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Executive Director
Marcel Acosta

IN REPLY REFER TO:
NCPC File No. 8654

July 14, 2025

Brett Banks
United States General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Brett Banks:

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission, I approved the preliminary and final site and building plans for the Southeast Federal Center Parcel P3 Redevelopment – The Yards located at 1300 5th Street, SE, Washington, DC. A copy of the Delegated Action of the Executive Director is enclosed and available online at www.ncpc.gov/review/archive/2025/7/ as part of the July 2025 meeting materials.

Implementation of the project may require review by local agencies, including the issuance of permits pursuant to regulations promulgated under the authority of federal environmental statutes.

Sincerely,



Marcel Acosta
Executive Director

Enclosures

cc: Anita Cozart, Director, DC Office of Planning
Thomas Luebke, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts



Delegated Action of the Executive Director

PROJECT	NCPC FILE NUMBER
Southeast Federal Center Parcel P3	8654
Redevelopment – The Yards	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER
1300 5th Street, SE Washington, D.C.	41.11(38.00)46011
SUBMITTED BY	ACTION TAKEN
United States General Services Administration	Approve preliminary and final site and building plans
	REVIEW AUTHORITY
	Advisory Per the Memorandum of Understanding, dated June 6, 2005, between the General Services Administration and the National Capital Planning Commission regarding the transfer by sale and/or long-term ground lease to Brookfield Properties and the mixed-use development of the Southeast Federal Center.

The United States General Services Administration (GSA) has submitted 35-percent design drawings for the proposed development of Parcel P3 located in the Southeast Federal Center (SEFC). This site is within the boundaries of the Washington Navy Yard Historic District which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Parcel P3 will house the Living Classrooms Foundation education center building. The mission of the Foundation is to provide hands-on education and job training, using urban, natural, and maritime resources as “living classrooms.” The design includes multi-level terraces, and the second floor cantilevered over the main building entry. The transparent ground level includes the culinary training restaurant and is designed with full-height overhead doors to open to the south terraces and waterfront. The floors of levels two and three form a more private zone to work and teach that is adaptable to the evolving culture of living classrooms. Panoramic views of the river are experienced from both inside the building and from the terraces that supplement the upper-floor classroom. Located in the 500-year flood zone, the building and surrounding site are raised to address long-term resiliency from flooding, in accordance with District requirements.

The project team has engaged extensively with federal and local agencies to develop an appropriate design responsive to the historic context and surrounding development. Projects in the SEFC, which is also known as The Yards, are reviewed pursuant to a 2005 MOU between NCPC and GSA. Pursuant to the MOU, projects in the SEFC shall prepare and submit 35-percent design drawings for NCPC’s review. Further, the MOU includes Urban Design Guidelines and Minimum Phase Performance Design Standards that projects in the SEFC must implement. The Urban Design Guidelines suggest that the massing and scale of the new buildings in the historic zone will be complementary to that of the historic buildings and innovative designs are encouraged to evoke the character of this and other industrial waterfront sites. The height, bulk and siting of buildings

should provide open views and vistas to and from the waterfront and, where practical, maintain views of federal monumental buildings. As a waterfront building, the guidelines encourage land uses that activate the waterfront with a ground level that maximizes uses that open to, overlook, and activate the public park and esplanade. The siting and design of all buildings and structures should maximize and enhance views of the Anacostia River.

Staff finds the proposal for Parcel P3 complies with the provisions of the MOU and is consistent with the approved SEFC Master Plan which designates a cultural/community use for this site. The building's low-scale height, terraced massing, and shifted floor plate articulation integrate into the waterfront context and respect adjacent historic structures. The design also references the Navy Yard's shipbuilding past through its form with a cantilevered "prow" and weathered wood materiality. Views of the Anacostia River are maximized from inside the building and from the upper floor terraces. The ground floor culinary training restaurant opens to the waterfront and activates the public realm. Additionally, the landscape design connects to the waterfront boardwalk through shaded terraces. The design was refined through agency consultation to enhance connection to the existing Yards Park.

NCPC received public comments on the proposed landscape planting plan recommending the addition of Common Milkweed, the removal of non-native species and cultivars, and the reduction of the percentage of wind-pollinated grasses. In response the applicant removed several non-native species from the plant list and replaced proposed cultivars. No plantings are deemed invasive. Staff finds the proposed plant list is generally consistent with the NCPC Pollinator Best Practices Resource Guide and Comprehensive Plan policies.



Figure 1: Illustrative view of the proposed education center building from the Anacostia River.

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its April 9, 2025 Meeting. The Committee forwarded the proposed preliminary and final site and building plans to the Commission with the statement that the proposal was coordinated with some, but not all, participating agencies. The District Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE) is not coordinated because some proposed improvements will likely trigger stormwater requirements. DOEE recommends that the applicant develop a stormwater plan and schedule a pre-development review meeting to discuss the project and determine how the site's stormwater will be managed. The participating agencies included NCPC, GSA, the National Park Service (NPS), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the District State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO), the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), DOEE, and the District Office of Planning (DCOP).

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Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on April 1, 2021 and per the Memorandum of Understanding, dated June 6, 2005, between the General Services Administration and the National Capital Planning Commission regarding the transfer by sale and/or long-term ground lease to Brookfield Properties and the mixed-use development of the Southeast Federal Center, I find that this project is consistent with the approved Southeast Federal Center Master Plan and performance design standards and therefore approve the 35 percent design for the proposed three-story cultural building on Parcel P3 at The Yards, formerly the Southeast Federal Center, located in Washington, DC.



Marcel Acosta
Executive Director

July 3, 2025

Date

Response to agency responses to my recommendations re. plantings in the Southeast Federal Center Parcel P3 Redevelopment – The Yards (File No. 8654) project

The agency has responded satisfactorily to some, but not all, of the recommendations that I made regarding the plantings in the Southeast Federal Center Parcel P3 Redevelopment – The Yards (File No. 8654) project. I therefore ask the agency to consider the information below and send me its response.

I recommended: “Add much Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) to the proposed planting plan on page 55 of the submission materials. Replace plants that thrive in sunny areas with *Asclepias syriaca* if needed to provide space for that milkweed.” However, the agency did not respond to my recommendation. I would appreciate receiving such a response.

The agency stated in regard to *Ilex glabra*: “According to DOEE GAR plant list and DDOT Green Infrastructure Plants for Biorentention list, *Ilex Glabra* is Native and recommended for planting in the District.” However, the agency’s sources are not primary sources for information. They are not correct. *Ilex glabra* is not native to the District of Columbia and its vicinity. *Ilex glabra* should not be recommended for planting in the District.

The relevant primary sources for information about the native distribution of *Ilex glabra* are the [USDA Plant Database](#) and the [Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora](#). Click on those links (in blue) to see maps of the plant’s native distribution.

The maps indicate that *Ilex glabra* is not native to the District of Columbia or to Virginia north of Caroline and Accomack Counties. Caroline and Accomack Counties are south of the National Capital Region. There are no county-level data available for Maryland.

As the agency suggested, Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) and Black Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) are both appropriate substitutions for *Ilex glabra*. The

agency should therefore replace *Ilex glabra* with one or both of these substitutes.

I recommended that the agency replace *Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Halka' with its parent or with another tree that has similar characteristics (e.g., size, shape, colors of flowers and foliage, blooming period, etc.) because it is a cultivar. The agency has instead replaced 'Halka' with *Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Shademaster'. Although 'Shademaster' is also a cultivar, it was bred to be "extra hardy" and "is not affected by street pollution, soot, or salt". 'Shademaster' is therefore an appropriate substitute for 'Halka'.

Thank you.

Bernard Berne
Arlington County, Virginia