



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Health Care System**  
**4150 Clement Street**  
**San Francisco, CA 94121**

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In Reply Refer To: 662/138

Julianne Polanco  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
California Office of Historic Preservation  
1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95816

Subj: Consultation of Replacement Public Safety Radio Project

Dear Ms. Polanco,

The San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) is coordinating with the City of San Francisco Department of Emergency Management (SFDEM) on this proposed Public Safety Radio Replacement Project consisting of telecommunications infrastructure to be installed on Building 2 at the VA Medical Center located at 4150 Clement Street in San Francisco, CA. The project includes the installation of a communications equipment shelter on the building's sixth-floor roof as well as steel stairs to the new communications shelter, a new roof access door, coax cables in a new cable tray across the roof, and new antennae.

The City of San Francisco has a long-term lease agreement with SFVAMC to house and operate emergency public safety radio communications equipment on the VA Campus. This radio equipment serves all of San Francisco's public safety and public service agencies, supporting over 9,000 radios and providing wireless radio coverage for the northwest corner of the city. The current equipment shelter and water tower (on which the City's antennae are installed) will be demolished as part of the SFVAMC Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) sub-phase 1.9, Building 40. LRDP sub-phase 1.9 has previously been consulted on with your office to include the demolition of the water tower and replacing it with underground water storage tanks. The SFVAMC and City staff surveyed alternate locations where the equipment and shelter could be moved that provided adequate space, security, and access necessary to operate the public safety radio system. Several locations for the shelter and antennae were reviewed. Specifically a location inside the facility was considered, however there was not adequate space or air conditioning for the equipment. Building 2, 6<sup>th</sup> floor roof was the only location with adequate space to install a prefabricated shelter as all the other rooftop locations are populated with various mechanical/ventilation equipment. This area is also in close proximity to the roof above the 7<sup>th</sup> floor where the antennas will be mounted. This is necessary to get adequate elevation for the antenna to provide optimal RF propagation/coverage and line of sight comparable to the existing antenna location on the water tower. Building 2 was selected as the location that best met the system needs within the spatial constraints of the SFVAMC campus.

Building 2 is a contributing element of the SFVAMC Historic District. Proposed projects in the SFVAMC Historic District are subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and specifically to the Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the SFVAMC, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), regarding the Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) for the SFVAMC. The proposed project falls under Review Category A of the PA (within the Historic District) and requires documentation including a project description and design analysis relative to the LRDP Finding of Effect and the Secretary of the Interior's (SOI) Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (Standards) and the Historic District Design Guidelines (HDDGs) created specifically to interpret the Standards to the SFVAMC. Per the PA the HDDG also applies to all exterior projects.

### **Project Description**

The proposed telecommunications infrastructure project will include the installation of a 12' x 20' communications equipment shelter on the sixth-floor roof of Building 2 of the SFVAMC. The project will also include installation of a sixth-floor-roof access door (to replace an existing window), steel stairs to the new communications shelter, a handrail mounted to the parapet and shelter, coax cables in a new cable tray across the sixth-floor roof, and two microwave dish and three whip antennae on the eighth-floor roof.

The communications shelter will be constructed on a steel frame behind the parapet of the sixth-floor roof, in front of the north wall of the building's eight-floor tower and placed as far back on the roof as feasible from an engineering standpoint. The shelter, including its raised steel frame, will be 13'-1" tall, and will rise 7'-1" above the existing parapet (Appendix A, Drawings C-03, C-04 and C-05). The steel frames the proposed shelter sits on are elevated to provide enough of a gap underneath for the purpose of roof maintenance or replacement. Due to the standardized equipment rack dimensions and need for adequate ventilation for the electronics, the prefabricated shelter must be the dimensions as designed. It will be painted to color-match the building. Proposed steel stairs will be located on the shelter's south elevation, facing the eighth-floor façade, providing access to the shelter door. The height of the stairs (top of the handrail) is proposed to be approximately 6" above the existing parapet wall which is 6' tall (Appendix A, Drawing C-03).

An additional handrail will be mounted to the inside of the east parapet wall, attaching to the steel shelter. This handrail will surround proposed metal grating on the rooftop, providing access to the HVAC units, and will rise above the existing parapet wall by approximately 6" (Appendix A, Drawings C-02 and S-04).

The proposed roof access door will replace the western-most window of three existing windows on the building's sixth-floor north façade. The door will be 5' tall x 3' wide. The door will fit within the existing window frame dimensions. The terra cotta panels will not be impacted. Stucco used around the door frame will match existing stucco surrounding the window. In addition, the eastern-most window will be infilled with a stucco wall, this is not an original window and was been previously replaced (Appendix A, Drawings C-02 and C-07).

Coax cables will be located in a 12" cable tray on the sixth-floor roof and will travel inside the abandoned shaft of the building to the penthouse roof, reaching the antennae on the eighth floor. These cables will not be visible except for from the sixth floor roof (Appendix A, Drawings C-02, C-05 and C-08).

Two microwave dish antennae will be located on top of the eighth-floor tower, and will be mounted to the east and south parapet walls. The bottom of each 4'-diameter dish antenna will rise approximately 6" above the walls. Two whip antennae will be attached to the south parapet wall and one to the east parapet wall, for a total of three whip antennae. These will rise approximately 3.75' above the wall (Appendix A, Drawings (C-02, C-05 and S-03).

The LRDP summarizes the character-defining features of the district as consisting of: 1) its function as a VA medical facility; 2) its 1934-designed seismic-resistant structural system; and 3) its Mayan Art Deco architectural features. Specific architectural features contributing to the district's significance include thick concrete walls and delicate terra cotta moldings on door surrounds, friezes, belt courses, and spandrel panels; inscribed Mayan-inspired design motifs; dramatic massing and proportions; towers with stepped parapets projecting above rooflines derivative of Mayan temples; and centrally-located entrances.

Building 2 has undergone substantial changes over the decades including the removal of the landscaped lawn and circular drive on the south elevation and the addition of Building 200 also on the south elevation in 1964. In 1990, metal casement windows were replaced with aluminum double-hung windows and several window bays were filled in as part of a comprehensive seismic upgrade (NRHP 2009). An equipment shelter was added previously to the roof of the building's west wing which appears to be similar in size and color to the one proposed (Appendix B, Photos 1 and 4). Several antennae have been placed on the building in various places, including on the eighth-floor rooftop. Despite these changes, the building has retained enough integrity on its north, east, and west facades to convey significance (NRHP 2009).

The proposed project will conform to the HDDGs by color-matching the paint of the new equipment shelter to the existing building and color-matching the stucco-infill wall replacing the eastern-most window to the existing stucco window surround (Appendix A, Drawings C-04 and C-07). The infill of one window and replacement of another with a new door would remove historic features and the Guidelines state that, "Removing or radically changing windows which are important in defining the historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished" is not recommended. However, the Guidelines also explain that "Alterations may include cutting new entrances or windows on secondary elevations" in relation to exterior alterations needed to assure its continued use. Therefore, the proposed window infill and new door would be in keeping with the Standards as long as the new door uses like materials and workmanship.

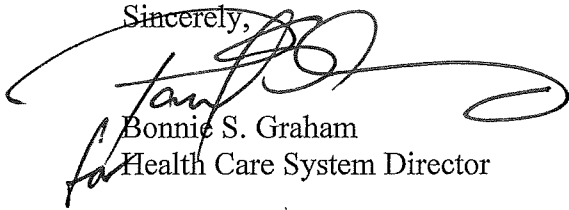
Based on the attached photo-simulations, approximately 7 feet of the shelter will be visible standing at ground level to the west and east of the building (Appendix C, Photos 2 and 6). Standing north of the building, less of the shelter can be seen (Appendix C, Photos 3 and 5), and from the south the shelter is not visible at all.

With this letter SFVAMC would like to consult on the Replacement Public Safety Radio Project. We understand this project is within the Historic District and have followed the PA and the HDDGs. The whip and dish antennae proposed for the eighth-floor roof would be visible; however, because the building currently has several antennae on its roof, the new antennae would not introduce a new visual element, nor would they block views of significant historical features of the building (Appendix C, Photos 2 and 6).

The Standards call for additions to be compatible in size, scale and massing, yet to be differentiated. There is already an equipment shelter on the eighth-floor roof of Building 2 (Appendix B, Photos 1 and 4); however, that shelter is placed on a wing instead of on the central towers and does not block views of significant historical features of the building such as windows or parapets. While the proposed equipment shelter would be minimized by being placed as far back on the sixth-floor rooftop as feasible and painted to color-match the building, the shelter would still be visible.

Should you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Robin Flanagan at (415) 750-2049.

Sincerely,



Bonnie S. Graham  
Health Care System Director

Attachments

Appendix A – Project Plans and Elevations

Appendix B – Map of SFVAMC Historic District and Photos of Building 2

Appendix C – Project Photos Simulations