

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG: 68-010-82

### 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Headquarters

other

### 2. Location

street and number 4017 Hamilton Street not for publication

city, town Hyattsville vicinity

county Prince George's County

### 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Douglas Development

street and number 702 H Street, NW, Suite 400 telephone

city, town Washington state DC zip code 20001-3875

### 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Prince George's County Courthouse liber 21981 folio 165

city, town Upper Marlboro tax map 50 tax parcel 80-93, 23-33, 52-61 tax ID number 16 1830124

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

Contributing Resource in National Register District

Contributing Resource in Local Historic District

Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

Recorded by HABS/HAER

Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT

☒ Other: Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission

### 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	1	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	1	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	2	Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		
				Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
				0	

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## 7. Description

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### Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

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Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission Headquarters (WSSC) Building, herein referred to as the WSSC building, is located at 4017 Hamilton Street in Hyattsville, Prince George's County. The building is located on a triangular-shaped 7.7055-acre parcel of land bounded by Hamilton Street on the north, 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue on the east, and Gallatin Street on the south. All of the streets include concrete sidewalks. This grassy lot slopes to the west and has been landscaped with mature trees and shrubs as well as foundation plantings. Two asphalt paved parking lots are located in the southeast corner of the property with access to 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Gallatin Street. A third asphalt parking lot is located west of the building. An elevated walkway extends from the sidewalk along Hamilton Street across a slight depression to access the building.

A brick sign is located southwest of the building.

### WSSC BUILDING

The WSSC building includes the original 1939, three-story and basement office building, and two 4-story additions constructed in 1953 and 1964. The design materials of the original building and first addition are similar. Both additions compliment the original building and each section contributes to the overall complex design. Consistency in material and color unify the complex without diminishing the individual components of the design. The primary materials include yellow brick exterior walls, cast stone or limestone trim and ornament, aluminum window frames and miscellaneous trim. Ceramic tile is used on some exterior and interior surfaces of public spaces. Hallways in the 1939 and 1953 wings are terrazzo.

The incremental expansion of the WSSC Building echoes the evolution of mid-century modern architecture. This can be seen in the treatment of the ornamental scheme for each component. The 1939 building features elaborate Art Deco detailing, including carved limestone, metal grillwork, and urns gracing the Hamilton Street entrance. Ornamental detail on the 1953 addition is less elaborate, and more two-dimensional. In the 1964 addition, there is virtually no ornamentation in the traditional sense, although building materials, composition, and technology (the louvers) replace ornament to create an exuberant architectural expression.

Architects Paul H. Kea of Hyattsville and Howard W. Cutler of Silver Spring designed the Art Deco-styled 1939 original building. The original, yellow brick building's design is modest in scale and embellishment. The building's Art Deco ornamentation is primarily focused at the central entrance bay, which is marked by four vertical projecting bands of limestone, which give the carved entrance surround a strong vertical thrust. A horizontal limestone panel tops the central doorway and is detailed with stylized scrolls. Two iron grilles flank the entrance. The design is noteworthy for its use of limestone banding and carved ornamentation which gives the building its style and sense of verticality. It aptly shows the transition from the floral motifs popular at the turn of the century to the geometric patterns made popular by the Art Deco movement of the mid-1920s. In an area that traditionally erected more conservative buildings (the neo-classical buildings of the Federal Triangle were new at this time, with John Russell Pope's National Gallery not to be completed until 1941), the WSSC's

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decision to erect an Art Deco building projected a progressive, corporate image. On the other hand, the centralized composition and 'portico'-like quality of the design are more conservative in character, underscoring the institutional nature of the client.

The 4-story 1953 addition by Paul Kea adopts the design approach of the original building. The window groupings and fenestration are repeated within the seven-bay addition with sculptural limestone panels providing the only ornamental relief along the strictly industrial facade. The 1953 addition projects slightly from the plane of the original building. Paul Kea clearly designed the 1953 addition to be read as an extension of the original building. The addition takes on a more plain, more industrial and modern appearance, lacking the relief provided by the ornamental Art Deco entrance of the original composition. This is typical of a somewhat unfortunate characteristic of many post-war institutional buildings -- a reduction in ornament (whether to appear 'modern' or to achieve a reduction in costs) without the spatial excitement or compositional energy of more successful modern design.

The 1964 design by architects Walton & Madden created a central lobby and the second four-story wing to the original building. The original proposal for the 1964 addition called for "renovation of the existing four-story headquarters office structure in Hyattsville and the construction of an eight-story addition. Four floors were to be finished for immediate use, while the remaining four floors would be enclosed but left unfinished to accommodate future expansion. In a cost cutting move, the four expansion floors were removed from the office building contract when construction was launched in 1963."<sup>1</sup> The addition was completed in 1964.

The 1964 addition is purely modern in all respects, although it includes early hints of post-modernism, also. It is a remarkable combination of modern design elements popular among architects of the time. In its massing, the design appears to separate office space from public functions such as lobbies and meeting rooms and expresses the public rooms as lower, individual, elaborately detailed volumes, with the offices expressed as a more industrial block. Expressing different functions in separate masses is a classic modern technique made popular by Le Corbusier earlier in the century (The Salvation Army building in Paris) and later with the United Nations complex (1950) in New York. The massing approach, without functional rationale, can also be seen in Lever House (1952) by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, one of the most widely acclaimed buildings of the 1950s.

The two-story façade of public spaces located on Hamilton Street introduces a long horizontal band of ribbon windows. The horizontal setting of the windows (a signature of the International Style) contrasts sharply with the more traditional 'punched' windows of the original building and first addition. East of the ribbon windows, the wall ends in a two-story decorative geometric design composed of industrial tiles. The entire composition occurs within a limestone surround (a material that visually connects to the older wing.) The overall design is abstract and modern in its composition and choice of materials.

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The Hamilton Street entrance lobby is reached by crossing a small concrete bridge spanning a pool of water. This feature was not required by the demands of the site, but added to introduce a 'water' theme, creating a symbolic relationship between the building and its occupant, the water and sewer authority. The water theme is carried out throughout the interior design by other water features and material choices. This mixing of modern architecture, and its inherently abstract architectural vocabulary, with thematic concepts and theatrical effects is quite common in the early 1960s as demonstrated by: Philip Johnson's "...roof of orange and blue plastic (state colors); the flying saucer observation platforms; and the rocket pod elevators..." of his 1964 New York World's Fair New York State Pavilion<sup>2</sup>.)

The lobby is a two-story space naturally lighted by tall windows on both the north and south walls. Light blue ceramic tile and interior water features continue the water theme into the elevator lobbies. The interior detailing features more decorative use of industrial and geometric elements, including aluminum stair rails and screens and relentless light blue tiles which give the lobby an 'ocean liner' character. Once revered by modern architects for the machine/industrial aesthetic signifying the utopian progressive approach of modern architecture, by 1964, the ocean-liner theme equally invoked the popular image of the good life of Miami Beach.

The south elevation is largely utilitarian and unornamented (it is the rear façade of the 1939 and 1953 wings) except for a large-scale dramatic volume of glass and cast stone marking the Gallatin Street entrance. The monumental scale, portico-like composition (recalling the original 1939 Art Deco entrance), and historically evocative arched-top glass curtain wall with its lighthearted pattern of mullions 'soften' the more harsh modernism in a manner popular at the time (Wallace Harrison's Metropolitan Opera in New York's Lincoln Center, the work of Monoru Yamasaki at Princeton, Edward Durell Stone's Huntington Hartford Museum in NY.) These designs all represent "a pivotal moment in the history of architectural taste, a time when the orthodoxies of modern architecture were beginning to crumble...(ushering) in an era of confusion that has since gone by many names: eclecticism, pluralism, postmodernism, or the relativity of taste."<sup>3</sup>

The office wing extends south toward Gallatin Street. The four-story wing is essentially an unadorned brick box with continuous (ground to cornice) vertical louvers covering the windows. The louvers were an innovative aspect of the modern architecture movement and were hailed as a successful experiment in sun control in the Sacramento Municipal Utility District building (1961). The environmentally responsive design of the louvers allowed for access to fresh air without the difficulty of confronting the heat and glare from the sun.<sup>4</sup> The louvers on the WSSC Building windows are movable, allowing occupants to respond to daily and seasonal changes in the position of the sun. Experimentation with technology and the use of technological, structural, and industrial elements as featured ornamental or compositional elements are hallmarks of the modern style by the 1960s. Their use in the last addition to the WSSC Building to express the idea of the modern or progressive completes an evolution from 1939 when the concept of 'modern' could be adequately expressed by the character of Art Deco ornament.

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### WSSC SIGN

This sign is located southwest of the building and faces Gallatin Street. Based on its materials, it appears that this sign was constructed c. 1939, the same time the original block of the WSSC Building was constructed. Faced with Flemish-bond brick, this convex-shaped sign has a concrete cap. Attached to the sign are the words: WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION.

### INTEGRITY

The WSSC Building maintains a high degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship despite the removal of the original windows from the 1939 building. The building retains much of its architectural character defining materials and exterior decorative treatments. The 1953 and 1964 additions, having achieved significance in their own right, have not subsumed the original structure's architectural expression and materials. The building's vacancy has affected, but not compromised its integrity of feeling and association. The WSSC Building is a rare example of an Art Deco-style government building in Prince George's County. Located in the city of Hyattsville, this building maintains integrity of location.

The WSSC brick sign maintains a high level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The sign is in good condition and retains all of its letters. Located prominently on the Gallatin Street elevation, this sign maintains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association despite the building's vacancy.

Overall, the WSSC Building and associated resources present a high level of integrity.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. *History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993*, pg. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Muschamp, Herbert, "Lincoln Center's Next big Production: Itself," *The New York Times*, 1/21/01.

<sup>3</sup> Muschamp, Herbert, "Lincoln Center's Next big Production: Itself," *The New York Times*, 1/21/01.

<sup>4</sup> "Building of Four Faces," *Architectural Forum*, Volume 114, 5/1961, pg. 83.

## 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>Local History</u>

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<b>Specific dates</b>	1939	<b>Architect/Builder</b>	Paul H. Kea and Howard D. Cutler
<b>Construction dates</b>	1939, 1953, 1963		

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Evaluation for:

<input type="checkbox"/> National Register	<input type="checkbox"/> Maryland Register	<input type="checkbox"/> not evaluated
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Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Building, located at 4017 Hamilton Street in Hyattsville, is an expression of the agency's public image through modern and distinctive examples of institutional architecture of the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s. It represents both the physical development of a significant public utility, and the association of WSSC with the development of suburban Maryland.

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission is a public agency that unified the water, sewer and refuse needs of Montgomery and Prince George's County as a single body to guarantee that the residents of the two counties were provided with proper refuse collection, safe water, and proper sewer treatment. The pioneering engineering developments by the WSSC represent solutions for water, sewer and refuse needs of both counties. One important contribution to the water supply field includes the first of its kind "Morse filter" at the Burnt Mills Plant and at the Patuxent Plant.

The original building and subsequent additions are architecturally noteworthy as products of their time and exemplify the stylistic evolution from the Art Deco details of the 1939 original building, and the moderne influence of the 1953 addition, with the full-blown modernistic expression of the 1964 addition. While all three additions are distinctive in treatment and clearly expressed, the architects endeavored to create a unified and consolidated building that continued to represent the public identity of the WSSC. In an area that traditionally erected more conservative buildings, the WSSC's decision to erect an Art Deco building and the subsequent more moderne styled additions projected a modern, progressive image. The multiple facets of WSSC's corporate identity are well represented by the combination of monumental and modern architectural elements.

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### HISTORIC CONTEXT

Hyattsville developed as a railroad suburb in the mid-nineteenth century and expanded with the early-twentieth-century advent of the streetcar and automobile. Anticipating the development of a residential suburb to serve the growing population of the District of Columbia, Christopher C. Hyatt purchased a tract of land in 1845 adjacent to the B&O Railroad and the Washington and Baltimore Turnpike (now Baltimore Avenue) and began to develop town lots.<sup>5</sup> The 1861 Martenet Map shows a grouping of residences, Hyatt's store, and the B&O station stop. The laying of roads, like those constructed in Bladensburg just south of Hyattsville, had not occurred by this time.<sup>6</sup> Hyatt's Addition, which was successfully platted in 1873, was followed by numerous additions subdivided by other developers. The Hopkins map of 1878 shows further development and the platting of additional roads in the community.<sup>7</sup> Despite Hyattsville's advantageous location along the railroad and turnpike, suburban development was slow until the extension of the streetcar lines in 1899. Hyattsville grew throughout the early twentieth century with no less than twenty-five additions, subdivisions, and re-subdivisions by 1942.<sup>8</sup> The end of the streetcar service and the ever-increasing rise of the automobile transformed Hyattsville into a successful automobile suburb, with a commercial corridor stretching along Baltimore Avenue that represents the city's several phases of development.<sup>9</sup>

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission building in Hyattsville, Maryland served as the central location and headquarters for the Commission from 1939 to 1991. The building as it stands today includes the original 1939, four-story office building, and two additions constructed in 1953 and 1964. Each of the three architectural designs which combine to form the integrated complex we see today -- the 1939 four-story office building, and the 1953 and 1964 additions -- is a "period piece" of great individual interest. Each uses the architectural vocabulary of its time to express a consistent corporate image for WSSC -- that of an agency which is an important and stabilizing institution during a period of explosive growth, yet one pursuing a thoroughly modern, high-tech, mission.

The construction of a central administration building in 1939 allowed the WSSC to house administrative and engineering personnel under one roof. By unifying the various departmental offices, the WSSC was able to serve the growing suburban population with a "one-stop shop." The consolidation resulted in a building program which demanded a relatively large structure, better reflecting the institutional role of the WSSC in the growth of the Maryland suburbs, one of the key events in mid-century history of the Washington, D.C. area.

Over its 52 year period of continuous occupancy of the Hyattsville building, the WSSC was responsible for the modern and pioneering direction of the sewer, water, refuse collection and storm drainage issues for Prince George's County and Montgomery County, the Maryland counties adjacent to Washington, D.C. Although the WSSC was primarily responsible for service within Maryland suburbs, the commission worked within the District of Columbia boundaries, also. WSSC, one of the pioneering water purveyors to begin fluoridation of the local water supply (1950), played a significant role in the growth of Washington D.C. and its suburbs.

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The growth of the Washington, D.C. suburbs in the middle of the twentieth century is mostly the story of private development -- subdivisions, shopping centers, etc. -- and its legacy rarely includes public buildings. More often, historic structures in the suburbs reflect pre-suburban history: typically, the mansions, farms, or town centers that were impacted by the juggernaut of new suburban development. The WSSC Building, on the other hand, was a public building whose very existence and expansion over decades was inextricably linked to the growth of the suburbs. The building clearly represents the importance of a public institution's manner of presenting itself and its role in the growth of the region over three decades that constitute an imperative period of growth for metropolitan Washington, D.C.

### HYATTSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The WSSC Headquarters building is located within the Hyattsville Historic District. In 1982, the Hyattsville Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. The historic district included 584 properties (539 contributing resources and 45 non-contributing resources) that represented the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century design characteristics of the City of Hyattsville. It was recognized for its association with typical patterns of suburban development based on the various modes of transportation and communication that encouraged its development. The period of significance, noted as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is presumed to be circa 1860 to 1932 (the fifty-year mark when the nomination was prepared). In 2004, the Hyattsville Historic District was amended and expanded to include the residential, commercial, social, institutional, and industrial buildings that document the development and transformation of the city because of major transportation modes. The historic district was also eligible under Criterion C for its contiguous collection of distinctive architecture that reflects the styles and forms fashionable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The period of significance for the amended and expanded historic district begins circa 1860, the date of the oldest extant building in the historic district, and ends in 1954. The Hyattsville Historic District as amended and expanded includes 1,374 properties. Of these properties, there are 1,215 contributing and 159 non-contributing primary resources. There are 364 secondary resources (313 contributing and 51 non-contributing). Collectively, this includes 1,528 contributing resources and 210 non-contributing resources. The historic district was also nominated under the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic Residential Suburbs in the United States, 1830-1960."<sup>10</sup>

### HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission was established in 1918 as a permanent agency to oversee the water and sewer services in Montgomery and Prince George's County. Emory Bogley of Friendship Heights, William Curtis of Chevy Chase, and T. Howard Duckett of Bladensburg were appointed to serve as the first commissioners to manage the WSSC.<sup>11</sup> The agency was charged with the task of repairing the inadequate water and sewer systems throughout the bi-county area and to head off a potential sewage pollution problem in a number of Maryland streams. The law establishing the WSSC was "an emergency law necessary for the



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immediate preservation of the public health and safety.”<sup>12</sup> On June 13, 1918, the WSSC surveyed the first of five possible projects for the commission to address in the upcoming year. The projects included the study of using Paint Branch as a water supply source; combining the Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, Cottage City, Decatur Heights, Riverdale, Brentwood and Bladensburg water systems; supplying Silver Spring with water from Takoma; combining Chevy Chase, Edgemoor, Friendship Heights and Bradley Hills water supplies; and survey the possibility of a Little Falls sewer project. These initial projects were but a small sample of the extensive problems that occupied Montgomery and Prince George’s County. Part of the Commission’s mission was the outright purchase of existing water and sewer systems within both counties to ensure quality control and the creation of a comprehensive regional system.<sup>13</sup> These proposed projects and the operating expenses for the WSSC were funded by bonds and taxes issued by the commission.<sup>14</sup> From the outset, the WSSC served a unifying and coordinating function among separate and independent jurisdictions facing the challenges of metropolitan growth.

The WSSC has been a significant force in promoting regional cooperation throughout the century. At its establishment, the WSSC attempted to work closely with the District of Columbia system. In fact, the Commissioners had planned to secure its water supply from the District of Columbia’s system during the late 1910s and early 1920s. However, at the time, the District of Columbia informed the commission that they would not be able to supply water to the WSSC. This lack of initial cooperation led the WSSC to develop a new and reliable supply of water with the construction of new plants in Maryland. In the 1920s, the WSSC attempted to work out a second agreement with the District of Columbia. This agreement was to connect the Maryland trunk sewer system with the District of Columbia system. The District agreed and the WSSC paid \$1.00 for each household it connected to the District’s system. This enabled the system under WSSC jurisdiction to be served by a central plant on the Potomac River. The ensuing decades saw various deals being brokered between the jurisdictions, culminating in a formal set of regional arrangements placed into effect in 1988 and serving as the National Capital Region’s water pollution program.<sup>15</sup> The services provided by the WSSC expanded significantly between their establishment in 1918 and the late 1930s. Between 1918 and 1936, the population served by the WSSC jumped from 30,000 to 78,000.

During World War II, several federal agencies were located in the Maryland suburbs that supported additional residential development to house the federal employees flooding into the area. The WSSC, despite limited funds, worked feverishly to provide the additional water and sewer facilities to support the increased suburban population. At this time, the WSSC became involved in the development of refuse disposal incinerators to counteract the number of unregulated dumps that had been servicing the refuse problem of Prince George’s County. An incinerator was constructed at Bladensburg and provided Prince George’s County with a reliable refuse disposal facility. New legislation in 1939 gave the WSSC the authority to issue permits to refuse haulers in Prince George’s County. In 1943, Montgomery County’s refuse collection services fell under the control of the WSSC. In the early 1950’s, the WSSC became one of the pioneering water purveyors to begin fluoridation of the local water supply.<sup>16</sup> By that time, the WSSC, responsible for the sewer, water, refuse collection and

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storm drainage issues for Prince George's County and Montgomery County, controlled a large portion of the infrastructure planning and operation which in turn helped to control some of the patterns of growth for the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC. Unfortunately, the WSSC began to find itself in a difficult position concerning the intense pressure by developers in the Maryland suburbs. The population served by the WSSC between the late 1930s and the early 1950s exploded from 78,000 to 320,000, a reflection of the extensive development that had been undertaken in the county post World War II. As the population of the suburbs of Washington, D.C. continued to grow, the WSSC worked feverishly to keep up with needs of the new customers.<sup>17</sup>

The 1960s saw another explosion in suburban growth and development pressure on areas outside of the WSSC's current system. The current system was quickly becoming outdated and needed to be reinforced and repaired at a rapid rate. A new sewage treatment plant to serve the Laurel area was constructed in the early 1960s and the Potomac River Filtration Plant opened in 1962. Citizens who favored a slow down in growth began to look at the WSSC as a mechanism through which their desires could be met. Despite pressure by these citizens on the government agencies in Montgomery and Prince George's County, the WSSC was not used as a method to control the rapid, expansive development in suburban Maryland.<sup>18</sup> The 1970s, 1980s and 1990s saw a continued growth in the suburban population and a demand for WSSC's water, sewer and refuse services. By the end of the 1980s, the population served by the WSSC rose from 560,000 in 1956 to 1.2 million customers in 1987. As suburban growth moved further from the center city, in 1991, WSSC moved its headquarters building to a location where growth was still occurring, reflecting its role as a shaper of the urban pattern.

In 2005, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission conveyed their Hyattsville property to Jemal's WSSC, LLC.<sup>19</sup>

### THE HYATTSVILLE HEADQUARTERS BUILDING OF THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION

In the 1910s and 1920s, the administrative offices for the WSSC were established in Washington, D.C. The engineering department occupied a number of different offices prior to 1921 including an office above Ford's Drug Store at the corner of Rhode Island Avenue and Farragut Street, the National Guard Armory in Hyattsville and the old Wilson residence on Route 1 in Riverdale.<sup>20</sup> In 1921, a new office building was constructed on Ralston Avenue (Gallatin Street) on the grounds of the present-day buildings in Hyattsville. This building continued to be used by the WSSC as a cafeteria and for storage until the construction and completion of the 1964 addition, when this original 1921 building was demolished. In 1921, the Hyattsville location was considered ideal by the commission because of its proximity to the B&O railroad and highway systems between Washington and Baltimore, and the proximity to the WSSC's new Hyattsville water plant. A large number of engineers were being hired from Washington and Baltimore, and the Hyattsville location was important to the commission's recruiting position. This building served as the primary office building for the WSSC until the construction of the new headquarters in 1939.<sup>21</sup>

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The new headquarters was designed by noted local architects Paul Kea and Howard Cutler in 1939 and served as the bi-county facility for the engineering and administrative personnel. The WSSC's decision to combine the two departments within one building in Hyattsville was a response to the explosive growth in the Maryland suburbs, and the ability to respond to increased service demands united under one roof.

From the 1920s, public utilities throughout the United States embraced modern architecture as an appropriate voice to reflect their innovative and technologically advanced work. Just as modern architecture was experimenting with the capabilities of curtain walls and new building materials, public utilities such as phone, water and sewer companies were pushing and advancing their work with technologically improved equipment and methods. Modern architecture liberated public utility companies from the rigidity of classical styles and the heaviness of Victorian design. Examples of this architectural liberation are found throughout the United States including the Illinois Bell Telephone Company in Springfield, Illinois (1939) and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District building (1961). The design of these buildings reflected the industrial mission and innovative thinking of these companies. The Illinois Bell Telephone Company's physical demands for their switching equipment are reflected in Holabird & Root's stark, modern vocabulary.<sup>22</sup> The sleek, innovative design of the Sacramento Municipal Utility District building by Phil Fein & Associates features an ingenious use of vertical aluminum louvers.<sup>23</sup> In Washington, these ideals were promulgated by the C&P Telephone Company and reflected in its development of Square 288 in Washington, DC (four modern buildings dating from 1903-1971.) The WSSC development in Hyattsville similarly reflects this advocacy of modern architecture.

As the WSSC's responsibilities grew and the population of the bi-county area continued to expand in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the WSSC's need for expanded facilities to accommodate additional staff became apparent. Paul Kea designed the 1953 addition, fulfilling the needs of the WSSC staff for only a decade before a four-story addition was constructed in 1964.

The second addition was designed by Walton & Madden and cost \$1.8 million dollars to construct. Maryland Governor J. Millard Tawes dedicated the addition in a special ceremony on December 12, 1964 and he was, "delighted to learn that this building is constructed so it can be expanded even more in the future."<sup>24</sup> Within ten years, the WSSC needed additional space, but was denied permission to expand its Hyattsville headquarters due to its location within a residential neighborhood. After leasing additional space throughout the bi-county area for almost twenty-eight years, the WSSC left their Hyattsville headquarters and moved to their new home in Laurel in 1991.<sup>25</sup>

The building is an expression of the agency's corporate image through distinctive examples of modern and commercial architecture of the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s. It represents both the physical development of a significant public utility, and the association of the WSSC with the development of suburban Maryland. The original building and subsequent additions are architecturally noteworthy as products of their time and

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Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Building  
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exemplify the stylistic evolution from the Art Deco of the 1939 original building, to the repetitive utilitarianism of the 1953 addition, to the full-blown modernistic expression of the 1964 addition. While all three architectural endeavors are distinctive in treatment and clearly expressed, the architects of the additions endeavored to create a unified and consolidated building that continued to represent the corporate identity of the WSSC.

The WSSC chose Hyattsville as the location for their headquarters as early as 1921. Hyattsville had historically been “the largest and most substantial town in Prince George’s County.”<sup>26</sup> It was a location that was easily accessible by both rail and highway, conveniently positioned between D.C., and Prince George’s and Montgomery counties.

The B & O Baltimore to Washington line had first opened in 1835 and the town of Hyattsville had quickly grown as a result of its accessibility by rail to Baltimore and Washington. Hyattsville was incorporated in 1886 and it became an important ‘commuter suburb’ for Washington, D.C. In 1901, Hyattsville became one of the first communities in Maryland to have its own waterworks, a pioneering public works endeavor that certainly appealed to the WSSC when looking for a location for their new headquarters. The decade of the 1920s was one of major growth for Hyattsville. In 1920, the city transferred its water and sewerage systems to the WSSC. The public library opened in 1921, and William Magruder deeded land for a park. An overhead crossing of the railroad was built, and in 1929 Rhode Island Avenue was opened. Residential growth continued in the twentieth-century as Hyattsville remained a popular community for commuters who worked in Washington but preferred to live in the country.

The business community responded to the stimuli of the trolley and residential “building booms” along both the Turnpike and the rail transportation routes. In response to the increased use of public transportation and expansion of the residential base, the business community in Hyattsville responded by modernizing existing buildings dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and constructing new buildings in ‘contemporary styles’. The public works movement of the 1930s brought about the construction of a new post office, the County Service Building, a new Municipal building and the expansion of the WSSC headquarters. In addition to the WSSC headquarters building off Ralston Avenue (Gallatin Street), the neighborhood was home to the Hyattsville Gas and Electric Company and the Hyattsville Ice Company. These light industrial buildings were located to the south and west of the residential neighborhood in Hyattsville. The City of Hyattsville offices, commercial areas, the rail lines and Route 1, bound the neighborhood to the east. The commercial and light industrial buildings found within the City of Hyattsville and along Baltimore and Rhode Island Avenue are representatives of a number of different styles including Art Deco, Art Moderne, and Modern designs.

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### THE ARCHITECTS

When WSSC decided to build a new central office in 1939, they looked to the architecture firm of Kea and Cutler. Both principals had distinguished architectural careers in Maryland, particularly in Prince George's and Montgomery counties. Kea and Cutler commissions resulted in important civic, educational and institutional buildings throughout the Metropolitan Washington area.

Howard Wright Cutler (1883-1948) was born in Ouray, Colorado and studied engineering and architecture at the Rochester Athenium and Mechanics Institute in Rochester, New York in 1904. After graduating, Cutler was employed in a Rochester architectural firm until he established his own firm in 1907. At the outbreak of World War I, Cutler served as a major for the surgeon general's staff, in charge of designing hospitals in the United States. His buildings included the Otten Tuberculosis Hospital at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and the General Hospital in Denver, Colorado. After the war, Cutler established himself in Washington, D.C., where his work included additions to Walter Reed Hospital, the Church of the Ascension in Silver Spring, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in College Park, and a number of buildings on the University of Maryland-College Park campus.<sup>27</sup>

Paul H. Kea (1886-1968) was born in Surry County, Virginia and studied architecture under private tutors in Surry County. At the age of 35, Kea opened his own architecture office in Portsmouth, Virginia and by 1929, he moved his offices to Hyattsville, Maryland. During this time, Kea is credited with the design of more than 50 public schools in Prince George's County, the First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, the Hyattsville Municipal Building, the County Courthouse and the Board of Education buildings in Upper Marlboro and the Prince George's General Hospital. Kea collaborated with Howard Cutler on a numerous projects including the Coliseum and Women's Field House at the University of Maryland-College Park campus. Kea was director of public works under the Council of Defense during World War II. A fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Kea was instrumental in the founding of the Potomac Valley chapter of the American Institute of Architects in Maryland in 1955. In that same year, Kea was appointed to the AIA's National Committee for the Preservation of Historic Buildings.

The 1964 addition was designed by the firm of Walton & Madden. The principals formed the firm in 1948 and had notable and prolific architectural careers in the Maryland area. Their commissions included many institutional and religious buildings throughout the Maryland suburbs.

Dennis W. Madden completed his architectural studies at Catholic University in 1943. Within five years of his graduation, Madden entered a partnership with John M. Walton. Madden and Walton completed a number of projects in Maryland including the WSSC addition, the Hyattsville Regional Library, the Metropolitan-Washington Retardation Center in Beltsville, Maryland, and Largo Senior High School. Madden was admitted to the Potomac Valley chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1950 and became president in 1964.<sup>28</sup>

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John M. Walton completed his architectural degree at Catholic University in 1935. In addition to his partnership with Madden, Walton had been appointed a member of the public advisory panel on architectural services for the GSA in 1972.<sup>29</sup> Mr. Walton was an early preservationist and was responsible for the restoration of His Lordship's Kindness, a National Historic Landmark in Clinton, Prince George's County, Maryland.<sup>30</sup> Walton's partnership with Madden expanded to include Cooper and Auerbach Architects in 1969.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., "Hyattsville," 8:18.

<sup>6</sup> Simon J. Martenet, "Atlas of Prince George's County, Maryland, 1861, Adapted from Martenet's Map of Prince George's County, Maryland" (Baltimore: Simon J. Martenet C.E., 1861).

<sup>7</sup> G.M. Hopkins, "Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington, Including the County of Prince George Maryland" (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, C.E., 1878).

<sup>8</sup> E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., "Hyattsville," 8:18-20.

<sup>9</sup> E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., "Hyattsville," 8:16.

<sup>10</sup> E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., "Hyattsville," 8:1.

<sup>11</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission to Jemal's WSSC, LLC, Prince George's County Land Records, REP 21981:165.

<sup>20</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 14.

<sup>22</sup> "Building Combines Three-story and Four-story Sections," *Architectural Record*, Volume 86, No. 4, 10/1939, pg. 33.

<sup>23</sup> "Building of Four Faces," *Architectural Forum*, Volume 114, 5/1961, pg. 83.

<sup>24</sup> "Governor Tawes Dedicates New WSSC Building in Hyattsville," The Washington Post, 12/13/1964, pg. B8.

<sup>25</sup> Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993, pg. 60, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Suburban Citizen, February 6, 1892.

<sup>27</sup> "Howard W. Cutler, 65, Retired D.C. Architect, Dies of Long Illness," Washington Star, December 20, 1948.

<sup>28</sup> Gane, John F., ed. American Architects Directory, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1970, pg. 962.

<sup>29</sup> The Washington Post, 4/22/1972, pg. D-12.

<sup>30</sup> "Historic Prestige for Prince George's; Condominium Concept at New Henlopen," The Washington Post, 4/29/1972, pg. F1.

<sup>31</sup> "Architectural Firms Merge." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, May 3, 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 29, 2010).

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. PG: 68-010-82

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Brigham, Arthur P. History of the WSSC-75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1918-1993.  
Prince George's County Land Records.  
*The Washington Post.*

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of surveyed property	<u>7.7055</u>	
Acreage of historical setting	<u>7.7055</u>	
Quadrangle name	<u>Washington East</u>	Quadrangle scale: <u>1:24,000</u>

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Headquarters is located at 4017 Hamilton Street in Hyattsville, Prince George's County. The building is located on a triangular-shaped 7.7055-acre parcel of land bounded by Hamilton Street on the north, 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue on the east, and Gallatin Street on the south. The WSSC building has been associated with Lots 80-93, 23-33, and 52061 as noted on Tax Map 50 since its construction in 1939.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

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name/title	Paul Weishar and Maria Dayton/Architectural Historian		
organization	EHT Traceries, Inc., for M-NCPPC	date	January 2010
street & number	1121 Fifth Street, NW	telephone	(202) 393-1199
city or town	Washington	state	D.C.

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The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Maryland Department of Planning  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600

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CHAIN OF TITLE  
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY LAND RECORDS

Deed 152:21 December 15, 1919	Robert M. Richards, executor of the Estate of George J. Johnson, Otway B. Zantzinger and Sarah C. Zantzinger, to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lots 86, 87, and 88 ½.)
Deed 173:498 June 21, 1921	Robert M. Richards, executor of the Estate of George J. Johnson, Otway B. Zantzinger and Sarah C. Zantzinger, to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lot 85)
Deed 189:388 July 24, 1922	Otway B. Zantzinger and Sarah C. Zantzinger to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lot 88 and the westerly area of lot 88 and 88 ½.)
Deed 777:211 May 22, 1945	Lawrence W. James and Clara C. James to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (part of lot 89)
Deed 2465:606 July 12, 1960	H. Carlyle deLozier and Marie H. deLozier to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lot 83)
Deed 2471:182 July 28, 1960	Richard W. Miller and Hattie D. Miller to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (east ½ of lot 84)
Deed 2471:183 July 29, 1960	Irvin G. Koch and Mireille J. Koch to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (west ½ of lot 84)
Deed 2551:595 April 27, 1961	Henry L. Posey and Sarah A. Posey to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (part of lot 89 and 90)
Deed 2594:373 August 31, 1961	George A. Aman and Carmel D. Aman to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lots 80, 81, and 82)
Deed 2638:453 January 16, 1962	Grace Fuller Tingley and Egbert F. Tingley to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lots 91, 92, and 93)
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Deed 1259:256 August 3, 1950	Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lots 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and lots 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, and 61)
Deed 2806:37 April 8, 1963	Prince George's County Police Boy's Club, Inc. to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. (lots 23, 24, 25, 26 and lots 52, 53, 54, and 55).
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Special Warranty Deed REP 21981:165 March 23, 2005	Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission to Jemal's WSSC, L.L.C.

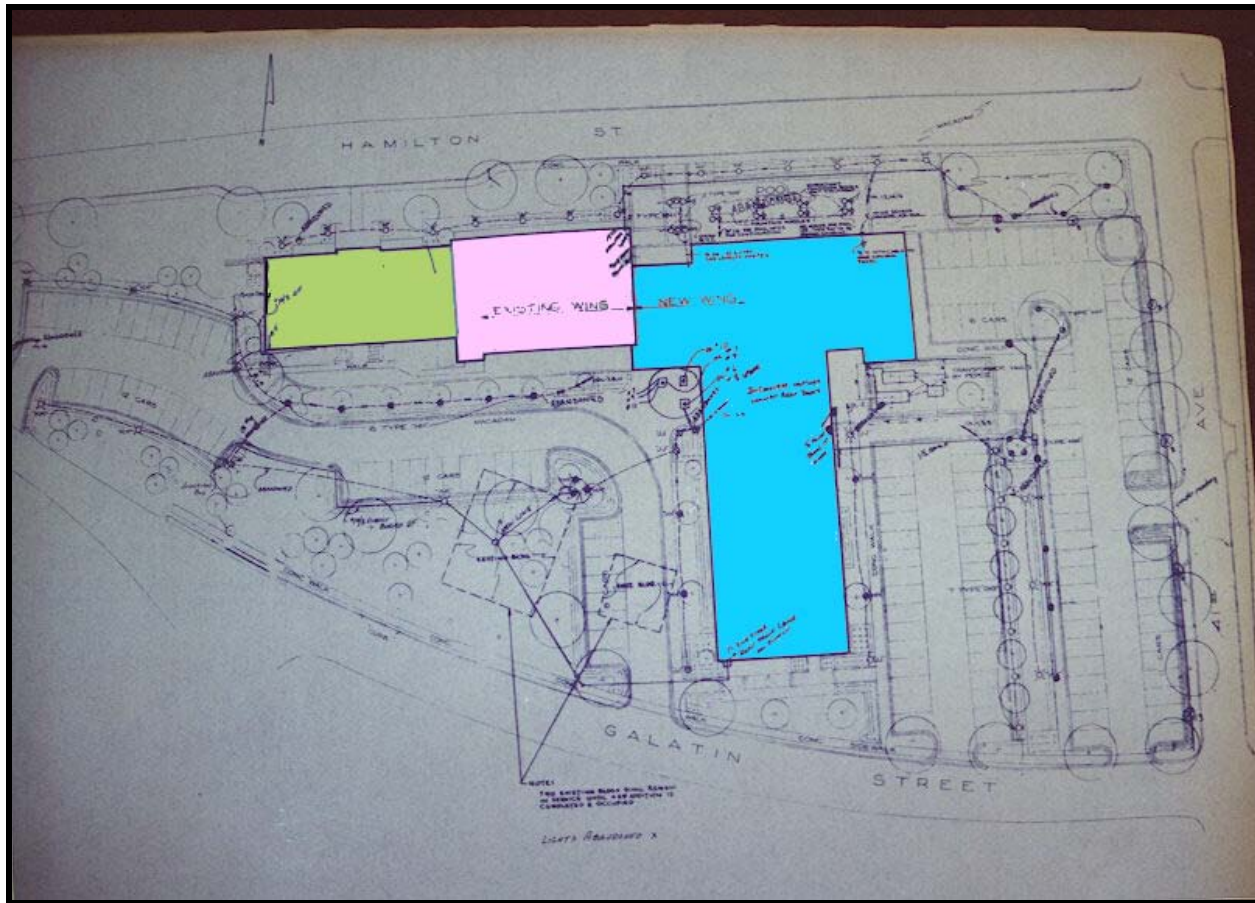


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## SITE PLAN AND BUILDING EVOLUTION

GREEN 1939 ORIGINAL BUILDING  
PINK 1953 ADDITION  
BLUE 1964 ADDITION

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Photo: WSSC Headquarters (1939), Hyattsville, view of the façade (north elevation), looking southeast. (December 2009)



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Photo: WSSC Headquarters (1939), Hyattsville, view of the façade (north elevation), looking south. (December 2009)

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Photo: WSSC Headquarters (1939), Hyattsville, view of the façade (north elevation), looking southwest. (December 2009)



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Photo: WSSC Headquarters (1939), Hyattsville, view of the east (side) elevation, looking northwest. (December 2009)

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Photo: WSSC Headquarters (1939), Hyattsville, southwest corner, looking northeast. (December 2009)



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Photo: WSSC Building Sign (c. 1939), Hyattsville, looking northeast. (December 2009)

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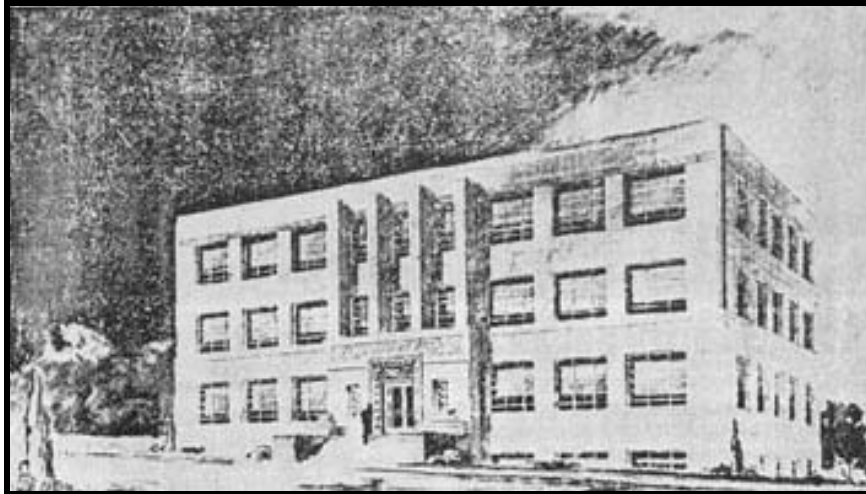


Image: 1939 original block. [credit: Hyattsville Preservation Association, "Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission," Hyattsville Then and Now, <http://www.preservehyattsville.org/wsscthenandnow.htm> (accessed September 9, 2009)].



Image: 1953 addition. [credit: Hyattsville Preservation Association, "Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission," Hyattsville Then and Now, <http://www.preservehyattsville.org/wsscthenandnow.htm> (accessed September 9, 2009)].



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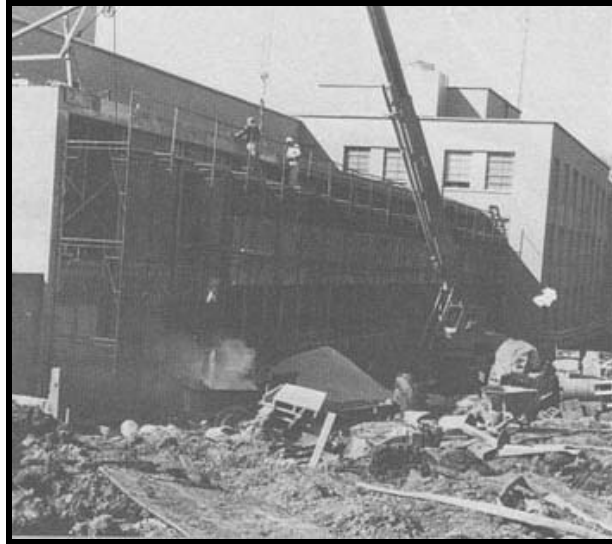


Image: 1963 side addition. [credit: Hyattsville Preservation Association, "Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission," Hyattsville Then and Now, <http://www.preservehyattsville.org/wsscthenandnow.htm> (accessed September 9, 2009)].



Image: 1963 rear addition. [credit: Hyattsville Preservation Association, "Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission," Hyattsville Then and Now, <http://www.preservehyattsville.org/wsscthenandnow.htm> (accessed September 9, 2009)].

