

DOCUMENT RESUME

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Further Improvements to a Building Leased for the Social Security Administration Should Not Be Made if the Activities Will Be Consolidated Elsewhere. LCD-76-351; E-159506. April 6, 1977. Released May 10, 1977. 2 pp. + appendices (17 pp.).

Report to Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman; by Robert F. Keller, Acting Comptroller General.

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Organization Concerned: Social Security Administration; General Services Administration.

Congressional Relevance: Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman.

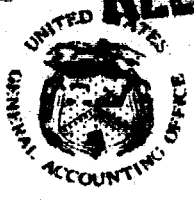
GAO investigated the actual and proposed expenditures to improve the Social Security Administration's (SSA) building in New York City, the justifiability of a \$3.6 million investment to improve to a building leased from an uncooperative landlord, and the possibility of saving money by consolidating office space into one building. The expenditures were for an experimental office landscaping project. Findings/Conclusions: The landscaping experiment, which entailed restructuring the office space from closed areas to open areas delineated by movable screens and sound barriers, has cost \$736,338. An incomplete evaluation report indicated that no further landscaping should be begun, but that certain aspects should be used elsewhere and that some employees in the landscaped area should be allowed to replace their specialized furniture with conventional furniture. SSA officials stated that although operations have not been impeded, the failure of the landlord to correct problems annoyed and inconvenienced the staff and required unnecessary management time to correct problems. A General Services Administration investigation indicated that the landlord was not uncooperative, just slow, and that there was no cause for breaking the lease. SSA stated that there was a need to consolidate personnel, now spread among five buildings, to improve work effectiveness, but no economic justification study has been done. Recommendations: No more landscaping projects should be undertaken unless the leases are renewed when they expire and the experimental project is considered a success.

(SS)

01138

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RELEASED 5/10/77



REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Further Improvements To A Building Leased For The Social Security Administration Should Not Be Made If The Activities Will Be Consolidated Elsewhere

**Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
General Services Administration**

Social Security spent \$736,000 on an interior design experiment in a leased building at its Northeastern Program Service Center. The building is one of several locations housing the Center's activities.

Due to continuous complaints concerning the building at Rego Park, New York, and the dispersed location of operations, Social Security has asked for a consolidated facility to accommodate activities now carried out at five locations. General Services and Social Security have not yet determined whether consolidated operations will be more economical. Until such a determination is made, GAO recommends that no additional areas be redesigned.



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-159506

The Honorable Elizabeth Holtzman
House of Representatives

Dear Ms. Holtzman:

Your January 12, 1976, letter requested us to look into (1) the actual and proposed expenditures to improve part of the Social Security Administration's Northeastern Program Service Center, at the 1 Lefrak City Plaza building in Rego Park, New York, (2) whether a \$3.6 million investment to improve the building's 18 floors is justifiable, since the property is leased and the landlord has been uncooperative, and (3) whether consolidating operations at 1 Lefrak City Plaza and an adjacent building into one building would save money.

Appendixes I through IV contain the information we gathered to answer your inquiry. We obtained comments on a draft of our report from the General Services Administration and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. These comments are enclosed in appendixes V and VI, respectively.

The expenditures to improve 1 Lefrak City Plaza were part of an office landscaping project, an interior design technique that combines technical and aesthetic factors to improve the comfort, appearance, and efficiency of work areas. The project, which served as an experiment for all the bureaus within the agency, was carried out on three floors of the building. It was completed in February 1977 at a cost of \$736,338. The agency's project evaluation report recommended that Social Security not embark on any further landscaping but use selected aspects of landscaping where appropriate. The report also recommended replacing some landscaping furniture with conventional furniture.

Continuing problems with the landlord mainly involve water leaks and inadequate cleaning services. Northeastern Center officials informed us that although these problems annoy and inconvenience the staff, they do not impede operations. General Services stated it has directed its regional office to take a more aggressive position on these matters.

B-159506

Social Security would like to consolidate at one location activities now spread among four leased buildings and a Government-owned warehouse. General Services and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare have not determined whether or not it would be more economical to consolidate the Northeastern Center, and they should consider that factor in deciding how to fulfill the Northeastern Center's space needs when the present leases expire in 1980.

We recommend that no additional areas at the Center's Rego Park building be landscaped unless Social Security and General Services decide to renew the leases and the experiment is considered a success.

As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We will be in touch with your office to arrange for release of the report so that the requirements of section 236 can be set in motion.

Sincerely yours,


ACTING Comptroller General
of the United States

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ABBREVIATIONS

GAO	General Accounting Office
GSA	General Services Administration
HEW	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
SSA	Social Security Administration

IMPROVING AND CONSOLIDATING BUILDINGS
AT THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S
NORTHEASTERN PROGRAM SERVICE CENTER
REGO PARK, NEW YORK

On January 12, 1976, Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman requested us to look into

- the actual and proposed expenditures to improve a building occupied by the Social Security Administration (SSA) at 1 Lefrak City Plaza, Rego Park, New York;
- whether a \$3.6 million investment to improve the building's 18 floors is justifiable, since the Government leases the property and the landlord has been generally uncooperative; and
- whether Government procurement of a building to consolidate SSA employees now working in 1 Lefrak City Plaza and an adjacent building would save money. (See app. VII.)

In response to her request we interviewed agency representatives and reviewed applicable agency records at SSA and General Services Administration (GSA) offices in New York City, Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND

The buildings that SSA occupies in Rego Park are part of the Northeastern Program Service Center. The Northeastern Center is one of six operated by the Bureau of Retirement and Survivors Insurance to review claims and process and maintain beneficiary records for payment of social security benefits. The Center primarily administers social security retirement and survivors insurance payments for about 6 million beneficiaries in New England and New York State.

The Northeastern Center is housed in four leased buildings and a Government-owned warehouse (Bush Terminal) of 15,000 square feet. Information on the leased buildings is given in appendix II. Most of the Center's operations are located in two buildings adjoining one another--1 Lefrak City Plaza and 96-05 Horace Harding Expressway.

The expenditures to improve 1 Lefrak City Plaza were part of an experimental office landscaping project, a technique of interior design that combines technical and aesthetic factors to improve the comfort, appearance, and efficiency of work areas. (See app. III.) The project was carried out on three floors of the building and consisted of demolition, electrical work, flooring, plumbing, carpentry, drapery installation, decorative plants, specialized furniture, and consultant fees for designing and evaluating the experiment.

LANDSCAPING HISTORY AND EXPENDITURES

In 1971, various SSA bureaus and offices, including the Bureau of Retirement and Survivors Insurance, expressed an interest in office landscaping. The Assistant Commissioner, Office of Administration, SSA, felt that the excessive costs and inefficiency frequently associated with simultaneous experiments indicated the need for a single SSA research project. This decision was also based on other factors: (1) reports on other landscaping projects were mixed, not all showing the technique was cost-beneficial on a large scale, (2) the ideal setting for landscaping was a newly constructed building that had been designed with the concept in mind, and (3) experimentation with landscaping was expensive.

The Bureau of Retirement and Survivors Insurance was chosen to lead the experiment. In commenting on a draft of our report, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) said that the New York site was selected primarily because of (1) the stable lease situation, (2) the fact that a new building was not being proposed for the Center, (3) the experiment offered an opportunity to begin upgrading the Center, and (4) the location was relatively convenient for monitoring by the SSA Central Office.

When the landscaping project was proposed in 1971, SSA estimated the experiment would be completed by September 1973. The project was delayed for various reasons and completed in February 1977, after GSA and HEW provided written comments on our report. In an evaluation report on the experiment that had not been completed when we completed our review, the Bureau recommended that SSA not embark on further landscaping, but instead use selected aspects of it which are generally included in GSA's open office space layout concepts. The tentative report also recommended that some of the employees in landscaped space be permitted to replace their specialized furniture with conventional furniture.

The three floors where the experiment was conducted have about 50,000 square feet, about 11 percent of all the office space in the Northeastern Center. Landscaping expenditures and obligations totaled \$736,338, \$213,000 for repairs, alterations, and improvements, and \$523,338 for consultant fees, purchasing and assembling furniture, and moving costs. (See app. IV.)

COMPLAINTS ABOUT LANDLORD

Most of SSA's landlord complaints pertain to two adjoining buildings--1 Lefrak City Plaza and 96-05 Horace Harding Expressway--leased by GSA from the same landlord.

Northeastern Center officials stated that although operations have not been impeded, the failure of the landlord to correct problems annoys and inconveniences the staff. They feel that unnecessary management time is spent in following through channels to obtain building services for which they are paying. According to GSA representatives, the landlord is not uncooperative but is slow in resolving complaints. We found that some of the complaints have not been resolved, particularly those concerning water leaks and inadequate cleaning services.

For example, SSA complained about water seepage in the basement of the 1 Lefrak City Plaza building as long ago as April 1971. We found in the files continued correspondence among SSA, GSA, and the landlord since then, and noted that some effort has been made by the landlord to correct the problem. However, SSA is still complaining about water leaks in the basement of that building. Because of these leaks, small quantities of supplies have been damaged and others have had to be relocated.

Numerous complaints by SSA and GSA regarding inadequate cleaning also began as early as 1971. Although the cleaning appears to have been adequate at times, complaints on cleaning still recur.

GSA's leasing procedures state that a lessor's failure to perform under the terms of the lease is not necessarily justification for terminating the lease, and that the Government's withholding of rent to assume a lessor's obligation is an alternative to be exercised with great caution and reasonableness and shall not be arbitrary or capricious. GSA has not invoked these penalty provisions of the lease contracts. In the opinion of GSA headquarters officials, the landlord is difficult to deal with but does not stand alone in this regard--

like many other lessors, he watches expenses carefully because inflation narrows profits on the fixed annual lease charges.

CONSOLIDATION REQUEST

Even though most of the Northeastern Center's operations are carried out in the two adjoining buildings, some are located in the College Point building 5 miles from Rego Park. In addition, the Northeastern Center has warehouse space at the Woodside building about 2-1/2 miles from Rego Park and at the Bush Terminal building about 10 miles from Rego Park.

SSA would like to consolidate at one location activities now spread among the five buildings. Northeastern Center and SSA headquarters officials believe that a consolidated facility would improve efficiency at the Center. Reasons given for consolidation are these:

- The present fragmented operation detracts from the efficiency of the Center's functions.
- There is a constantly increasing need for space to satisfy an increased workload.
- There are continuous problems with the landlord.
- The building layout does not conform with the way the Northeastern Center is organized to carry out its activities.

GSA has reviewed the request for space from SSA and as of April 30, 1976, has determined that the Northeastern Center will require 796,205 square feet of space. A GSA representative stated that this requirement could be satisfied with a lease in the metropolitan area.

The GSA New York regional office has recommended to its headquarters that GSA's long-range program include the consolidation of the Northeastern Center in one location, preferably in Queens. GSA headquarters representatives told us that they doubt a consolidated facility would be constructed for SSA by 1980, when the current leases expire. They expect that the Northeastern Center will have to continue occupying leased space, as GSA's budget levels for building or purchasing space often leave no alternative other than leasing.

In its January 3, 1977, comments on our draft report, GSA stated that it was evaluating alternatives for providing the necessary space for a consolidated center, and that it would submit a proposal to HEW in about 60 days.

No economic study has been performed by either SSA or GSA to determine whether there would be considerable economy in consolidation.

CONCLUSION

Until the final evaluation of the project has been completed and approved and a determination is made about where the Northeastern Center will be located after the current leases expire, it would not be prudent to landscape any other space there.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare direct the Commissioner of Social Security not to landscape any additional areas of the Rego Park building unless SSA and GSA decide to renew the present leases when they expire and the experiment is considered a success.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR EVALUATION

At the time we provided our draft report to GSA, HEW, and SSA for comment, SSA estimated that the evaluation of the landscaping experiment would not be completed until April 1977. Additionally, SSA had planned to landscape all of the centers if the experiment proved successful. In view of this and the uncertainty of where the Northeastern Center would be located after 1980, we recommended that the Secretary of HEW direct SSA not to landscape any additional areas at the Northeastern Center unless GSA and SSA decided to renew the leases and the experiment was considered a success. In their written comments on our draft report, GSA and HEW both agreed with the recommendation and stated that the report presented a generally accurate description of the experiment. (See apps. V and VI.)

The landscaping experiment was completed in February 1977. In a tentative evaluation report on the experiment, the Bureau of Retirement and Survivors Insurance has recommended that SSA not embark on any further landscaping. However, at the time we completed our review, this report had not been completed or approved.

In its comments, HEW stated that a major difficulty in completing the experiment as originally planned was the long delay by GSA in acquiring the space, contracting for the work, and designing the work stations. Our review showed that some of these delays may have been beyond GSA's control, such as negotiating a lease change with the lessor to obtain swing space and evaluating the specialized furniture design before procuring it. Other delays were attributable to SSA, particularly in deciding which bureau would lead the experiment and in changing the direction and scope of the project to conform with a new way the centers processed claims.

HEW stated that it disagrees with GSA's views on relations with the landlord and believes the landlord has been uncooperative. From our review of the correspondence between GSA, SSA, and the lessor, and a tour of the facility, we found no evidence of SSA's operations being seriously impeded. In any case, GSA stated in its comments that its regional office was directed to more aggressively enforce the lease terms, including using economic sanctions when appropriate.

Neither GSA nor SSA has determined whether consolidating the Northeastern Center's activities would save money. We believe the agencies should do so, however, before deciding how to fulfill SSA's space needs in 1980-81, when the current leases expire.

INFORMATION ON CURRENT LEASES,
NORTHEASTERN PROGRAM SERVICE CENTER

	<u>1 Lefrak City Plaza</u>	<u>96-05 Horace Harding Expy.</u>	<u>College Point</u>	<u>Woodside</u>
Effective date of lease	9-1-70	6-1-66	3-8-74	11-1-66
Date of lease expiration	8-31-80	5-31-81	3-7-79	7-31-81
Annual rental (Mar. 1976)	\$1,619,246	\$975,163	\$583,378	\$11,220
Square footage:				
General office space	170,000 sq. ft.	212,000 sq. ft.	61,000 sq. ft.	-
Warehousing	10,000 sq. ft.	5,000 sq. ft.	-	7,500 sq. ft.

SSA DESCRIPTION OF OFFICE LANDSCAPING

A landscaped installation is characterized by the absence of interior walls; the presence of decorative, sound-absorbing movable screens; planters; carpeting, curtains, and contemporary furniture, including open file units; a coordinated color scheme; a ceiling system that provides integrated acoustical, lighting, and air-conditioning control; and a plug-in system of electrical and telephone service. There are few private offices. Work stations and employee status are delineated by area assignments, the character of furnishings, and partial screens. Area arrangements and locations are based upon engineering studies of work flow, communications, and traffic patterns. The layout appears irregular, and the setting seems elaborate compared to the rectilinear plan of partitioned offices or expansive open areas encumbered with rows of desks and filing cabinets.

The various features of landscaping are intended to fulfill various purposes. The irregular floor plan shape reflects the work flow and intergroup communications; improves office efficiency and interpersonal relations by enabling the formation of closely knit, task-related work groups; and utilizes available office space in the most practical manner. Screens and planters afford visual privacy and facilitate communication. The fact that they are easily removed, combined with the integrated ceiling design and the electrical and telephone system, serves to reduce office rearrangement costs. Carpeting, curtains, sound-absorbing area dividers, artificial sound to neutralize the effects of transient noise, the color scheme, the decorations, lighting, and air conditioning create a pleasant working environment to raise employee morale and productivity.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES AND/OR
LIABILITIES FOR OFFICE LANDSCAPING

Consultant fee

Original contract	\$ 62,500	
Increase for enlarged building configuration	12,964	
Reorganization to modular processing	<u>35,303</u>	
		\$110,767

Furniture

Modular work stations	\$135,000	
Basic furniture and furnishings	<u>254,775</u>	
		389,775

Onsite work by GSA--
New York region

Space preparation	a/\$213,000	
Furniture assembly and moving	<u>22,796</u>	
		<u>235,796</u>

Total

\$736,338

a/Cumulative expenses for repairs, alterations, and improvements exceed the 25-percent limitation set forth in 40 U.S.C. 278a. However, the Administrator has determined that there is a savings to the Government pursuant to 40 U.S.C. 490(a)(8) and the 25-percent limitation is not applicable.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20405



January 3, 1977

Honorable Elmer B. Staats
Comptroller General of the United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

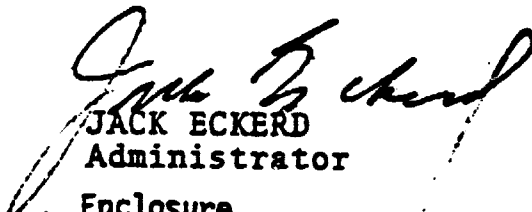
Dear Mr. Staats:

This is in response to Mr. Fred J. Shafer's letter dated November 8, 1976, requesting our comments on a draft report to Congress on "Improving and Consolidating Buildings at the Social Security Administration's Northeastern Program Center, Rego Park, New York."

We have reviewed the report and our comments are contained in the attached fact sheet.

Thank you for the opportunity to review, evaluate, and comment on GAO's recommendations. We welcome any additional comments or suggestions and will be happy to make representatives of the General Services Administration available for discussion purposes should the need arise.

Sincerely,


JACK ECKERD
Administrator

Enclosure

GSA FACT SHEET
Public Buildings Service
Office of Space Planning
and Management
December 13, 1976

COMMENTS ON

DRAFT REPORT - "IMPROVING AND CONSOLIDATING BUILDINGS AT THE
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S NORTHEASTERN
PROGRAM CENTER, REGO PARK, NEW YORK"

GAO Recommendation:

We recommend that the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare direct the Commissioner of Social Security not to landscape any additional areas of the space leased for the Northeastern Program Center, unless SSA and GSA decide to renew the present leases when they expire and the experiment is considered a success.

GSA Comments:

With respect to the Office Landscape demonstration project, we feel that both descriptions of the planning concept and of the project itself are fair and accurate. In addition, we agree that further applications of Office Landscaping at Northeastern should be held in abeyance until a determination has been made for housing the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Northeastern Program Center after 1980.

In evaluating the Office Landscape planning concept for future use at northeastern and other SSA program centers, it should be recognized that certain costs would be nonrecurring. For instance, since the function and, therefore, the layout of all SSA program centers are basically the same, SSA would be able to use the planning principles generated at Northeastern, and would probably not have to hire a consultant again. The consultant's fee at Northeastern included the design of a furniture system specifically tailored to the functional needs of the occupants of a SSA program center. This represented a one-time expense that would not occur in other program centers. Additionally, costs for some furnishings and for space preparation would be considerably less at the other four centers in question since items should be considered in determining the true costs associated with the Office Landscape concept as it applies to the SSA program centers.

General Comments:

With regard to the unresponsiveness of the lessor, we have advised the regional office to take a more aggressive position in enforcing the terms of the lease including the use of economic sanctions whenever appropriate.

In connection with the eventual consolidation of SSA's Northeastern Program Center, GSA is currently evaluating alternatives for providing the necessary space, and a proposal will be submitted to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for consideration in about 60 days.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

JAN 27 1977

Mr. Gregory J. Ahart
Director, Human Resources
Division
United States General
Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Ahart:

The Secretary asked that I respond to your request for our comments on your draft report entitled, "Improving and Consolidating Buildings at the Social Security Administration's Northeastern Program Center, Rego Park, New York." The enclosed comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John D. Young".

John D. Young
Assistant Secretary, Comptroller

Enclosure

COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE ON THE
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE DRAFT REPORT ENTITLED, "IMPROVING AND
CONSOLIDATING BUILDINGS AT THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S NORTH-
EASTERN PROGRAM CENTER, REGO PARK, NEW YORK"

We concur with GAO's recommendation that we not landscape any additional areas of the space leased for the Northeastern Program Service Center unless decisions are made to renew the present leases when they expire and the landscaping experiment is considered a success.

The draft report presents a generally accurate picture of the history and development of the office landscape experiment. However, we offer the following comments to correct or clarify certain statements in the report.

The building at 1 Lefrak City Plaza, housing most of the operations of the Northeastern Program Service Center, was selected for the office landscape experiment primarily because of the stable lease situation and the fact that a new building was not being proposed for the Center. Office landscaping offered an opportunity to at least begin upgrading space at the Center. Moreover, the location was relatively convenient for Social Security Administration (SSA) Central Office monitoring of the experiment.

The office landscaping experiment was not, as GAO indicates, a prototype for other SSA Program Service Centers being constructed. Specifications for the Centers or buildings being constructed had already been approved when the experiment was designed. SSA did expect the experiment to provide information on efficient workflow, layout, and functional furniture as they occupied the new buildings. The other features of office landscaping were either included in the specifications for the new buildings or could easily be added after occupancy.

The draft report states that SSA estimated that the landscaping experiment would be completed by September 1973, but that various delays caused SSA administrators to extend the completion date to April 1977. We would like to point out that a major difficulty--which was beyond our control--was the long delay experienced by the General Services Administration (GSA) in acquiring the space, contracting for the work necessary to implement the project and finalizing the design of the work stations after submission by the consultant. SSA will complete the final evaluation report in February 1977, rather than in April 1977, as the draft report states.

According to the report, GSA does not feel that the landlord is uncooperative but, rather, is simply slow in resolving complaints. Based on complaint correspondence between GSA, SSA, and the lessor--over the period 1971 to the present--we believe that there is a clear indication that the landlord has, in fact, been uncooperative.

The draft report mentions that, based on SSA's request for space, as of April 30, 1976, GSA has determined that the Northeastern Program Service Center will require 796,205 square feet of space. It is possible that this estimate will be revised downward as we review the impact of proposed changes in operating methods and procedures on space requirements.

In the title and body of the report, the Center is referred to as the Northeastern Program Center. The reference should be changed to the Northeastern Program Service Center.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that Program Service Center operational efficiency dictates the consolidation of facilities in one location, and we expect that this will continue to be an important objective.

BRIDGEVILLE OFFICE:

1452 PLATINUM AVENUE

BRIDGEVILLE, NEW YORK 11210

PHONE (212) 851-6111

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

1027 LONGWORTH BUILDING

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

PHONE (202) 223-6416

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
 Washington, D.C. 20515

January 12, 1976

Mr. Smith Blair, Jr.
 Office of Congressional Relations
 441 G Street, N.W.
 Room 7023
 Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Blair:

I have been contacted by an individual who has brought to my attention the matter of the extensive repairs being made to the building occupied by the Social Security Administration at 1 Lefrak City, Rego Park, New York.

I have been informed that approximately \$400,000. will be spent to "landscape" two floors of this building and that, eventually, each of the other sixteen floors will be decorated at an estimated cost of \$200,000. per floor.

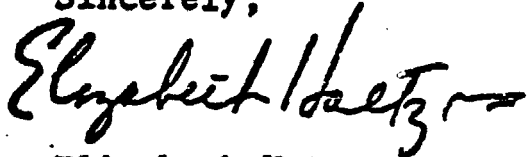
In view of the fact that the government rents this property in accordance with the General Service Administration's policy to lease rather than build or buy, and in view of the opinion of the administrators of the Social Security office that the landlord is generally uncooperative, is it justifiable to make such a large investment in the property at this time?

The administrators have told me that they feel that it would be a considerable economy in this case if the government purchased a building in which the employees who work at 96-05 Horace Harding Expressway and the adjacent building at 1 Lefrak City could be united under one roof.

I would very much appreciate your looking into the actual and proposed expenditures to improve 1 Lefrak City and letting me have your views in this matter.

Thank you for your cooperation. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Holtzman". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a horizontal flourish at the end.

Elizabeth Holtzman
Member of Congress