

Guiding Principles of Design Excellence in Diplomatic Facilities

April 2010

Concerned that the caliber of federal construction was declining, in 1962, President Kennedy convened an Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Architecture to ensure that such architecture continued to represent American ideals – from dignity, stability and vigor to embodying the finest architecture of its time.

That Ad Hoc Committee, chaired by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, set forth Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture. Those guiding principles are just as relevant today as they were nearly 50 years ago – although today they would very likely be expanded to include the importance of security, sustainability and flexibility in our resource constrained and rapidly changing world.

The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) - following in the footsteps of the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Design Excellence Program it developed nearly 15 years ago - is renewing its commitment to Design Excellence and developing a Design Excellence Program for U.S. Embassy and Consulate Facilities.

The Guiding Principles of a new Department of State program, based on the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, are articulated below. These Principles will serve as the foundation of a comprehensive effort that will include, in the coming months, the development of a Strategic Plan which will, in turn, be the basis for OBO Design Excellence Policies and Procedures, to be implemented by the beginning of 2011.

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Guiding Principles:

Delivering Design Excellence is a comprehensive process that seeks to utilize the best methods, technologies and staff abilities. Each office, person and action in OBO will contribute to the realization of this goal. If the guiding principles below are applied, OBO will produce facilities that are outstanding in all respects. OBO project teams are challenged to apply all of these principles, coordinate their efforts and deliver built embassy complexes that represent the best of American architecture, engineering, technology, art and culture.

- **Purpose and Function:** Embassies and consulates have two essential purposes: to be safe and functional and inspiring places for the conduct of diplomacy and to physically represent the U.S. Government to the host nation. A facility that represents the best of American architecture, design, engineering and construction will be an appropriate workspace, and will also be contextually appropriate and become a respected landmark – representing the best of American Government, enterprise and culture - in the host nation.

- **Site:** The site and location of an embassy has practical as well as symbolic implications. OBO will develop sites that best represent the U.S. government and its goals, and enhances the conduct of diplomacy. Whenever possible, sites will be selected in urban areas allowing U.S. Embassies and Consulates to contribute to the civic and urban fabric of host cities. Special attention will be paid to the general ensemble of surrounding buildings, streets and public spaces of which embassies and consulates will form a part.
- **Design:** The design of buildings and sites is a comprehensive process of understanding and balancing requirements and incorporating them into a thoughtfully conceived cohesive and coherent whole. OBO will evaluate designs on the basis of their success in skillfully balancing requirements and on how well the design represents the U.S. to the host nation. Designs are to be functionally simple and spatially flexible to meet changing needs and be enduring over time.

An official embassy style will be avoided. Buildings are to be welcoming while representing dignity, stability, innovation, humanity and openness. Ostentation is not appropriate. Designs will be cost effective, employing an economy of means and methods.

The design will be responsive to its context, to include the site, its surroundings, and the local culture and climate. The design will make use of contextually appropriate and durable materials.

The grounds and landscaping will be as important as the architecture and together are to be conceived as an integrated whole. The grounds will be viewed as functional and representational space, and will be sustainable, include indigenous plantings and incorporate existing site resources, such as mature trees.

- **Engineering:** The engineering of facilities will incorporate the most advanced methods, systems, technologies and materials appropriate to the facility and local conditions, including the site, climate, natural hazards and the practical reality of construction in the host nation.
- **Safety and Security:** The safety and security of staff and visitors is paramount. Designs and construction will meet or exceed all security and safety standards and specifications. Architects and engineers will be challenged to design and develop ever improving methods, materials and solutions and to thoughtfully integrate these into overall designs.
- **Sustainability:** Buildings and grounds will incorporate sustainable design and energy efficiency, and these features will be integrated into their design. Construction, maintenance and operations practices will be sustainable. Particular attention will be given to the climate, context and site conditions.

- **Architectural and Engineering Professional Services:** OBO will seek to hire the highest quality of American architects and engineers to produce the best designs. Their selection will be based on the quality of their design achievements and portfolio of work; and the selection methodology will be open, competitive and transparent.
- **Construction:** Construction professionals are partners in Design Excellence and will be engaged throughout the process to ensure the best possible design and implementation. OBO is committed to using the best construction practices and craftsmanship possible and every effort will be made to utilize the most qualified building contractors with a record of delivering high quality projects.
- **Operations and Maintenance:** Buildings and sites will be economical to operate and maintain and will utilize equipment and materials that are durable, dependable and suitable. Designs will be based on life-cycle analysis of options that take into account long-term operations and maintenance concerns. Design intent and features will be maintained throughout the life of the facility, using the best stewardship practices.
- **Art:** Embassy buildings and grounds are an opportunity to showcase the best of American and host nation art and culture. OBO is committed to integrating such art into its facilities such that each property will be both an individual expression of design excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America's designers and artists can leave to later generations.
- **Historically, architecturally or culturally significant properties and collections:** OBO is committed to preserving the Department's historical, cultural and architectural legacy. The Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property is the official listing of important diplomatic overseas architecture and property that figure prominently in our country's international heritage. OBO is also committed to the development of a world class stewardship program, dedicated to the proper conservation and maintenance of the Department's culturally significant historical properties and assets.