

Final Environmental Assessment for the Proposed U.S. Courthouse Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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II. Alternatives Considered



2 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

This chapter describes alternatives considered for the Proposed Action and the process for evaluating prospective sites. More than 25 sites were identified within the City of Harrisburg as potential locations for the new U.S. Courthouse. After determining whether or not the proposed sites fulfilled the purpose and need of the project, sites were preliminarily evaluated based on a list of site selection criteria established for the project. Through this process, 12 sites – the “Long List” sites – were identified for further environmental inquiry. After collecting additional information on the environmental features and issues associated with the sites, GSA evaluated the Long List and chose three sites for detailed analysis.

The three sites under consideration in this Environmental Assessment and the No Action Alternative are described in this Chapter (Section 2.4, Alternatives Considered in Detail) followed by a summary of impacts for each alternative in Section 2.5, Comparison of the Alternatives Considered. This comparison is based on the detailed information presented in subsequent chapters of this Environmental Assessment, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences.

2.1 SOLICITATION FOR POTENTIAL SITES

In May 2004, GSA placed public notices in *FedBizOpps*, the *Patriot-News*, the *Central Penn Business Journal*, and the *NJPA Real Estate Journal* to solicit properties for consideration, which led to identification of several potential sites. Through this solicitation and other coordination efforts undertaken by GSA with various federal, state, and local officials, additional sites were suggested. Realty specialists also identified sites.

More than 25 sites were identified within the City of Harrisburg as potential locations, and many more outside of the city limits. These sites that were considered are shown in Figure 2.

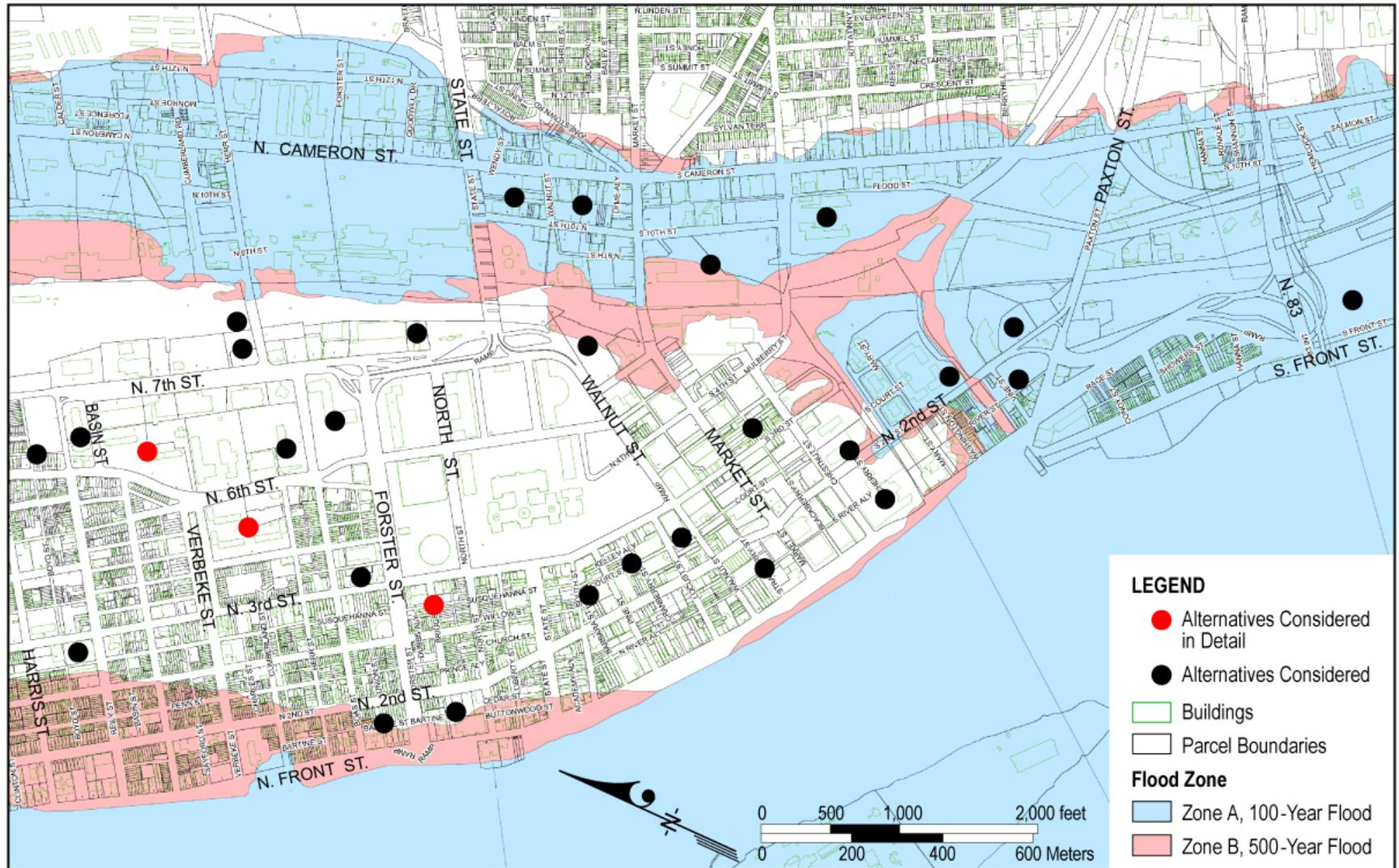


Figure 2: Sites Considered for Proposed U.S. Courthouse

2.2 SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

Site selection criteria are developed for all GSA construction projects prior to beginning the site selection process. Some of these criteria are set by Executive Orders and federal regulations. For example, by Executive Order 12072, federal agencies are required to give first consideration to the centralized community business areas when meeting space needs are located. GSA was unable to find a sufficient number of sites to provide enough area for the new Courthouse within the Central Business District. GSA then returned to Congress for an expanded delineated area in the City of Harrisburg. Unless compelling justification is demonstrated otherwise, GSA as a matter of policy locates Courts and Court-related agencies downtown in close proximity to other city, county, state and federal government facilities. Delineation cannot be expanded beyond the City of Harrisburg because it is federally mandated that Federal Court must be heard in the City of Harrisburg (28 U.S.C. Section 118(b)). Executive Order 11988 regarding floodplain management and GSA Order ADM 1095.6, Consideration of Floodplains in Decision Making, require GSA to locate federal facilities outside of flood zones, unless there are no practicable alternatives.

The site selection criteria for this project are outlined below. In the lists that follow, the Minimally Responsive Criteria are developed to ensure that the sites under consideration are capable of fulfilling the purpose and needs of the project and any federal Executive Orders or regulations. These criteria are considered prerequisite and must be achieved by the site.

2.2.1 Minimally Responsive Criteria

- Site must be located within the Harrisburg city limits, in compliance with 28 U.S.C. Section 118(b);
- Site is not located within the 100-year floodplain;
- Site must be of sufficient size and shape to construct a 262,970 gross square foot U.S. Courthouse (2.5 acres minimum, dependent upon configuration);
- Site owner(s) must possess marketable title;
- Site must be available within required time frame; and
- Site costs for acquisition, relocation, remediation, etc. must be maintained within project budget.

The remaining criteria have been assigned varying levels of importance to aid in the evaluation of alternatives. The sites under consideration may not meet, and in most cases, do not meet all remaining criteria.

2.2.2 Project Requirement Criteria

- Site accommodates 50-foot setback requirements or can achieve waivers;
- Site offers opportunity for future expansion beyond the present need;
- Site supports Courthouse Program of Requirements;
- Site meets U.S. Marshals Service guidelines for security or mitigates deficiencies;
- Site is located within the Central Business District of Harrisburg;
- Site offers appropriate image and presence befitting a U.S. Courthouse;
- Site offers opportunities for enhanced relationships with the city;
- Site is within reasonable distance from City Government Center and other court functions;
- Site is within reasonable distance to amenities such as dining, shopping, and daycare;
- Site is accessible for judges, staff, and visitors; has parking and public transportation nearby;
- Site provides for construction staging area, preferably on-site without street closures; and
- Site provides opportunity for effective re-use of existing building.

2.2.3 Technical Criteria

- Site has no physical constraints to development that cannot be reasonably mitigated;
- Choice of site would limit development within the 500-year floodplain;
- Site has no environmental impacts that could not be reasonably mitigated;

- Site has no historic or archeological resource impacts that can not be reasonably mitigated;
- Site contamination could be remediated by owner or within budget;
- Site meets zoning requirements or can be mitigated;
- Choice of site would not conflict with city goals;
- Choice of site would have little or no impact on tax base;
- Site has access to community services;
- Site can be served by utility providers with no major relocation constraints; and
- Site configuration that requires streets/alley closure would be acceptable to the city.

2.2.4 Cost Criteria

- Total site cost must be within project budget;
- Nature and number of onsite improvements/tenants will be considered, for example, removal/demolition/reuse of existing structures, removal of hazardous materials, and relocation of business and residential occupants;
- Relocation of site occupants could be accomplished within the project budget and schedule;
- Site has reasonable preparation costs (on and off-site), for example, excavation, fill, pile foundations, and utility relocations; and
- Site can be procured through funding from alternate sources and/or trades for existing assets.

2.3 SCREENING OF ALTERNATIVES

Sites were preliminarily evaluated based on the site selection criteria established for the project. Some of the sites considered did not fulfill the Minimally Responsive Criteria and/or had other immediately recognizable constraints to development of the site for the U.S. Courthouse. Twelve sites – the “Long List” sites – were identified for further environmental

inquiry. After collecting additional information on the environmental features and issues associated with the sites, GSA weighed the Long List against the Site Selection Criteria and chose three sites for detailed analysis. GSA has considered all sites that were presented to them by the public, including vacant lots within the vicinity of the three sites (See Section 3.4.1, Figure 10).

Table 1 provides a list of the sites that were considered for the project and a summary of the reasons the sites were or were not chosen for further analysis after site evaluation screening. The table is categorized in two groups, Long List sites and sites that were considered but did not make the Long List.

Table 1: Site Selection Summary

Site	Size (acres)	Reason for Dismissal
LONG LIST SITES		
N. 3rd & Forster St.	3.6	Site retained for detailed study
N. 6th & Verbeke St.	6	Site retained for detailed study
N. 6th & Basin St.	6.4	Site retained for detailed study
YMCA block	3.1	Partially within 500-yr floodplain Total cost exceeded budget
Labor & Industry Building	5	Total cost exceeded budget
N. 3rd to N. 2nd, Locust to South	5.6	Total cost exceeded budget
Block south of Federal Building	1.7	Insufficient acreage Inadequate security setbacks
City Hall plus adjacent blocks	2.4	Parcel configuration unsuitable

Site	Size (acres)	Reason for Dismissal
Rite Aid blocks (S.N. 3rd & Market)	2.2	Narrow configuration Inadequate security setbacks Proximity to parking garages is a security concern Potential delay of schedule and high cost for relocation of utility vaults
Executive House block	2.1	Narrow configuration Inadequate security setbacks
N. 2nd & Vine	2.1	Entirely within 100-yr floodplain
N. Front & Sycamore	12	Entirely within 100-yr floodplain
SITES CONSIDERED BUT NOT SELECTED FOR THE LONG LIST		
N. 2nd & N. 3rd at Mulberry Courts	13	Entirely within 100-yr floodplain
N. 5th & Walnut (Forum Place)	2.2	Total cost exceeded budget Partially within 500-yr floodplain Proximity to railroad is a security concern
100 N. Cameron St.	1.8	Entirely within 100-yr floodplain Insufficient acreage Inadequate security setbacks
22 N. Cameron St.	0.5	Insufficient acreage Inadequate security setbacks
S. 10th & Mulberry	4	Entirely within 100-yr floodplain
N. 7th & Herr	6	Narrow configuration Inadequate security setbacks Proximity to railroad is a security concern

Site	Size (acres)	Reason for Dismissal
N. 7th & Herr to the north	6.2	Narrow configuration Inadequate security setbacks Proximity to railroad is a security concern
AMP, N. 3rd & Reily	2.5	Narrow configuration Inadequate security setbacks
N. 6th & Reily	5	Overly remote from commercial markets, amenities, etc. Closure of Reily Street

2.4 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Three alternative sites for construction of the proposed U.S. Courthouse (Build Alternatives) (see Figure 3) and the No Action Alternative are analyzed in detail in this Environmental Assessment. These alternatives are described below.

2.4.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Pennsylvania Middle District Court in Harrisburg would continue to occupy the U.S. Courthouse in the Ronald Reagan Federal Building. Thus, this alternative would represent a continuation of the status quo with inadequate conditions in the Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse. These conditions would persist and likely deteriorate as the District Court caseload continues to grow as projected. The No Action Alternative does not meet the project purpose and needs of providing enhanced security, correcting operational deficiencies, and providing increased space for current and future needs of the U.S. Courthouse. However, as required by NEPA, the No Action Alternative is included in this Environmental Assessment to provide a baseline for assessing the magnitude of environmental effects of the build alternatives.

2.4.2 Build Alternatives

Three sites were selected for detailed evaluation and are described in the following section. The three alternative sites are as follows:

- N. 3rd and Forster Street
- N. 6th and Verbeke Street
- N. 6th and Basin Street

GSA has identified the N. 6th and Verbeke Street Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for the U.S. Courthouse. The “preferred alternative” is the alternative which GSA believes would best fulfill its statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical and other factors. However, it is important to understand that the selection of a preferred alternative is not a final site selection. GSA will focus its efforts on the preferred site as we finalize the site evaluation and environmental studies. A recommendation will be made to the GSA Regional Administrator, who will have the final approval on a site selection. A final site selection is scheduled to be announced this summer.

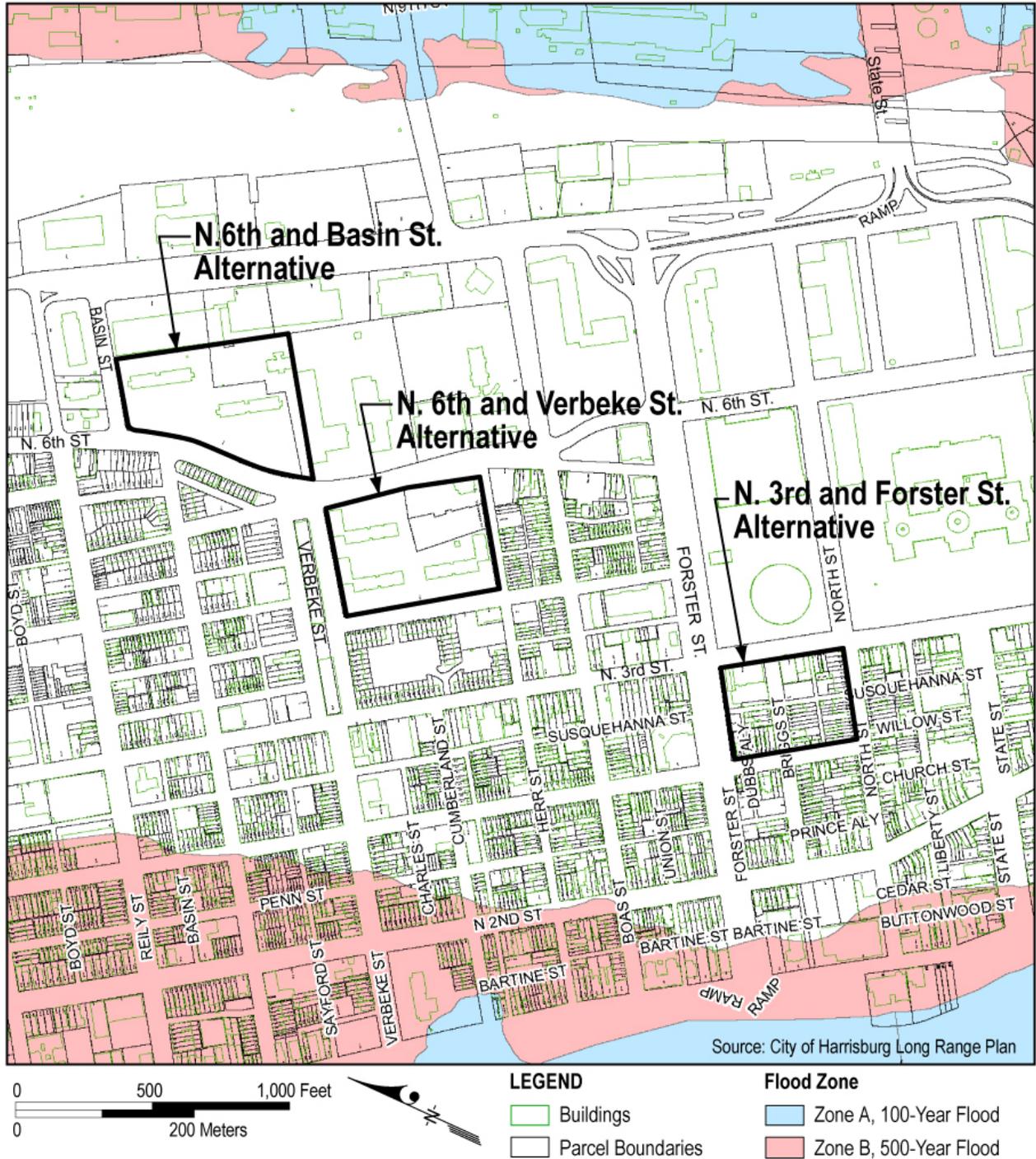


Figure 3: Alternatives Considered in Detail

2.4.2.1 N. 3rd and Forster Street

The N. 3rd and Forster Street Alternative consists of a 3.6 acre block bounded by N. 3rd Street, North Street, Green Street, and Forster Street (Figure 4). Buildings located within this block include approximately 40 two- and three-story rowhouses in which uses include residences (both owner inhabited and tenant occupied), office, restaurant, and retail; two buildings with restaurant/entertainment businesses; and one five-story office building with associated parking.



Figure 4: N. 3rd and Forster Street

2.4.2.2 N. 6th and Verbeke Street (Preferred Alternative)

The N. 6th and Verbeke Street Alternative consists of a 6 acre block bounded by N. 6th Street, Herr Street, Capital Street, and Verbeke Street (Figure 5). Buildings located within this block include the Cumberland Court Apartments (approximately 108 housing units) and associated surface parking lots and the Harrisburg Friends Meeting House.



Figure 5: N. 6th and Verbeke Street

2.4.2.3 N. 6th and Basin Street

The N. 6th and Basin Street Alternative consists of a 6.4 acre block bounded by N. 6th Street, Basin Street, the PHEAA building, and the Benjamin Franklin Elementary School (Figure 6). Buildings located within this block include the Jackson Lick Apartments, consisting of two high-rise apartment buildings (one of which is vacant) and parking lots. In addition, this alternative includes the pool house for the Jackson Lick Community Pool which is located on an adjacent parcel. The pool is not included in this alternative.

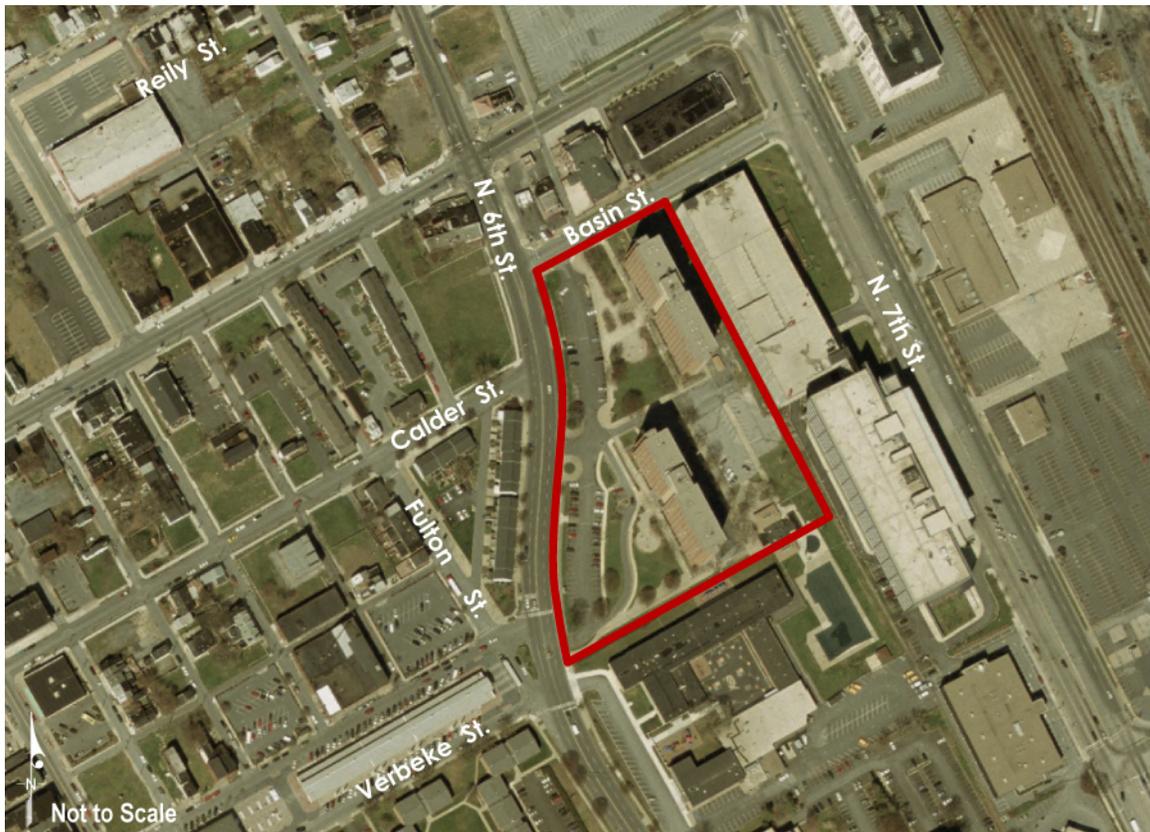


Figure 6: N. 6th and Basin Street

2.5 COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Based on the conclusions of the impact analysis, a comparative summary of alternatives was prepared and is presented in Table 2. This table addresses only those impact topics with identified concerns addressed in Chapter 3.

Table 2. Comparison of Anticipated Impacts

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Natural Environment				
Floodplains and Flooding	No Impact	Outside 100 and 500-yr floodplain; minor, indirect, adverse impact on court operations should access roads become flooded.	Outside 100 and 500-yr floodplain; minor, indirect, adverse impact on court operations should access roads become flooded.	Outside 100 and 500-yr floodplain; minor, indirect, adverse impact on court operations should access roads become flooded.
Social Environment				
Land Use and Zoning	No Impact	Moderate, direct and indirect, long term, adverse impacts on land use planning; minor, direct, long-term adverse impacts on zoning; no indirect impacts on zoning	Moderate, direct, long term, adverse and beneficial impacts on land use planning; minor, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to local zoning; no indirect impacts to zoning.	Moderate, direct, long term adverse and beneficial impacts on land use planning; minor, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to local zoning; no indirect impacts to zoning
Population and Housing	No Impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact on housing stock; major, direct, short-term, adverse impact to current residents	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact on the availability of subsidized housing; major, direct, short-term adverse impact on the current residents	Major, direct, long term, adverse impact on the housing stock for low-income elderly and disabled persons; major, direct, long-term adverse impact on the current residents

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Economy and Employment				
<i>Offices/Businesses</i>	No Impact	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact to individual office entities; negligible, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the City of Harrisburg economy	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the business owners if unable to relocate in City; minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the City of Harrisburg economy.	Resource does not exist at this location.
<i>Restaurant</i>	No Impact	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the restaurant owners; moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the City of Harrisburg economy.	Resource does not exist at this location.	Resource does not exist at this location.
<i>Night Club</i>	No Impact	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the nightclub; minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact to the City of Harrisburg economy	Resource does not exist at this location.	Resource does not exist at this location.
<i>Employment</i>	No Impact	Moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impacts to employment	Moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impacts to employment	Moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impacts to employment

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Taxes and Revenues	No Impact	Moderate, direct and indirect, long-term, adverse impacts on taxes and revenue to the City of Harrisburg.	Moderate, direct and indirect, long-term, adverse impacts on taxes and revenue to the City of Harrisburg.	No direct or indirect impacts on taxes and revenue. Property is exempt from the city property tax rolls and the site does not contribute to business tax revenue for the City.
Community Services				
<i>Mass Transit</i>	No Impact	No Impact	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to the residents of Cumberland Court.	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to the residents of Jackson Lick.
<i>Police Services</i>	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
<i>Fire Services</i>	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
<i>Emergency Services</i>	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
<i>Healthcare Services</i>	No Impact	No Impact	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to the residents of Cumberland Court.	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impacts to the residents of Jackson Lick.

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Community Facilities				
<i>Libraries</i>	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
<i>Educational Facilities</i>	No Impact	Loss of tax revenue from this site would be a long-term, minor to moderate adverse impact; moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impact to Ronald H. Brown Charter School due to increased noise during construction.	Loss of tax revenue from this site would be a long-term, minor to moderate adverse impact on the Harrisburg School system; moderate, direct, short-term, adverse effect on patrons of the Praise N Play Daycare; moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impact to Benjamin Franklin Elementary School due to increased noise during construction	No impact to the tax roll of the Harrisburg School; moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impact to Benjamin Franklin Elementary School due to increased noise during construction.
<i>Recreational Facilities</i>	No Impact	Minor, indirect, long-term, adverse impact Harrisburg area recreational facilities	Minor, indirect, short-term, adverse impact on the pool; minor, indirect, long-term, adverse impact on the Camp Curtin YMCA.	Major, direct and indirect, long-term adverse impact to the Jackson Lick Pool.
<i>Religious Facilities</i>	No Impact	Resource does not exist at this location.	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to Friends Meeting House	Minor, indirect, short-term, impact to Friends Meeting House (construction activities)

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Community Cohesion	No Impact	Major, direct, short term or long term, adverse impacts for residents; moderate, indirect, short-term, adverse impact to the larger CAN community	Major, direct, short term or long term, adverse impacts for residents, Friends Meeting House, Praise N' Play Daycare and surrounding community	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to residents
Cultural Environment				
Archaeological Resources	No Impact	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact on archeological resources.	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact on archeological resources.	Moderate, direct, long-term, adverse impact on archeological resources.
Historic Structures	No Impact	Major, direct, long-term, adverse impact to historic structures; moderate, indirect, long-term, adverse visual impacts to Midtown Historic District, the Pennsylvania State Capitol District, and the Fox Ridge Historic District historic resources.	No direct impacts; moderate, indirect, long-term, adverse impacts to the Broad Street Market, the German Evangelical Zion Lutheran Church and the Fox Ridge Historic District from visual impacts.	No direct or indirect impact to historic structures
Man-Made Environment				
Traffic Conditions	No Impact	Minor, direct, long term, adverse impact to operating conditions due to changes in existing traffic volumes and patterns.	Minor, direct, long term, adverse impact to operating conditions due to changes in existing traffic volumes and patterns.	Minor, direct, long term, adverse impact to operating conditions due to changes in existing traffic volumes and patterns.

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Parking	No Impact	Moderate, direct, long-term adverse impact to parking space availability	Moderate, direct, long-term adverse impact to parking space availability	Moderate, direct, long-term adverse impact to parking space availability
Mass Transit	No Impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact to mass transit.	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact to mass transit.	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact to mass transit.
Pedestrian and Bicycle Access	No Impact	No impact as traffic patterns would not be altered.	Negligible impact anticipated for pedestrians and bicycles as a result of traffic pattern changes.	Negligible impact anticipated for pedestrians and bicycles as a result of traffic pattern changes.
Electrical Power	No Impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact
Natural Gas	No Impact	Moderate, direct, adverse, short-term, impact	Moderate, direct, adverse, short-term, impact	Moderate, direct, adverse, short-term, impact
Centralized Heating and Cooling Services	No Impact	Moderate, direct, adverse, short-term, impact	Resource does not exist at this location.	Resource does not exist at this location.
Public Water and Wastewater Systems	No Impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact	Minor, direct, long-term, adverse impact
Telecommunications	No Impact	Moderate, direct, short term, adverse impact to Comcast; negligible impacts to Verizon’s capacity, and moderate, short-term impacts to Verizon services.	Moderate, direct, short term, adverse impact to Comcast; negligible impacts to Verizon’s capacity, and moderate, short-term impacts to Verizon services.	Comcast resource does not exist at this location; negligible impacts to Verizon’s capacity, and moderate, short-term impacts to Verizon services.

	No Action Alternative	N. 3rd and Forster Street	N. 6th and Verbeke Street	N. 6th and Basin Street
Site Contamination/Hazardous Waste	No Impact	Minor, direct, short term, adverse impact on public health and the environment from hazardous materials, wastes, or constituents.	Minor, direct, short term, adverse impact on public health and the environment from hazardous materials, wastes, or constituents.	Minor, direct, short term, adverse impact on public health and the environment from hazardous materials, wastes, or constituents.