effects to socioeconomics would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. The proposed projects would not involve the addition of permanent military, contract, or civilian personnel or their families. Therefore, no impacts to the local or regional population would occur.

The construction of new facilities and demolition of existing facilities would result in a temporary increase of construction personnel, depending on the number of projects occurring simultaneously; any temporary increase would have a negligible, beneficial impact on the socioeconomic condition on the region. Because there would be no permanent increase in military, contract, or civilian personnel, there would be no need for additional housing. Therefore, no adverse impacts on employment, housing, or educational resources would occur under the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Environmental Justice and Protection of Children

No significant effects to environmental justice populations and children would be expected to result from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternatives. Access to Laughlin AFB is restricted to military personnel, civilian employees, and assigned contract workers. Impacts to residents living outside Laughlin AFB would not occur because the proposed activities are wholly contained within the Base. Therefore, there would be no disproportionate impacts to minority, low-income, or youth populations.

Cumulative Impacts

The EA considered cumulative impacts that could result from the incremental impact of the Proposed Action Alternatives when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable environmental trends and planned actions on Laughlin AFB. No potentially significant cumulative impacts were identified.

Mitigation

The EA analysis concluded that neither Alternative 1 nor 2 of the Proposed Action would result in significant environmental impacts; therefore, no mitigation measures are required. BMPs are described and recommended in the EA where applicable.

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, CEQ regulations, and 32 CFR Part 989, and which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the proposed activities would not have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This decision was made after considering all submitted information, including a review of agency comments submitted during the 30-day public comment period, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that meet project requirements and are within the legal authority of the US Air Force.

Kevin A. Davidson
Colonel, United States Air Force
47 FTW Wing Commander
Laughlin Air Force Base

DATE