National Trust *for* Historic Preservation®

February 23, 2026

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

Re: Proposed Construction of White House Ballroom NCPC File Number 8733

Dear Mr. Scharf:

The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States ("National Trust") is a private charitable, educational, nonprofit corporation headquartered in Washington, D.C., and chartered by Congress in 1949 to further the historic preservation policy of the United States. 54 U.S.C. § 312102(a). This Congressional charter obligates the National Trust to "facilitate public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings, and objects of national significance or interest."

We respectfully submit the following comments concerning the current proposal by the Office of the Executive Residence (EXR) for the construction of a 90,000 square-foot ballroom addition to the White House. We urge the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to consider these comments in connection with its responsibility to (i) review the proposal for consistency with the NCPC's Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital, *see* 40 U.S.C. §§ 8721(a), 8722(c); (ii) advise EXR, the submitting agency, regarding the proposal, *id.* § 8772(b); (iii) approve, or disapprove, of the "location, height, bulk, number of stories, and size" of the proposed ballroom, as well as the "provision for open space in and around" it, *id.* § 8722(d); and (iv) comply with its own obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.

Historic preservation is a vital expression of the American story. Protecting our history connects communities, bridges generations, and strengthens public understanding. The White House is perhaps the most significant historic site in the United States. Before our historic places are permanently altered or lost, the American public should have an opportunity both to be heard, and to shape the decisions that affect our shared national heritage.

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A National Historic Landmark and a National Park, the White House has been the home to our Presidents since 1800. Owned by the American people and stewarded by the National Park Service, the White House was designed by Irish architect James Hoban, whose winning design was selected by President George Washington in a competition for the honor of designing the home of the American president, and demonstrates Georgian and neoclassical architectural principles.

The National Trust acknowledges the utility of a larger meeting and gathering space at the White House. However, we remain deeply concerned that the sheer massing and height of the proposed 90,000 square-foot new ballroom construction will overwhelm the Executive Residence, which is only 55,000 square feet. The National Trust is also deeply concerned that, as proposed, the new construction will permanently disrupt the carefully balanced classical design of the White House complex, which emphasizes the prominence of the Executive Residence in contrast to its two smaller, and lower, East and West Wings.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation offer clear guidance for construction projects such as this one that affect historic properties. 36 C.F.R. § 68.1 *et seq.* The Standards provide that new additions should not destroy the historic fabric of the property, and that the new work should be "compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing" of the existing structure. *Id.* § 68.3(a)(9)-(10). To that end, the National Park Service's Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House, issued in 2000, recognized the need for expanded event space — yet proposed locating such facilities in "new underground structures" so as to "minimize any new intrusions on the surface" and ensure that "the integrity and character-defining features of the White House and its grounds … are preserved and maintained."[1]

The National Trust frequently and successfully advises on renovations to significant historic properties around the country—including a ballroom at Mar-a-Lago—to ensure that those properties can accommodate modern needs while preserving their historic character. We know from experience that both goals are simultaneously achievable.

To this end, any proposed new addition to the White House complex should accommodate and respect the primary historic importance of the original Executive Residence. To do so here, the ballroom addition should be subordinate in scale to the Executive Residence. We appreciate the submission of plans that continue to revise the design of the addition. That being said, having reviewed the

[1] National Park Service, *Comprehensive Design Plan: White House & President's Park* (2000), at 82, 92, 96, 103, *available at* https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951p009596291&seq=3 (last visited Feb. 13, 2026).

revised plans, we continue to recommend several modifications to the proposed project, including:

- **Reduce Overall Size and Visibility.** The size, volume, and massing of the proposed new construction (90,000 square feet) should be reduced or disguised (such as by placing portions underground, as recommended in the 2000 Comprehensive Design Plan) so the new building appears smaller than the Executive Residence itself (55,000 square feet). Its height should also be substantially lower than the Executive Residence.

- **Reduce Footprint and Protect Key Views.** The footprint of the proposed building should not extend past the existing south-facing façade of the historic Treasury Building, nor further interrupt the views of the Executive Residence from Pennsylvania Avenue.

- **Respect the Established Classical Composition of the White House Complex.** The new addition should retain the carefully balanced classical design of the White House complex with its two smaller, lower, and substantially symmetrical East and West Wings.

- **Preserve the Historic East Façade of the Executive Residence.** The connection of the colonnade to the Executive Residence should protect and preserve the original historic materials of the east façade of the Executive Residence and should not cover or demolish the existing fenestration and detailing of the east façade.

- **Ensure that the Proposed South-facing Portico Is Subordinate in Scale to the White House South Portico.** The proposed portico on the south façade should be smaller and less grand in scale than the existing portico on the south façade of the Executive Residence.

We respectfully urge the NCPC to consider these recommendations. Doing so will help ensure that the project both honors the exceptional historic significance of the White House complex and acknowledges the investment that the American people have in the preservation of this beloved place.

The National Trust stands ready to assist the White House, the National Park Service, relevant review agencies, and Congress in exploring design alternatives and modifications that would accomplish the objectives of the Administration while preserving the historic integrity and symbolism of the People's House.

As we approach the 250th Anniversary of our country's founding, the preservation of historic places that represent our nation's history has never been more relevant or important. We urge you to consider the deep reverence that all Americans hold for this iconic place and undertake a review process that ensures the protection of the historic White House complex for future generations.

Sincerely,

Carol Quillen
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Trust for Historic Preservation

CC: Jessica Bowron, Acting Director, National Park Service
Ed Forst, Administrator, General Services Administration
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