

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY
NEPA DETERMINATION



RECIPIENT: Town of Natick

STATE: MA

PROJECT TITLE: Healthy Learning Environments Matter

Notice of Funding Opportunity Number
DE-FOA-0002756

Procurement Instrument Number
DE-SE0000715

NEPA Control Number
GFO-SE0000715-001

CID Number
GO715

Based on my review of the information concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (authorized under DOE Policy 451.1), I have made the following determination:

CX, EA, EIS APPENDIX AND NUMBER:

Description:

A9 Information gathering, analysis, and dissemination

Information gathering (including, but not limited to, literature surveys, inventories, site visits, and audits), data analysis (including, but not limited to, computer modeling), document preparation (including, but not limited to, conceptual design, feasibility studies, and analytical energy supply and demand studies), and information dissemination (including, but not limited to, document publication and distribution, and classroom training and informational programs), but not including site characterization or environmental monitoring. (See also B3.1 of appendix B to this subpart.)

B5.19 Ground source heat pumps

The installation, modification, operation, and removal of commercially available smallscale ground source heat pumps to support operations in single facilities (such as a school or community center) or contiguous facilities (such as an office complex) (1) only where (a) major associated activities (such as drilling and discharge) are regulated, and (b) appropriate leakage and contaminant control measures would be in place (including for cross-contamination between aquifers); (2) that would not have the potential to cause significant changes in subsurface temperature; and (3) would be located within a previously disturbed or developed area. Covered actions would be in accordance with applicable requirements (such as local land use and zoning requirements) in the proposed project area and would incorporate appropriate control technologies and best management practices.

Rationale for determination:

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing to provide federal funding to the town of Natick for the installation of an air-cooled electric heat pump, heat exchanger and building energy management controls at the Bennett-Hemenway Elementary School in Natick, Massachusetts. The project includes on-site mechanical, plumbing and electrical work at the school and would be implemented over a two-year period. The heat pump would be placed on a ground-installed 25' x 9' x 8" concrete pad adjacent to the school's gymnasium.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) website identifies two federally listed bats, and one federal candidate insect that have home ranges overlapping the elementary school. The IPaC cites the northern long-eared bat (federally endangered) and the tricolored bat (proposed federally endangered) as occurring in the vicinity of the project. The project is not expected to impact these species, given the nature of the project, where installation would occur in pre-disturbed areas adjacent to the school and the lack of impact to any trees in the area. The monarch butterfly is a federal candidate species and is not currently afforded protection under the Endangered Species Act. This species occurs in a variety of habitats that include patches of milkweed during the local activity season and while this habitat may be in close proximity to the two schools, no impacts to natural habitats are expected as a result of project implementation. The proposed project site is outside of the critical habitat of all IPaC listed species. Accordingly, DOE has determined there would be no effect on federally listed threatened or endangered species. Further, DOE does not anticipate adverse impacts to migratory bird species.

There are no wetlands at the proposed project site and it does not occur within the 1% flood exceedance area (the 100-year floodplain).

Consultation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (the State Historic Preservation Office; SHPO) was initiated by the recipient on February 21st, 2024, and completed on March 8th, 2024. The Historical Society found that no eligible properties would be affected by the project because none are present within the area of potential effect. That said, the project has since changed from a HVAC to the current heat pump project. The project installation area has therefore changed from being on the roof of the building to ground level and would be situated on pre-disturbed land. The change would be even less of a visual impact to potential historical properties, as the ground equipment installation would be less visually impactful compared to a roof equipment installation.

Potential hazards associated with project implementation would be mitigated through adherence to established institutional health and safety policies and procedures. The recipient would adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local health, safety, and environmental regulations. Any changes to the project activities or locations are subject to additional NEPA review by DOE and are not authorized for federal funding unless and until the Contracting Officer provides written authorization on those additions or modifications. Any and all permits required for the execution of the project at the above-referenced locations would be the responsibility of the recipient.

DOE has considered the scale, duration, and nature of proposed activities to determine potential impacts on resources, including those of an ecological, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic nature. DOE does not anticipate impacts on these resources that would be considered significant or require DOE to further consult with agencies or stakeholders.

Any changes to the project activities or location are subject to additional NEPA review by DOE and are not authorized for federal funding unless and until the Contracting Officer provides written authorization.

EERE is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision of *Marin Audubon Society v. FAA*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, EERE has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508, in addition to DOE's procedures/regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet the agency's obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

NEPA PROVISION

DOE has made a final NEPA determination.

Include the following condition in the financial assistance agreement:

1. The recipient must adhere to the terms and restrictions of their DOE-executed Historic Preservation Programmatic Agreement, available at https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/prototype_programmatic_agreements/2018-07/DOE%20Prototype%20PA%20Final_Complete.pdf.
2. If during project activities the recipient or their contractors encounter any cultural materials (i.e. historic or prehistoric), all activities must cease in the vicinity of the discovery immediately. The recipient must inform the SHPO and DOE Project Officer of the discovery so that an evaluation of the discovery can be completed prior to continuing work.
3. The recipient is responsible for reviewing the online NEPA and Historic preservation training at www.energy.gov/node/4816816 and contacting gonepa@ee.doe.gov with any NEPA or general historic preservation questions.

Notes:

Office of State and Community Energy Programs – State Energy Programs
NEPA review completed by Chris Akios, 6/9/2025

FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATIONS

The proposed action (or the part of the proposal defined in the Rationale above) fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D. To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the

environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

SIGNATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTES A RECORD OF THIS DECISION.

NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:  Electronically Signed By: Matthew Blevins Date: 6/11/2025
NEPA Compliance Officer

FIELD OFFICE MANAGER DETERMINATION

- ☒ Field Office Manager review not required
☐ Field Office Manager review required

BASED ON MY REVIEW I CONCUR WITH THE DETERMINATION OF THE NCO :

Field Office Manager's Signature: _____ Date: _____
Field Office Manager