November 26, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting comments I made at the Veterans Administration’s public meeting on November 8, 2018, at the Hilton Garden Inn in South Barrington. The meeting was purportedly set to solicit input on the VA proposal to develop a columbarium on 15 acres in the Village of South Barrington. The Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG) opposes the proposed development on this site, and our objections are expressed in the comments below.

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PUBLIC MEETING REGARDING
PROPOSED VETERANS ADMINISTRATION COLUMBARIUM CEMETERY
FOR LOCATION IN THE VILLAGE OF SOUTH BARRINGTON

Delivered by: Janet Agnoletti, Executive Director
Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG)
November 8, 2018

I am speaking on behalf of the Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG), which is a regional planning and advocacy organization comprised of nine (9) local governments in the greater Barrington area. Our organization is a unique council of governments in that its foundational document is a regional comprehensive plan first adopted in 1975 that lays out land use throughout the 80-square mile area of BACOG. In addition to planning, member services, and legislative activities, we also have a strong environmental protection program.

First I want to say I was glad to see BACOG and its website referenced in the Environmental Assessment (EA) numerous times for:
- our regional comprehensive plan, and
- our groundwater mapping and monitoring program, which is part of our environmental protection effort.

BACOG is an extremely cohesive group of small local governments, and our members have been collaborating for almost 50 years. As you saw in the BACOG Comprehensive Plan on our website at www.bacog.org, and as referenced in your Environmental Assessment, the plan is a
cooperative planning effort that covers approximately 80 square miles, 9 governments, and 40,000 residents.

I would like to talk about the meaning of “land use” for a moment. Land use is a planned future vision. Under the BACOG regional comprehensive plan, the intensity of new development is matched to the environmental resources available to support it. And environmental resources must not be depreciated in order to accommodate overly intensive land uses.

All land uses among our member communities are connected, each community relies on the land uses of the others for their own success, and each is successful ONLY IF each carries out their planning. This is true for the biggest parcels to the smallest parcels. All members stand behind any one member when that government’s planning is challenged by inappropriate development, which is the case with the VA proposal for the Village of South Barrington on the particular site you have selected.

The EA states that the BACOG Plan does not mention any plans for the project area. That is inaccurate, as the land use policies and map contained in the BACOG Plan document clearly designate the site as low density residential at 1 acre. In fact, contrary to what is stated in the EA, the proposed columbarium development DOES CONFLICT with the land use policies in the BACOG Plan. Because this is a deviation from the regional plan of BACOG and its nine member governments, we cannot support the proposed use of a columbarium on this particular site.

There is a lot of attention to environmental resources in the EA. BACOG is a very green-thinking region, and so we appreciate the green focus. The Environmental Assessment notes:

- 10 threatened and endangered species might occur in the area of the site, 2 of which may be in the vicinity of the site, and
- 21 species of migratory birds that might be affected by the development, and
- The site is potentially summer roosting habitat for the Northern Long-Eared Bat,
- Mention of other important environmental components that might be affected.
- We would also expect that there are more valuable species in the area to the east, the Deer Grove Forest Preserve, and they should be considered in the assessment of impacts of the proposed development.

These species are all mentioned in the EA from documents contained in state or federal systems that collect information, and the EA pulled those documents to make its conclusions. But here in the BACOG area, we have many, many individuals who are experts on these natural environments, the forest preserves, the wetlands and prairies, and we even have nationally known experts – who know our environmental resources exceptionally well. These individuals have worked in the forest preserves, woodlands, prairies, wetlands and fields for decades. We would like them to contribute their assessments of the plants, birds and wildlife on this site. This is a request to the VA and your EA consultant, to allow us to bring environmental expertise and facts to the consideration.

We would especially ask our experts, and the VA, to consider the on-going rifle noise 3-5 times every day as a factor in the well-being and nesting and other habits of important species. We
do NOT believe, as stated in the EA, that the on-going rifle noise will not affect wildlife. We believe the noise will have a significant impact on migrating birds and other wildlife.

In the section about potential controversy, the EA says “The VA solicited input from various federal, state and local government agencies.” As the Executive Director of BACOG, I work in government. I know what “soliciting input” means. It means reaching out and asking for participation and comments. Per the numerous references in the EA, the VA’s expert consultants have been to the BACOG website, and the BACOG organization itself was referenced several times in addition to information about how to contact me and the organization. But I never received any notice of the proposed development or this meeting. I therefore question the transparency of your process and the sincerity of your effort to “solicit input.”

Due to the VA’s inadequate efforts to date, BACOG strongly believes there should be more effort on the VA’s part devoted to notifying government agencies and the public and requesting their input, and more time spent in consideration of any such input, before you move forward with this proposal.

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Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We believe another site would be more suitable for the proposed development, and we hope you and the Village of South Barrington might identify an appropriate location for the columbarium. If I can assist with this effort, please let me know; feel free to contact me at the BACOG office at 847.381.7871.

Sincerely yours,

Janet L. Agnoletti
Executive Director

Cc: Chairman and Members, BACOG Executive Board