



March 20, 2025

Stephen Ehikian
Acting Administrator, General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Subject: AIA comments on Presidential Memo: Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture

Dear Acting Administrator Ehikian,

On behalf of The American Institute of Architects (AIA) and our over 100,000 members, I am writing to share our views regarding the recent presidential memo, “Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture.” AIA remains steadfast in our support for design freedom, community engagement, and the continued adherence to the Design Excellence Program and the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, which have successfully shaped our federal building landscape for over six decades without federal mandates. These principles ensure that federal buildings remain functional, sustainable, and reflective of contemporary needs while respecting historical and regional contexts.

We acknowledge the directive’s emphasis on ensuring federal public buildings are visually identifiable as civic structures and that they respect regional, traditional, and classical architectural heritage. However, we strongly caution against any approach that mandates or establishes a singular preferred architectural style for federal buildings. Prescriptive style mandates stifle innovation, limit architectural diversity, and disregard the unique cultural and historical contexts of local communities. Further, classical architecture, while an important element of our nation’s architectural legacy, often demands expensive materials, longer construction timelines, and higher maintenance costs—burdens that ultimately fall upon taxpayers.

We urge the GSA to prioritize the following in its recommendations to the President:

- Maintain the flexibility of architectural expression in federal projects, allowing communities and designers to determine the best solutions for each site.
- Protect the integrity of the Design Excellence Program, which has successfully delivered high-quality, innovative, and sustainable public buildings.
- Oppose federal mandates that impose a singular architectural style preference, recognizing that diversity in design ennobles our nation.
- Strengthen community engagement processes to ensure federal architecture prioritizes local control and design freedom.

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As architects, we are dedicated to designing spaces that uplift and serve the public while embracing the diverse and evolving character of American architecture. We urge the GSA to

uphold policies that encourage creativity, sustainability, and community-driven design in the federal built environment.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the GSA on advancing policies that uphold the values of design freedom and local control in federal architecture. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further dialogue on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen T. Ayers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Stephen T. Ayers, FAIA
Interim Executive Vice President and CEO
The American Institute of Architects