

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

D. Hamilton  
NCPC File No. 6292



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**SUITLAND FEDERAL CENTER  
CENSUS BUREAU HEADQUARTERS BUILDING  
FINAL SITE AND BUILDING PLANS – PHASE 1  
Suitland, Prince George’s County, Maryland**

Submission by the General Services Administration

February 26, 2004

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***Abstract***

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted final site and building plans, Phase 1, for the new Census Bureau Headquarters Building at Suitland Federal Center (SFC) in Prince George’s County, Maryland. The Commission approved the revised preliminary site and building plans for the facility at its November 7, 2002 meeting with several requests. The GSA has responded to the recommendations of the Commission.

***Commission Action Requested by Applicant***

Approval of final site and building plans pursuant to Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1)).

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***Executive Director’s Recommendation***

The Commission

**Approves** the final site and building plans for the Census Bureau Headquarters Building, Phase I, at the Suitland Federal Center in Prince Georges County, Maryland, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 3205(38.00)-41319.

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## **BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL**

The GSA has submitted final site and building plans for the new Census Bureau Headquarters Building, Phase 1, at the Suitland Federal Center. Phase I includes the first portion of the office building and the first of the two parking structures. The new facility will consolidate Census employees located in various offices on the SFC campus (FOB 3 and FOB 4), and employees in leased space in the Suitland area. The existing SFC facilities are in significant disrepair and do not meet Census ever-increasing technological space needs.

#### *Site*

The headquarters building would be located in the southeastern part of the SFC immediately north of the Suitland Metro Center. The site has frontage on Silver Hill Road on the east, Swann Road and FOB 3 on the north, the woodland preserve and historic Suitland House on the west, and the Metro station on the south. The new Census Bureau Headquarters would occupy a plateau overlooking the Metro station and the Suitland Parkway. The curving, elongated site is currently covered by surface parking lots and slopes in a southwesterly direction towards the woodland preserve on the west. In plan, the overall building is formed by the separation of a curved rectangular mass that is split open at the center to create an internal courtyard framed by eight-story building masses. A portion of each eight-story section shifts vertically to create additional breaks in the facades.

#### *Phase I*

Phase I of the Census Headquarters Building consists of the office building and the associated parking garage:

- The Phase I would provide for a curving, eight-story building and parking garage that would occupy the western portion of the site near the woodland preserve and the Suitland House.
- The building's main concourse level would contain much of the building's common space and would be accessible from the building's main entrance and parking garage. The main entrance is located adjacent to the Suitland Metro Station and is set back 50 feet to meet the minimum security requirements.
- The building incorporates one-and two-story pavilions that protrude from the main building and contain many of the shared uses such as the cafeteria, auditorium, and conference center. Loading and mail deliver and the library would be located closer to Silver Hill Road.
- The conference and training center, the auditorium and the library are designed to allow secure independent public access

- It would house 6,000 Census Bureau employees as well as a number of GSA employees and support personnel. The four-story garage would provide 1,594 parking spaces.

### *Building Design*

The overall design is a product of GSA's Design Excellence Program which envisions buildings to be future federal landmarks. The concept behind the headquarters building is to use a sustainable design with the intent of minimizing the project's impact on the natural environment. The design is also intended to maximize the access to natural daylight, create outdoor gathering spaces, and to integrate the building into the landscape:

- The exterior elevations of the building would be constructed of precast concrete spandrel panels and ribbon windows overlaid with vertical wood louvers to provide shading and to express the architecture of the building. The wood screen system contributes to the higher efficiency of mechanical systems, resulting in energy cost savings and reduced cooling loads, and contributes to the building's LEED Silver Rating. GSA believes that the wood screen system provides both contextual sensitivity and environmental sustainability.
- Each panel would consist of 6 to 7 bent natural wood louvers approximately 9 inches wide and 13.5 feet long. These wooden blades would be of Ipe wood which would weather to a warm gray color over time.
- Within each panel, the bent louvers would be spaced between 10 inches to 16 inches apart.
- The internal elevations facing the courtyard would be a glass curtain wall to provide open views into the courtyard. This elevation will also contain a wood treatment similar to the exterior elevations.
- On the Silver Hill Road elevation, the wood screen would be made up of straight blades arranged perpendicular to the façade in the center, but angling to a maximum of 45 degrees as the blades get closer to the building corners. In passing, one will get a varied view of the building shell underneath the wood screen system.
- The four-story parking garage would contain a "green-wall" system on the façade of the upper three levels.

### *Landscaping and Screening*

There are three distinct landscaped zones proposed for the site – the urban garden, the natural garden, and the manufactured garden:

- The urban garden is located north of Metro's structured parking garage and will function as an active urban plaza and formal forecourt to the main building entrance. A grid of

street trees would be integrated with the visitor parking and a loop road for drop-off shuttle bus stop for employees. This area would include a defined tree canopy with under-story plantings and site furniture.

- The paving pattern for the urban garden would include multiple bands of color and unit pavers.
- The natural garden is located in the southwestern edge of the site and is adjacent to the woodland preserve and is designed as an extension of this area. GSA has coordinated closely with the National Park Service, the Maryland State Highways Administration, and WMATA to “reforest” a portion of the woodland preserve as well as to screen the exit ramp from Suitland Parkway.
- The plans include more complete details of the proposed landscape screening along the Suitland Parkway. Under the planting plan proposed by GSA, red maple trees would be planted along the Suitland Parkway between the northern end of the Metro platform and the Parkway, and on the westbound exit ramp to Silver Hill Road.

#### PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its November 7, 2002 meeting, the Commission:

- Approved the revised preliminary site and building plans for the Census Bureau Headquarters Building at Suitland Federal Center in Prince George’s County, Maryland
- Required that prior to submission of final site and building plans, GSA:
  - Provide a detailed description of the NPS and WMATA consultation process as it relates to landscaping adjacent to the Suitland Parkway, including what landscaping each agency is committed to installing and the timing of such installation. Any landscape screening of the Census building installed by GSA should include plant materials that can provide year-round screening of the Census building.
  - Consult with WMATA on improved pedestrian access to the SFC campus and the Census building from Metro, including a covered walkway within WMATA’s site connecting Metro users directly to the SFC campus entrance. In addition, consult with WMATA on the feasibility of installing the curved walkway proposed by GSA early in the Census design process.
  - Continue to work on the urban plaza to make this an active, pedestrian space, and ensure that the presence of visitor parking is subservient to the use of this space as a gateway to the campus.

## CONSULTATION

The NCPC staff served as a catalyst and facilitator for coordination between GSA and its consultants, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Maryland State Highways Administration, and the National Park Service to resolve issues previously raised by the Commission. Since the previous Commission action in November 2002, there have been numerous meetings between all parties involved. As a result, they have modified and refined the final plans.

## EVALUATION

Staff recommends approval of the final site and building plans for Phase I of the Census Bureau Headquarters Building proposal:

- GSA has effectively coordinated with the National Park Service, WMATA, and the Maryland State Highways Administration to provide substantial screening landscaping in the southwest portion of the site. Rather than the previously proposed single line of trees, GSA has agreed to “re-forest” portions of the woodland preserve area between the Metro station and the preserve in accordance with NPS guideline for re-forestation. The species of trees proposed in this area include Green Ash, Hackberry, Black Oak, Sassafras, Red Oak, Eastern Red Cedar, Virginia Pine, and Winged Sumac.
- GSA further proposed tree plantings in the Suitland Parkway exit ramp area in consultation with the Maryland State Highways Administration.
- The final plans more clearly indicate the manner that pedestrian access from Metro to the Census Headquarters building will be accomplished. Access will be provided via a glass covered walkway from the metro to the main entrance of the Census building. The walkway would primarily be approximately 8 feet, 2 inches high with an increase in height to approximately 15 feet high near the Census entry plaza.
- The urban plaza has been developed in a manner that emphasizes the pedestrian movement in this area and would be enlivened by the abundant use of street furniture and landscaping.
- GSA is commended for its coordination efforts to provide effective screening of the Census Building Headquarters Building.

## CONFORMANCE

### Master Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Master Plan for the Suitland Federal Center, approved by the Commission at its October 3, 2002 meeting. The master plan provides for the development of the Census Bureau Headquarters Building.

### National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), GSA completed a Final Environmental Assessment on the Census Bureau headquarters on August 30, 2002. GSA accomplished a Finding of No Significant Impact pursuant to NEPA requirements on September 27, 2002.

Visual quality effects of the proposed Census development became an important issue during the public review of the draft EA. In response to concerns expressed, several aspects of the building were revised and include:

- A reduction in the height of the headquarters building from nine floors to eight.
- Movement of the building footprint 25 feet to the north to provide further distance from the Metro station and provide a greater security buffer.
- Stipulation within the Memorandum of Agreement with the Maryland Historic Trust to ensure that views of new construction from the Suitland Parkway are minimized through a combination of building siting, massing and new tree plantings.

Staff believes the MOA stipulation is an important binding commitment by GSA to ameliorate view shed effects of the new Census building in regard to the Suitland Parkway.

### Historic Preservation Act

GSA and the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office concluded a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in August 2002 on the Phase II development at the SFC. The MD SHPO concurred with GSA's determination that the Phase II development, including the construction of a new Census Bureau building as indicated in the Master Plan, would have *no adverse effect* on the nearby Suitland House and on the Suitland Parkway. However, the MOA stipulates that: "GSA shall ensure that views of new construction from the Suitland Parkway are minimized through a combination of building siting, massing, and new tree plantings."