

VVMC East Wing Conditional Use Permit
Preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment for Proposed Heliport

Background and Environmental Impact Report Process

The 2015 Vail Valley Medical Center Site Specific Master Redevelopment Plan (Master Plan) includes a chapter dedicated to the discussion of the Emergency Helipad. Among other things, the Master Plan states that “an Environmental Impact Report will be provided as an element of the CUP application”.

Chapter 12 – Environmental Impact Report of the Town’s Zoning Regulations outlines requirements, standards and procedures for environmental impact reports. Among other things, Chapter 12 outlines a preliminary environmental assessment (PEA) process. The PEA is a step that occurs prior to the completion of a full EIR and is intended to determine, at a preliminary level, if a project may have “an insignificant impact on the environment”. If a finding of insignificant impact is made the subject project is exempt from the full EIR process.

Section 12-12-3 C. describes the PEA - “A project which, on the basis of a preliminary environmental assessment covering each of the factors prescribed in section 12-12-2 of this chapter is found to have an insignificant impact on the environment. The preliminary environmental assessment and the finding on environmental impact shall be made by the administrator.”

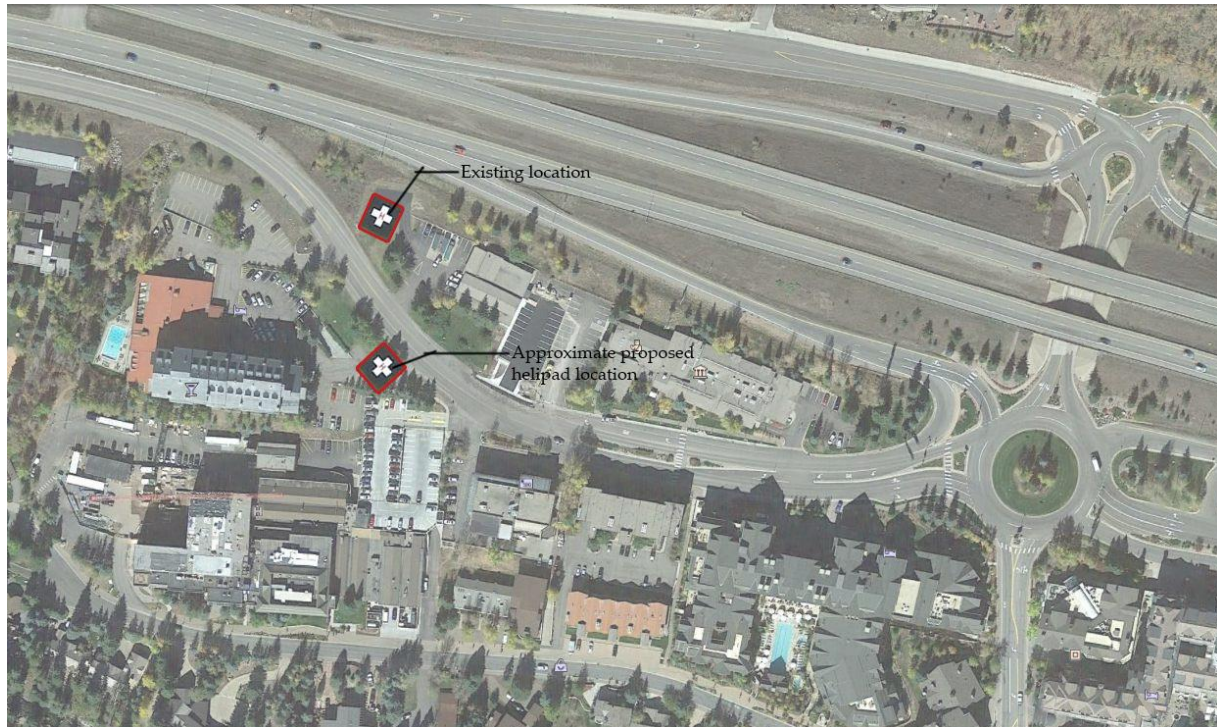
The PEA outlined below is Vail Valley Medical Center’s (VVMC) initial step in addressing the Master Plan requirement to provide an EIR as an element of the CUP. If, in accordance with the provisions of 12-12-3 C. a finding of “insignificant impact on the environment” is made, the East Wing CUP will be exempt from completing a full EIR. If it is determined that the project could result in significant environmental impacts a full EIR will be required.

Description of Proposed Heliport

Existing Heliport

For many decades VVMC has utilized an off-site helipad located on the north side of the South Frontage Road just west of the Town of Vail Municipal building. The heliport is located on land owned by the Colorado Department of Transportation. While a serviceable helipad, its off-site location necessitates patients being transported via ambulance between the heliport and

VVMC. The diagram on the following page depicts the existing heliport and the proposed heliport location.



VVMC Master Plan

The need for ambulance transport is less than desirable due to the potential risk to the patient, the time necessary for the transport and the demands transport places on local emergency service providers. For these and other reasons, the Master Plan goal for VVMC's heliport is:

Establish an emergency helipad within the VVMC campus that is located to provide direct internal connection to the new Emergency Department and with sensitivity to the surrounding neighborhood.

The Master Plan also provides general recommendations for the location and height of the on-site heliport. The recommended location is at the north end of the East Wing along the South Frontage Road and to be at a height of approximately 75'. This location and height was determined to allow for helicopter flight paths that minimize impact on the future development of the Evergreen Hotel and the Town's municipal site and to locate the heliport as far from neighboring residential areas as possible.

Description of proposed heliport

The proposed heliport is located on the rooftop of the northern most portion of the east wing. The landing pad itself is 46' in diameter and is at a height +/-74' above the elevation of the main entry to the East Wing. Access to the pad is provided by elevator and two stairwells that link directly to the new Emergency Department below. The proposed heliport is located approximately 200' south of the existing heliport.

More detailed information on the heliport is provided in the full CUP submittal that has been provided under separate cover. The rendering below depicts the proposed heliport.



Operations/anticipated utilization

The heliport will be privately owned (by VVMC) and its use will be limited to emergency helicopters only. All emergency helicopter operators utilizing the heliport will need VVMC approval to do so and all providers will be required to adhere to operating procedures that will be established by VVMC. A draft outline of operating procedures has been provided with the CUP submittal.

The vast majority of all helicopter flights involve the transport of patients from Vail to hospitals in Denver. While patients are occasionally flown to Vail for treatment, this occurs very infrequently. While the number of helicopter transports varies from year to year, historically

VVMC has averaged approximately 70 air transports per year (a handful of there are airplane transports out of Eagle). As of July 10, VVMC has had 28 helicopter transports in 2017.

Preliminary Environmental Assessment

As outlined in Section 12-12-3 C., the preliminary environmental assessment is to be made based on the environmental factors listed in Section 12-12-2. These factors are listed below, along with response to how the project may affect these factors. Note that this evaluation addresses the potential impacts from the heliport only, no considerations are made relative to other aspects of the proposed East Wing expansion.

A. Alters an ecological unit or land form, such as a ridgeline, saddle, draw, ravine, hillside, cliff, slope, creek, marsh, watercourse, or other natural landform feature.

Response

The heliport is located on the roof of a building that will be constructed on land that is currently in a developed condition (existing parking structure and surface parking lot). As such the project will have no effect on the factors listed above.

B. Directly or indirectly affects a wildlife habitat, feeding, or nesting ground.

Response

There is no wildlife habitat, feeding or nesting ground at or near the project area. As such the project will have no effect on the factors listed above.

C. Alters or removes native grasses, trees, shrubs, or other vegetative cover.

Response

The heliport is located on the roof of a building that will be constructed on land that is currently in a developed condition (existing parking structure and surface parking lot). While a small strip of landscaping will be removed, no native grasses, trees, shrubs or other vegetative cover will be affected.

D. Affects the appearance or character of a significant scenic area or resource, or involves buildings or other structures that are of a size, bulk, or scale that would be in marked contrast to natural or existing urban features.

Response

The project is located along the South Frontage Road and proximate to the interstate highway system, it will not affect scenic areas or resources. The height and scale of the heliport and the building below is consistent with the height of other buildings located along South Frontage Road (The Lion, Four Seasons, Solaris) and is within the height limit of prescribed by zoning for the neighboring Evergreen Lodge. The heliport is not in marked contrast to natural or existing urban features.

E. Potentially results in avalanche, landslide, siltation, settlement, flood, or other land form change or hazard to health and safety.

Response

The heliport is not located in any geologically sensitive areas (based on Town of Vail mapping of geologic hazards). As such the project will have no effect on the factors listed above.

F. Discharges toxic or thermally abnormal substances, or involves use of herbicides or pesticides, or emits smoke, gas, steam, dust, or other particulate matter.

Response

The heliport will not discharge toxic or thermally abnormal substances, involve the use of herbicides or pesticides, or emit smoke, gas steam dust or particulate matter. Helicopters using the heliport will emit engine exhaust during arrivals and departures.

Exhaust emissions from helicopters is essentially invisible and due to the temperature difference with surrounding air will rise and dissipate rapidly. Exhaust from the helicopter will naturally disperse and due to the height of the heliport and the helicopter's relative distance from the general public, the impact of exhaust from the helicopter will be insignificant.

G. Involves any process which results in odor that may be objectionable or damaging.

Response

The heliport will not produce odors. While helicopters using the heliport will emit engine exhaust, there is minimal odor associated with helicopter exhaust. This is particularly in this case given the elevation of the heliport is +/-75 above ground. Any impact from odor will be insignificant.

H. Requires any waste treatment, cooling, or settlement pond, or requires transportation of solid or liquid wastes to a treatment or disposal site.

Response

The heliport will not involve waste treatment, cooking or settlement ponds, nor require transportation of solid or liquid wastes.

I. Discharges significant volumes of solid or liquid wastes.

Response

The heliport will not involve any discharge or solid or liquid wastes.

J. Has the potential to strain the capacity of existing or planned sewage disposal, storm drainage, or other utility systems.

Response

The heliport will have limited sewage and utility needs and will not strain these systems. Runoff from the helipad will be accounted for in the design of the overall projects storm drain system.

K. Involves any process which generates noise that may be offensive or damaging.

Response

Helicopters will produce noise during arrivals and departures from the heliport. On average VVMC has +/-70 helicopter transports each year, or one arrival and one departure every five days. The “sound event” from a landing or takeoff lasts approximately 45-60 seconds and the degree to which noise is perceived is dependent upon background noise from other sources. In this case background noise (primarily) from Interstate 70 affects how and the length of time helicopter noise is perceived. Under certain conditions noise from a helicopter may be evident for as little as 20 seconds. Many other standard activities or devices (lawn mowers, leaf blowers, vacuum cleaners, motor cycles, trucks) regularly produce noise levels higher than that which the average person would perceive when they hear a helicopter.

For a number of decades VVMC has used an existing heliport that is located just 200’ from the proposed heliport. The proposed heliport is +/-75’ above grade. This elevation will decrease the level in which helicopter noise will be perceived.

Given its elevation above grade and proximity to the existing heliport, the proposed heliport is not expected to result in any appreciable change in noise levels as compared to what has been occurring for the past many decades. Helicopter flights are very infrequent and noise from the flights is of very short duration. Noise from the heliport will have an insignificant impact and not be offensive or damaging.

It is also noteworthy that Chapter 1-Public Nuisances of Title 5 of the Town Code establishes noise regulations that prohibit excessive or unusual noises. These regulations specifically exempt from noise regulations “authorized emergency vehicles when responding to an emergency call or acting in time of an emergency”. Helicopter transport of medical patients would qualify as an exception from the Town’s noise regulations.

L. Either displaces significant numbers of people or results in a significant increase in population.

Response

The heliport will have no impact on the displacement of people or on increase to population.

M. Preempts a site with potential recreational or open space value.

Response

The heliport site has no potential recreation or open space value.

N. Alters local traffic patterns or causes a significant increase in traffic volume or transit service needs.

Response

The heliport will not alter local traffic patterns or cause an increase in traffic volumes or transit service needs.

O. Is a part of a larger project which, at any future stage, may involve any of the impacts listed in this section. (Ord. 29(2005) § 31: Ord. 8(1973) § 16.200

Response

The heliport is not a part of a larger project to be developed in the future.

Findings

Based on the findings above, the proposed heliport will have no or insignificant impacts on the environment.