

May 4, 2026

Mr. William Scharf
Chair, National Capital Planning Commission
401 Ninth Street NW, Suite 500N
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Eisenhower Executive Office Building Exterior Beautification Project, NCPC File Number: 8777

Dear Chair Scharf and NCPC Commissioners:

[The Society of Architectural Historians \(SAH\)](#) is a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1940, with headquarters in Chicago, IL, that serves an international network of institutions and individuals who focus on the history of the built environment and its role in shaping contemporary life. As the leading scholarly organization for architectural historians in North America, SAH limits its advocacy to matters of national and international import.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB) in Washington DC, built between 1871–88 for the State, War and Navy Departments, and designed by architect Alfred B. Mullett, is a highly significant federal public building that enjoys a prominent place beside the White House in our nation’s capital. Its ornate granite and slate exterior make the EEOB one of the country’s best examples of the French Second Empire style of architecture. In appreciation of these attributes, the building was designated a National Historic Landmark (the highest honor for historic buildings in the country) in 1969 and is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites.

The proposed EEOB Exterior Beautification Project, as submitted to the National Capitol Planning Commission (NCPC) by the Executive Office of the President, will **adversely and permanently alter** this important part of American heritage and should be rejected. In support of our recommendation, we offer the following arguments:

Severe Negative Impacts to Visual Appearance, Historic Intent and Architectural Integrity:

The 1969 National Historic Landmark listing for the EEOB specifically lists the “purple-gray Virginia granite walls,” and the “almost unbelievable variety and richness of detail” in the building façade as “the quintessence of vigorous superscaled Victorian architecture.”¹ Throughout its history, the building has survived multiple attempts to alter its appearance, most notably in 1917 and 1930, when plans were prepared to clad the building in marble to make it better match the Classical style of the Treasury Building at the other end of the White House. Again in 1957, proposed demolition of the building was thwarted, owing to public opposition.² By the 1960s, amid growing appreciation for historic buildings and preservation, the EEOB was designated a National Historic Landmark, precisely **because it had stayed unaltered**.³ By 1977, the noted architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, described it as “perhaps the best extant example in America of the Second Empire.”⁴ The exterior gray granite, with its natural color, texture and finish, was strategically and intentionally chosen by the original architects and builders and is an important character-defining feature. This current proposal to paint the building white will alter it drastically, deviate from historic intent, and lead to a loss of architectural integrity. Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to convey its historical significance, and is assessed among other aspects, in extant historic materials, workmanship and design.⁵ It is an important factor in determining whether historic buildings are eligible to be designated as Landmarks and included in the National Register

of Historic Places. This current proposal threatens to acutely diminish the building's integrity, endangering the building's status as a National Historic Landmark.

Poor Technical Performance Leading to Irreversible Damage:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties clearly state: "Applying paint or other coatings (such as stucco) to masonry that has been historically unpainted or uncoated is NOT Recommended."⁶ This advice protects not only against loss of visual integrity as noted above but also stems from well-documented harm to historic masonry by paints and coatings.⁷ Paints and coatings carry risk of trapping moisture within the masonry leading to accelerated spalling and freeze thaw damage, mask leaks and problems, and necessitate constant reapplication. Moreover, they are often irreversible. The EEOB has stood solidly for almost a century and a half, with gentle cleaning, repair and restoration of its granite walls. There is no reason to deviate from that and approve a painting proposal that runs counter to all published preservation guidance, including that from our own federal government.

In closing, we want to reiterate that even if it *was* technically feasible to paint the EEOB (which the current plan fails to establish due to lack of specifics), this "concept proposal" should be rejected, because simply put, it is conceptually flawed. Such a drastic and irreversible change to a landmark's visual appearance is *not* the correct way to address repair issues. There are well-established and time-tested procedures for repairing historic granite facades, that are followed on large buildings across the nation, none of which involve painting the stone.⁸ The EEOB's gray granite walls are an indispensable part of its original architectural design, including but not limited to color, texture, relief, ornamentation and light reflection—all of which will be forever and radically altered by painting it white. Our nation's landmarks are a testament to the historic contexts in which they were built. They serve as a tangible archive, offering direct evidence to architectural historians and the public, of past construction techniques, design ideas, craftsmanship and cultural values. The American public relies on agencies like the NCPH to steward our built heritage and protect it from irreparable harm. We therefore urge you to promptly reject this proposal.

Sincerely,



Priya Jain, AIA

Chair, Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) Heritage Conservation Committee

Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee: Fallon Samuels Aidoo, Ph.D., Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D., Pushpita Eshika, Ph.D., Yannick Etoundi, Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., Başak Kalfa, Ph.D., Mary Rzepczynski
Swati Chattopadhyay, Ph.D. (ex-officio member), Ben Thomas, Ph.D. (ex-officio member)

¹ "Executive Office Building," *National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form*, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, June 4, 1969, 2.

² Eisenhower Executive Office Building, *The White House*, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/about-the-white-house/eisenhower-executive-office-building/>

³ "Executive Office Building," *National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form*, p. 2. The Integrity section of the form specifically notes that the building is "Unaltered."

⁴ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Penguin Books, 1977), 169.

⁵ Historic Integrity, Glossary, National Historic Landmarks, National Park Service, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/glossary.htm>

⁶ "Masonry: Stone, Brick, Terracotta, Concrete, Adobe, Stucco and Mortar," *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service Technical Preservation Services, 2017, 31 and 80.

⁷ Robert C. Mack and Anne Grimmer, "Preservation Brief 1: Assessing Cleaning and Water Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings," US Department of the Interior, National Park Service Technical Preservation Services, 2000.

⁸ Large federal historic buildings with granite facades that have undergone historically appropriate repairs and restoration in recent decades include the EEOB Building (from 1980s-2014), the Old Post Office, Washington DC and the Conrad B. Duberstein U.S. Bankruptcy Courthouse, Brooklyn, NY, to name a few.