

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 6430



GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE PERIMETER SECURITY DESIGN CONCEPT

Headquarters Building, 441 G Street, NW

Submission by the General Accounting Office

March 5, 2004

Abstract

The General Accounting Office has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans to enhance perimeter security around its Headquarters Building at 441 G Street, NW. The building presently also houses the headquarters of the Army Corps of Engineers. The building occupies nearly the entire block between G, H, Fourth and Fifth Streets, NW, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of design concept pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(d) and Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b) (1)).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Background

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for site improvements to enhance perimeter security at its headquarters building. The building presently also serves as the headquarters for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Site

- The GAO building, located in northwest Washington, is bounded on the north by H Street, on the south by G Street, on the east by Fourth Street, and on the west by Fifth Street. An office building and church are located on the northwest corner of the block and fronts along portions of H and Fifth Streets.
- The GAO building is immediately north of, and faces, the Pension Building to the south. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority headquarters building is diagonally adjacent to the southwest, and Judiciary Square is south of the Pension Building between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

Perimeter Security Plan

The proposed perimeter security includes four major elements:

- An existing plinth wall would be reinforced and extended around the entire building. It would follow the existing property line and not be located within the public space around the building. The wall height would be approximately 26 inches, and the depth would be 14 inches. The wall would be clad with Cold Springs “Royal Sable” granite to match the existing plinth wall and building’s base.
- Stainless steel bollards would be placed in front of the G and H Streets main pedestrian entrances as well as along the driveway curb-cut and the two pedestrian emergency exit walkways along 4th Street. The bollards at the driveway entrance would be retractable and the bollards in front of the main entrances on G and H Streets would be placed on the inside of the sidewalk line.
- Delta barriers would be installed on all ramps to and from the parking garage so that they will not be visible from the street. The barrier at G Place, which serves as the entrance to the loading dock, would be placed at the beginning of this entry drive.
- A guard booth would be located on each side of the building next to the driveway entrances (a total of four).
- G Place is currently a dead-end public street used for service access for GAO and a church adjacent to the site. Perimeter security in this location would consist of a pop-up barrier and guard booth at the edge of the building yard. GAO is petitioning the City to permanently close G Place and restrict access for use by the GAO and the adjacent church only.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its February 5, 2004 meeting, the Commission approved the design concept for the perimeter security enhancements, General Accounting Office Headquarters Building, except for the fixed bollards along Fourth, Fifth and H Streets, NW. The Commission recommended that, in the preparation of preliminary and final site and building plans, the General Accounting Office:

- Replace fixed bollards at the curb along Fourth and H Streets with a plinth wall at the edge of the building yard, as shown along G Street.
- Replace black bollards proposed at the H Street pedestrian entrance, at the emergency exits on Fourth Street, at the vehicular entrance to the loading dock on Fourth Street, and around the guard booth at G Place with stainless steel bollards, similar to those shown at the G Street entrance.
- Replace black bollards along Fifth Street with black steel cable incorporated in the hedgerow around the daycare area, and stainless steel bollards at the daycare entrance.
- Simplify the design of the guard booth roof structure by maintaining the decorative steel banding while eliminating the decorative appliques, and reducing the overhang.

Although it was not part of the proposal, the Commission advised the General Accounting Office that it is not in favor of the proposed closing of G Place.

EVALUATION

In preliminary consultation, staff indicated to GAO that a plinth wall solution at the edge of the building yard would be more in keeping with the policies established in the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP) than rows of bollards at the curb line, because it provides perimeter security in a manner that does not clutter the public realm, and avoids the monotony of endless lines of bollards. Following further discussions, GAO has agreed to this approach and has directed their consultants to modify the construction documents accordingly. Staff therefore recommends that the concept submission be approved with the following recommendations, to which GAO has agreed:

- Replace fixed bollards at the curb along Fourth and H Streets with a plinth wall at the edge of the building yard, as shown along G Street.
- Replace black bollards proposed at the H Street pedestrian entrance, at the emergency exits on Fourth Street, at the vehicular entrance to the loading dock on Fourth Street, and around the guard booth at G Place with stainless steel bollards, similar to those shown at the G Street entrance.
- Replace black bollards along Fifth Street with black steel cable incorporated in the hedgerow around the daycare area, and stainless steel bollards at the daycare entrance.

While the attempt to reflect the architecture of the GAO headquarters building in the design of the guard booths is commendable, the resulting design needs refinement. The guard booths, particularly the booth on the G Street side of the building should be refined to be more compatible with the overall simple design of the building. The overhanging roof and overly detailed fascia for the guard booths bring unnecessary attention to these elements and should be simplified. The roof design should be modified by preserving decorative steel banding while eliminating the decorative appliques, and reducing the size of the overhang.

Finally, while the closure of G Place is not part of this submission, it would come before the Commission as a street closing referral. Staff therefore believes that it is appropriate to advise GAO that the proposed security enhancements will provide the desired restriction of unauthorized vehicles. The proposed taking of public land is therefore unnecessary, and staff will not support it if it comes before the Commission in the future.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed concept is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. The Federal Facilities element designates the site of the GAO Headquarters Building for Executive Branch Administrative Facilities.

Commission on Fine Arts

The proposal received concept approval by the Commission on Fine Arts at its October 16, 2003 meeting. Subsequently, at its January 15, 2004 meeting, the Commission requested that the design of the guard booths be refined and that GAO provide elevations of the guard booths.

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposed concept is consistent with the Urban Design and Security Plan (UDSP) which calls for the use of plinth walls, hardened street furniture, bollard fences and bollards in this area. The primary use of the plinth wall works well with the existing building design.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on January 14, 2004 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. 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.

National Environmental Policy Act

The GAO advises that they do not anticipate any permanent adverse impacts to the environment, with the development of the proposal, and is in the process of securing a Categorical Exclusion pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act.

Historic Preservation Act

The GAO Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. GAO staff advises that they have determined that the proposal would have no effect on the National Register building. Concurrence is being sought from the State Historic Preservation Officer.