

# MIETRO

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## Planning Agency Approves Homeland Security Complex Preservationists Fear Effect on St. Elizabeths Campus



BY LINDA DAVIDSON — THE WASHINGTON POST  
The Center Building at St. Elizabeths would be renovated and become part of the federal Homeland Security Department complex. The \$3.4 billion headquarters would provide a workplace for 14,000 federal employees.

By MARY BETH SHERIDAN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

After years of battling historic preservationists, the federal government won approval yesterday to build a massive headquarters for the Department of Homeland Security on a 176-acre hilltop site east of the Anacostia River.

The \$3.4 billion headquarters would be one of the largest construction projects in the Washington area since the Pentagon was built in the 1940s. Advocates say it would generate economic activity in one of the city's poorer corners and provide a secure workplace for 14,000 Homeland Security employees scattered across the Washington area.

"This is an important step forward for Anacostia and for Washington," said John V. Cogbill III, chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission, which voted 9 to 1 to approve the mas-

ter plan for the headquarters, to be built on the grounds of St. Elizabeths Hospital.

Historical preservationists have said the project would ruin a national landmark site with panoramic views of the District, where the first federal psychiatric institution was established in Southeast Washington in 1852. Some questioned whether a high-security facility tucked behind two layers of fencing would produce much of a payoff for the neighborhood.

"The DHS employees might as well be working on the moon for all their presence will benefit the city," testified David Garrison, a fellow at the Brookings Institution, who said that the personnel would largely commute from the suburbs.

The dissenting vote on the master plan came from a National Park Service representative, who warned that the development could endanger the site's historic landmark status.

If Congress provides funding, construction will begin next year and continue through 2016, according to the plan. Building the complex and renovating existing historical structures would create at least 26,000 jobs, officials said.

"The timing is optimal," said Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), who has championed the project. "Development has dried up in the city, and this is direct government-funded work."

Under the plan, most of the facility would be built on the vacant western campus of St. Elizabeths, property owned by the federal General Services Administration. One large building would be constructed on land leased from the District on the eastern campus, where the D.C. government is hoping to lure offices, restaurants and shops.

Residents of nearby neighborhoods have expressed mixed feelings about the complex. James Bunn, executive director of the Ward 8 Business Council, predicted that Homeland Security's migration would serve as a long-needed catalyst for new retail and housing in the Congress Heights community.

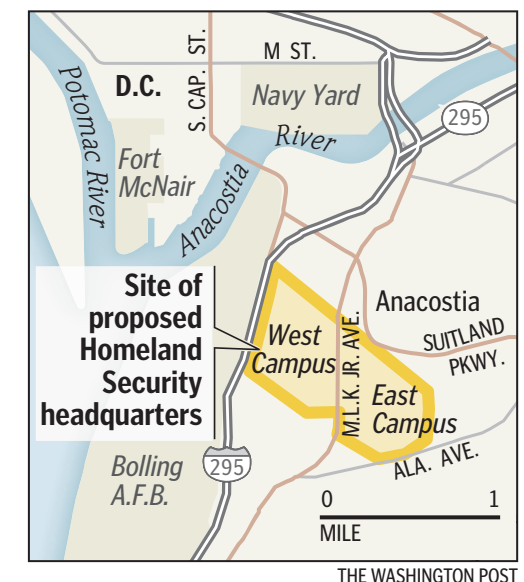
"Those 14,000 employees will need a place to live," he said. "And they'll need somewhere to eat. I can already see a coffee shop or a sit-down restaurant. It's a win-win situation for the ward."

But Linda Jackson, executive director of the East of the River

Community Development Corp., questioned whether Homeland Security employees would leave their self-contained campus along Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and frequent nearby businesses.

"More study should be done on what exactly the community benefits will be," she said. "And there's the traffic. There will be an overwhelming influx of people using roads and the Metro."

The plan envisions widening part of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and developing an access road on the southwestern part of the campus. Shuttle buses would run from the Metro.



St. Elizabeths Hospital was built when Dorothea Dix, the social reformer, persuaded Congress to provide \$100,000 for a model psychiatric hospital in 1852. The campus is thought to exemplify the ideas of a 19th-century movement that sought to improve care for the mentally ill through therapeutic design and environment.

District officials and the National Capital Planning Commission had balked at earlier plans to set up a giant agency headquar-

ters on the western campus of St. Elizabeths, fearing that development would overwhelm the site.

To assuage their concerns, officials moved some of the proposed headquarters facilities onto the east campus, reduced the amount of parking and shifted new buildings away from the historic core.

Under the new plan, about 11,000 employees would work in 3.8 million square feet of space on the west campus, and the remaining 3,000 would be on the east campus, where the District still runs a mental health facility. The sites would have parking for about 5,000 cars.

Fifty-two of the 62 historic structures on the grounds would be renovated and used by the agency, including the Center Building, a red-brick structure in the Gothic revival style that was designed by Thomas U. Walter, the architect responsible for the U.S. Capitol dome.

The first building to be constructed would be the Coast Guard headquarters. In addition to offices, the site would have a barbershop, cafeteria, child-care center and gym.

Authorities have been trying for years to find an institution to take over the long-neglected St. Elizabeths. But the cost of rescuing the run-down 19th-century buildings and overhauling the infrastructure was prohibitive.

Homeland Security officials said the site is ideal for their agency. The western campus is the largest piece of unused federal land in Washington, and the new buildings would sit far enough back from the street to avoid being shattered by a car bomb.



BY LINDA DAVIDSON — THE WASHINGTON POST  
St. Elizabeths occupies high ground and is celebrated for its panoramic views. Preservationists worry that a Homeland Security complex could threaten the site's historic landmark status.