

P.G. back in running for HHS complex

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Prince George's County is getting a do-over after a government oversight office ruled the headquarters selection process that kept a major federal agency in Montgomery County was flawed.

The Government Accountability Office ruled that bids for the new Department of Health and Human Services headquarters weren't evaluated by the same guidelines that had been outlined in the solicitation.

The ruling is a response to an appeal filed in April by three developers, including two in Prince George's, protesting the General Services Administration's decision to renew its lease and keep HHS' more than 3,000 employees in Rockville.

Ron Gart, the attorney representing One Largo Metro, said the ruling "gives new life" to his client.

"It's a long and extensive process," he said. "I feel bad for all the protesters and, for that matter, the initial awardee putting out that kind of money [during bidding] and having there be defects in the process."

Largo was joined in the protest by Metroview Development Holdings, which bid a site near the New Carrollton Metro station, and King Farm Associates, which proposed a site near the Shady Grove Metro.

The ruling puts all three protesters, who proposed building developments around a new headquarters, back in the running.

The winning bid was JBG Cos.' proposal to invest \$270 million to renovate a more than 900,000-square-foot office building it owns near the Twinbrook Metro station. JBG is also redeveloping the area around Twinbrook.

Ralph White, the GAO's acting managing associate general counsel for procurement law, said the government's leasing arm essentially failed to address the local retail and services proposed for each site as a part of its decision. It also didn't give enough reasoning for its final choice.

The GSA will have 60 days to acknowledge the recommendations, but the ruling is no guarantee the administration will follow them. And if it does, it could still select Twinbrook.

David Iannucci, a leader on the Prince George's Economic Development Team, said even if that happens, he is confident Prince George's will lure a federal tenant with developers at four Metro stations focusing on that goal.

"We have been working to build our relationship with the GSA and have been making the case in general they need to present us with a real opportunity," Iannucci said.