

# STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6558

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**GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION HEADQUARTERS  
BUILDING MODERNIZATION  
1800 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC**

Submitted by the General Services Administration

January 27, 2005

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## **Abstract**

The General Services Administration has submitted a concept design for the modernization of its headquarters building at 1800 F Street, NW. The project includes the addition of 105,000 square feet of office space that would partially fill in two deep courtyards on the building's rear, E Street, façade. The addition would link the ends of the wings in the E-shaped building. The exterior of the building would be rehabilitated. A project option to create a more formal entrance on E Street is also proposed but is not budgeted at this time. When modernized, the building may house up to three federal agencies, all with medium-level security requirements. No perimeter security design is presented with the concept submission, but GSA will submit it with the next phase of project review (preliminary site and building plans). The General Services Administration is now developing an Environmental Assessment and has initiated Section 106 review for this National Register-listed building.

## **Commission Action Requested by Applicant**

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

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## **Executive Director's Recommendation**

The Commission:

**Approves the concept plans** for the modernization of the General Services Administration Headquarters at 1800 F Street, NW, as shown in NCPC Map File No. 23.00(38.00) 41531.

**Concurs** with GSA's proposal to create an E Street entrance to improve both the function and appearance of the building but **excepts from approval** the currently submitted E Street entrance design at this time, understanding that GSA has not yet decided on an entrance design and that there are no budgeted funds for the entrance, with the recommendation that further study of proposed designs occur prior to submission of preliminary site and building plans.

**Requires** that GSA submit perimeter security design with the submission of preliminary site and building plans.

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Site

The General Services Administration (GSA) Headquarters building is located two blocks west of the White House in an enclave of federal office buildings that was developed during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Developed with the initiative of the National Capital Planning Commission, it has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as the Northwest Rectangle Historic District. The area is characterized by massive masonry office buildings. The GSA Headquarters was part of the first wave of building in the precinct, as it was constructed in 1917. E Street and Rawlins Park serve as an east-west spine for this area. The GSA Building faces F Street, and its E Street façade, although prominently visible, is the rear façade of the building. The E-shaped building has three long wings with two deep courtyards visible from E Street. The building fills its site, as do adjacent buildings such as the New Interior Building immediately to the south across E Street.

### Background

GSA plans to modernize the building comprehensively, after which it will remain in use as a federal office building, although the agencies to occupy it are not known at this time. In addition to significant interior renovation of circulation space, office space, and building systems, GSA proposes the addition of approximately 100,000 square feet. The space would be added in the form of additions to the two deep courtyards visible from E Street. The E-shaped footprint would become, in essence, a figure 8 plan, with connections at the south side of the building that currently don't exist. The new infill would be glazed and would have a distinctly contemporary character.

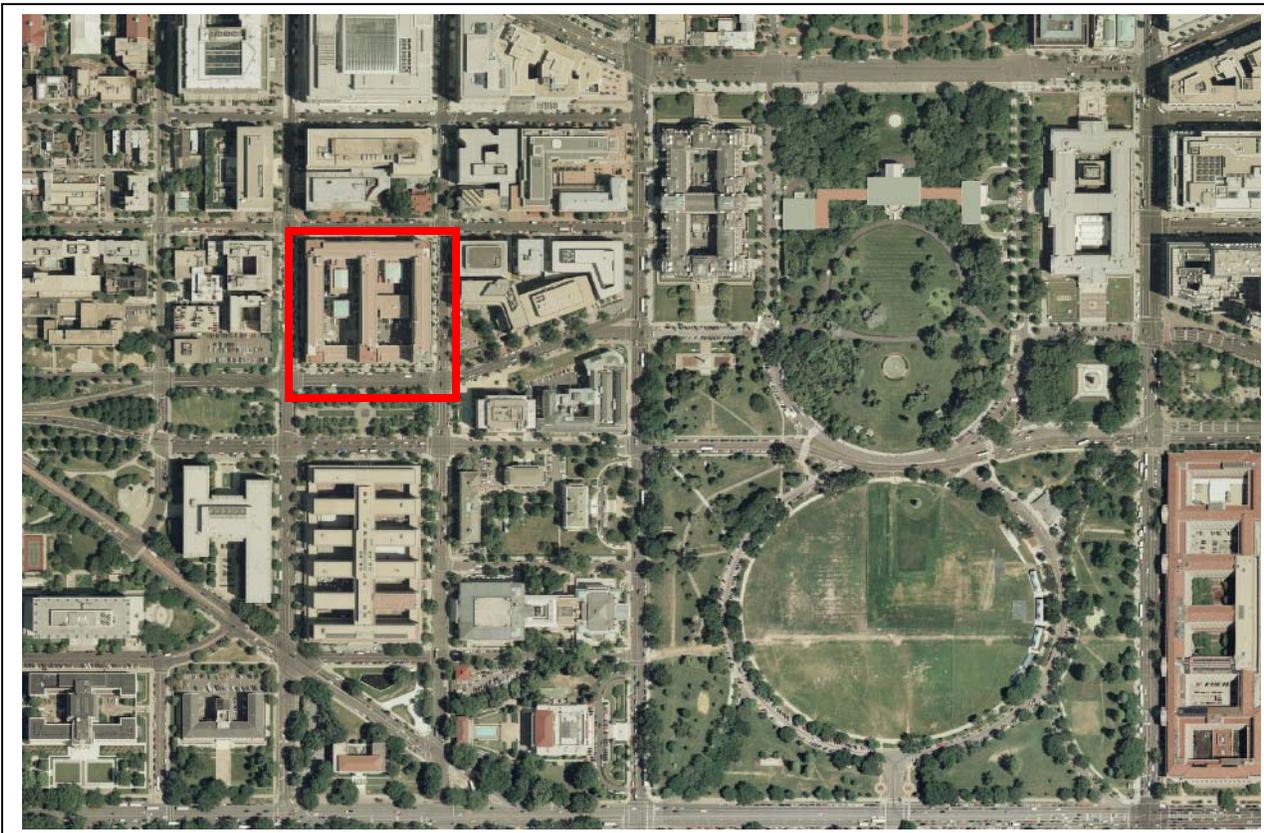
### Proposal

The proposed exterior alterations include:

- Two infill sections of steel-framed glass, rising to the roof level of the building and set back from the ends of the three wings.
- Corridors, offices and common office functions, and atria in the additions.
- *Briser-soleil*, or sunscreens, used in conjunction with transparent low-E glass to mitigate the effect of the sun on the south-facing exposure.
- New and upgraded building systems, including mechanical penthouses on the roofs of the new additions.
- Removal of mechanical equipment now housed within the courtyards.

Exterior alterations not included in this concept submission and anticipated with submission of preliminary site and building plans:

- Perimeter security design
- The option of a formal new entrance from E Street with handicapped access.
- Alterations to the original wooden windows to improve blast resistance (now under study).



GSA Headquarters Building, between F and E Streets, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets, NW, west of the White House. New Interior is to the south, across E Street and Rawlins Park.



GSA Headquarters Building at 1800 F Street, NW. View of rear façade on E Street, facing south, showing three wings and two deep courtyards.



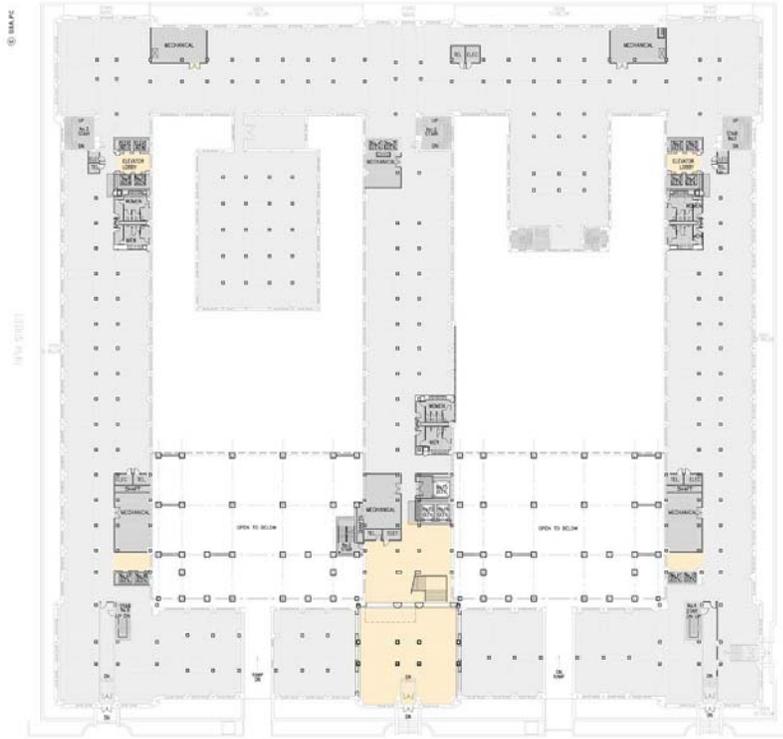
Photograph of architectural model of proposed new construction, showing glass-and-steel infill additions in both courtyards, connecting the wings. Existing historic structures in the courtyard (auditorium and library) are also shown. In the foreground are E Street, Rawlins Park, and the roof of New Interior.



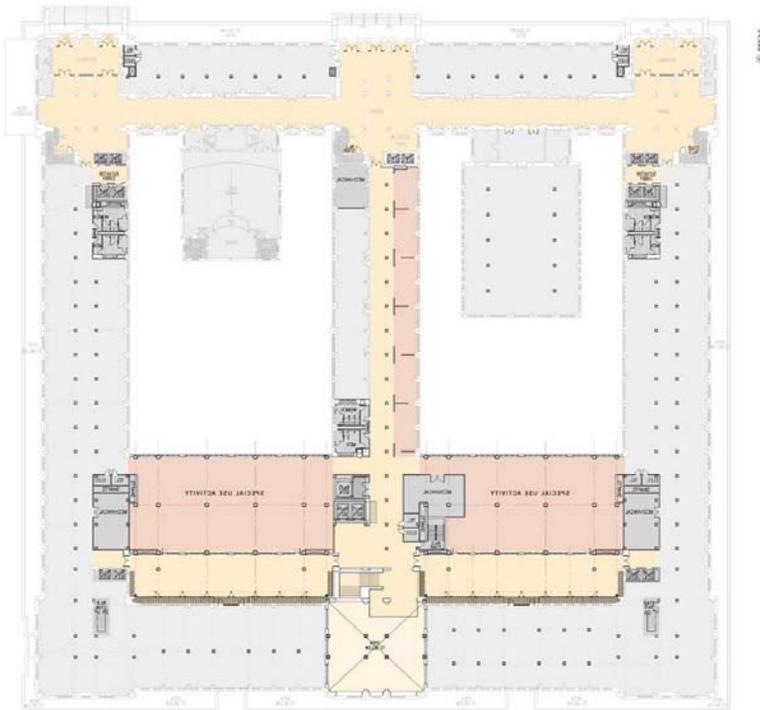
Rendering of glazed infill addition between two of the wings, facing E Street and Rawlins Park.



Proposed structural and surface treatment of infill additions.



Ground floor plan



First floor (similar to upper floors) showing two infill additions consisting of office space and open atria.

### Development Program

Applicant: General Services Administration  
Estimated Cost: \$140 million  
Architect: Shalom Baranas Architects  
Construction Date: Completion anticipated in 2008

### PROJECT ANALYSIS

The staff commends GSA and its design team for a striking infill design that retains the original form of the building while formalizing its orientation toward E Street and other federal office buildings in the precinct, particularly New Interior, the 1936 Waddy Wood-designed building immediately to the south across E Street and Rawlins Park, and also individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The proposed additions are set back sufficiently to allow the three wings of the historic building to retain their appearance and legibility. At the same time, the location of the additions will allow the building to function much better, with considerably improved circulation throughout. The additions are logical extensions of the original E-shaped footprint of the building. GSA has determined that the proposal will have an adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the historic building. Staff concurs with this determination of effect, as do the DC State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Staff notes however that the proposed additions result logically from the footprint of the building, are located so that the character and plan of the historic building remain legible, and that the modernization and additional square footage will extend the useful life of the building.

The staff particularly commends the use of atria on the south façade. Each atrium is engaged with the open circulation corridor spanning the addition. Not only will these open atria provide a more spacious interior space with views of Rawlins Park and adjacent buildings and monuments, but their screening effect from the exterior will improve the appearance and formality of the new facade. Each atrium is disengaged from the wings at their edges, adding to a desirable effect of textured layers. Staff believes that the atria are a significant component of the overall design.

The staff recommends **approval of the concept design** for the proposed infill additions.

### Possible South Entrance

Although not budgeted at this time, GSA is considering the creation of a formal south entrance from E Street, NW. *Staff supports this idea.* In addition to the functional benefits of a second entrance in a building of this size, a new entrance will reinforce the new orientation and formalization of the E Street façade facing Rawlins Park and other federal office buildings.

GSA is still considering several design options for a new E Street entrance and has not made an internal decision. *Therefore, staff recommends that no specific entrance design be approved at this*

*time*. In staff's view, all of the options shared with staff require additional study and consultation and this should occur by the time preliminary site and building plans are submitted. The entrance is a subject of the Section 106 review and preliminary comments have been made by the staffs of the Commission, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Commission of Fine Arts, as well as by other consulting parties.

In staff's judgment, the goal should be an entrance that is secondary to the F Street entrance but that is responsive to the formal setting of Rawlins Park and other monumental historic buildings, especially New Interior. The proposals are two stories in height, whereas existing entrances—GSA's F Street entrance and the New Interior entrances, for example--are one story in height. The new entrance should be compatible with the fenestration and architectural character of the original building, since it is on the central wing of the historic building, and yet reflect the new orientation of the E Street façade. Handicapped access should be designed to incorporate the new formality of the E Street façade and yet not overwhelm the limited area between the sidewalk and the building.

### Windows

GSA is still conducting a window study to determine the treatment of the original historic wood windows and how to make them resistant to blast. Options range from the installation of interior blast windows to the replacement of the windows. *GSA will provide the results of the window study and its recommendations at the next phase of review.* Staff recommends that the original windows be retained if possible, as they are a significant feature of the building.

### Perimeter Security

*GSA is still studying perimeter security design and has not included it in this concept submission. At NCPC's request, GSA has agreed to submit proposed perimeter security designs for the next level of Commission review (preliminary site and building plans), anticipated in several months.* Further, the design should be the subject of staff-level consultation and Section 106 consultation prior to submission. Although GSA has stated that the future federal agency occupants of the building are unknown at this time, they will be medium-level security agencies.

## COORDINATION

### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on January 12, 2005. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the District Department of Transportation; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

## CONFORMANCE

### Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Relevant policies in the *Preservation and Historic Features* element include:

#### *National Capital Image*

5. Protect and enhance the vistas and views, both natural and designed, that are an integral part of the national capital's image.

#### *Stewardship of Historic Properties*

1. Sustain exemplary standards of historic property stewardship.

6. Protect the settings of historic properties, including views to and from the sites where significant, as integral parts of the historic character of the property.

### National Environmental Policy Act

The current submission, as a concept design proposal, does not require the Commission to complete its NEPA determination at this stage of project review. Based on the initial information supplied by the General Services Administration (GSA), the agency would be acting as the lead federal agency for any environmental review and will be undertaking preparation of an environmental assessment in accordance with GSA NEPA review requirements.

Staff has identified to the GSA project team the Commission's requirement that any environmental assessment preparation should be developed in accordance with the Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures. The Commission should be identified as a cooperating federal agency in the drafting of the environmental assessment to ensure timely and required adoption of the document by NCPC, as specified by the Commission's procedures. An initial discussion with the responsible project staff has determined the environmental assessment development will meet the requirement. Presently, it is estimated by NCPC staff that the GSA NEPA document may be available for public review by the second week in February 2005.

In developing the submission of any future preliminary project plans to the Commission, GSA should respond to any substantive comments on the environmental assessment prior to the submission of the proposal for NCPC review. NCPC staff emphasizes that the GSA must determine the findings of its environmental review and develop a conclusion and mitigation of any adverse impacts from the planned action prior to submitting any phase of the project.

### National Historic Preservation Act

GSA has initiated Section 106 consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. GSA has determined that the proposed interior alterations as well as the infill additions would have an *adverse effect* on the qualities that

qualify the GSA Headquarters for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. GSA held a consultation meeting with all review agencies (including the Commission of Fine Arts) and with the D.C. Preservation League and the Committee of 100 on January 11, 2005, at NCPC's request.

The participants expressed favorable views toward the design concept of the infill additions, including the atria, and toward the creation of an E Street entrance. The desirability of transparency in the walls between the new office addition and the connecting corridor was stressed. Several alternative suggestions for the design of the E Street entrance and the associated handicapped ramp were made, with none of the proposed designs under consideration by GSA garnering consensus support. The Section 106 review will also include discussion of the proposed significant interior alterations that are not subject to the Commission's review.

All parties stated that the future design of perimeter security was of paramount interest and importance and that consultation on proposed location and design should occur prior to GSA's submission of security design at the next stage of NCPC review.