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February 6, 2020

Docomomo US became aware in the last few weeks of a draft executive order that is circulating for consideration by the White House officials that would designate “classical” architecture as the preferred style for federal buildings. This significantly alters the long-standing Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture written in 1962 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan which states that Federal architecture and new buildings should place major emphasis “on the choice of designs that embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought.” The policy continues to explicitly state, “The development of an official style must be avoided. Design must flow from the architectural profession to the government and not vice versa”.

The draft executive order which states, “the classical architectural style shall be the preferred and default style” would roll back Federal architectural policy by nearly sixty years and set a dangerous precedent for how we value our nation’s architectural diversity and history.

In the now circulated draft, there is concerning and highly subjective language on what is beautiful; the need for architecture that “commands respect by the public”; and the absurd suggestion when renovating buildings not in the “preferred style, the feasibility of redesign in a preferred style should be examined.” These are dangerous top-down policies unfit for a democracy.

We, along with our colleagues at AIA, oppose this change in policy to promote any style of architecture over another for federal buildings across the country. This decision could create long standing issues with new and also existing facilities that have achieved significance since the 1960s. We encourage you to visit the AIA’s website, add your voice to the issue, and sign their petition to condemn this move to enforce a top-down directive on architectural style.



Todd Grover

Docomomo US Vice-President Advocacy