



Executive Secretary John Stanwich
The Committee for the Preservation of the White House
1849 C Street, NW, Room #1426
Washington, DC 20240

August 5, 2025

Dear Members of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House:

For more than a century, The American Institute of Architects (AIA) has been a vocal advocate for the preservation and enhancement of the White House, working to uphold its historical integrity and symbolic significance. President Theodore Roosevelt himself entrusted AIA to serve as “perpetual guardian” of the White House’s architectural integrity, a sacred responsibility we honor to this day.

With that historic mandate in mind, we are writing to you on behalf of AIA regarding the proposed \$200 million East Ballroom addition to the White House. The AIA’s longstanding dedication to the preservation and careful adaptation of the White House compels us to offer thoughtful recommendations regarding this significant project. It is precisely because the White House is the “People’s House” that stewardship must be paramount. We recognize that the building has evolved over time; however, any further changes must proceed in a systematic manner that is rooted in a deep understanding of place and a thoughtful, deliberate design process—one that fully appreciates both the magnitude of the proposal and the lasting impact of the interventions. We understand this project may begin as early as September; we urge the Committee to allocate the time necessary for a rigorous process, ensuring decisions are made with the utmost care and consideration.

Although the ballroom project may have secured private funding, the White House is not a private building. The historic edifice at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is the People’s House, a national treasure and an enduring symbol of our democracy. Any modifications to it—especially modifications of this magnitude—should reflect the importance, scale, and symbolic weight of the White House itself. So, too, must the *process* rise to the significance of the building and the extent of the proposed alterations. We believe that any material changes to this historic landmark must strictly adhere to established federal processes for public buildings. To that end, we strongly encourage the following:

1. Qualifications-Based Selection Process

The Committee for the Preservation of the White House has a proud history of leadership in stewardship and preservation to maintain and improve the White House for future generations.

While the proposed extension will be privately funded, given the magnitude of the project and the symbolism the White House carries for all Americans, we strongly urge a Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) process to identify the most qualified architect or design team for this project.

Adherence to the QBS process is the recommended approach for all public projects of national significance and will ensure the selection of professionals who possess the expertise necessary to

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balance the White House's architectural heritage with the functional requirements of a 21st-century presidency. We also encourage a robust, public-facing interdisciplinary feedback process—inviting input from preservation specialists, engineers, security experts such as the Secret Service, and sustainability advisors to address the full scope and complexity of the project.

2. Historic-Preservation Review

A rigorous historic-preservation review is critical to guarantee harmony with James Hoban's neoclassical style and protection of historic sightlines, such as Pennsylvania Avenue and Lafayette Square. Strict adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards (HABS/HAER/HALS) is essential to the safeguarding of the White House architectural legacy. It is critical that the Committee ensures that these standards are rigorously applied.

3. Transparency and Public Accountability

Private funding must not bypass the care and deliberation required for proposing and constructing new additions or making such significant material changes to the White House. Given the White House's symbolic importance, the design and decision-making processes must be transparent and open to public input. Providing public clarity on the funding, procurement, and design selection processes will signal the administration's commitment to accountability and the stewardship of the White House while easing public concerns about the changes being proposed to this national landmark.

4. Proportionality and Design Harmony

The proposed 90,000-square-foot addition raises concerns regarding scale and balance. The design absolutely must harmonize with the White House's existing architectural proportions while preserving its role as both a national museum for the people, and the functional seat of power representative of the people. We urge careful consideration of adjustments that would align the proposed additions more closely with the White House's historic character.

5. Collaboration and Expertise

The AIA offers its full assistance and expertise to ensure that the project fulfills its goals while adhering to current, best preservation practices, and AIA's Framework for Design Excellence. In the spirit of transparency and openness to public feedback, we are ready to support and provide guidance on design criteria, energy efficiency, resiliency, and the fundamental and overarching balance of progress and preservation.

We commend the Committee for its dedication to preserving the White House's legacy. We look forward to discussing these recommendations further and stand ready to assist the Committee in any way necessary.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Lee
2025 AIA President

Stephen Ayers
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