

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

J. McIntyre

NCPC File No. 6648



---

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**BUILDING MODERNIZATION AND PERIMETER SECURITY**  
Herbert C. Hoover Building  
14th Street, NW and Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

Submitted by the General Services Administration

March 30, 2006

---

## Abstract

The General Services Administration is submitting concept site and building plans for the phase one building modernization and perimeter security for the Herbert C. Hoover Building located at the intersection of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW and Constitution Avenue, NW in Washington, DC. Phase I includes interior and exterior repairs, modifications and enhancements as well as replacement of all major site utilities and building service infrastructure.

## Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

---

## Executive Director's Recommendation

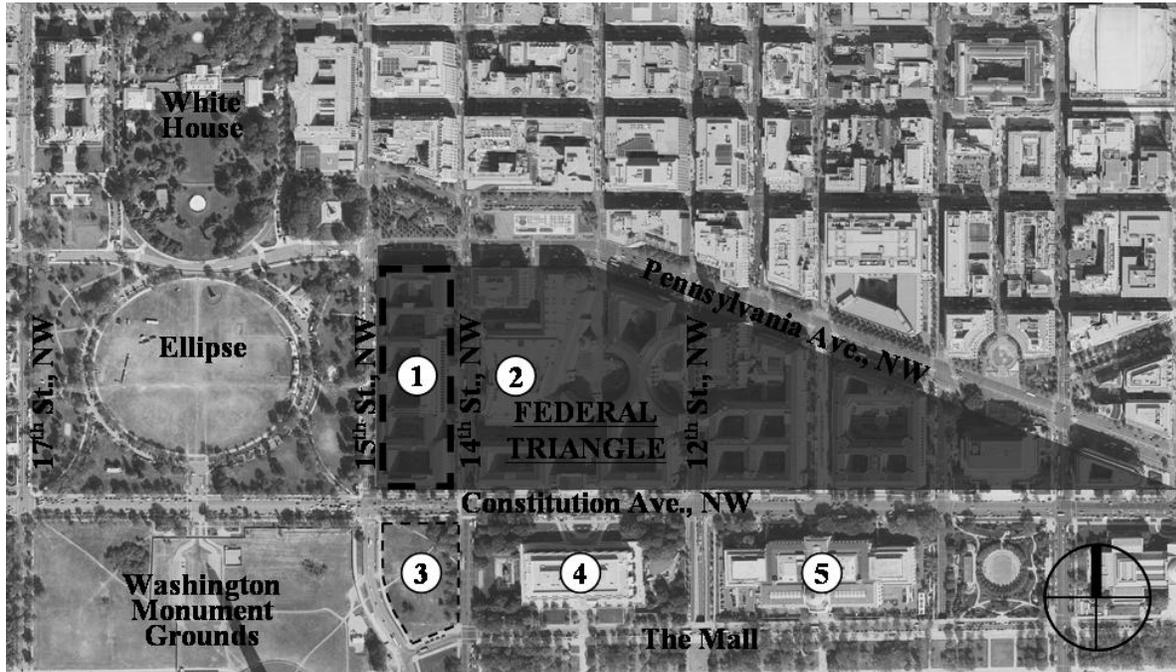
The Commission:

**Comments favorably** on the concept site and building plans for the phase one building modernization for the Herbert C. Hoover Building, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.23(38.40)41970, **with the exception** of the perimeter security and streetscape elements

**Finds** the proposal for perimeter security and streetscape enhancements to be premature and recommends that further action on this aspect of the design be deferred until it can be coordinated with efforts to develop a comprehensive design solution for the entire Federal Triangle, including Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues.

\* \* \*

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

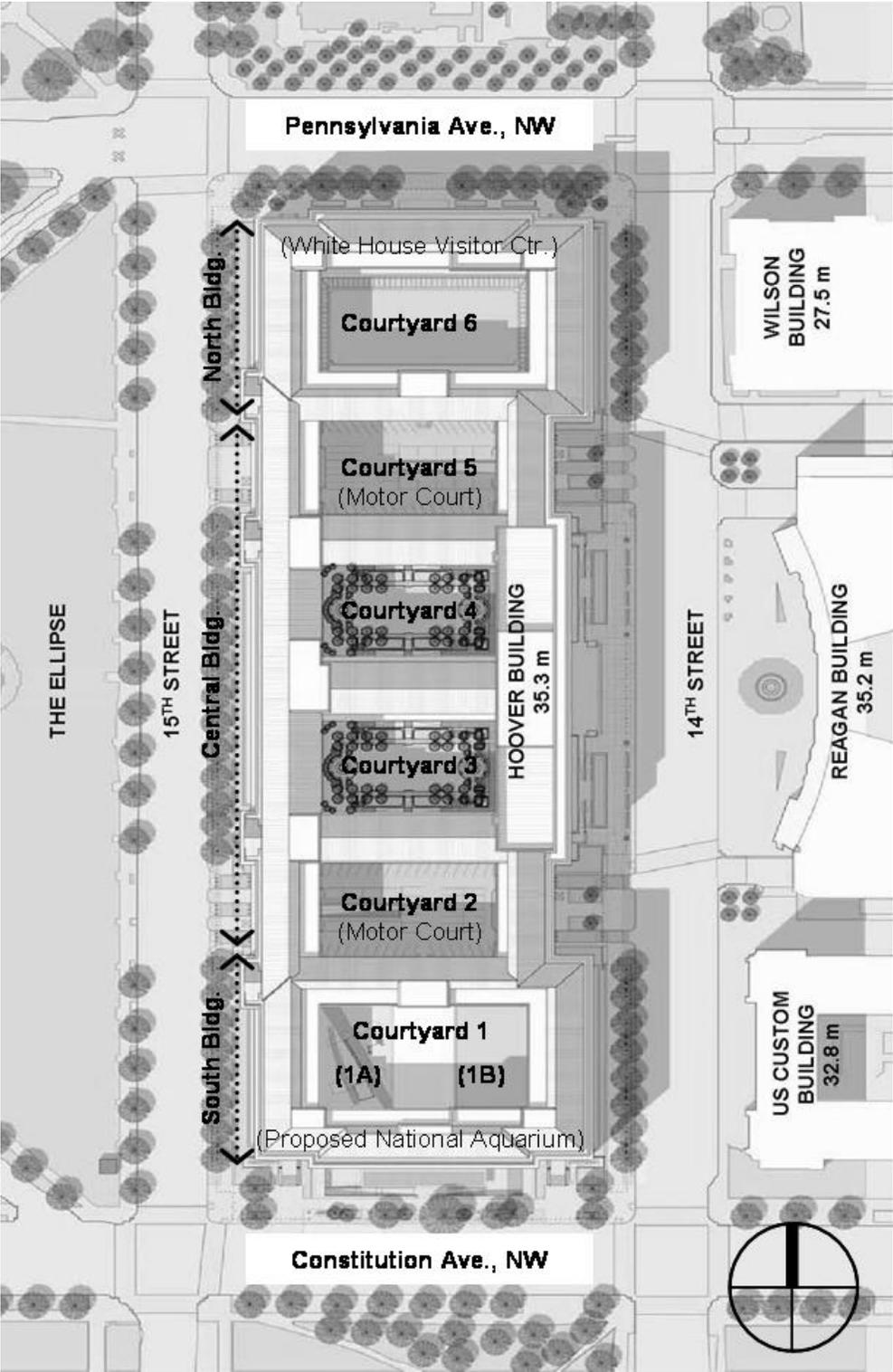


**1. Department of Commerce, Herbert C. Hoover Building; 2. Ronald Reagan Building; 3. Future National African American Museum of History and Culture;**  
**4. National Museum of American History; 5. National Museum of Natural History**

### SITE AERIAL

#### Site

The Department of Commerce, Herbert C. Hoover Building is located at 1401 Constitution Avenue, situated between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW and Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, NW. The building is located at the western most leg of the Federal Triangle and is directly adjacent to the National Mall to the south and the White House Ellipse to the west located in the Presidential Park. The Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center is located to the east, across 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW. The proposed site for the future Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture is located immediate south of the building.



SITE PLAN

## Background

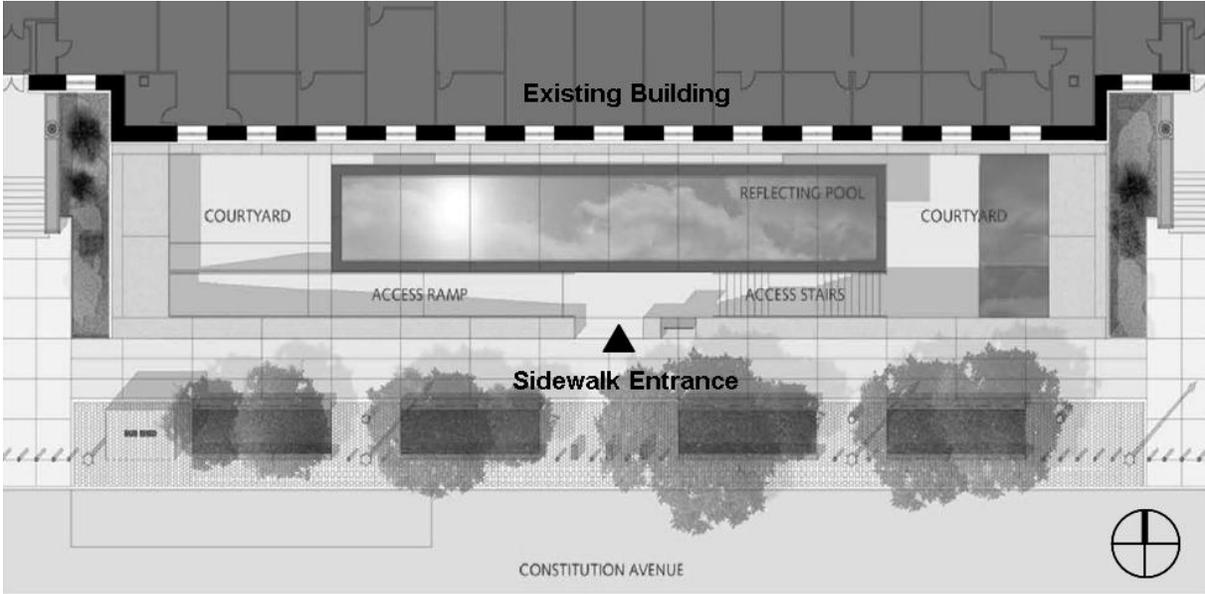
The seven-story, Herbert C. Hoover Building was the first building constructed in the Federal Triangle. The 323,865 square foot footprint occupies the entire site and six exterior courtyards divide the complex into three buildings, the center, north and south buildings. Courtyards 2 and 5 are motor courts, accessed from 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, that provide limited employee parking and service access. The complex provides 1,913,245 square feet of tenant space; the primary building tenant is the Department of Commerce. The White House Visitors Center occupies a portion of the north building and has a visitor entrance directly off of Pennsylvania Avenue. The National Aquarium currently occupies the basement of the center building and visitors enter off of 14<sup>th</sup> Street. A pedestrian tunnel, below 14<sup>th</sup> Street, connects the Herbert C. Hoover and Ronald Reagan Buildings.

At its December 6, 2001 meeting, the Commission approved preliminary and final site development plans for a temporary security barrier system at the U.S. Department of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover Building for a period not to exceed 18 months. The project included installation of concrete planters around the perimeter and replacement of six vehicle barrier gates at Courtyards 2 and 5 driveway entrances on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Commission noted they “understand that GSA is working on a permanent security solution for the Commerce Building and other buildings within the Federal Triangle in accordance with the *Urban Design Guidelines for Physical Perimeter and Entrance Security: An Overlay to the Master Plan for the Federal Triangle* and requests that proposals are also consistent with the recommendations of the Commission’s Interagency Task Force on Security and coordinated with the Urban Design and Security Plan now in preparation.”

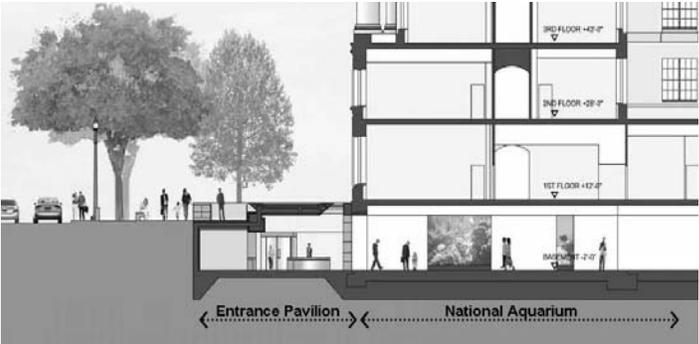
At September 5, 2002 meeting, the Commission approved preliminary and final site development plans for panel antennas below the seventh floor balcony and balustrade on the northeast corner, south façade and west façade of the building for a period of five years, except for the stealth boxes. The Commission delegated approval of the final antenna screening design to the Executive Director. The Commission “expects the General Services Administration to submit for review those antennas currently installed on the Department of Commerce Building that have not been previously reviewed by the Commission.”

## Proposal

The General Services Administration (GSA) is performing whole building modernization in four phases over nine years which will upgrade and replace major building systems for the Department of Commerce, Herbert C. Hoover Building. GSA is submitting phase one concept site and building plans that will include interior and exterior repairs, modifications and enhancements to meet current building standards and new programmatic functions. All major site utilities and building service infrastructure will be replaced.



**National Aquarium – Enlarged Entrance Plan**



**National Aquarium – Partial Building Section at Entrance**



**National Aquarium -  
Proposed Sidewalk View**

*National Aquarium Entrance*

The proposal relocates the existing National Aquarium from the center building basement on 14<sup>th</sup> Street to the south building basement adjacent to Constitution Avenue. An existing basement areaway will be expanded south into the building yard to the edge of the existing sidewalk and provide space for an entrance pavilion for security screening. Modifications to existing areaway window openings and/or new wall penetrations through the historic building fabric will be required to provide access from the entrance pavilion into the basement aquarium space. Visitors will access the aquarium entrance, approximately nine feet below the sidewalk, via a staircase and/or ADA compliant ramp. The proposed pavilion structure will have a roof top water feature and skylights.

### *Courtyard 6 Perimeter Skylights and Green Roof*

Courtyard 6 currently is infilled with several building floors. The modernization will upgrade the substandard interior conditions and mechanical systems and install two egress stair towers. The proposal will remove floor slabs placed in the existing north, east and west areaways and install a continuous perimeter skylight that will introduce natural daylight into the interior tenant spaces below. The laminated insulating skylight glazing will have low emissive and ultra violet coatings. The remainder of the courtyard “roof” will be engineered with a new green roof system.

### *Child Care Center Play Yard*

As part of the internal modernization, the existing Child Care Center (CCC) will be relocated from Courtyard 6 to the west side of Courtyard 1 (1A). The proposal creates an outdoor play yard adjacent to the CCC in the western side of Courtyard 1. Internal building modifications will allow CCC temporary parking and drop off in the 15<sup>th</sup> Street motor court/Courtyard 2. An enlarged ADA compliant ramp will be installed at the entrance to facilitate stroller access to the CCC.

### *Courtyards 3 and 4 Landscapes*

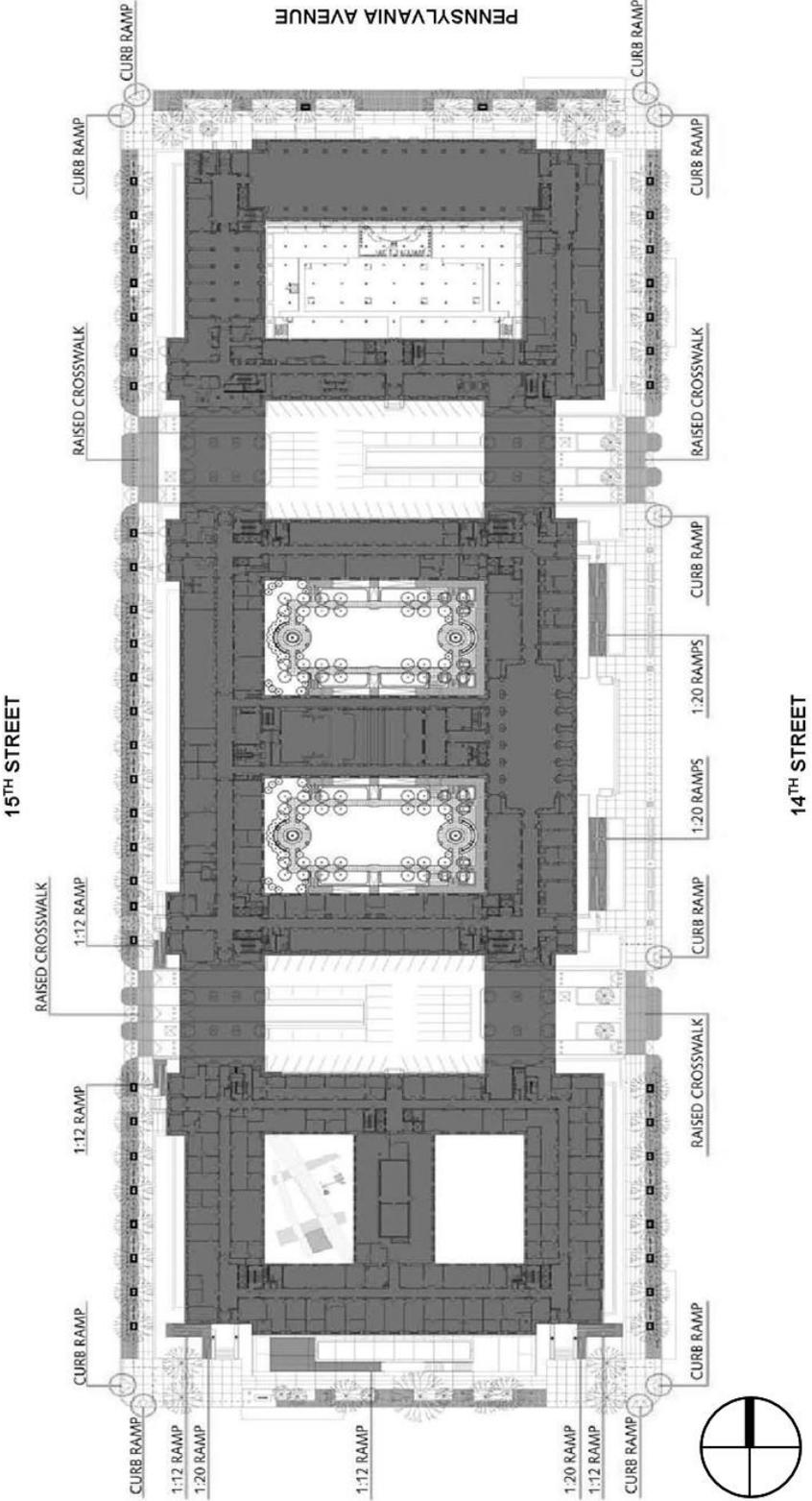
The proposal re-establishes the design intent of the original 1935 landscape plans, produced by the New York firm of Vitale and Geiffert, for Courtyards 3 and 4. Appropriate plant materials will be selected responding to the low light levels and match the spirit of the historic landscape plan.

### *Building Exterior*

The existing exterior facades will have routine maintenance, repair, conservation and cleaning. The original galvanized window frames will be repaired and refurbished and blast resistant storm windows and frames will be installed. The original historic exterior doors will be repaired and refurbished. Portions of the existing roof systems will be repaired or replaced.

### *Exterior Landscape and Streetscape*

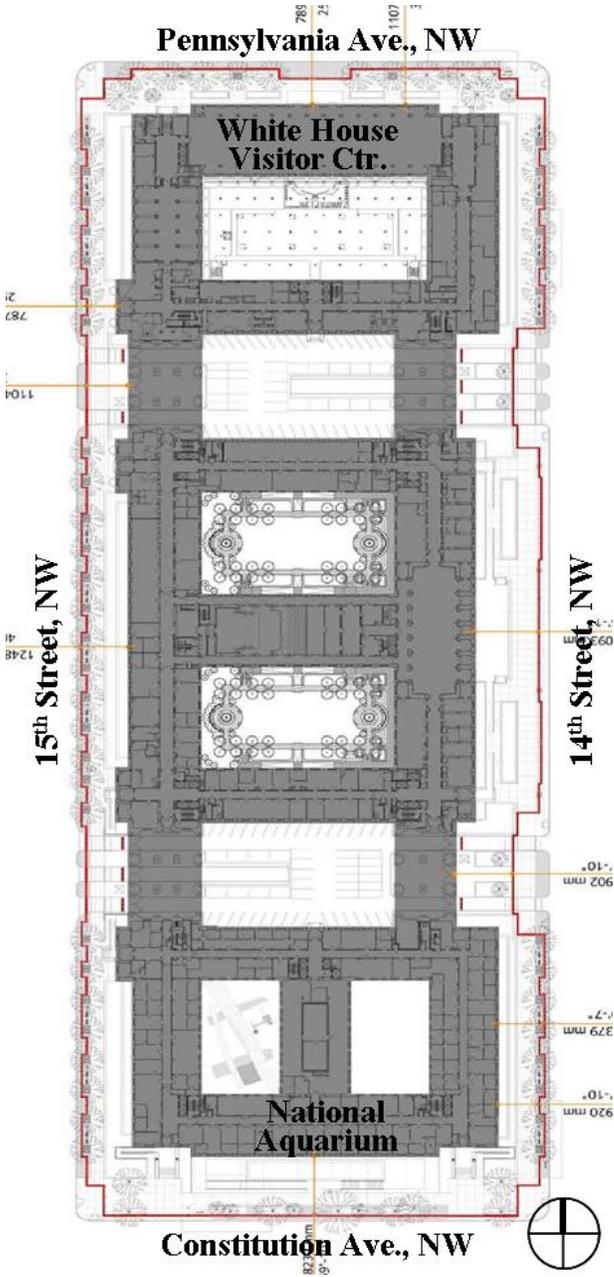
In conjunction with the proposed perimeter security elements, the exterior landscape and streetscape surrounding the building will be modified. Unhealthy street trees and plantings will be removed and replaced with new landscape, based upon historic photographs and the McMillan Plan. The proposed landscape design will recreate the orthogonal placement of street trees, emphasize the building entrances and simplify the foundation plantings. The existing sidewalks will be replaced and resurfaced with stamped or precast concrete and unit pavers; granite pavers will signify prominent building entrances. Relocated and new Washington Globe streetlights will be uniformly spaced around the building perimeter for consistent light levels



**Proposed Exterior Handicap Ramps**

*Exterior Access Ramps*

The proposal will install access ramps, compliant with the American Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG), at all employee and visitor entrances. Low profile ramps will be integrated into the landscape design (low planters), perimeter security elements and historic building fabric and setting. Ramp lighting will be incorporated to increase safety.



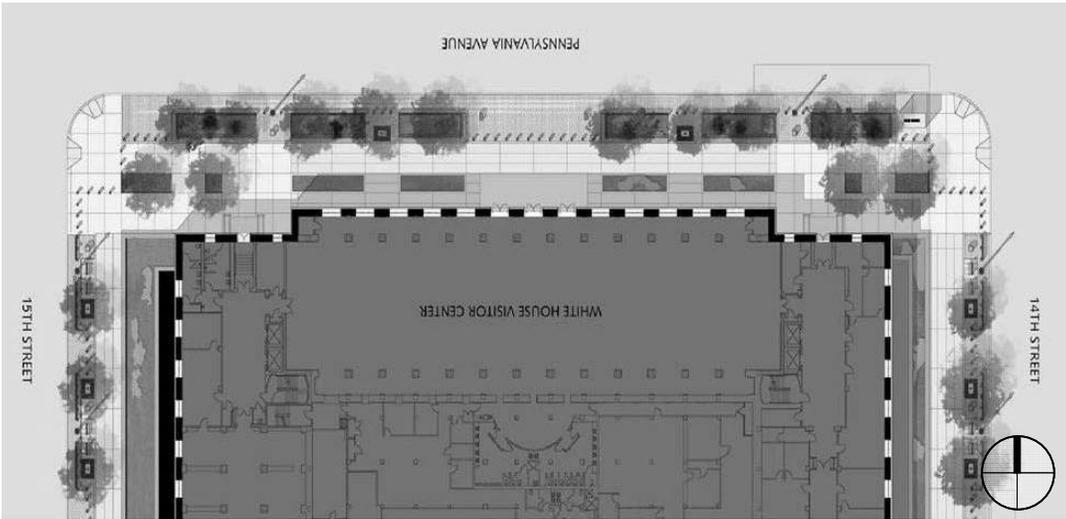
**Proposed Perimeter Security Site Plan**

*Perimeter Security*

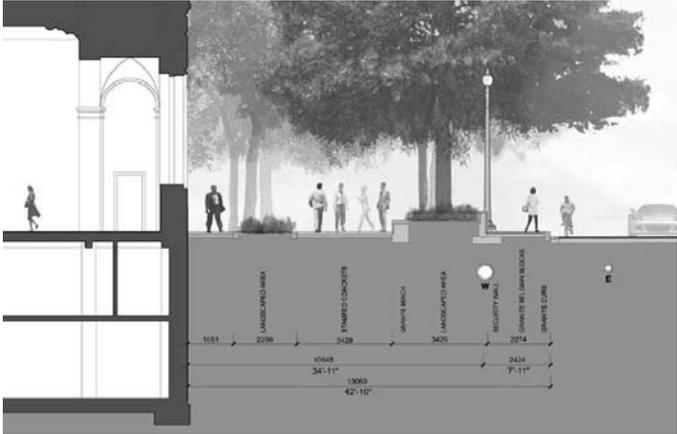
The proposal develops various perimeter security elements around the building site that will create a cohesive, accessible, and pedestrian-friendly urban streetscape. The intent is to formulate a design that will unify with other building perimeter security elements found in the Federal Triangle

In general, the proposed line of perimeter security boundary will run parallel and four feet from the curb in order provide the largest possible stand off distance while allowing the maximum pedestrian circulation space on the sidewalks. Perimeter security elements will be pulled away from sidewalks adjacent to the major street intersections in order to accommodate pedestrian crosswalk circulation and unobstructed handicap curb ramps.

The following is a brief summary of the perimeter security elements around the building:

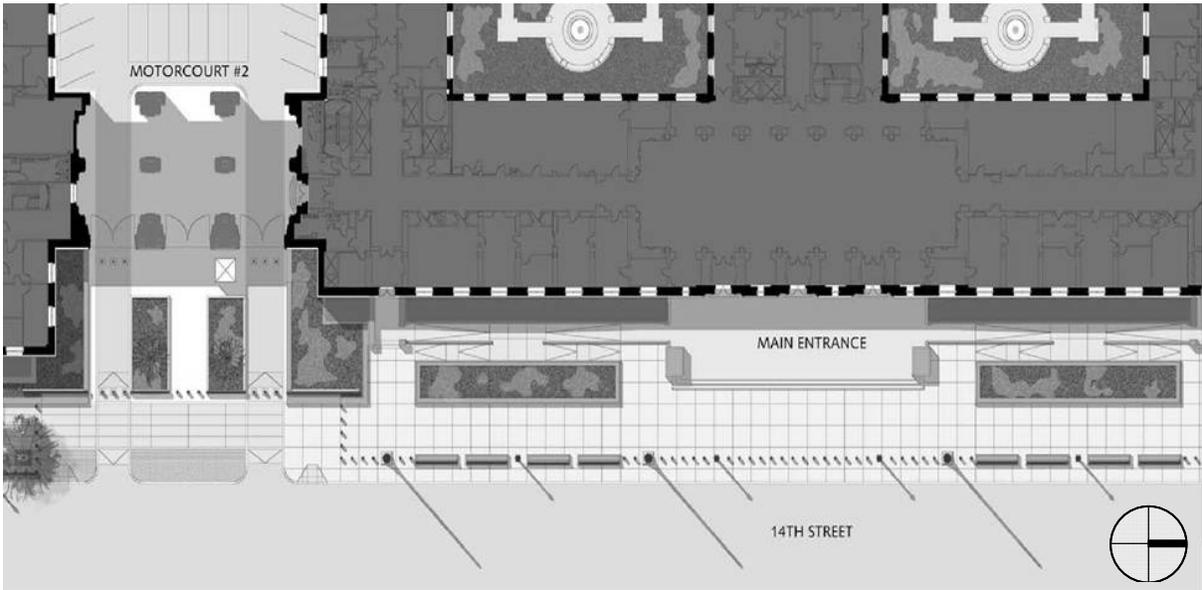


**Pennsylvania Avenue Perimeter Security – Enlarged Plan**

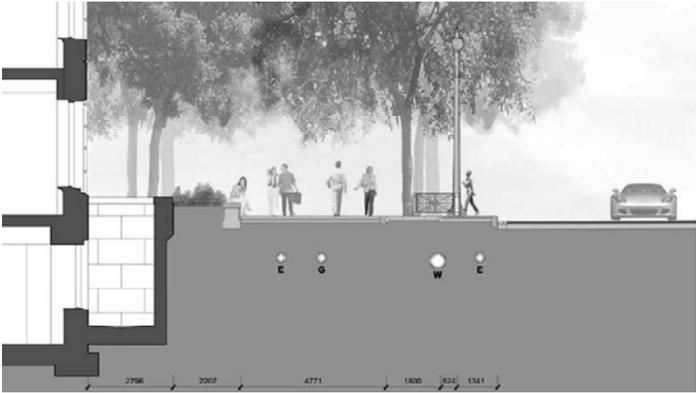


**Pennsylvania Avenue Perimeter Security – Site Section Detail**

- Pennsylvania Avenue
  - 30-inch high, fixed and retractable bollards with granite cladding or 14-inch diameter, cast-iron cover. Maximum clearance of 42 inches between bollards.
  - 30-inch high, granite clad, elevated tree planters, approximately 8 feet from the curb with 16-inch high granite bench on the side facing the building sidewalk.
  - Hardened streetlights.



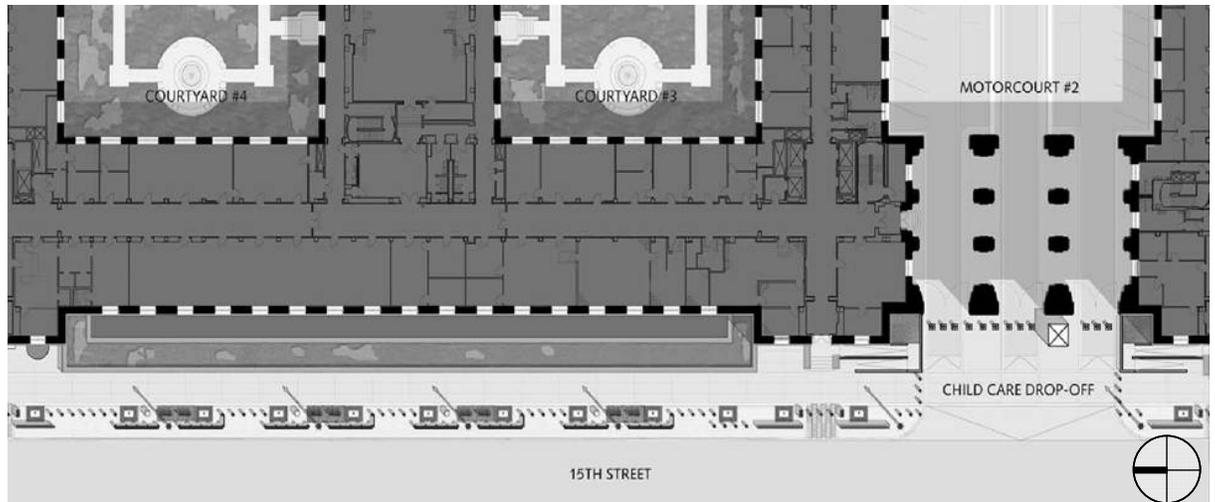
**14<sup>th</sup> Street Perimeter Security – Partial Enlarged Plan Main Entrance**



**14<sup>th</sup> Street Perimeter Security – Site Section Detail**



**14<sup>th</sup> Street Perimeter Security – Proposed Sidewalk View**



**15<sup>th</sup> Street Perimeter Security – Enlarged Plan**

- 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets
  - 30-inch high, fixed and retractable bollards with granite cladding or 14-inch diameter, cast-iron cover. Maximum clearance of 42 inches between bollards.
  - 30-inch high, decorative fencing and bollards around tree pits.
  - Hardened streetlights and flagpoles.
  - Hardened granite benches.
  - Elevated granite clad, building yard plinth walls.
  - Guard booths, adjacent to the building, and retractable driveway bollards located at each vehicular entrance to Courtyards 2 and 5.
- Constitution Ave (*see National Aquarium – Enlarged Entrance Plan*)
  - 30-inch high, fixed and retractable bollards with granite cladding or 14-inch diameter, cast-iron cover. Maximum clearance of 42 inches between bollards.
  - 30-inch high, freestanding granite clad, security wall located on the curb side of the tree pit, approximately six feet from the curb.
  - Hardened streetlights.

### Development Program

Applicant: Department of Commerce  
Architects: GGA|Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn  
Acreage: 10.95 acres  
Estimated Cost: \$43,255,973 (Phase I)  
Schedule: September 2006 – October 2008 (Phase I)

## PROJECT ANALYSIS

### Executive Summary

Staff supports the proposed phase one building modernization for the Herbert C. Hoover Building. The building façade maintenance and site and streetscape improvements will refresh and re-establish the historic architecture and urban setting. Interior building and courtyard modifications will improve employees' quality of life and productivity.

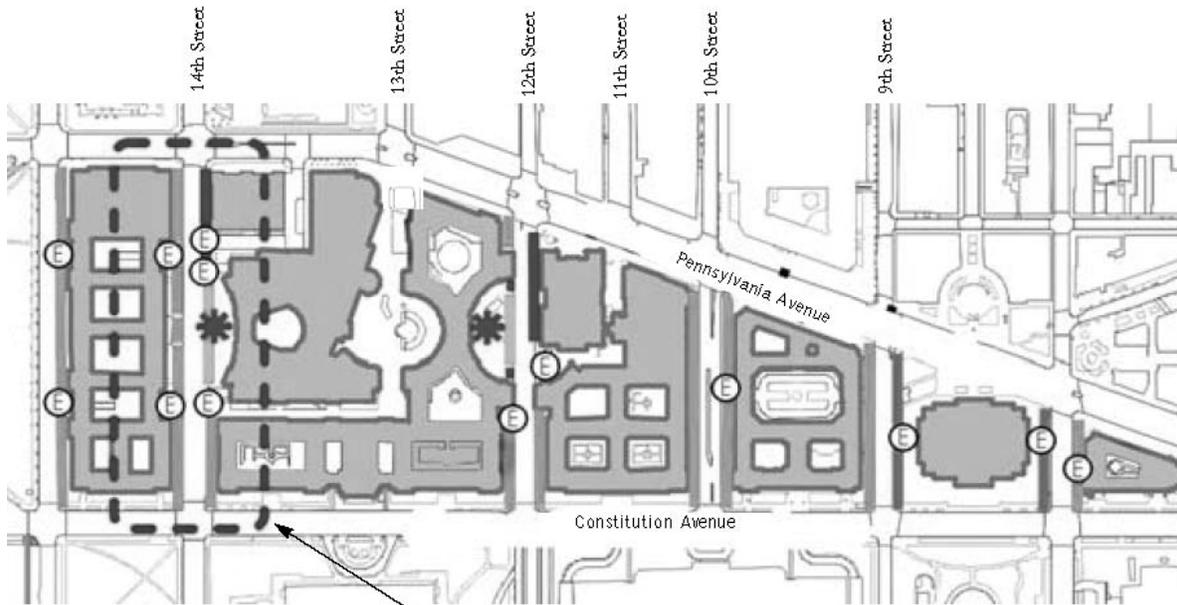
Staff supports the relocation of National Aquarium adjacent to Constitution Avenue. The orientation, adjacent to the Mall and the future National Museum of African American Culture and History, will increase public awareness and attendance and will activate pedestrian activity along Constitution Avenue. Staff recommends maximizing pedestrian circulation space in front of the entrance areaway by incorporating perimeter security into the entrance design and eliminating streetscape security elements and clutter. Staff recommends further design study of the entrance element in consultation with NCPC, CFA and DC SHPO staffs in order to minimize the impact to the historic building yard and building fabric, setting and street-level view sheds.

Staff finds the proposal for perimeter security enhancements to be premature and recommends that further action on this element be deferred until it can be coordinated with efforts to develop a comprehensive design solution for perimeter security and streetscape improvements in the entire Federal Triangle including Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues. Since December 2001 the Commission has understood that GSA would pursue such a comprehensive solution. Since 2004 the Commission has included as recommended and strongly endorsed two related projects in Federal Capital Improvements Program.

- Federal Triangle and Pennsylvania Avenue (3<sup>rd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW) Perimeter Security and Streetscape Improvements
- Constitution Avenue (3<sup>rd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW and 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets, NW) Perimeter Security and Streetscape Improvements.

In recent weeks, NCPC and GSA staff have been discussing how to proceed with these important initiatives. In the near future, these discussions will be expanded to include the National Park Service.

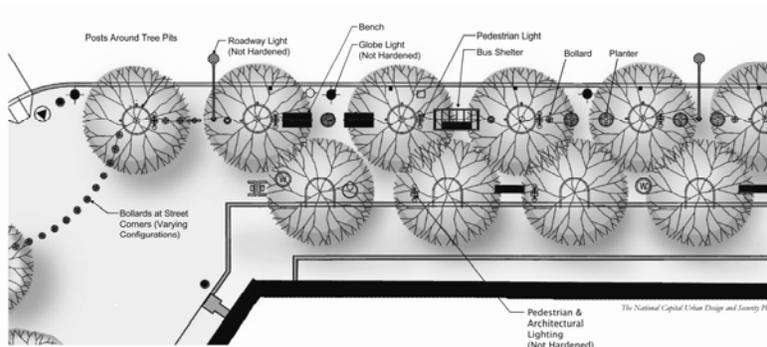
Staff finds that the proposed perimeter security concept is not entirely consistent with the design framework in the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*, but does not recommend that the commission make specific recommendations for further design development without a comprehensive design solution for the Federal Triangle. While we continue to recommend that agencies use the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan* as a guide and resource, staff notes that perimeter security technologies and requirements have advanced since it was published in 2002.



FEDERAL TRIANGLE KEY PLAN

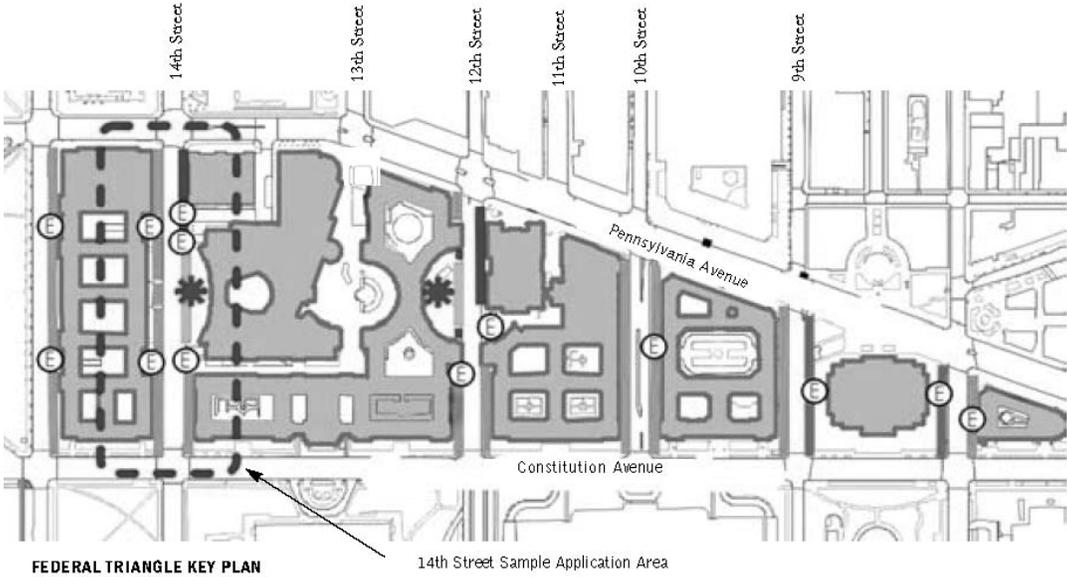
14th Street Sample Application Area

**National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan: Pennsylvania Avenue Design Framework**

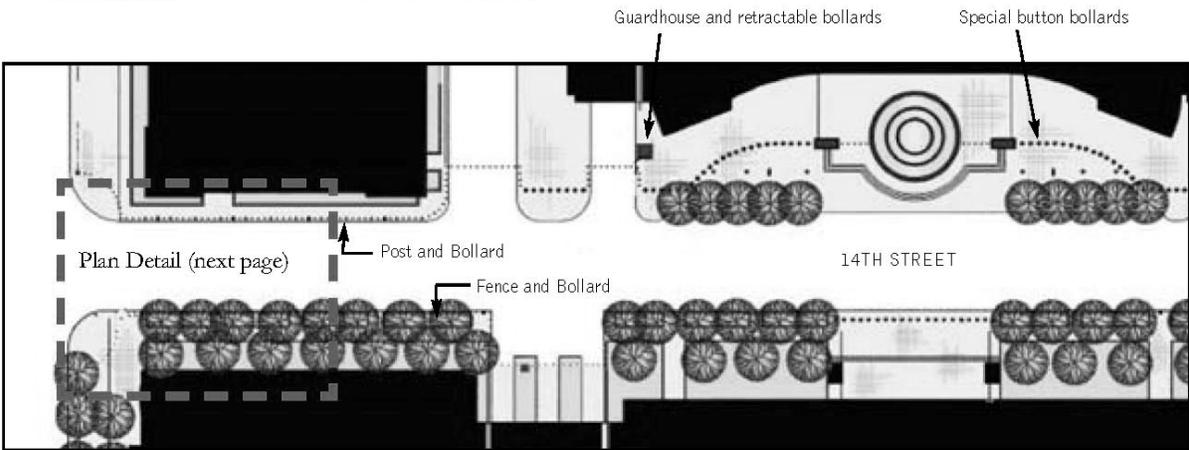


**National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan: Pennsylvania Avenue Details/Sample Application**

The design framework for Pennsylvania Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, as contained in the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*, reinforces the existing streetscape of the avenue by incorporating new, custom-designed hardened street furniture. The plan notes, however, that the ultimate design direction for the avenue will be determined by the National Park Service. The proposed perimeter security concept and elements for Pennsylvania Avenue are not consistent with recommendation to incorporate new, custom-designed hardened street furniture and do not reflect coordination with the National Park Service for the remainder of Pennsylvania Avenue.



**National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan: Federal Triangle Design Framework**



FEDERAL TRIANGLE - 14TH STREET SAMPLE APPLICATION AREA

**National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan:  
Federal Triangle 14<sup>th</sup> Street Details/Sample Application**

Staff finds that neither the proposed landscape plan nor the security elements proposed along 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets (north-south streets) are consistent with the design framework recommended in the *National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*. To minimize the impact of security in public space and ensure a well designed streetscape, the plan recommends additional trees and a cohesive palette of street furniture comprising of a variety of hardened security elements. The concept design also does not include uniform streetscape design information for both sides of 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

Staff recommends that future submission materials include graphic documentation of existing conditions in order to facilitate understanding of the extent and impact of proposed modifications to the existing historic building fabric and setting. Staff suggests that the applicant limit project submission information and materials to those items that relate to the review authority of the Commission.

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff has determined that the proposed concept is consistent with the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements*, in particular the Federal Workplace, the Preservation and Historic Features, and Visitor Elements.

The proposed modernization, repair and rehabilitation will ensure the continued preservation and stewardship of federal historic property. The project will increase the quality of workplace for federal employees and will attract and retain workforce within the monumental core. The revitalized National Aquarium will be directly accessible to pedestrians and attract visitors in the vicinity of the Mall. The building is currently served by several modes of public transportation and pedestrian routes. The site improvements will reinforce the historic green character of the nation's capital by maintaining street trees that will frame the L'Enfant streets.

While in isolation, the proposal reflects security polices in the Federal Workplace element and *The National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan*, it has not been planned and/or coordinated to be consistent with other building perimeter security projects within the Federal Triangle and along Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues. A balanced approach for visitor accessibility and unified aesthetics will complement the character of the Federal Triangle within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

### Federal Capital Improvements Program

The Commission recommended and strongly endorsed The Department of Commerce, Herbert C. Hoover Building Modernization as noted in the Federal Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Years 2006-2011.

The Commission recommended and strongly endorsed the Federal Triangle and Pennsylvania Avenue (3<sup>rd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW) Perimeter Security and Streetscape Improvements as noted in the Federal Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Years 2006-2011.

The Commission recommended and strongly endorsed the Constitution Avenue (3<sup>rd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets, NW) Perimeter Security and Streetscape Improvements as noted in the Federal Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Years 2006-2011.

#### National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

Applicant submission guidelines do not require completion of NEPA information at the concept submission stage for standard building improvements, as defined by the Commission's project review requirements. Furthermore, until GSA has completed consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office the determination of any impact to exterior site elements, and especially cultural resources in regard to exterior features, that coordination effort may further define mitigation measures that either conform to a potential categorical exclusion action or require additional environmental review documentation by GSA.

#### National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

GSA has been in consultation since late 2005 on proposed exterior and interior alterations to the Commerce Building with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, as well as with Commission staff and other parties.

The Commerce Building is the largest building in the Federal Triangle. Designed by the prominent New York architectural firm of York and Sawyer (formed by architects who had previously worked in the firm of McKim, Mead, and White), the building was designed principally by Louis Ayers, who represented his firm on the Board of Architectural Consultants for the Federal Triangle. Constructed between 1926 and 1932, it was said at the time to be the largest government building in the United States. Clad in Indiana limestone with the characteristic red-orange tile roof of Federal Triangle buildings, the building expresses the Renaissance Revival and Beaux Arts styles, especially in plan, and in its rusticated base, graduated fenestration pattern, and colonnades of monumental Doric columns.

The Federal Triangle, conceived in the McMillan Plan, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, the area was designated for its exceptional architectural and planning significance and for its contribution to the image of the federal government in the Nation's Capital.

## CONSULTATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its February 8, 2006 meeting, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

At their March 16, 2006 meeting the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed and approved the proposed building modernization concept for the reconfigured cooling towers, Courtyard 6 building infill, and National Aquarium entrance. CFA did not approve the perimeter security concept with the understanding that GSA will be looking at perimeter security for the Federal Triangle.