EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATION
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MEMORANDUM

To: National Capital Planning Commission

From: Joshua Fisher
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SUBJECT: EAST WING MODERNIZATION PROJECT

Following the Executive Residence at the White House's (EXR) participation in an informational session before the NCPC on January 8, 2026, EXR has met with NCPC staff on several occasions to discuss the project. The purpose of this memorandum is to address questions raised by the NCPC and provide a history of the East Wing of the White House.

HISTORY OF THE EAST WING

During the modern era, the East Wing of the White House was generally understood to encompass both the East Colonnade and the East Wing building. The East Colonnade connected the Executive Mansion to the East Wing building.

The origins of the East Colonnade can be traced to the early 19th century. When Thomas Jefferson arrived at the President's House in 1801, he found that the structure lacked adequate space for domestic services that were required to support the home. Inspired by the concept of Palladian-style domestic service wings that he had employed at his Monticello home, President Jefferson directed Benjamin Henry Latrobe, surveyor of public buildings, to construct wings, or terraces, on the east and west sides of the President's House that would be faced on the south side by colonnades and ultimately connect to the adjacent Treasury Department and War Department buildings. The roofs of the structures were intended to serve as open-air promenades.

The first portions of these wings were erected by the end of 1805. Construction continued on both the east and west side through 1808, but plans were eventually scaled back and construction stopped. As a result, Jefferson's original vision to connect the wings to the adjacent office buildings was not realized by the time he left office.

In its original form, the East Colonnade was a simple, one-story, rectangular building that rose from the ground floor level of the President's House. It had a shallow, nearly flat, pitched roof. The East Colonnade was arranged into two basic parts: a series of enclosed

rooms and a colonnade from which the structure took its name. The enclosed rooms stood adjacent to one another and were positioned along the north wall, with half-round windows facing north and doors opening to the south. The rooms provided space for domestic services, including a smokehouse, hen-house, stables, servants' quarters, and a privy. The doors of these rooms opened into the colonnade, which was a covered, outdoor, south-facing space positioned beneath the building's roof.

The fire set by the British in 1814 damaged Jefferson's east and west wings. Although they were later rebuilt and returned to use in 1818, they never fully extended to the Treasury Department or War Department buildings.

During President Andrew Johnson's administration, the East Colonnade was deemed to be unsafe for occupancy. Supervising architect of the Treasury, Alfred B. Mullet, recommended demolition, and in 1866, the structure was torn down.

Under President Theodore Roosevelt, the East Colonnade was rebuilt in 1902, and a new entrance pavilion for social functions was constructed at the east end, along with the addition of a carriageway and lighting fixtures. The new structures were erected according to the designs of McKim, Meade & White.

While the rebuilt East Colonnade incorporated the original concept of a covered outdoor space, the early 20th century construction also provided the area with temporary storm window sashes that could be installed between the columns that formed the colonnade, enabling the exterior space to be enclosed seasonally. Once installed, the sashes were not removed, and the East Colonnade remained forever altered from its original example.

The new pavilion, a predecessor to the modern East Wing building, functioned primarily as a guest entrance loggia and garden pavilion. It was positioned directly opposite the west entrance portico of the Treasury Department building across East Executive Drive and was arranged to allow carriages to ascend from the drive, via a half-circular cart path to a porte-cochere along its east front. Guests could disembark there and ascend by steps through a new covered outdoor, east- and west-facing space positioned beneath the building's flat roof. This covered space extended through the width of the building allowing westward views through its opening to the White House's east gardens.

The East Colonnade and East Wing building roofs were connected and made to be the same level. They featured low parapet walls fixed with lanterns atop light poles. The roofs served as exterior promenades and were fitted with large planter boxes. Architecturally, the East Wing building's distinctive features included fourteen large columns in the Tuscan Order – these formed the porte-cochere and supported a lower, flat roof. There were also large, recessed statue niches in the facades.

In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt contemplated rebuilding the East Wing to support his growing staff and to house a museum that would showcase White House and

presidential history and artifacts. The idea was still under consideration when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This development immediately intensified the need for more office space, since large numbers of staff would be required to work at White House to support the war effort. Initially, President Roosevelt considered erecting temporary buildings to meet this need. However, the President quickly changed course, and on December 8, he directed architect Lorenzo Winslow to build a new permanent East Wing. Winslow signed the specifications for the reconstruction two days later. Soon after, the Army recommended that an air-raid shelter be built beneath the building. After initially objecting, President Roosevelt approved the plan for the bunker.

Demolition of most of the 1902 structure began in December 1941, followed by rapid construction of the new wing. Excavation of the bomb shelter had to be completed in secrecy, which required sealing East Executive Avenue off to traffic and concealing the construction site. Details of the World War II-era East Wing project, which were tied to military purposes, were closely held.

The new East Wing was first occupied in May 1942. This exceedingly brief, five-month, construction duration indicated a building with necessarily low degrees of quality-control and low-finish craftsmanship. More bunker-like than the elegant original East Wing pavilion, the new East Wing included the underground bomb shelter, two floors of office suites, and the surviving enclosed colonnade that connected the building to the Executive Mansion. The building was fronted by a porte-cochere and a horseshoe-shaped covered driveway. President Roosevelt converted a cloakroom into a theater to view newsreels on the war. Rooms intended to house a White House museum were ultimately used as office space for staff and never served their original purpose.

During the renovation of the White House that occurred under President Truman's administration in the 1950s, construction impacted the areas surrounding the East Colonnade and East Wing, and the structure received a fresh coat of white paint in 1952. While interior modifications have been made to the East Wing over the intervening years, no major building renovations occurred after the 1942 reconstruction.

STATE OF THE EAST WING IN 2025

Pre-Demolition Considerations

When the Project first commenced, EXR engaged multiple stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate various options for executing the President's goals for the East Wing. These stakeholders included government agencies with White House missions and extensive expertise in their respective fields, like the United States Secret Service (USSS), the White House Military Office, and the National Park Service (NPS). The stakeholders' initial design alternatives and structural analyses were developed with the goal of keeping the East Colonnade and the East Wing intact. They studied the structural

condition of both of the buildings and consulted not only internally with their experts, but also with various architects at different stages of project planning and civil, structural, mechanical, and electrical engineers.

In evaluating the buildings, the parties studied the two buildings' structural conditions as well as their security and structural capabilities, considering both, the above ground and below ground structures. Structural conditions were considered in terms of *existing* qualities and physical strengths, as well as *future* structural requirements for the buildings and their anticipated performance under adverse events. With regard to the security capabilities, the stakeholders analyzed the existing building envelope performance and overall effectiveness in protecting the President and First Family.

In addition, prior to demolition, the major stakeholders evaluated the merit of retaining all or portions of both structures. Specifically, they evaluated the security and other requirements for the buildings and the impacts to the overall quality of the planned improvements based on the retention or removal of all or part of the existing buildings. Based on these reviews, the stakeholders concluded that to modify the existing buildings to meet such requirements, the buildings would need to be stripped to the shell and structural walls. Additional structural support would also be required throughout the building. These additional supports would need to be located in existing spaces, forever altering the original layout and finishes.

After careful consideration of the President's goals and the analyses described above, EXR and the major stakeholders presented the findings to the President and senior administration officials. Based on the analysis, demolition of the existing East Wing structure and reconstruction of a new East Wing provided the most effective solution to many longstanding issues affecting the White House and delivered the best long-term risk reduction.

Mitigation and Preservation of the East Wing Historical Elements

In determining that demolition would be required, EXR and the major stakeholders engaged in extensive mitigation and sought to preserve as much of the existing structure and other historical elements as was feasible. Throughout the process, the existing conditions of both structures and their contents were carefully and meticulously documented. The architects provided detailed measurements and photographs of all interior and exterior spaces and the Structural Engineer surveyed and studied existing structural components and systems, which will remain with the Government. In addition, the major stakeholders conducted professional, 3rd-party photographic and 3-D scanned documentation of the building's exteriors and interiors to be used for future preservation and interpretive purposes. The Curator's office also documented all works of art, furnishings and objects used in both buildings.

Multiple preservationists from the National Park Service and General Services Administration advised on and documented the removal of historical elements of the building and oversaw the manner in which the removals took place. To that end, significant historical items associated with the buildings have been meticulously preserved. These items include, but are not limited to, the East Wing cornerstone and plaque, movie theater furniture, the East Colonnade columns, the Porte-cochere columns, interior wood paneling, chandeliers, historic windows and doors, and other hardware and fixtures. Our goal is to ensure that some of these items will be integrated into the new structure. Furthermore, the historic Kennedy Garden and other trees of significance are preserved offsite or have been relocated within the 18 acres. The IM Pei-designed pergola from the East Garden has also been preserved.

In similar fashion, EXR and the major stakeholders closely coordinated demolition efforts with additional contractor and Government specialists to ensure all proper measures were taken in the interest of preservation, safety, and security. Demolition is dangerous and requires careful advanced planning and expert performance. In our oversight of the contractors, we believe that the best and most skilled individuals were hired to work on the Project and that all appropriate measures, based on best practice and recommendations from historians and preservation specialists, have been implemented to protect the historic White House mansion.

As an initial matter, all heavy equipment has been kept at a safe distance from the White House Mansion as based on industry standards to prevent inadvertent damage to the structure. The booksellers area of the colonnade structure abutting the White House mansion was removed by hand without the use of large equipment. We zealously monitored the Contractor's work and moved at an extremely cautious pace in deep respect for the ongoing physical integrity of the historic White House mansion. We were also involved to oversee equipment selection to ensure that proper tools and machinery were utilized to achieve careful, methodical building removal rather than sudden catastrophic destruction. At added cost, we mandated that portions of the buildings be adequately stabilized prior to removal to ensure that there would be no structural collapse or resultant damage to key building components. As part of the process, we've also extensively used vibration and crack movement monitoring to ensure that ongoing work does not detrimentally affect the mansion and surrounding structures. A detailed survey of existing historical structures was, likewise, performed prior to demolition commencing. Asbestos and lead paint that were present in the interiors of the East Wing buildings were removed and disposed of in full compliance with laws and guidelines related to the abatement and removal of such material.

To date, the government evaluation following the removal of the East Colonnade and the East Wing buildings is that the condition of the east façade of the White House Mansion is excellently preserved.

Structural Issues with the Existing Buildings

Our analyses of the existing buildings uncovered a multitude of structural and operational issues that counseled in favor of a complete rebuild. The East Colonnade Building had an aging and structurally unstable roof system and the earlier rooftop promenade and garden had been long abandoned. The Colonnade also had insufficient foundation and underpinning support to execute any necessary structural upgrades. In addition, use of the White House Mansion's East Room doorway to the east colonnade roof terrace had been abandoned for all purposes except for maintenance and security matters.

Regarding the East Wing Building, the exterior envelope was in bad condition and stones that formed the walls' exteriors were out of plane with the wall surface. The upper roof was in moderate-to-poor condition and the Porte-Cochere roof was finished with low-quality and extremely worn asphalt-impregnated roll roofing fabric. As a whole, the roof had long exceeded its service life, causing chronic water intrusion and substructure leaks that were actively deteriorating structural and historic elements of the building. Persistent moisture from the widespread water intrusion had created extensive mold contamination throughout the buildings, which created health hazards for occupants. Aside from this, the existing structure was incapable of supporting necessary security requirements of USSS. Basement areas were also in a state of disrepair with water intrusion issues and did not meet current needs.

Finally, the East Wing was also not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or life safety code, and did not conform to current energy efficiency and conservation requirements. While alterations were made to serve those with disabilities, structural limitations prevented full compliance with the ADA's requirements. At the time of demolition, only the east door of the East Wing building complied with the ADA. Importantly, the existing East Wing did not meet current life safety code requirements. Deficiencies in egress capacity, compartmentation, and fire and life safety systems created an unacceptable risk to occupants. In the event of an emergency, these conditions could have significantly delayed or prevented safe evacuation, placing the First Lady's staff at high risk of not being able to exit the building in a timely and safe manner. These issues were not able to be resolved without significant impacts to operation and significant architectural and structural modifications to the existing East Wing.

PROJECTS BEYOND THE BALLROOM

Beyond the Ballroom, the Administration has a plan for beautifying the visitor experience in areas such as Lafayette Park, Sherman Park, First Division Park, and the Ellipse. We are also establishing a superior, more efficient, White House visitor security screening center.

The plan to improve and beautify Lafayette Park focuses on fountain repairs and landscape rehabilitation. This includes sod and plant replacement, repairs to broken and

damaged walkway pavers, replacement of missing park benches, and the installation of post-and-chain barriers around ornamental planting beds. It will also include removal and replacement of select trees. This focus is all part of Phase 1 which is scheduled to be completed by approximately May 31, with operable fountains and overall park beautification in place ahead of America 250 festivities.

In parallel, we are coordinating with the USSS to incorporate buried utility infrastructure to support USSS security requirements. Where feasible, this work is being integrated into Phase 1, but will also necessarily overlap with Phase 2. While the goals of Phase 2 are still being developed, it will include replacement of the walkways with granite and the addition of enhanced security fencing around the Lafayette Park area.

Separately, USSS, NPS, the General Services Administration, and the Department of Treasury are implementing temporary measures and studying permanent solutions to enhance physical barriers on the north and south sides of the Executive Avenues. As part of this effort, these parties are considering incorporating a new ADA sidewalk and perimeter fence around First Division Park. The improvements will enhance security to the White House complex and provide more accessibility to the public by minimizing First Division Park security closures.

The National Park Service is also working with the Administration to improve the visitor experience at the Ellipse. As part of this project, the irrigation system for the park will be restored, new grass will be installed, and other park amenities will be improved. This will include repairing and updating stone walkways and installing new benches.

Regarding the visitor screening facility, we intend to replace the existing doublewide trailer with a permanent structure befitting the White House. The trailer that has heretofore been used has far exceeded its intended lifespan. The intended new structure will have a sub-grade building entrance and queuing plaza occupying the south quadrant of Sherman Park. The design will maintain the existing park layout, and steps and ramping around monument will be maintained. By having the visitor queuing plaza positioned below grade there will be minimal visual impact and it will eliminate the need to use the entire park when queuing for large events. Rather, visitors will continue to be able to use and enjoy Sherman Park uninhibited during such events – an outcome not available with the current system.

ACCESS / CIRCULATION

Vehicle circulation on the east side of the Treasury Building will generally remain the same after the various projects have concluded. Motorized vehicles, bikes, and other personal means of transportation for the general public will be subject to the same closures and accessibility as before the project.

Authorized access for vehicles supporting the East Wing will typically enter through the intersection of 15th Street and E Street. For ballroom events, food and support equipment will be delivered on the South Grounds through a loading dock on the south end of the proposed ballroom. Vehicles supporting events and operations within the Executive Residence will utilize the existing driveway north of the East Wing, connecting East Executive Avenue to the Executive Residence. Other vehicle traffic on East Executive Avenue will be limited to traditional operations such as White House staff parking, Treasury operations, and emergency support vehicles.

Pedestrian access and circulation on the east side of the Treasury Building will generally remain the same after completion of the projects. White House and Treasury staff utilizing public transportation or offsite parking will be able walk onto the complex using East Executive Avenue to enter their respective facilities. White House staff will typically enter the East Wing through the East Portico entrance.

The general public walking around the White House complex perimeter will be able to utilize Pennsylvania Avenue and the Ellipse to view the north and south elevations of the White House. White House guests and public tours, as discussed above, are anticipated to enter the complex through a new sub-grade visitor screening facility on the western side of Sherman Park. Guests will be processed through security and discharged on the East Executive Avenue sidewalk, north of Hamilton Place, then continue northbound to enter the facility through the East Portico.

Lastly, during large White House events previously held in exterior tents, the general public would be subject to additional vehicle and pedestrian security closures in areas surrounding the White House until the event was finished. By moving these large events into a protected indoor space, it is anticipated that such security closures adjacent to the White House will be minimized, benefitting both pedestrian and vehicular traffic before, during, and after such events.

WEST WING

At this time, no architectural studies have been undertaken relative to the West Wing. Internally, there have been preliminary discussions related to the possibility of a one-story addition to the west colonnade in the interest of creating symmetry around the Mansion's main structure. A structural analysis has been initiated to determine if the Colonnade of the West Wing has the capacity to carry additional loads. No decision will be made regarding such a project until these aspects are fully studied and analyzed.

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