

Statement  
On The Executive Order  
“Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture”

Society of Architectural Historians  
Heritage Conservation Committee

Originally issued “*Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again*” in 2020 and modified slightly and reissued in 2025 as “Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture,” the Executive Order” remains a source of concern for the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH). As the leading international scholarly organization for architectural historians, SAH represents a broad and diverse membership engaged in the study and preservation of the built environment.

We reaffirm our strong opposition to the language and intent of the Executive Order, echoing the concerns originally voiced in 2020 by the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and allied academic associations who joined us in protest.

Since its founding in 1940, SAH has documented and analyzed both historic and contemporary architecture across the United States and globally. Our scholarship demonstrates that the most enduring and significant civic architecture arises from a productive interplay of aesthetic ambition and the specific contextual needs of place and community. While we support careful consideration for the design of major federal buildings—particularly courthouses and public buildings in the national capital, and those exceeding \$50 million in construction costs—we oppose the imposition of any mandated architectural style.

The 1962 principles of *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*, commonly referred to as *Democratic by Design*, remain a foundational reference. Its declaration that “design must flow from the architectural professional to the Government, not vice versa” underscores the importance of professional autonomy and community engagement. The document advocated for contemporary American architectural thought, a position rooted in democratic openness rather than stylistic prescription.

These values have yielded significant achievements in federal design—from the U.S. Tax Court Building in Washington, DC, lauded by Ada Louise Huxtable as a modern response to a classical tradition, to the Oklahoma City Federal Building, whose design by Carol Ross Barney embodied transparency and resilience following the 1995 bombing.

Recommitting to the principles of *Democratic by Design* offers a clear path toward federal architecture that is responsive to local context and inclusive of public voices. Rather than impose stylistic uniformity, federal design should encourage excellence through meaningful engagement with communities and professionals alike.

Accordingly, while SAH continues to oppose the provisions of this Executive Order, we affirm our support for a renewed national dialogue around architectural excellence—one that advances a civic architecture that is enduring, innovative, and democratic in both process and expression.

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*Society of Architectural Historians*  
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