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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 17-11

**U.S. Department of State Building  
2201 C Street, NW  
Square 0084, Lot 807**

Meeting Date: July 27, 2017  
Applicant: U.S. General Services Administration, National Capital Region  
Affected ANC: 2A

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The HPO recommends that the Board designate the U.S. Department of State Building at 2201 C Street, NW as a landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. The property has already been forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places by the Federal Preservation Officer for the General Services Administration, applicant of this nomination.

The property meets National Register Criterion A and District of Columbia Criterion D (“Architecture and Urbanism”) at the local level of significance for its association with a deliberate urban planning effort of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to build federal buildings within a defined area in Washington’s northwest quadrant, called the Northwest Rectangle. In addition, the property meets National Register Criterion A and D.C. Criterion D at the national level of significance for its role as the headquarters of the U.S. Department of State.

### **Background**

The U.S. Department of State Building is a massive, multi-wing, limestone and granite-clad federal government office building spanning its 12.1-acre site between C and D and 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets, NW in Foggy Bottom. The building was constructed in two phases and consists of two principal parts: The U.S. Department of War Building, built 1939-1941 and the U.S. Department of State Extension, built 1957-1960. The buildings occupy a part of the Northwest Rectangle—a large site bounded by Constitution Avenue on the south, New York Avenue on the north, 17<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street on the west that was planned during the 1930s as a complement to the Federal Triangle, to be dedicated to the construction of federal office buildings.

The U.S. Department of War Building, designed by private architects under the supervision of the Office of the Supervising Architect headed by Louis A. Simon, occupies the northeast section of the site. It is notable for its early Modern aesthetic of stripped classical elements, punched window openings, and minimal ornamentation—often referred to as Stripped Classicism and a favored building style by the federal government in the 1930s and 1940s. The building has an irregular footprint with a U-shaped configuration facing east and an E-shaped configuration facing west. The east elevation holds the original entry to the building, occupying the central recessed block of the U-shaped plan, with wings projecting to either side. This central entry block with its Giant order colonnade raised upon a tall base, recalls classical temple forms, while the square columns and lack of ornamentation, are overtly modern. The interior provides an

excellent example of Art Moderne finishes and detailing, particularly in the entry lobby with its integrated furnishings, original pendant light fixtures, original doors, and original marble-clad interior walls.

The Department of State Extension, built twenty years later, presents a more mature example of Modernism. The eight-story building with a series of wings and courtyards, capped by a series of penthouses on the flat roofs, no longer recalls Classical building forms or treatments. The building is constructed of concrete, but clad in buff limestone and granite consistent with the federal government aesthetic. The exterior is composed of severe planar walls with punched window openings and no ornamentation.

The Department of War Building was constructed at a time of overcrowding of federal agency offices. The Department had been sharing space in the State, War and Navy Building (Eisenhower Executive Office Building) for decades, but by 1938, it had moved out at which point the building was taken over by the Department of State. When Congress appropriated funds for construction of the new Department of War Building in the Northwest Triangle in 1938, three other federal buildings had already been completed on the site—the Public Health Service Building (1933), the Department of the Interior (1936), and the Federal Reserve Board (1937). However, by the time the building was completed, the department had already outgrown the building designed for it, and would soon depart it for the Pentagon, built at the outset of World War II.

Like the Department of War, the Department of State experienced rapid growth due to World War II, requiring it to seek quarters outside of the old State, War and Navy Building. In 1947, the Department of State moved its first unit into the Department of War Building in the Northwest Rectangle, and in 1955, Congress appropriated funds for an extension to the building to become the Department's headquarters. This purpose-built extension incorporates features specific to the needs of the agency responsible for the international relations of the United States and has, along with the former War Department Building, served that agency for more than six decades.

The Period of Significance extends from 1939 to 1960, encompassing the periods of construction for both the original building and its extension.

### **Boundaries**

The U.S. Department of State and its grounds occupy the entirety of Square 61, consisting of the two blocks bounded by C and D streets on the north and south, and 21<sup>st</sup> Street and 23<sup>rd</sup> streets on the east and west.

### **Integrity**

The Department of State Building has undergone certain modifications, largely for security reasons. Most significantly, the recent construction of the double-height Diplomacy Center fills the open forecourt of the Department of War's entry pavilion. Other modifications are more modest and overall, the modifications have not impaired the historical character of the building. Further, the two principal building parts still offer two distinct, but harmonious stylistic expressions of the Modern Movement.