



OFFICES OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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County Executive

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May 20, 2014

Ms. Valerie Nottingham
Division of Environmental Protection
National Institutes of Health
Building 13, Room 2S11
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892
VIA EMAIL: nihnepa@mail.nih.gov

Dear Ms. Nottingham:

Please accept my comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the NIH proposed Master Plan. The Draft EIS provides for significant construction in anticipation of the migration over 20 years of approximately 3,000 personnel from outlying facilities to the main NIH campus in Bethesda. This represents a 15% increase of personnel at NIH. While I appreciate that NIH has met and exceeded the goals of its own Transportation Management Plan (TMP) to reduce SOV usage by NIH personnel, I am concerned that the TMP is based on a low threshold of one parking space for every two (1:2) employees.

The number of NIH-generated SOVs will increase under the proposed Master Plan with the addition of 1,500 parking spaces to the existing 10,000 spaces and will contribute to a level of traffic that is not sustainable in Bethesda's urban environment. NIH must raise the bar to further reduce SOV traffic by implementing a more robust TMP and increasing the ratio to 1:3 as recommended by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). In comparison, a 1:3 parking ratio has been maintained by Naval Support Activity Bethesda (NSAB), which experienced a greater percentage of growth (45%) due to Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) over a more accelerated period time (seven years) than is projected by the NIH Master Plan (15% growth over 20 years).

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The proposed Master Plan offers an opportunity for NIH to reduce SOV usage in the heavily congested residential and commercial neighborhoods of Bethesda. Under the proposed Master Plan, NIH intends to replace surface parking by constructing new multi-level parking (MLP) facilities. By scaling back the design of the new MLPs, NIH can achieve the federally recommended 1:3 parking ratio.

NIH should seize this opportunity to do the right thing. The proposed Master Plan should be revised to reduce on-campus parking and provide a more robust Transportation Management Plan that achieves a 1:3 parking ratio. These revisions would make the proposed Master Plan a forward-looking document that best serves the interests of NIH and the surrounding community.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Phil Alperson
Military Installations and BRAC Coordinator