

May 3, 2026

To the Chairman and Members of the National Capital Planning Commission:

I am writing to express my opposition to the plans to paint the Eisenhower Executive Office Building white. I am a long-time resident of Washington, DC, a professor emerita of history and historic preservation, and the author of six books on American architectural history. I have a long and deep commitment to historic architecture and its power to explain the past and inform the present.

The EEOB was never intended to be painted, and the original intent of the designers should be respected. In a period that favored darker colors for architecture, Alfred B. Mullett selected a gray granite. In a description of this building, Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee (in *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 158) write:

In raking light, the gray Virginia granite takes on a violet hue, which, combined with the violet-gray of the slate and the verdigris of the copper in the mansard roofs, contributes to the overall richness of effect achieved by relatively simple means.

The subtle coloration inherent in the selection of this stone would be lost if this building were painted.

Much has been made of the fact that the EEOB was not widely admired for its architecture in the decades after its completion. In fact, the Second Empire style had a relatively short period of popularity. But beginning in the 1970s, historic preservationists realized that buildings should be judged on their own merits, not by current-day standards, and Victorian buildings that had been derided as too busy or too dark began to be appreciated. I would hope that the Commission of Fine Arts could extend that same generosity of spirit to the EEOB. Furthermore, the building is a National Historic Landmark, designated for its current, unpainted appearance, and repainting it would violate the character of its granite exterior.

Painting this building would also introduce a host of complications and costs. Paint is difficult to remove from granite, so the original appearance would be lost forever. Paint has to be renewed as often as every ten years or even more frequently, so painting the building now would be introducing a maintenance problem for years to come. Every time the building is painted, extensive scaffolding would have to be constructed. The cost of all this would be astronomical.

I urge the National Capital Planning Commission to appreciate the Eisenhower Executive Office Building for what it was designed to be, and what it is today: a superb example of the French Second Empire style, constructed of a gray granite that changes subtly in changing light.

Sincerely,



Alison K. Hoagland