

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #9**

Date of Meeting: January 19, 2011
Project: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Location of Meeting: 600 Maryland Avenue, NW – 5th Floor
Time of Meeting: 9:30 am – 12:00 noon

Attendees: Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Louise Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Tom Whitley, Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington, D.C.
Sarah Batcheler, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
Judy Robinson, Robinson & Associates
Rodrigo Abela, Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol
Felicia Bell, U.S. Capitol Historical Society
Madison Fitzwater, U.S. Capitol Historical Society
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH
Amy Ballard, SI OFEO
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates
Eliza Voight, National Park Service
Jud McIntire, SI OFEO
Kelan Dyer, SI OFEO
Judy Charles, AECOM

Meeting Summary

Amy Ballard (AB), SI OFEO, brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. AB began by announcing that Nancy Witherell has accepted a new position with the GSA as the Regional Historic Preservation Officer for the National Capital Region and that Dreck Wilson has been appointed to the Board of Advisors of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. AB then introduced Jud McIntire (JM), SI OFEO, who would provide a summary of the NCPC and CFA presentations and give an update on the EIS.

On September 2, 2010, the Smithsonian submitted the concept design of the Refined Pavilion Scheme to the NCPC. JM noted that the NCPC commented favorably on the concept design and made the following recommendations:

- clarify any outstanding property line questions;
- study the placement of the service access along 14th Street;
- study the addition of skylights on the north to ensure that the area reads as landscape rather than building;
- study the ways in which the porch element on the south affects lot coverage and views;
- minimize the potential physical and visual impacts of security elements;
- clarify the intent and character of the project's internal and external lighting;
- finalize tree species selection in consultation with the NPS;
- and identify all shrub and perennial planting areas for the next submittal.

JM noted that the Smithsonian has been following up on these recommendations.

The concept design of the Refined Pavilion Scheme was presented to the CFA on September 16, 2010. JM noted that the Commission reviewed and approved the concept submission. JM summarized the Commission's comments:

- the design must reconcile the relationship between the building form and the picturesque landscape;
- there was support for the conceptual site plan, particularly for its reinterpretation of the curvilinear paths of the Washington Monument Grounds;
- further study of the site design along 14th Street was recommended to mitigate the imposition of the service entrance;
- there was support for the concept of the canopy as a welcoming feature, but its design needs to be refined;
- the design of the water feature on the south side needs to be refined in conjunction with the design of the canopy and the pedestrian circulation through the site;
- there were strong concerns about the water feature along Constitution Avenue, which would be unprecedented in this context;
- there was support for the simple form of the corona in the landscape, but transparency through the building at ground level needs to be emphasized;
- and the material, color, and transparency of the corona exterior needs to be carefully considered.

Next, JM discussed the 14th Street service entrance, noting that the Smithsonian met with the D.C. Department of Transportation twice in November to discuss the service environment. Ann Trowbridge, SI OFEO, has crafted a final memo regarding this issue. JM noted that the Smithsonian has looked at a number of different design options. Modifications to the service entrance have included increasing the depth of the landscape buffer and aligning the north end of the ramp with the north end of the corona, among other things. Dreck Wilson (DW), ASAALH, asked if the ramp would be covered. JM replied that it would be partially covered.

JM concluded by giving an update on the status of the EIS. He noted that the DEIS was put out for public comment and that the comment period was now closed. There were two public meetings on November 17, 2010, and January 6, 2011. JM added that all of the comments on the DEIS will be addressed in the FEIS, which is expected to be completed by early summer.

AB added that project updates and the DEIS are available on the project website www.nmaahceis.com. AB introduced Rodrigo Abela (RA), Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, to present the landscape design.

RA began by pointing out the major features of the landscape design as it was presented to the NCPC and CFA as part of the concept design submissions. He summarized the feedback received by the commissions and noted that significant changes were made to the landscape plan as a result. Changes included retaining the allee of trees along Constitution Avenue, pulling the north water feature back from the sidewalk, reconfiguring the entries on the south side, studying the scale of the water feature on the south, and reworking the entire geometry of the south landscape including the terminus of the curvilinear path at the southwest corner. After presenting the revised landscape plan to the agencies, the design team was asked to further refine the following elements – the landscape character on the south side of the site, the security features along 15th Street, and the grading along Constitution Avenue. Additional changes were made to the landscape design based on the agencies' comments. The shape of the landscape on the south took on a trapezoidal form to better relate to the geometry of the south water feature and adjacent trapezoidal landscapes. A strip of lawn was introduced along 15th Street between the sidewalk and the security wall, which also serves as a retaining wall. The topography of the

north landscape was modified to relate to the topography of the Washington Monument Grounds. RA showed a section through the site to illustrate how the height of the mounds on the north were calibrated to accommodate the concourse level below and to allow enough soil depth for lawn coverage and trees.

Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, asked if the door on the southwest was only to be used as an exit. RA confirmed that this is correct – that the door on the right is the entrance and the door on the left is the exit – and that this was done for security reasons. Thomas Leubke (TL), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, commented that by doing this, the design team has lost a major opportunity to bring people from the north, down along the curved path with views of the Washington Monument, and into the building at the southwest. DW asked if there were skylights on the north over the concourse level. RA replied that there is the oculus, but that it was still under development. DW asked if the slope of the mounds on the north were meant to parallel the lines of the corona. RA replied that the mounds were meant to relate to the rolling topography of the Washington Monument Grounds. RA noted that the intent was to make the height and slope of the mounds mirror the height and slope of the topography of the Washington Monument Grounds along 15th Street south of Madison. Felicia Bell (FB), U.S. Capitol Historical Society, commented that, as viewed from the sidewalk along Constitution Avenue, the mounds felt like hills. AL agreed that they were too high.

Next, RA explained that – in consultation with the agency staff – the landscape design and building footprint were staked-out for a site walk-through. RA showed images of the stake-out and noted that the results were very illuminating and that the consensus among the agencies was that the mounds along Constitution Avenue were too high. RA added that the design team is currently working with the architectural and structural teams to see what can be done to bring down the height of the mounds. TL asked what the height was at the crossing of the paths. RA replied that it was about chest height.

Eliza Voight (EV), National Park Service, asked where the trees will be. RA replied that there will be a allee of trees along Constitution Avenue and groves of trees at the northwest and the southwest. TL asked if they had given consideration into the type of trees to be planted, stating that large 60-foot trees are probably not appropriate for this site. RA responded that they are considering a mixture of smaller trees with larger canopy trees and that they have been using the Olin plan for the Washington Monument Grounds as a reference. TL added that large trees will just exaggerate the height of the mounds. RA commented that their primary goal is to lower the mounds and open up views of the Washington Monument Grounds. He added that soil depth is not the primary concern, but added that they do want the landscape to be habitable, so shaded areas with trees where people can sit are desired. RA also noted that they also need some soil depth to prevent the lawn from drying out.

Sarah Batchelor (SB), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, commented that the valley in the north landscape where the paths cross could be more subtle and asked about the landscape at the northeast corner. RA replied that they are recommending this area as a good spot for an outdoor sculpture. DW commented that he thought the landscape design was coalescing, but added that he disagreed with the programming of the space. He thinks that there is a great opportunity to do more with the outdoor space on the north and that, as it currently stands, the landscape is too passive. JM asked if DW was referring to the plans for a quiet reading grove. DW clarified that he meant the whole idea of a “tapis verde.” He would like to see less lawn and more paving that could be used for a variety of activities such as outdoor concerts, outdoor sculptures, space for exhibits and displays, etc. FB suggested eliminating the water feature from the south and using that space for programming.

TL asked if the oculus still had a water element and if it is planned to be open or a skylight. He added that the oculus will be a good way to look down into the museum from the outside. JM replied that the oculus is a skylight, but the design is still being worked out. It will feature an engraving around the perimeter. RA added that the landscape directly around the oculus is also still being developed. AL suggested that the oculus be designed to be decked over, adding that it could become a raised platform for speakers, etc. FB asked for the dimensions of the oculus. RA replied that it is about 30 feet in diameter. JM added that from the interior looking out, the oculus is meant as a quiet, reflective space with striking views out and that it still will feature a water curtain. TL noted that there is a real opportunity with the oculus to create a rich experience within the landscape as well. He thought the use of water had rich metaphorical possibilities, but having water drip through a skylight may not work. SB added that there are several strong associations with the oculus – its shape, the water elements, the engraved quotations, etc. – and questioned if there was a link between these associations.

Louise Brodnitz (LB), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, expressed concern that the Section 106 process is shrinking and not embracing all interested parties. She wants to ensure that the process is inclusive. AB listed some of the ways in which the Smithsonian is trying to increase participation – the list serve for the public hearing is extensive, they have a Facebook page, etc. She would like to get feedback on additional ideas. LB noted that direct emails to people with details as to what will be discussed at meetings are effective. LB added that the development of certain features of the landscape design – such as the curvilinear paths – are a direct result of the Section 106 process. LB questioned if the north area of the site needs to bear the full burden of the Washington Monument Grounds context. LB noted that a major impact of the project is that public land is being taken away. It is a much more controlled site now and needs to be activated.

FB commented that she likes the softened, enveloping landscape of the north as an entrance. She added that traditionally, the back porch is where people gather more informally, thus the south landscape should reflect this. She added that if the water feature on the south was smaller, there would be more programmable space. TL added that the porch on the south serves as a gathering space, a programmable space.

Next, RA discussed the two options the landscape team presented to the agencies for the development of the trapezoidal piece in the south landscape. He also clarified that the design team intends the south landscape to be a very flexible space – the water can be drained from the water feature and used as a stage for speakers, etc. He added that the scale of the space is similar to the entrance of the East Wing of the National Gallery. LB commented that the water feature does not seem very fun and asked if children will be able to splash in the water. JM replied that the intent is to make the water feature a more reflective element rather than an active element. A section will include agitated water, however. FB asked if the trees in the plan are already there. RA replied that – with the exception of the trees along Constitution – they will be new trees.

TL asked for clarification on what was meant for the northeast corner of the site. RA replied that they are suggesting that spot for an outdoor sculpture. TL added that there is an opportunity there because currently it is an isolated dead spot. SB noted that there was once talk of putting the cooling towers in the northeast and added that an outdoor sculpture would be good because it would divert attention from the loading dock. RA noted that the team is exploring geothermal to replace the cooling towers.

AL commented that a Section 106 agreement document has to be completed and that he would be interested in hearing ideas for mitigation besides a better design context.

DW asked if there would be any more public hearings for the EIS. JM replied that there would not. DW noted that he is the only one present representing an African American constituency on a national basis. His constituency would like to hear more about the design. He is aware of local outreach, but would like to see the Smithsonian take presentations to Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, and he would like to see political outreach to the Congressional Black Caucus. LB agreed, stating that it would be a good way to get more input into the Section 106 process. JM noted that there have been a number of efforts, one of which has been national outreach to communities to discover African American collections. This has also served to strengthen the local African American institutions in those communities. AB added that Lonnie Bunch has been to many cities on behalf of the museum, but she is not aware how much he has spoken about the design. SB commented that several members of the design team are designing libraries across the city. LB added that she wants to see outreach beyond the D.C. area, and DW agreed. FB questioned if it was too late in the game to solicit comments at a national level. AB noted that she wants to talk to the museum to see how much has already been accomplished. LB added that she thinks now we are at the point where input can be focused and that compromise should be reached on the museum symbolism tempered by the Washington Monument Grounds context. She suggested that significant mitigation will be needed for this intervention. JM noted that outreach could be happening alongside fundraising efforts and also by the NMAAHC Council.

AB noted that the next consulting parties meeting is scheduled for February 16, 2011. JM added that this would be a good time to get together again because they plan to make the next submission schedule for the CFA presentation on March 17, 2011, and the NCPC presentation on April 7, 2011. JM noted that there will be progress made on the design of the building that can be presented and discussed in February. LB asked if the Smithsonian could make a better effort to get more people to the next meeting. SB requested that the stake-out be redone for the Commissioners and suggested that it may also be useful for the consulting parties. DW asked if the final archaeological report had been submitted. JM replied that it had as part of the Tier I EIS process.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.