

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4608**

January 13, 2017

Ms. Alexis Gray, NEPA Compliance Specialist  
U.S. General Services Administration  
National Capital Region  
301 7th Street, SW, Room 4004  
Washington, DC 20407

Dear Ms. Gray:

I write to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) for the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC) 2016 Master Plan Update, prepared by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). The NFATC is of great interest to me, as it is located in Virginia's 8th Congressional District, which I represent in the U.S. House of Representatives. I recognize and appreciate that the NFATC is the U.S. government's premiere foreign affairs training provider and a strategic enabler of diplomatic excellence. The State Department's substantial growth and policy requirements make the NFATC's expansion understandable and necessary.

The NFATC's location, in the heart of Arlington County, makes it critical that the facility maintain a healthy partnership with the surrounding community. Therefore, I respectfully request consideration of the following points:

Pedestrian Trail

Currently, an easement is granted for the 3,055 foot-long paved pedestrian trail that runs along the southern edge of the NFATC's property, from S. Quincy Street southwestward past the Childcare Center, then west past the guard station at S. George Mason Drive. While I understand that with the proposed expansion would come new physical security requirements to mitigate increased risk, I am concerned that the proposal eliminates the general public's access to this trail. The Draft EA concludes that "the proposed action's impact on neighborhood connectivity would be minor," and that "this determination is based on the limited number of individuals using the NFATC's pedestrian trail."

Feedback I have received from the NFATC's neighbors suggests this assessment is inaccurate. There is concern that the Foreign Service Institute's (FSI) measurement to determine the path's usage may have been flawed. Specifically, the measurement tool was placed at the eastern trailhead when in fact many of the path's users access the trail from the dirt footpath adjacent to the trailhead. Had FSI placed the counter at a midpoint on the trail, their numbers would likely have increased and more accurately reflected use.

Additionally, the path serves as more than simply a recreational route. It provides connectivity through a superblock in Arlington and allows for a safe, traffic-free crossing of S. George Mason Drive. Students use the path to walk to and from school, and residents use it to stay off congested major thoroughfare roads when simply moving about the neighborhood. Supporting safe pedestrian friendly routes for all ages is a priority of Arlington County, the Alcovia Heights neighborhood, and mine. Taking these factors into consideration, I encourage the GSA to revisit the determination that the proposed action's impact on neighborhood connectivity would be minor.

#### Traffic

The Draft EA's discussion of the traffic impacts of the NFATC also raises several concerns. The Draft EA concludes that all of the intersections around the facility now operate at an acceptable level, with the exception of George Mason and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. From discussions with the neighbors of the NFATC, however, I understand George Mason Drive is regularly backed up in the morning from Route 50 as far south as 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

Further, the Draft EA states that a 20 percent increase in personnel can be handled by alternative transportation modes—transit, walking, and bicycling—without having a significant impact. There is no evidence that this will be remotely successful, however. Public transit to the site is very limited. Additionally, lessons from the redevelopment of the Army National Guard Bureau facility adjacent to the NFATC demonstrate that an increase in population at the site may cause significantly more single-use automobile congestion. These considerations clearly indicate the need for further review of the traffic implications of the NFATC expansion before proceeding.

I appreciate GSA's willingness to engage in a discussion about these areas of concern. To be truly successful, the process will require give-and-take from and among the NFATC, GSA and the neighborhood. I offer my office's assistance facilitating these conversations. The proposed actions and Master Plan updating present an opportune time to engage with the community for long term visioning for the site that could also include constructing an east-west connector trail along the southern boundary of the NAFTC site and the issues mentioned above. Thank you for your time and attention to these important comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dan By', is written in a cursive style.

DB/NS