

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

NCPC File No. 6666



**LAFAYETTE BUILDING
BUILDING MODERNIZATION
811 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.**

Submitted by the General Services Administration

March 29, 2007

Abstract

The General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted final building plans for the modernization of the Lafayette Building, located at 811 Vermont Avenue, NW. The modernization project will upgrade and alter the interior, clean the exterior, repair or replace windows, add a secondary building entrance on 15th Street, and upgrade the ventilation system to improve building performance. The building is a National Historic Landmark (NHL) and is also a contributing structure in the Fifteenth Street Historic District.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of the final building plans for building modernization; pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722 (b)(1) and (d). Perimeter security and site improvements have been excepted from review and approval.

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves final building plans for modernization of the Lafayette Building at 811 Vermont Avenue, NW, as shown in NCPC Map File No. 21.00(38.00)42205, with the exception of the fence-wall at the roof adjacent to the Shoreham Building.

Requires the applicant to:

- submit for approval any proposed provisions for a guard booth at the alley connecting to 15th Street NW; and resubmit for approval a fence-wall at the roof adjacent to the Shoreham Building, and, before any future submission of perimeter security elements,

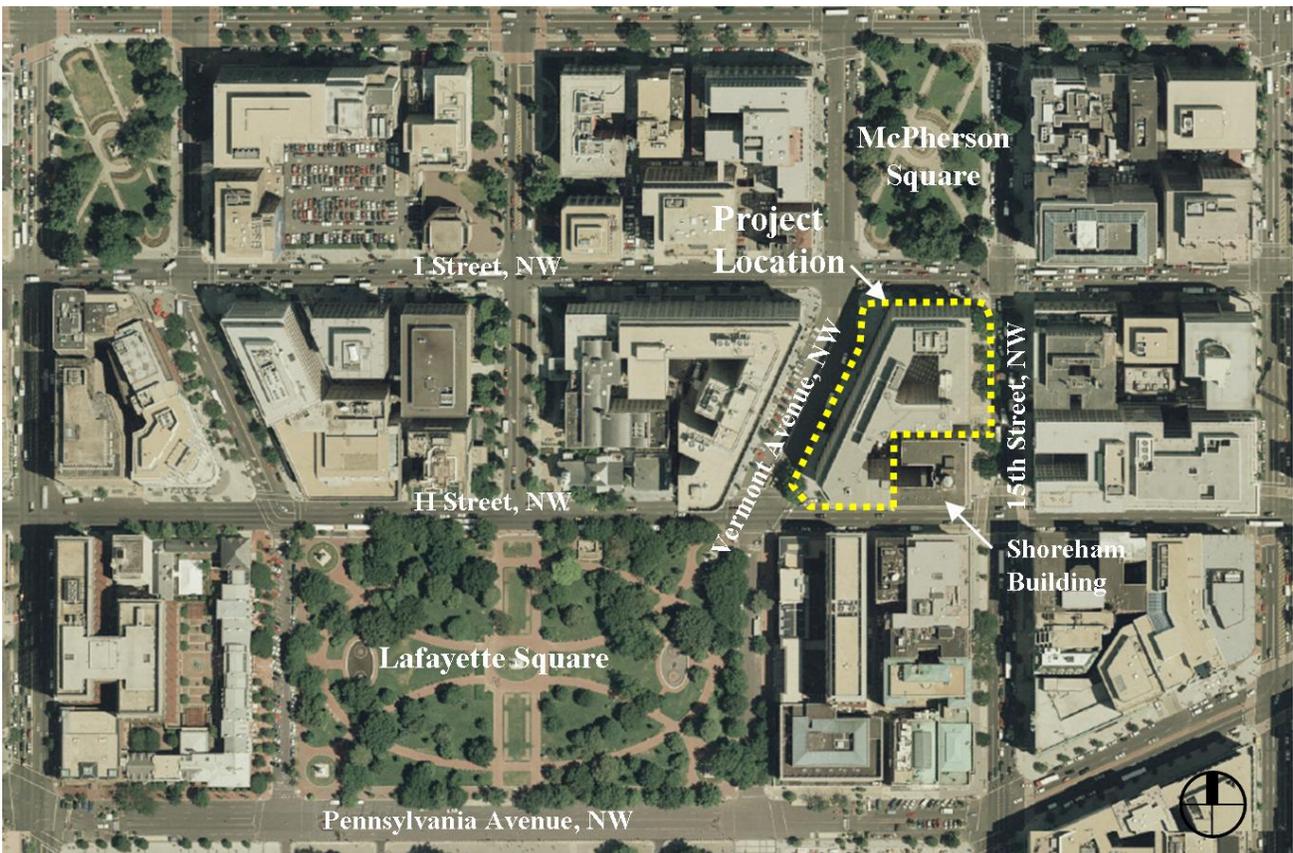
- provide information required for the Commission to fulfill its obligations under the National Environmental Protection Act, and
- engage in further Section 106 consultation as specified in the Memorandum of Agreement.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The Lafayette Building is on the block bounded by Vermont Avenue and 15th, H and I Streets Northwest. Its main entrance is on Vermont Avenue. The building occupies two thirds of the block and wraps around the Shoreham (hotel) Building. There are entrances to an underground parking garage from H Street. The rear of the building faces an ‘L’ shaped alley which originates on H Street, alongside the garage entrance, and which exits onto 15th Street. This alley provides service access for both the Lafayette and Shoreham Buildings. Ground floor retail lines 15th Street between the alley and I Street. McPherson and Lafayette Squares are to the north and southwest, connected by the diagonal avenue. The building is a National Historic Landmark (NHL) and is also a contributing structure in the Fifteenth Street Historic District.



Site Aerial

Background

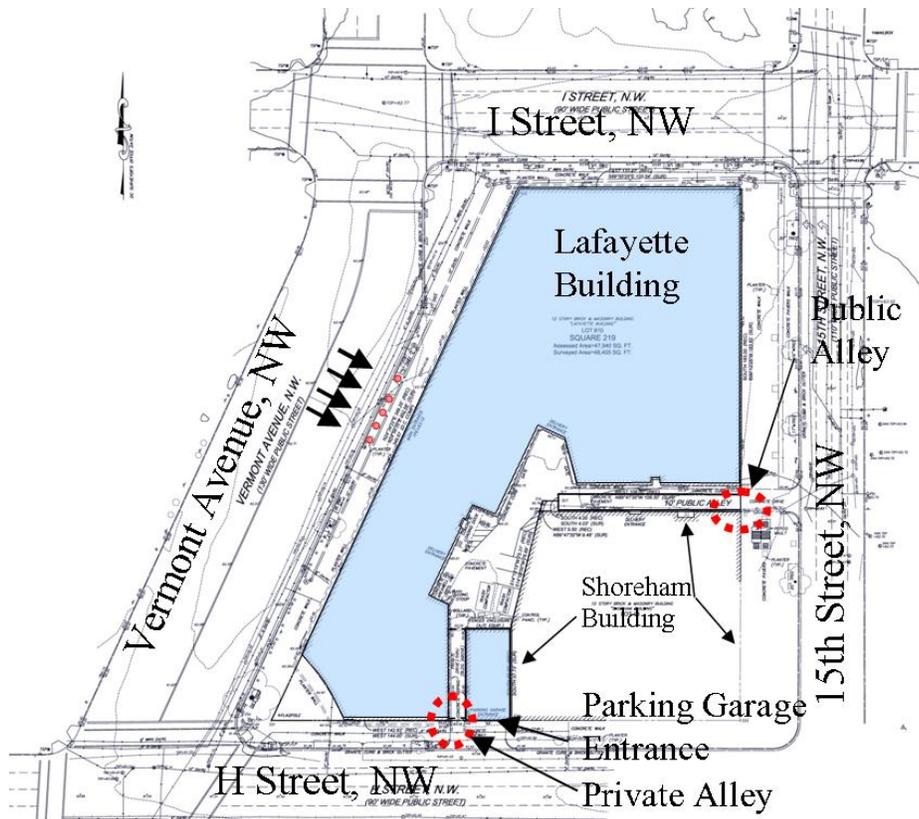
The building houses the Export-Import Bank (EXIM) and several departments of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Built in 1940, it was one of the first government office buildings in the city with central air-conditioning and a built-in garage. The current proposal includes an extensive renovation in order to achieve a GSA class A status.

- At its March 7, 2002 meeting, the Commission approved preliminary and final site development plans for temporary installation of concrete planters at the main entrance to the Lafayette Building, which GSA would replace with permanent security elements once the Interagency Security Task Force completed its Urban Design and Security Plan for the Downtown area.
- On August 5, 2005 the Executive Director approved the preliminary and final site and building plans for installation of three security cameras.
- At its May 4, 2006 meeting, the Commission **Approved** preliminary building plans for modernization of the Lafayette Building, and
 - **Recommended** that GSA use the Decision Support Tool developed by GSA's Office of the Chief Architect to develop the Design Basis Tactics and Level of Protection as recommended in the Interagency Security Committee (ISC) Security Design Criteria for New Federal Office Buildings and Major Modernization Projects.
 - **Recommended** that in further development of the design for perimeter security, GSA:
 - Develop a variety of hardened streetscape elements along Vermont Avenue as proposed for this area in the National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan, and coordinate the design for both sides of Vermont Avenue between Lafayette and McPherson Squares.
 - Preserve the building's historic retail uses along 15th Street, and coordinate with retail tenants and the Downtown Business Improvement District to ensure that adjacent security elements do not impede the area's commerce and vitality.
 - Coordinate with the adjacent property owner to develop design strategies for providing perimeter security at the public alley from 15th Street.
 - **Advised** the applicant that the perimeter security portion of the project as proposed does not meet any of the Commission's criteria for categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act, in which case an environmental assessment may be required to accompany the preliminary submission.

Proposal

Building Modernization (Final Building Plans)

GSA plans to update and remodel the building interior in order to provide a class "A" building for its occupants. The proposed final building plans would refurbish the interior and exterior finishes and upgrade all building systems including:

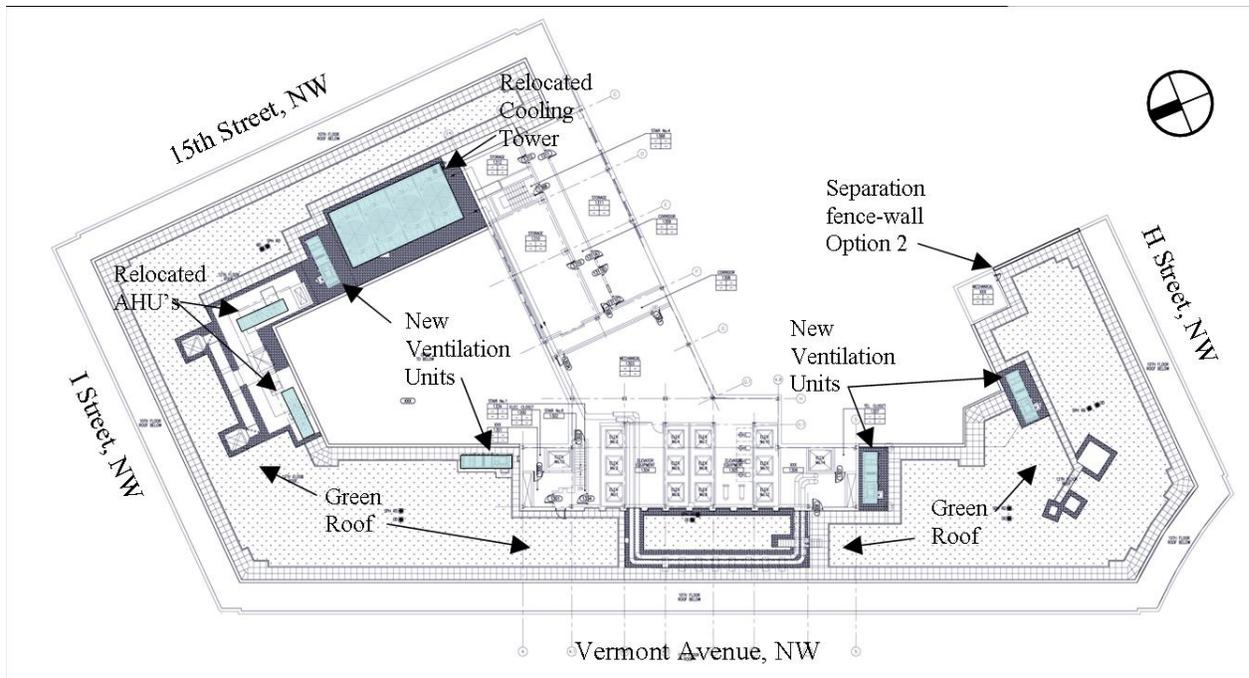


Access Points



Building Exterior at Intersection of Vermont Avenue & H Street, NW

- Reconfiguration and upgrade of interior space, including partial removal of original corridors and restoration on three levels to exemplify original condition,
- Repair of exterior masonry,
- Repair of original steel and bronze storefronts and upper story windows and new interior storms for blast protection,
- Skylight installation and landscape at the third floor interior courtyard,
- Installation of intensive green roof (sedum) at roof penthouse,
- Relocation replacement, and/or new exterior mechanical equipment:
 - Relocation of existing rooftop cooling tower (17'-4" high) from the Vermont Avenue side to the 15th Street side,
 - Relocation of two existing rooftop air handling units further in from I Street side,
 - Removal of two at-grade ventilation units in the Vermont Avenue building yard,
 - Installation of four rooftop ventilation units (5'-6" high), and



Rooftop Equipment



Simulated Removal and Replacement of At-Grade Louvers

- Restoration of existing retail space as retail except for installing a secondary building entrance at the corner of 15th and Vermont.



Existing Retail Facade Entry



Proposed Secondary Building Entrance

Perimeter Security and Site Improvements

In early consultation, GSA provided several alternatives for providing a guard booth at the alley connecting to 15th Street NW. However, no guard booth was shown in the construction documents included with the submission. The guard booth is therefore not included in this review.

The submission includes perimeter security elements and site improvements. Section 6 of the Commission’s Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures requires that submissions for preliminary approval be accompanied by NEPA documents unless categorically excluded under NCPC procedures. Because this perimeter security project meets GSA’s categorical exclusions under NEPA, and as noted in the previous Commission action, does not fall within NCPC’s categorical exclusions, we are continuing to discuss with GSA how to assure that NCPC has the information it needs to handle the perimeter security and site improvements submission, so it is not included in this review.

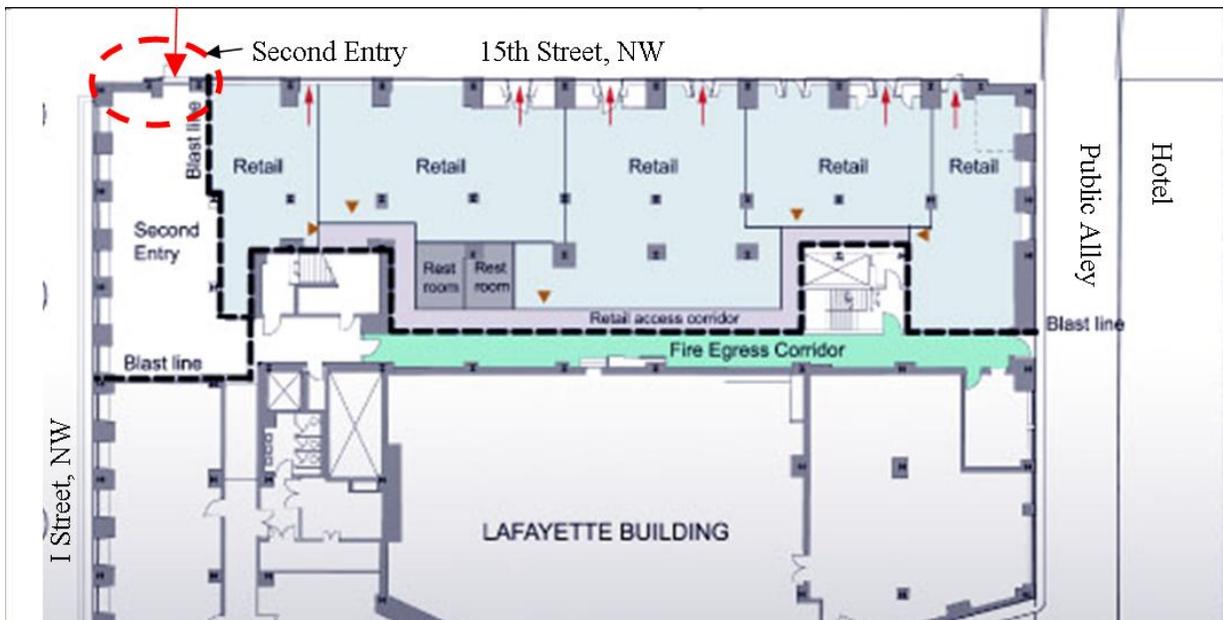
Development Program

Applicant:	General Services Administration
Architects:	DMJM Design/Lee and Associates
Acreage:	1.1 acre
Estimated Cost:	\$164 M (including 4.5 M for Perimeter Security & Site work)
Schedule:	Building Modernization Phase 1 - April 2008 – November 2010 Building Modernization Phase 2 – November 2010 – June 2012 (perimeter security at end of Phase II)

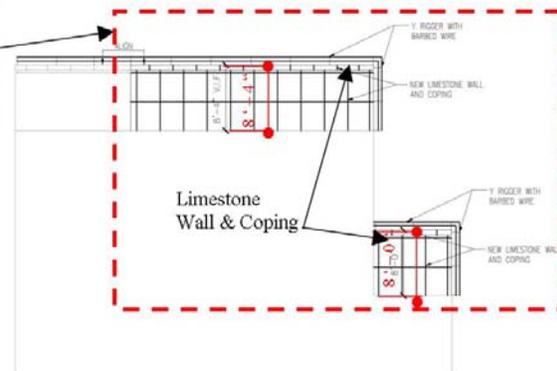
PROJECT ANALYSIS

Building Modernization

The building includes 8,919 usable square feet (USF) of ground floor retail along 15th Street. GSA has selected the baseline design to retain and restore existing retail space for continued retail use. This would add a secondary building entrance on 15th Street and a separate access corridor for retail tenants, reducing the retail space to 5,335 USF. GSA would restore the building's historic facade by replacing the double doors to the deli with limestone facing and carving a new lobby door with sidelights and transom to fill the storefront height. Although loss of the retail in its entirety (proposed previously) would have affected significantly the existing character of the building and the vitality of the adjacent streetscape, staff is satisfied with the current proposal to retain the majority of the retail space for its original purpose in the context of the restored facade.



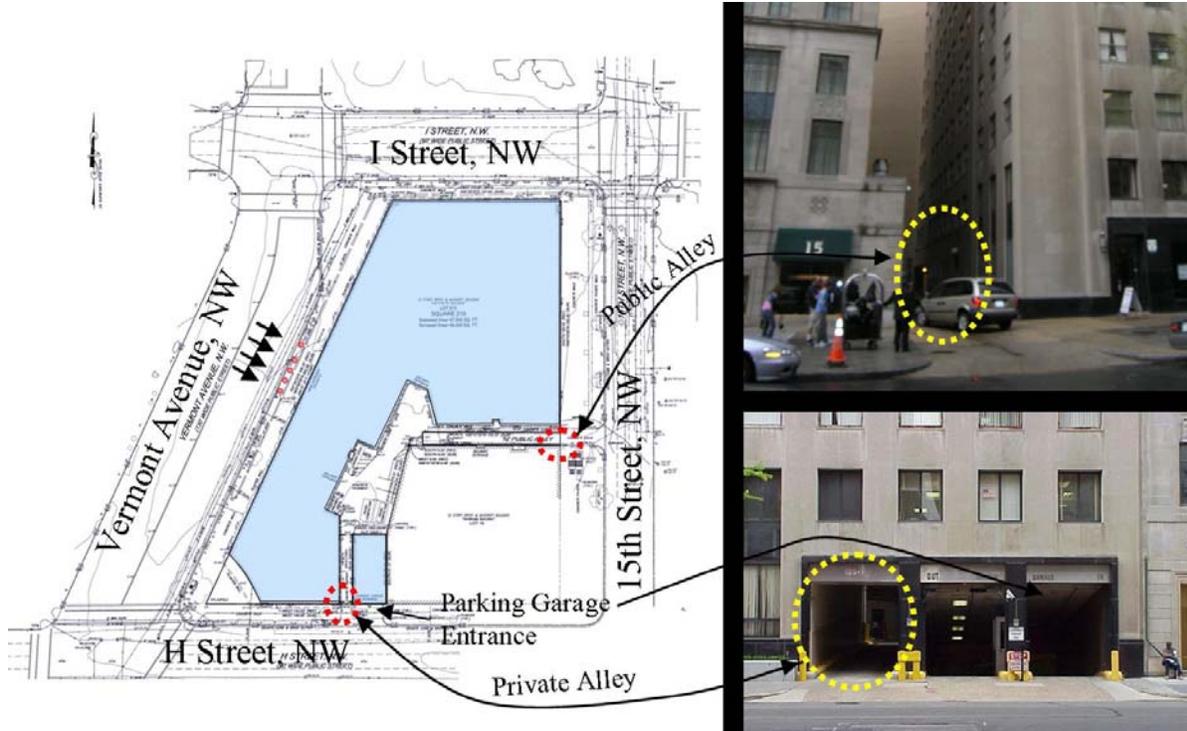
Proposed Layout of Retail and Second Building Lobby Entrance



Separation Fence-Wall Adjacent to Hotel Roof

- a fence-wall at the roof between Lafayette Building and adjacent Shoreham Building hotel:

Staff recommends excepting from approval the fence-wall at the roofline between the Lafayette Building and the adjacent Shoreham Building. Roof plan drawings show a separation extending only at the penthouse level, but elevations show a stepped down wall 8-feet-4-inches faced with limestone at the penthouse and eleventh floor. However, the applicant’s architect provided a different drawing showing an earlier version, Option 2, of an 8-foot high black chain link no-climb fence with razor wire at the top. Pending clarification of which option is included and resubmitting, staff recommends that the Commission except this element from approval.

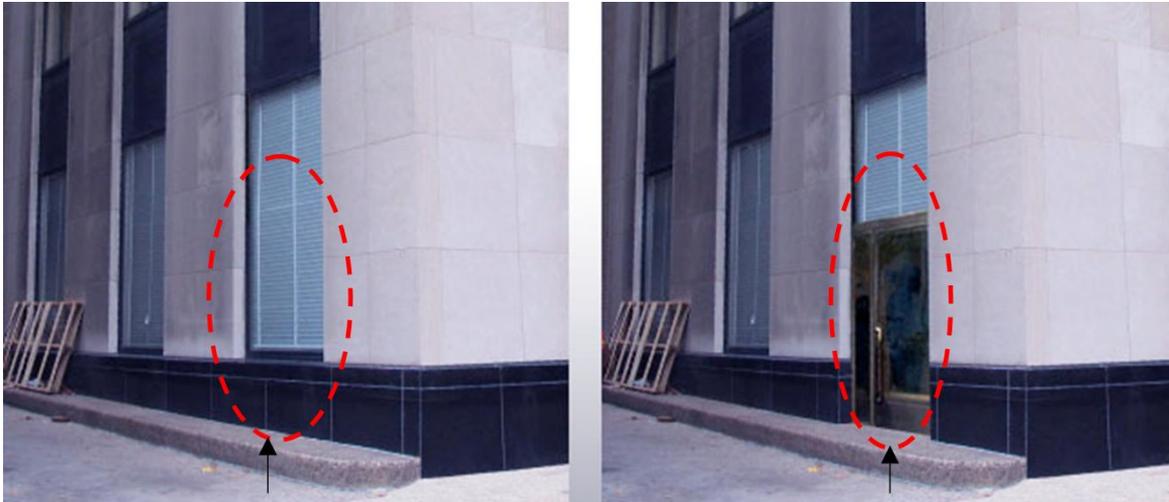


Access Points

At a consultation in January, 2007, GSA presented design options, included in the submittal, for

- a guard booth at the public alley off 15th Street:

The applicant presented four options for a booth to guard the public alley off 15th Street between the Lafayette Building and the adjacent Shoreham Building hotel; three integral and one physically separated from the building. Of the options presented, staff prefers integral Option 2A for its minimization of effect on the building. However since none of the options are included in the Final Building Plans, staff cannot recommend approval of any of them. Although staff commends GSA for developing design strategies for perimeter security at the public alley from 15th Street, GSA has not yet consulted with DDOT, as recommended, to minimize encroachment of public space and minimize its adverse effect on the historic L’Enfant streetscape.



Existing Condition at Public Alley

Guard Booth Option 2A

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

Staff finds that the proposed project would not be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital's relevant policy under the Federal Workplace Element, largely due to GSA's demonstrated efforts to"Modernize and rehabilitate existing federally owned facilities in the monumental core for federal workplaces before developing new facilities."

Federal Capital Improvements Program

The Lafayette Building Modernization project is included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Years 2006-2011, recommended and strongly endorsed by the Commission. Project cost is estimated at \$109,170,000. Prior funding of \$8,470,000 has been received.

National Environmental Policy Act

The General Services Administration has concluded that the proposed project qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion in accordance with GSA requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The project as proposed does not meet any of the Commission's criteria for categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act. NCPC has an independent obligation under NEPA and staff will review the perimeter security portion of the project once the applicant provides information requested by separate memo to enable staff to determine environmental effects based on alternatives analysis. The mechanical equipment portion of the project qualifies as a categorical exclusion conforming with NCPC requirements under §8(C)(21).

National Historic Preservation Act

GSA, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer, (DC SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on February 28 and March 2, 2007. Most for the MOA stipulations concern interior alterations, which are not in NCPC's purview, and for which GSA developed a design approach to mitigate the adverse effect

of the loss of the original corridors on some floors. The MOA has a stipulation (excerpted below) pertaining to future review of perimeter security elements, since the signatories recognized that this element remains unresolved:

The design for perimeter security is included in HPPR and it should be noted that GSA used the ISC guidelines and the GSA Security Assessment Software to determine the appropriate level of security for the Lafayette Building. GSA will submit design revisions and final plans to the SHPO, ACHP, NCPC and CFA for review and comment to resolve the outstanding design issues related to perimeter security. GSA shall afford the consulting parties thirty (30) days to complete their review and comment once the revised design documents have been submitted. GSA will consult the consulting parties as needed, during or after the 30 day comment period, to resolve any adverse effects and respond to questions.

NCPC staff considers the L'Enfant Streets key among those resources for which effects of the perimeter security should be considered, and notes that the MOA does not include L'Enfant Streets in the undertaking's area of potential effect. In addition, the MOA does not cover the separation fence-wall at the roof.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on April 12, 2006, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented, the participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the Fire Department; the General Services Administration, and the National Park Service.

Commission of Fine Arts (CFA):

In its January 18, 2007 Meeting, the Commission reviewed the final submission and approved the comprehensive alterations of the building's modernization and repair, including the window refurbishment and rooftop screening, but did not approve the design of the perimeter security barriers. Regarding the perimeter security, the Commission expressed concern with the profusion of sidewalk furnishings, the multitude of their configurations and alignments, as well as the size and shape of the proposed bollards. They requested that the design team continue to study this proposal to make the perimeter security less obtrusive, such as by using smaller bollards to minimize the visual and physical impact of the security barriers on the surrounding streetscapes.

DC Department of Transportation (DDOT)

The sidewalk and alley around the Lafayette Building is public space under DDOT jurisdiction, so will require a Public Space Permit and must comply with DDOT Public Space Security Policies.