

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION



C. Kelly

NCPC File No. 7182

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## FEDERAL TRIANGLE BUILDING IDENTIFICATION SIGNS

Bounded by 6<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW and Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, NW  
Washington, DC

Submitted by the United States General Services Administration

November 23, 2010

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### Abstract

The General Services Administration (GSA) proposes to construct twenty-six exterior building identification signs within the Federal Triangle. The signs will be installed at the buildings that GSA currently owns and/or manages, and will replace the existing “ribbon” signs that are in poor condition. The proposed signage is a pilot program that may be implemented at other GSA buildings within the National Capital Region.

### Commission Action Requested by Applicant

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

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### Executive Director’s Recommendation

The Commission:

**Comments favorably on** the concept design for building identification signs in the Federal Triangle, with the exception of the proposed signage locations, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.23(38.00)43202:

**Recommends** that the General Services Administration continue working with NCPC staff, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer to reevaluate the proposed signage locations. This evaluation should consider the location and content of all existing and planned signage including agency identification incorporated into the facades of buildings, the new exterior signs at the National Archives, the District of Columbia’s blue wayfinding signs, and future signage for the relocated National Aquarium and the Federal Triangle Heritage Trail.

**Notes** that while this project is for the Federal Triangle, the General Services Administration intends to implement the signage program to all its buildings in the National Capital Region and eventually nationally.

**Supports** the development of a unified signage design for all federal buildings throughout the national capital region.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Site

The Federal Triangle is bounded by 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW on the west, Pennsylvania Avenue, NW on the north, 6<sup>th</sup> Street, NW on the east, and Constitution Avenue, NW on the south. The General Service Administration (GSA) proposes to construct building identification signs for the buildings it owns and/or manages in the Federal Triangle: these buildings include: the Department of Commerce, the Ariel Rios building, the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center, the Old Post Office Pavilion, the Department of Justice, and the Federal Trade Commission. The National Archives building and the John Wilson Building, a District government building, are located within the Federal Triangle but are not part of the sign program because they are not GSA buildings.

### Federal Triangle Location



Background

*GSA Signage Program*

GSA first established a signage program for its buildings in July 2000 as part of the GSA First Impressions Initiative. The signage program examined design concepts for exterior signage for approximately sixty federal buildings within the National Capital Region. The goal of the program was to create a unified sign design for all GSA buildings by replacing different “ribbon” signs and blue post and panel signs that are currently seen around the region.

**Existing Signage Ribbon Signage in the Federal Triangle**



On September 29, 2005, pursuant to delegations of authority, the Executive Director approved the concept design and site placement for proposed signage at the Aerial Rios Building and final design for signage for the Department of Veterans Affairs. On August 31, 2006, pursuant to delegations of authority, the Executive Director approved security upgrades for the Department of Labor (DOL) - Frances Perkins Building; the project included exterior signage. The DOL signage is the same coloring and size as the proposed signage for the Federal Triangle.

**Approved Signage**



**Department of Labor Signage**



**Department of Veterans Affairs Signage**

In April 2010, GSA reestablished the First Impression Program and contracted the original signage designers from 2000, the architectural firm of Gensler and Associates, to develop plans for the Federal Triangle. The Federal Triangle signage program will be used as a pilot for an overall signage program that may eventually be expanded to GSA buildings throughout the region.

*Other Actions pertaining to signage in the Federal Triangle*

At its January 2000 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary and final site and building plans for exterior building signage at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, except for the proposed 35-foot banner poles and banners at the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance to the building. The Commission delegated review of the Pennsylvania banners to the Executive Director.

On March 26, 2009, pursuant to delegations of authority, the Executive Director approved the preliminary and final development plans for signage for the National Archives Building. The project included the installation of three free-standing signs and six wall-mounted signs. The three free-standing signs identify the building entrance and provide visitor information. The three identification signs are six feet six inches high, three feet two inches wide, and three inches in depth.



**National Archives New Signage**

**Proposal**

GSA proposes to construct twenty-six building identification signs in the Federal Triangle. The proposed signs will be nine feet in height, two feet six inches wide, and three inches thick. The signs will be double-sided aluminum fabrication. The signs will be colored by a two-part epoxy metallic dark bronze paint with a lighter bronze silkscreen for lettering and symbols.

The hierarchy of the sign is as follows:

- The address is primary
- Tenants and congressionally appointed name are secondary
- The entrance name is tertiary

The proposed design includes the following information (from top of sign to bottom):

- Congressionally appointed name of building (if there is one)
- Great Seal of the United States
- Building address
- Tenant names
- Location of main entrance and location of accessible entrance

- Web address at the bottom of the sign for people to access additional information about the tenant agencies of the building

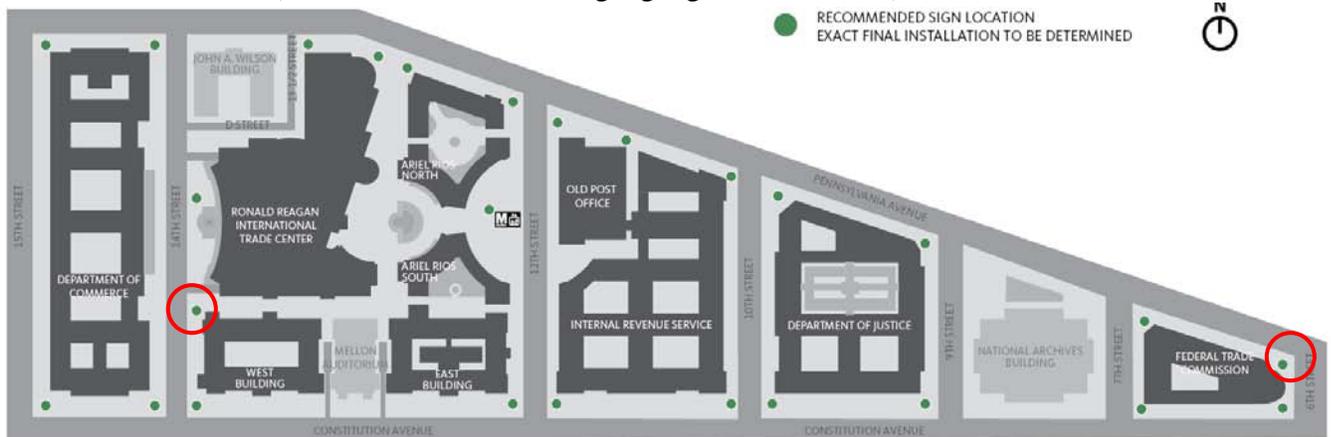
### Proposed Signage Design



GSA proposes to construct the proposed signage in the location of the current signage at the corners of the buildings. Only two locations would receive signs that do not have signage current; this would be for the Federal Trade Commission at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, and for the Environmental Protection Agency West Building along 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

### Proposed Sign Locations

(locations without existing signage circled in red)



## PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff supports the replacement of the “ribbon signs” located throughout the Federal Triangle due to their deteriorating condition, as well as supports the creation of a unified signage program for GSA buildings. However, staff encourages GSA to reevaluate the location of the proposed signs and also encourages GSA to coordinate the signage location and content with other signs existing and proposed in the Federal Triangle. Staff encourages GSA to continue to work with NCPC staff and others including the Commission of Fine Arts and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer on sign locations as the project moves forward.

Upon visiting the project area, staff found that some of the proposed site locations seem unnecessary or inappropriate and therefore encourage GSA to evaluate the necessity of some of the proposed sign locations. These locations include the sign for the Federal Trade Commission at the intersection 6<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, the signs for the Old Post Office, the sign along 14<sup>th</sup> Street for the Environmental Protection Agency - West Building, and the signs for the Ronald Reagan International Center.

GSA should evaluate the need to replace the existing Ronald Reagan International Trade Center signage. The International Trade Center houses many activities that are not typical of federal buildings such as reception areas, exhibit halls, a food court, restaurants and cafes, corporate showcase areas, a private-sector trade-related office, federal trade entities, and community-based entities. The approved signage for the Reagan Building reflects this unique activity. Replacement of signs that are more geared toward these activities with a sign more uniform may take away from the success of this building being a publically accessible venue and attraction.

### Existing Ronald Reagan International Center Signage



Staff encourages GSA to evaluate the proposed signage at the Old Post Office building. The current signage for the site sits awkwardly in the sidewalk and detracts from views of the building; any proposed signage in this location has the potential to have the same visual effect. Also like the Reagan Building, the Post Office provides a function as public space with a food

court and shops. Signage identifying the federal tenants of the building might be best located near the entrance that accesses the federal entities rather than at the front of the building.

**Existing Signs at the Old Post Office**



Currently, at the Federal Trade Commission there is not a sign located at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. In this location there is no landscaped area and the outdoor space is dedicated to children play areas for the daycare. Any sign proposed for this location would be placed within the sidewalk. Staff finds it unnecessary for a building identification sign to be located in this area due to the area's character.

**Federal Trade Commission at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW**



Staff encourages GSA to evaluate signage locations at the entrances to buildings rather than the corners of the buildings. Many of the entrances to the building have signs indicating handicap entrance location, employee only entrances, visitor entrances, agency names, and hours. If the proposed identification signs are moved to the building entrances many of the extra signage could be removed.

### **Existing Entrance Sign**



Staff recommends that GSA coordinate the location and content of the proposed signage with existing and future signs within the Federal Triangle. This includes the proposed location of the National Aquarium and its signage and the future Federal Triangle Heritage Trail signs. GSA also should coordinate the content of the proposed signs with the existing Federal Triangle signage, specifically the District of Columbia Department of Transportation blue signs, to ensure that information is coordinated.

### **Existing Sign adjacent to DDOT Blue Sign**



## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed signage program is not inconsistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, in particular the Visitors Element, which establishes goals to provide accurate and helpful information to visitors to the city. The addition of the web address on the signs allows the public to access more information about the agencies located within the Federal Triangle.

### National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), GSA has determined that the project is a categorical exclusion under its regulations Section 5.4B for implementing NEPA, for improvement to an existing facility. NCPC staff has independently reviewed the project information and has determined that the project is categorically excluded under Section 8(c)(2) of NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures for routine installation of site elements such as site or building identification signs.

### National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

Completion of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act review is not required for Commission review at the concept level. GSA initiated consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) per letter dated November 8, 2010. GSA determined that the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties. Completion of Section 106 review is required prior to GSA's submission of the project for final approval.

## CONSULTATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its November 10, 2010 meeting and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with following participating agencies: the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; the District of Columbia Department of Planning; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. NCPC did not coordinate at the meeting due to recommendations outlined in the report.

### Commission of Fine Arts

The proposed signage program was submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) for revised concept design. CFA reviewed the project at its November 18, 2010 meeting. CFA was supportive of an overall signage program that standardizes GSA building signage; however, they did express concerns about visual clutter and recommended that GSA evaluate each site for signage location to minimize clutter with other Federal Triangle signage.