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City zeroes in on neighborhoods affected by BRAC in new study

San Antonio Business Journal - by [Catherine Dominguez](#)

While the focus of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure decision is on several San Antonio military installations, local community leaders say this is an opportunity to revitalize some Alamo City neighborhoods as well.

The BRAC action is bringing over \$2 billion in construction to the city, most of that to the Fort Sam Houston area. That area will also see an influx of more than 11,000 people.

"All the growth coming to Fort Sam Houston over the next few years is great news for San Antonio. It's going to be a tremendous boost to our economy," says Howard Peak, former San Antonio mayor. "However, we need to make sure this growth is managed in such a way that we not only reap the economic benefits ... but that the growth won't create problems in the community."

The San Antonio Office of Military Affairs (OMA) is conducting a study to determine the impact the BRAC construction will have on the areas surrounding the installation.

Peak, who is a member of the San Antonio Military Transformation Task Force, says the study is critical to addressing the future needs of those neighborhoods. He adds the study will likely identify areas that can be rebuilt and breathe new life into that older area of town.

"There are neighborhoods around Fort Sam Houston in some state of rejuvenation," he says. "My hope is that with the influx of personnel (at Fort Sam Houston) it will accelerate that process."

The main projects taking place in San Antonio will be the renovation of **Brooke Army Medical Center** (BAMC) to handle in-patient hospital care and civilian trauma care and the conversion of **Wilford Hall Medical Center** into an ambulatory care clinic that will focus on outpatient care.

The military is also consolidating its medical training programs for all military branches at Fort Sam Houston. All BRAC projects are scheduled to be complete by 2011.

Part of the puzzle

James Henderson, deputy director of the OMA, says the revitalization study will be part of a larger study, called the Growth Management Plan, that will look at the different issues related to BRAC.

The OMA was established in late 2006 via a \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment to temper the local impact of the 2005 BRAC action.

He says combining the smaller studies into the Growth Management Plan will avoid any duplication of studies as city, county and business leaders work to stay on top of the issues facing the community in light of BRAC.

The research for the Growth Management Plan will cost about \$500,000 to conduct and will examine transportation and infrastructure, economic development, neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment, and health care delivery. Henderson declined to say how much of that cost will be devoted to the revitalization study.

To date, the OMA has completed a Military Economic Impact Study and a Transportation Study that will be included in the Growth Management Plan.

"We are going to look at a whole basket of issues in terms of revitalizing that area around the post," Henderson says. "The study will inventory the residential and commercial availability and property in that area."

Although the majority of the area around Fort Sam Houston is built out, Peak says there are some great opportunities in that area for new construction.

"There is a little bit of vacant land, not very much," he explains. "But, there is also property that has buildings on it being used for transitional use that have been there for years."

Those structures, Peak says, would be good candidates for demolition and new construction. He adds that while some revitalization has taken place in the area, the BRAC effort, with its influx of people, may be the jump-start that area property owners need to move forward with rebuilding efforts.

Community involvement

One key to making the BRAC action a win for both the military and surrounding neighborhoods is to assure the involvement of local residents and business leaders.

"What we are trying to do is create a situation where both the military and civilian side of the fence know what is going on," Peak says.

Since the BRAC announcement, there have been several community meetings to bring together those living and working in the Fort Sam area. Peak says that the Military Transformation Task Force (MTTF) will create a committee made up of

representatives of the community and military. The committee will be formalized following the completion of the revitalization study.

The MTTF was organized in November 2005 in response to the BRAC decision to help the city and county transition during the realignment. It is composed of former and current city and county representatives and area business leaders.

Peak says the details of the planned revitalization committee, including how many members it will have and how they will be selected, have not yet been determined.

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