

It has been reported that the proposed new ballroom at the White House will have an estimated cost ranging from \$200 million to \$300 million. For a space reportedly planned to be approximately 90,000 square feet, that equates to between \$2,222 and \$3,333 per square foot. How does this reconcile with typical market costs? Herein we take a data-driven look at how these proposed costs compare with standard commercial or institutional construction cost benchmarks.

Cost Benchmarking

One of the most commonly relied-upon cost estimating references is the *Marshall & Swift Valuation Service*, commonly referred to as “MVS”. This manual is widely utilized throughout the United States in appraisal, finance, architecture, and insurance costing exercises. The proposed White House ballroom will be like various types of construction covered in the MVS guide. We have listed some of those similar construction styles and their typical projected market costs below.

Ballroom Cost Estimations from MVS								
Category	Section/Page	Class	Quality	Base Cost/SF	Current Multiplier	Local Multiplier	Cost \$/SF	Cost to Construct Whitehouse Ballroom
Hotels: Full Service (594)	S11/P25	A	Excellent	\$380	1.06	1.03	\$415	\$37,339,560
Country Clubs (314)	S11/P31	C	Excellent	\$341	1.05	1.03	\$369	\$33,191,235
Banquet Halls (718)	S13/P19	C	Excellent	\$290	1.06	1.03	\$317	\$28,495,980
Governmental Buildings (327)	S15/P30	A	Excellent	\$493	1.07	1.03	\$543	\$48,900,177
Auditoriums (302)	S16/P14	A	Excellent	\$555	1.03	1.03	\$589	\$52,991,955
Convention Centers (482)	S16/P16	A	Good	\$389	1.03	1.03	\$413	\$37,142,109
Community Recreation Centers (514)	S16/P18	A-B	Good	\$329	1.03	1.03	\$349	\$31,413,249
Average Cost				\$397			\$428	\$38,496,324

Expanding the same calculation for the average of the building types to other major cities provides regional context:

City	Location Multiplier	Adjusted Cost per SF	Approx. Total (90,000 SF)
Washington, D.C.	1.03	\$409	\$36,775,414
New York City	1.29	\$512	\$46,058,529
Chicago	1.2	\$476	\$42,845,143
Los Angeles	1.19	\$472	\$42,488,100
Dallas	0.93	\$369	\$33,204,986

Even the most expensive location (New York City) results in a projected cost totaling less than 20% of the mid-range estimate for the proposed White House ballroom. The proposed

ballroom's cost is five to eight times higher than normal high-quality institutional or commercial construction.

Why the White House Estimate Is So Much Higher

This stark difference doesn't necessarily indicate overspending; it may reflect necessary and unavoidable context and complexity.

Legitimate Reasons for Divergence

The following factors may be legitimately driving the divergence from the above commercial cost benchmarks:

1. **Historic Site and Security Requirements** - The White House grounds are among the most sensitive and protected sites in the country. Security infrastructure, blast resistance, and restricted-access logistics can add substantial cost.
2. **Architectural Integration** - The Ballroom addition ought to harmonize with the White House's neoclassical style. Custom materials, specialized craftsmen, and preservation oversight all contribute to higher unit costs.
3. **Site Constraints and Construction Logistics** - Unlike an open-site convention center, construction within an occupied and operating campus involves tight staging areas, night work, and constricted contractor movement—all of which extend schedules and budgets.
4. **Prestige Finishes and Design Standards** - Public rooms in the White House feature ornate detailing, fine millwork, and bespoke finishes. Replicating that level of craftsmanship dramatically increases interior cost per square foot.
5. **Non-Standard Infrastructure** - Ballistic glass, advanced HVAC filtration, and communications shielding add technical layers not typical in commercial and civic structures.

Problematic Reasons for Divergence

The following factors sometimes explain why construction costs exceed budgets and norms.:

1. **Incompetence** - Poorly managed construction projects easily spiral out of control.
2. **Fraud** - Commercial and civic construction has historically suffered, and continues to suffer, from simple fraud.
3. **Imprudence** - Many real estate developments fail due to ego, overreach, and grandiosity, when wisdom and moderation are in short supply.

Conclusion

By objective benchmarks, the White House Ballroom represents an extraordinarily costly investment. However, the project's context as a high-security, historic, architecturally sensitive site—means that direct cost comparisons to ordinary high quality commercial and civic facilities are inherently limited.

From an appraisal or construction-economics standpoint, the figures emphasize that contextual factors such as heritage, security, and design prestige can outweigh baseline cost models by several multiples. The ballroom's estimated cost, while striking, may simply reflect the unique environment in which it will stand. However, given that the proposed budget is multiples of typical costs, best practices require close review of the intention and planning. Given the proposed budget, this project requires close management, auditing, and review of contracting, accounting and engineering.