

STAFF RECOMMENDATION



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NCPC File No. 7004

BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING (MAIN BUILDING) REHABILITATION AND ADDITION TO TOUR ENTRANCE BRIDGE

310 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Department of the Treasury

November 24, 2009

Abstract

The Department of the Treasury has submitted a project for the rehabilitation of the public tour entrance bridge, including a small addition to accommodate new interpretive exhibits and a theater, at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) Main Building. The scope of the project will entail the rehabilitation of the steel truss entrance bridge that is part of the original historic fabric of BEP's Main Building. The existing metal panel walls and single-pane windows that enclose the bridge will be removed and replaced with metal-framed glass panels that will showcase the historic structure, increase natural light to the interior, and provide additional space for exhibits. The project also proposes to heating, cooling, and ventilation systems of the entrance bridge, and will be designed to maximize energy efficiency according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of approval of comments on concept design pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the overall concept design for the rehabilitation of, and addition to, the public tour entrance bridge at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (Main Building), as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.74(38.00)42903.

Recommends that the applicant continue to work closely with NCPC, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office to identify whether the public plaza along 14th Street can be restored to its original curvilinear configuration, and to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse affects on the existing historic fabric of the BEP Main Building and entrance bridge.

Recommends that the applicant work with staff to identify opportunities to improve pedestrian circulation and the overall streetscape along the 14th and 15th Street frontages of the BEP Main Building.

Notes that complete environmental documentation prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, and completion of the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, is required prior to the Commission taking final action on the project.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION



Map showing location of project site and surrounding context

Site

The project is located at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP, the Bureau) Main Building at 310 14th Street, SW. To the north of the project site is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; the Liberty Loan Building is located to the immediate south. West of the BEP Main Building, across 15th Street (also known as Raoul Wallenberg Place, is the Tidal Basin and West

Potomac Park. Directly To the east of 14th Street is the BEP Annex building; it occupies the entire block bounded by 13th Street, 14th Street, C Street, and D Street, SW.

Background

The BEP Main Building was constructed in 1914 in response to the Bureau having outgrown its existing facilities, and the federal government's expanding industrial printing needs. The building was designed with two distinctly different façade treatments corresponding to its surroundings and intended use. Along 15th Street, the building, with its classical design and monumental colonnade, reflects the prominence of its location adjacent to the National Mall. The building's east elevation, along 14th Street, reveals the industrial nature of the facility, albeit in a monumental style. Four wings, housing printing machinery, extend toward 14th Street and are separated by three deep courtyards designed to bring natural light into the production areas. The south courtyard was eventually filled with utility buildings and equipment, while the north courtyard was eventually modified for an underground wastewater treatment facility and surface parking area.

Upon completion in 1914, the center courtyard was primarily occupied by an unenclosed, elevated, steel truss entrance bridge that spanned the center courtyard and connected 14th Street to the rear entrance of the Main Building. Though the bridge was originally intended to be used solely by employees, by 1916 it was also being heavily used by visitors to the Bureau. As the number of visitors continued to grow through the years it was acknowledged that a more convenient visitor reception area was needed, and in 1929 the BEP initiated a three-year project to renovate the bridge in order to provide such an area. The project included the installation of metal panel walls and industrial single-pane windows to provide additional protection from the elements, as well as a heating and cooling system. Other improvements included restrooms, drinking fountains, and a guard station. In the 1940s, a trolley turnaround was constructed underneath 14th Street in front of the BEP; and as a result many of the Bureau's employees utilized the tunnel beneath the entrance bridge to enter the Main Building. This left the bridge to serve mainly visitors and tourists, and eventually became the primary entrance



Historic image showing entrance bridge under construction



Historic image showing completed entrance bridge prior to being enclosed in 1929 (circa 1914)



Existing condition of entrance bridge (north elevation)



Existing condition of entrance bridge (south elevation)

for the production tour established in 1965. Although the interior finishes and exhibits have been changed over the years, the bridge remains largely as it was following the first renovation in 1929.

Currently, the Bureau serves approximately 250,000 tourists annually who come to learn about the history and mission of the BEP, and witness the production of printed currency. Those wishing to view the exhibits and experience the production tour must first acquire a ticket from a booth located along 15th Street. Each morning, particularly during the spring and summer months, tickets are distributed for a finite number of tours that will take place that day. Typically, tickets are fully distributed by mid-morning. Upon receiving a ticket, visitors make their way to the public tour entrance located on 14th Street. Queuing for the production tour takes place along the sidewalk and visitors are only admitted into the exhibit gallery – located along the entrance bridge – shortly before the tour begins. Currently, visitors who are unable to acquire a ticket for the production tour also are unable to experience the exhibits within the gallery and are turned away.

Proposal

In preparation for its upcoming Sesquicentennial in 2012, the BEP wishes to expand and enhance its public tour experience in part by rehabilitating the existing entrance bridge and visitor's exhibit gallery. Collectively, the project seeks to preserve the historic fabric of the entrance bridge by maintaining and highlighting its original steel structure; reduce energy consumption and maintenance; and provide a modern, convenient, year-round tour experience for visitors to the BEP. The project will include new interior and exterior public spaces that will minimize outdoor queuing and conflicts with general pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk, and provide visitor access to the interpretive exhibits without having to first acquire a ticket to the production tour. According to the BEP, the successful completion of the project will accomplish the following interior and exterior renovation goals:

Interior Renovation Goals:

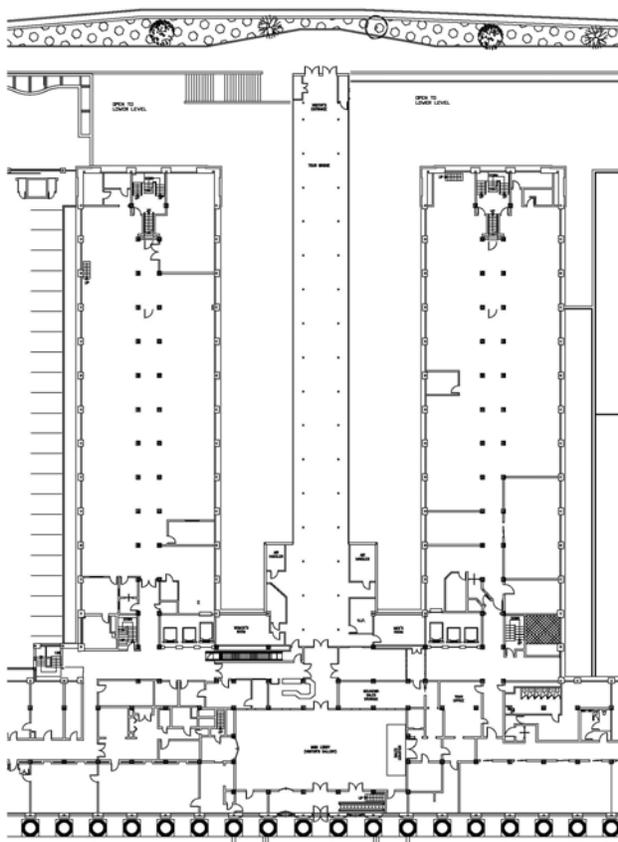
- Maximize exhibit space to allow for exhibits and special programs.
- Enhance the quality of the exhibit gallery through better finishes and improved aesthetics.
- Improve visitor circulation through security, information desk, and the progression through exhibits and the production tour.
- Provide an enclosed orientation theater for up to 60 people.

- Provide an experience that can accommodate both production tour ticketholders and those wishing only to visit the exhibit gallery.

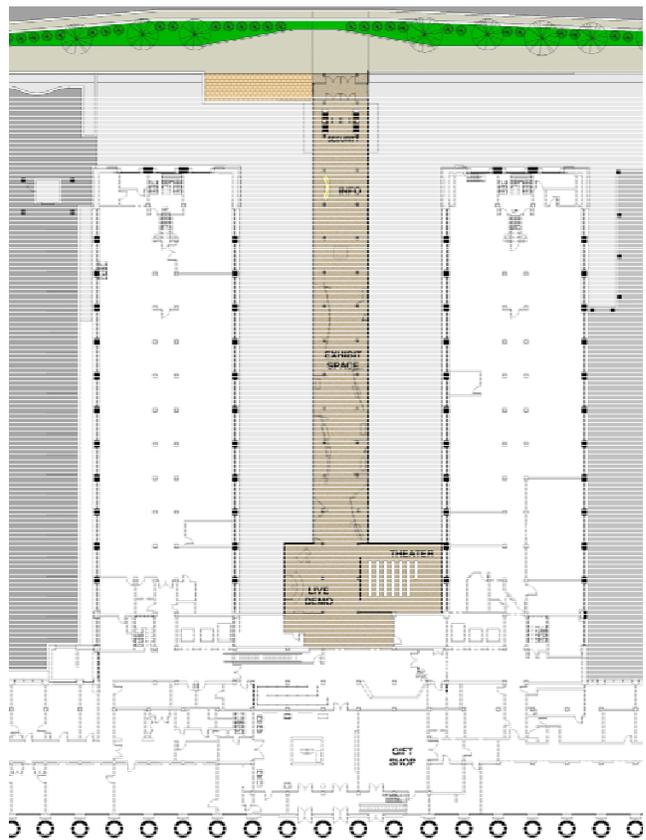
Exterior Renovation Goals:

- Reduce queuing and provide added separation between tourists and general pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk by providing a small entry plaza to the north of the entrance bridge.
- Create a visual “identity” for the BEP at the pedestrian and vehicular level along 14th Street, an important southern gateway into the city.
- Provide exterior educational information and wayfinding signage.
- Showcase the original historic structural elements of the entrance bridge.

At the entrance to the bridge, the proposed design concept includes a new entry vestibule that is more transparent and aesthetically pleasing than what currently exists. The design of the new entrance is influenced by the original bridge structure and appears to be an extension of the historic fabric. To minimize queuing within public space, a small plaza expansion will be added to the north of the entry vestibule by utilizing space above a set of abandoned stairs that lead down to the courtyards below. The existing wall that runs along the inside of the sidewalk will be realigned to the outside edge of the plaza, and will contain lettering that will serve as a sign for the BEP Main Building.



Existing site plan of entrance bridge and exhibit gallery



Proposed site plan of entrance bridge and exhibit gallery showing plaza and theater additions

Although the historic bridge structure will remain, the proposed concept includes the replacement of the metal panel walls and windows that currently enclose the entrance bridge. The existing thin walls and single-paned windows will be replaced with new framed glass panels that will run the entire length of the bridge. The glass panels will alternate between transparent and translucent in order to maximize the amount of natural light into the space and reveal the structural components of the historic bridge to the largest extent possible, while providing display space for exhibits and interactive displays. The roof over the bridge will be replaced with a standing seam roof over rigid insulation. The roof material will recall the metal roof of the building's penthouse monitors and existing guard booths. In addition to the improvements to the existing bridge structure, a small addition will be constructed along the southern side of the bridge near the Main Building. The addition will house a small theater intended to serve approximately 50 – 60 people, and will be located adjacent to a live demonstration area. As this project is still in the concept stage, the details of this addition have not yet been designed.



View of proposed entrance bridge improvements from the intersection of 14th Street and C Street, SW



View of proposed entrance bridge from the north along sidewalk showing extended public plaza and wall signage.



View of proposed entrance bridge from the south along sidewalk showing theater addition.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Overall, staff is pleased with the Bureau's overall concept to rehabilitate the existing entrance bridge and exhibit gallery, and construct a small addition to accommodate a new theater. The proposed concept design has evolved significantly during consultation and is now much more sympathetic to the historic fabric of the entrance bridge and the Main Building. Though the proposed concept design will continue to evolve as it moves into the preliminary and final stages, staff is confident that the end product will not only serve its intended purpose of highlighting the important history and mission of the Bureau, but it will also make the Main Building itself a part of the visitor experience by highlighting its architectural design and maintaining its historic integrity.

As the project moves forward staff recommends that the BEP consider the following issues:

Sensitivity to existing historic fabric of the entrance bridge and BEP Main Building

While staff is encouraged by the efforts BEP is making to restore and showcase the historic fabric of the bridge and Main Building, much care will need to be taken as the details of the bridge addition progress further. Specifically, as the project moves forward, staff will be particularly interested in how the proposed addition will connect to the existing bridge structure, and whether it will attach to, or penetrate, the façade of the Main Building.

Furthermore, in reviewing some of the historic photographs provided by the Bureau, staff noted that the original public plaza at the bridge entrance had a curvilinear shape, and that the front entrance of the bridge aligned with the enclosing wall of the public plaza. It appears that the rounded plaza may have been removed when the staircase leading down to the maintenance courtyard was constructed, and that the front façade of the entrance bridge has been extended forward slightly. In order to further preserve the historic integrity of the entrance bridge, staff recommends that the applicant explore the feasibility of returning the public plaza and front façade of the bridge to their original configuration through consultation with NCPC, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office as part of the continuing Section 106 process for this project.

Impact to public space and existing perimeter security elements along 14th Street

At its September 1996 meeting, the Commission approved File No. 5583, Bureau of Engraving and Printing Southwest Gateway Project. In addition to a new visitor center, which was never constructed, and building alterations, this project also included a number of site improvements. These improvements included the construction of a low seating wall and planter along the western curb of 14th Street for the purposes of separating pedestrians from traffic, providing building security, and reducing the number of bollards that would need to be installed. In addition, a short line of bollards running perpendicular to the sidewalk at either end of the planter was also included in the approved site improvements. As noted in the staff report for this project, "the planters are elevated to allow sufficient soil depth for plant growth, and ten street trees will be included, located to avoid conflicts with below grade tunnels." Staff's report also noted that a bollard design for the 14th Street side of the BEP Main Building was not submitted as part of the

Southwest Gateway Project, rather the design would be coordinated with planned bollards at the Holocaust Museum.

Since the Commission's approval of the Southwest Gateway Project, the elevated curbside planter has been constructed along the 14th Street frontage of the BEP Main Building. Similarly, security bollards at both ends of the planter, and along the curb north of the planter, have been constructed. The design of these bollards is similar in appearance to what has been constructed at the Holocaust Museum – approved by the Commission at its February 3, 2000 meeting.

Given the narrowness of the sidewalks along 14th Street, most likely due to the width and number of vehicular travel lanes along this heavily traveled corridor, it is important that the streetscape remain as open and accessible as possible so as not to impede pedestrian movement. This will allow for the successful continuation of the increasing role this stretch of 14th Street has as a destination corridor in the nation's capital. It will also serve to reduce visual clutter and assist the BEP in achieving its goal of improving the overall experience for its visitors. Therefore, staff recommends that the BEP analyze its 14th Street frontage to determine what opportunities exist to improve pedestrian circulation and the overall streetscape, including the removal of redundant or unnecessary perimeter security elements.

Location of public tour ticket distribution

As noted above, tickets to the BEP production tour are distributed on a daily basis from a small ticket booth located along 15th Street. After receiving a ticket, visitors must then make their way to the 14th Street side of the Main Building in order to gain access to the visitor's gallery. Staff notes that in order to improve the overall efficiency of the ticketing and public tour process, it may be beneficial for the BEP to relocate ticket distribution to somewhere within the renovated visitor's gallery. In addition to making the process more convenient for visitors, this



View of existing ticket distribution booth on 15th Street

could have the added benefit of improving the streetscape along 15th Street by removing the existing ticket booth. Therefore, as the project moves forward staff recommends that the BEP and NCPC work together to see if this can be accomplished without compromising the quality of the tour experience or the Bureau's programmatic needs.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital includes several polices that support the BEP's proposal to rehabilitate its tour entrance and enhance the overall quality of the visitor experience. Specifically, the Visitors Element contains polices that encourage the federal government to

support publicly accessible visitor attractions on federal property such as exhibits and other educational activities and events that can inspire and educate visitors about the role of government. The Federal Workplace Element recommends that federal buildings remain open to the public by locating accessible activities “within federal workplaces on public streets and other pedestrian access levels, as well as within courtyards and on rooftops.” In addition, by preserving and rehabilitating the original bridge structure of the Main Building, the project is also successful in carrying out polices contained in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Monumental Core Framework Plan

The project is located within the Southwest Rectangle precinct of the Monumental Core Framework Plan (the Framework Plan). Immediately south of the BEP Main Building, the Framework Plan recommends the redevelopment of the Liberty Loan Building as a nationally significant cultural destination with ground-floor amenities. In addition to its location across from the National Mall, and its views of the Tidal Basin, the Framework Plan considers the Liberty Loan site an ideal location for its ability to extend the sequence of important visitor attractions that exist along 14th Street south of the National Mall, of which the BEP tour is included. The project will undoubtedly improve the street presence of the BEP as well as the quality of the streetscape along 14th Street. This could have the added effect of increasing pedestrian flow towards the Liberty Loan site thereby helping to make it more attractive to future museum sponsors.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Both NCPC and the BEP have independent responsibility for this project under NEPA. In order for NCPC to approve this project, BEP is required to prepare environmental documentation in advance of the preliminary and final stages. Staff will continue to work closely with BEP to determine what type of documentation will be required.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The BEP Main Building is among the buildings on the original 1964 Joint Committee on Landmarks list. It is a significant example of a federal government facility designed in the aftermath of the 1901 McMillan Plan, and the establishment of the Commission of Fine Arts in 1910. The building's construction was authorized in 1911, and completed in 1914, in response to the federal government's expanding industrial printing needs. Designed by James Knox Taylor in the Classical Revival style, the building is a reflection of the prevailing Beaux-Arts tastes of the era. The west (15th Street) elevation, with its 360 linear foot colonnade, is the most formal realization of the McMillan Plan's intentions south of the Mall. By contrast, the east elevation on 14th Street reveals the industrial nature of the building, albeit in the context of the monumental core. The four wings housing printing machinery are separated by three deep courtyards, of which the center courtyard houses the entrance bridge, a contributing element of the historic building.

The proposed project is subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. BEP has begun consultation on the proposed alterations and additions to the tour bridge entrance with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO). An introductory meeting took place on September 2, 2009. On October 2, 2009, staff visited the

project site to discuss the project further. At this early date, the DC SHPO staff has indicated general support for the proposed concept design and has suggested as much transparency as possible for the bridge's replacement windows. Section 106 consultation will continue through the phases of design development. NCPC staff will continue to participate in the consultation process, which must be completed prior to the Commission's final action.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its November 10, 2009 meeting and forwarded it to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were NCPC; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; the District of Columbia Department of Housing and Community Development and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

At its meeting on November 19, 2009, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) expressed no objections to the concept design for rehabilitation of the 14th Street public tour entrance at the BEP Main Building. CFA suggested that additional study be given to restoring the entrance plaza to its original curved configuration and that the detailing of the new entrance way be further refined.