

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
TESTIMONY TO THE PLANNING BOARD
RE: THE NAVAL ORDNANCE LABORATORY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (33/25-1)

WHITE OAK SCIENCE GATEWAY MASTER PLAN PUBLIC HEARING
May 23, 2013

Good evening. I'm William Kirwan, Chair of the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission. I'm here tonight to present the HPC's recommendations for the Naval Ordnance Laboratory Administration Building, once also known as NOL Building One. The building is located at 10903 New Hampshire Avenue in Silver Spring, MD. It's within the new US Food and Drug Administration consolidated headquarters, at the White Oak Research Center. The building is now known as FDA Building One, reflecting its continuing prominence on the new campus. The number for this resource is 33/25-1.

On February 22, 2012, the HPC held a public hearing and worksession to evaluate the Administration Building. In concurrence with staff, the HPC unanimously recommended that the resource be added to the *Locational Atlas* and designated on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. We therefore ask the Planning Board to add the resource to the *Atlas* during the Board's worksession to evaluate the resource. We also ask that during its worksession, the Board recommend designation on the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*. Our recommended environmental setting and a summary of our findings in recommending designation are shown on pages 80 to 82 of the draft *White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan*.

The HPC found that the Administration Building has exceptional architectural and historical significance, meeting four of the nine designation criteria in the Montgomery County Code. Also worthy of note, the Maryland Historical Trust found the Naval Ordnance Laboratory Historic District, of which the Administration Building is a part, eligible for listing on the *National Register of Historic Places*. The building is also a stellar example of how a successful historic restoration program can also be environmentally sustainable, having achieved U.S. Green Building Council's LEED® NC 2.0 Gold certification.

Architecturally, the building embodies the distinctive characteristics of modern (or stripped) classicism, an architectural style popular for federal buildings in the 1930s and 1940s. Hallmark features, all exhibited by the Administration Building, include classical composition, implied classical design elements, planar walls, and limited ornamentation. One of the few other federal buildings in Montgomery County to exhibit this style is the Bethesda Naval Hospital Block (1939-41), which is on the

National Register of Historic Places and in 1979, was designated on our own *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*.

Prior to the 1930s, the County had few architect-designed buildings. The Administration Building was designed in 1946 by Eggers and Higgins, a nationally prominent New York firm. Otto Eggers and Daniel Paul Higgins worked for many years in the office of John Russell Pope, a famed architect who advocated Beaux Arts classicism for civic buildings. When Pope died, Eggers and Higgins set up a successor firm in their own names. The new firm had many commissions and was responsible for the construction phase of Pope's Jefferson Memorial (1939) and National Gallery (1941). The firm became proponents of modern or stripped classicism, and their Dirksen Senate Office Building (1958) is a late example of this style.

With its imposing design and prominent location, the Administration Building is also significant architecturally because it quickly became an area landmark, remaining so to this day.

Historically, the Administration Building has significance as part of the development and heritage of the county and nation and for its association with persons who influenced society. The Administration Building is representative of the Naval Ordnance Laboratory, a large federal complex that operated on this site in White Oak from 1945 to 1997. In 1997, the NOL was closed and its personnel, equipment, and operations dispersed. Many of its buildings have been or are being razed. In the post WWII era, the NOL contributed significantly to national weapons research, development, and testing. Its scientific advances helped achieve US foreign policy objectives and were often adapted for non-military purposes. Prominent scientists were associated with the NOL, including German scientists who were brought here after WWII.

The NOL also helped transform White Oak from a rural to suburban area, as neighborhoods developed around the new federal complex to meet the needs of its burgeoning workforce. The Administration Building thus stands as a reminder of the effects of the federal government's policy during and after WWII to disperse governmental operations vulnerable to attack to sites outside but near Washington DC.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the HPC's recommendations. For more information, see the Naval Ordnance Lab link at www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic .