

by John Fritze

The General Services Administration will allocate more than half of its \$82 million construction budget this year for the Food and Drug Administration's consolidation project in White Oak, despite deep cuts the agency took to help reduce the nation's budget deficit, Maryland lawmakers said Wednesday.

The agency, which serves as the federal government's landlord, will spend \$44 million on the project this year. When completed, the 12-year-old project will provide 1 million square feet of space for the Food and Drug Administration and house 9,000 employees, many of whom are now scattered around the Washington region.

General Services – and the FDA project by extension -- was cut as part of the short-term budget deal approved this year to avoid a government shutdown. Those cuts are still in effect, but the agency will now use a significant portion of its discretionary construction fund to keep the FDA project moving.

“The FDA is our premier agency for safeguarding the nation's public health regarding food products, drugs, medical devices and other products that Americans use every day,” Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin said in a statement. “The allocation of more than half of GSA's construction budget for this project confirms its importance.”

Cardin, along with Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, and Reps. Steny Hoyer, Chris Van Hollen and Donna Edwards [wrote the GSA in May](#) asking that officials use as much of its budget authority as possible on the project. In that letter, the Democrats wrote that 500 construction jobs were at stake if the complex had to be redesigned or put on hold.

“Consolidating FDA's offices and laboratories at White Oak will allow some of the world's top

researchers to move out of dilapidated working conditions and into state-of-the-art facilities,” Hoyer said in a statement. “However, this allocation still falls far short of what will be needed to complete the FDA headquarters consolidation project on schedule.”

The funding will allow the project to continue without a redesign this year, but the schedule could be pushed back -- particularly given that the FDA will now have to seek funding annually, rather than relying on a dedicated source of money.

A spokesman for the GSA was not immediately available for comment.