

CFA 15/NOV/18-6

LOCATION:

Parcel I, bounded by N, Canal, and 1 1/2 Streets and N Place, SE
Washington, DC

OWNER:

U.S. General Services Administration

PROPERTY:

Southeast Federal Center (The Yards)

DESCRIPTION:

New eleven-story mixed use building (residential-retail)

REVIEW TYPE:

Concept

Letter

26 November 2018

Dear Ms. Wright:

In its meeting of 15 November, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a concept design for a new eleven-story mixed-use building at The Yards, to be located on development Parcel I, bounded by N, Canal, and 1½ Streets, and N Place, SE. In accordance with the review process established in the Memorandum of Agreement between the General Services Administration and the Commission of Fine Arts regarding the redevelopment of the Southeast Federal Center, the Commission approved the submission with the following comments.

In their support of the design, the Commission members made several recommendations for its development. They emphasized that this new building—the first on the western section of The Yards—would establish the architectural and urban character for the area and should therefore seek to achieve a high quality of design. They commented that the north and south wings of the building, described in Modernist terms as bars, should instead be understood as parts of a single urban building connected by a unifying base. They commented that the two-level bridge spanning the courtyard of the building at its upper floors appears alien when compared with the more traditional masonry wings; they said that this bridge could be an impressive feature of the building, but careful detailing will be required to relate it more decisively to the overall design. To achieve a more coherent design, they recommended decreasing the contrast between the dark precast block proposed for the base and the light brick of the building's upper volumes, and integrating the appearance of the lobby with the rest of the base. They observed that the unarticulated glass facade proposed for the lobby appears incongruous with the two masonry wings, and it lacks the detailing of a prominent building entrance. In addition, they suggested that the projecting glazed egress stair, which would also be used for exercise by residents, should be developed further in form and material to emphasize its role as an amenity for the building. They suggested further expressing the lobby's green roof with generous plantings; this concept could also be incorporated into the egress stair, bringing further consistency to the design. Finally, they commented that the proposed material palette—which includes two types of brick, as well as decorative metal screens and reflective aluminum panels—appears overwrought and should be simplified.

The Commission looks forward to reviewing future submissions for the continued development of The Yards. As always, the staff is available to assist you.

Sincerely,

/s/Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Mina Wright, Director
Office of Planning & Design Quality
General Services Administration, National Capital Region
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20407-0001

cc: Sarah Forde, Forest City Washington
Brett Swiatocha, Perkins Eastman DC