

GSA Site Selection Announcement

Thu 11/9/2023 9:12 AM



All,

Last night, the General Services Administration (GSA) announced it selected Greenbelt, Maryland, as the future home of the FBI's new Headquarters. I had hoped this message would include our enthusiastic support for the way GSA arrived at its selection. Unfortunately, we have concerns about fairness and transparency in the process and GSA's failure to adhere to its own site selection plan.

Throughout the selection process, the FBI coordinated closely with GSA with a clear focus on what's best for our workforce, the mission, and the American people. Paramount for us were fairness and transparency in the process. In the course of our work with GSA, however, we identified concerns about a potential conflict of interest involving the site selection authority and whether changes that individual made in the final stage of the process adhered to the site selection criteria. Despite our engagement with GSA over the last two months on these issues, our concerns about the process remain unresolved.

Process is one of our four pillars because it's critical to the way we accomplish the mission and maintain the trust and confidence of the American people. And I want to be clear with you all, in the same way we have been clear with GSA, that our concerns are not with the decision itself but with the **process**. I believe it's important for you as members of the FBI Family to understand the context for our concerns, and the steps we took to attempt to mitigate them. So in the spirit of transparency, below you can find additional details about the site selection process and our work with GSA over the last 18 months.

Congress initiated the site selection process, so, moving forward, it will control the next steps. For our part, we will continue to be clear about our process concerns, even as we work with GSA toward the design and construction of a facility.

There are still a lot of open questions, and we've still got a long way to go. But ultimately, our focus will remain on doing everything we can to ensure the FBI has a Headquarters that best meets the needs of our workforce, our mission, and the American people.

Thank you.

Chris

In March 2022, through the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022*, Congress directed GSA to choose one of three sites — Greenbelt, Maryland; Landover, Maryland; or Springfield, Virginia — to be the future home of the FBI's suburban campus in the National Capital Region.

In September 2022, GSA publicly announced the site selection process that would be used to pick the site, a process that was closely coordinated with the FBI. In December 2022, Congress passed the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023*, which directed GSA to hold consultations with political delegations representing the three sites to receive their feedback on the September 2022 site selection plan. The FBI's view was that the original plan published by GSA in September 2022 was fair and reasonable, and there was no need to make changes. Nonetheless, GSA decided to amend the site selection plan and published a revised plan on July 14, 2023. GSA then commenced the site selection process.

The process consisted of two phases. In the first phase, hundreds of pages of site-specific details were provided to a three-person panel that evaluated each of the three sites according to the parameters and criteria included in the published site selection plan. This panel was comprised of two career GSA officials and one career FBI official, along with several technical, legal, and procurement advisors. The three panel members reached a unanimous recommendation indicating Springfield, Virginia, as the highest rated site according to the criteria included in the selection plan. The site selection panel wrote a detailed consensus report articulating the basis for its recommendation of Springfield.

The second phase of the site selection process was for a senior executive within the GSA to independently evaluate the three sites and make the final selection decision. This senior executive, a political appointee, reviewed and considered the site selection panel's report and its unanimous recommendation. In a number of areas, the executive diverged from the panel's conclusions and selected Greenbelt.

The senior executive wrote a Site Selection Decision report explaining the rationale for the Greenbelt selection and provided a draft report to the FBI for review and feedback. Upon review of GSA's decision report, the FBI expressed concern that elements of the site selection plan were not followed. In particular, the FBI observed that, at times, outside information was inserted into the process in a manner which appeared to disproportionately favor Greenbelt, and the justifications for the departures from the panel were varied and inconsistent. Moreover, with one immaterial exception, each of the senior executive's deviations from the unanimous panel either benefited the Greenbelt site or disfavored the Springfield site. The result of the senior executive's one-directional changes was that Greenbelt became the most highly rated site. The FBI's concerns were exacerbated by the fact that the senior executive rejected the recommendation of the unanimous site selection panel — something that, while not inherently inappropriate, is exceedingly rare.

Lastly, the FBI raised a serious concern about the appearance of a lack of impartiality by the GSA senior executive given the executive's previous professional affiliation with the owner of the selected

site. The Greenbelt parcel of land is owned by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which was the senior official's immediate prior employer.

Over the past two months, the FBI has engaged with GSA to convey these process and conflict of interest concerns. In September 2023, Associate Deputy Director Brian Turner sent a letter to the GSA Administrator detailing the FBI's concerns and requesting additional clarification regarding the site selection process. GSA did not comprehensively respond to those questions and concerns, so Director Wray sent a letter to the GSA Administrator in October further detailing the FBI's concerns and again requesting a substantive response. Last week, GSA elected to move forward with its decision without meaningfully addressing the FBI's concerns.

In addition to the suburban campus, the administration's FY 2024 budget request to Congress reiterates support for GSA and FBI to continue efforts to identify a federally owned location in the District of Columbia to support approximately 750 to 1,000 FBI employees.