

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #3**

Date of Meeting: February 17, 2010
Project: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Location of Meeting: 600 Maryland Avenue, NW – 7th Floor
Time of Meeting: 9:30 am – 12:00 noon

Attendees: Phil Freelon, The Freelon Group
Hal Davis, SmithGroup
Rodrigo Abela, Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol
Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates
Zena Howard, The Freelon Group
Sharon Park, Smithsonian Institution
Elsa Santoyo, SmithGroup
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
Doug Jacobs, National Park Service
Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, AECOM
Melissa Hatcher, AECOM
Ken Walton, National Capital Planning Commission
Austin Harris, Adjaye Associates
Jud McIntire, Smithsonian Institution Lynn Chase,
Lynne Chase, NMAAHC
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates
Amy Ballard, Smithsonian Institution
Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Perry Wheelock, National Park Service
Louise Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Jane Passman, Smithsonian Institution
Harry Rombach, Smithsonian Institution
Kelan Dyer, Smithsonian Institution
Judy Scott Feldman, National Coalition to Save Our Mall
Peter Cook, Davis Brody Bond Aedas
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH
Brenda Sanchez, Smithsonian Institution
Patsy Fletcher, AAHGS

Meeting Summary

Sharon Park (SP), Smithsonian Institution, brought the meeting to order at 9:45 am. SP began by reviewing the agenda and the objectives of the meeting and updating the consulting parties on progress since the last meeting. SP noted that AECOM was finalizing the Tier II EIS scoping report and that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) was preparing a formal response to issues raised in the previous meeting by the National Coalition to Save Our Mall and in a letter to the Council. Perry Wheelock (PW), National Park Service, clarified the differences between the Washington Monument Grounds Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) and the Washington Monument Grounds Cultural Landscape Report (CLR). PW also noted that there was a graphics error in the National Mall Plan that the National Park Service was working on correcting. SP introduced Phil Freelon (PF), The Freelon Group, and Rodrigo

Abela (RA), Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, and explained that the architectural team would be presenting a powerpoint illustrating the three design alternatives.

1. Powerpoint Presentation

PF began the presentation by introducing Hal Davis (HD), SmithGroup, and RA. HD provided an overview of the design principles and discussed urban context. He noted the major axis, edge areas, and buildings that define the monumental core and explained how the heights of the alternatives were derived.

RA followed with a discussion of the site plan alternatives. He noted that the design team first and foremost sought to define the context of the site. He spoke about “stripping away” the words that have been used to describe the site and simply looking at its spatial composition. The team also looked back at what previous people had thought of the site, studying the monument grounds through time. RA remarked that the team studied several historic and contemporary plans for the Washington Monument Grounds. RA commented that as one approaches the edge of the Mall – itself based on classical landscape principles – there is an opening up and a stylistic shift to a looser, picturesque character. RA remarked that one quality of the picturesque are framed views that informally acknowledge elements of the landscape. The design team believes that this kind of “framed” relationship between the museum and the Washington Monument is appropriate.

PF provided an overview of the roadways that define the site and noted vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns. Also as part of their analysis, the design team studied the path of the sun across the site in both the summer and winter hours and studied important views.

After the presentation of the design principles and context, PF individually presented each of the three design alternatives. PF explained that the Plinth scheme is a refinement of the competition entry. The Plinth scheme directly addresses the linearity of the Mall and the alignment of the buildings to the north and east of the building site. PF noted that the porch of the plinth is pulled back, the height of the building is 118 feet, the ratio of the building footprint to the size of the site is lower than average when compared to the other buildings along the Mall, and the scheme calls for some below ground program space. PF reviewed the sketches prepared by the design team to illustrate the massing of the Plinth scheme. He noted that the view from Constitution Avenue is screened by existing trees on the National Museum of American History site. The Plinth scheme includes an elevated element on the south side of the building that would offer additional views to the Washington Monument.

RA discussed the proposed site plan for the Plinth scheme stating that it strategically opens up a framed view of the Washington Monument and that water elements are used on the south as an entry feature and on the west.

Next, PF provided an overview of the Plaza scheme. With this scheme, the program is split between two buildings – the corona and the education wing – that are connected below grade. The outdoor space, or plaza, between the two buildings serves to frame views to the Washington Monument Grounds. The east-west orientation of the plaza also frames views east to the National Museum of American History. PF commented that by splitting the site, the scheme references the L’Enfant Plan, which illustrates a diagonal through the site (the unimplemented path of Maryland Avenue). PF also noted that in the Plaza scheme, the corona has three bands, in contrast to the Plinth scheme in which the corona has two bands. With the Plaza scheme, the footprint takes up 27% of the site and more of the program is below grade than with the Pavilion scheme. PF remarked that the plaza serves as an outdoor room and also has the advantage of drawing pedestrians in from the north from Constitution Avenue. With the Plaza

scheme, the corona element is shifted south. From the top of the corona visitors will have views east down the Mall and to the Capitol.

RA commented that the site plan for the Plaza scheme employs dense landscaping around the educational wing, while the landscape around the corona is opened up.

Lastly, PF discussed the Pavilion scheme. This scheme consolidates all of the functions and programming of the museum into one building. The corona in this scheme has a larger footprint, yet is aligned with the buildings to the north and to the east along the Mall. PF noted that the Pavilion scheme pushes up the corona to allow for visual transparency/porosity at the base. The grand hall in the center of the building offers visitors direct views to the Washington Monument. PF remarked that this is the most efficient of the three schemes, with a footprint that covers 25% of the site. PF reminded the meeting attendees that the geometry of the corona was driven by the angle of the top of the Washington Monument. This is the case with all three schemes. PF remarked that the Pavilion scheme will have porch element on the south, but that this design component has not yet been finalized.

RA remarked that the site plan for the Pavilion scheme works with the existing landscape, as a component of the Washington Monument Grounds.

In wrapping up the powerpoint presentation, PF invited meeting attendees to gather around the model and provide comment/feedback on the alternatives presented.

2. Group Discussion

Regarding the Plaza scheme, Doug Jacobs (DJ), National Park Service, asked if the design team considered flipping the location of the corona with the location of the education wing. PF replied that they did, but that ultimately they decided it was more appropriate to have the education wing at the urban edge of the site and the corona near the pedestrian flow of the Mall.

Zena Howard (ZH), The Freelon Group, noted that the design team is working on producing models of the other building along the Mall to better illustrate the site context.

Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, commented that the Plaza scheme has an adverse affect in that the location of the corona component projects outside the contextual building alignments. PF agreed and remarked that this scheme relates more to the Washington Monument Grounds than to the Mall.

Regarding the Pavilion scheme, AL asked if there was potential for more underground space to retain the proportions of the corona shown in other schemes. Jud McIntire (JM), Smithsonian Institution, responded that the Smithsonian is concerned about the amount of below grade space because of the site's water issues.

Judy Scott Feldman (JSF), National Coalition to Save Our Mall, commented that the lower height and large footprint of the Pavilion scheme is less distracting and less overpowering than the alternate schemes. JSF also raised the issue brought up in the previous consulting parties meeting regarding the site location. She questioned if it was considered part of the Washington Monument Grounds or the Mall, noting that this makes a difference in how the site is understood. SP replied that the National Park Service, Smithsonian, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation were working on a response to her concerns and that this was addressed at the beginning of the meeting. Perry Wheelock (PW), National Park Service, repeated her earlier statement about the CLI, CLR, and National Mall Plan. JSF inquired

about the validity of the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans as the National Park Service makes changes to the Mall. SP clarified the Smithsonian's approach, explaining that they are looking at the legislative issues and relying on official documentation. The Smithsonian expects their work to be rigorous and well documented. In summary, they are finding that the site is part of the Washington Monument Grounds. Sarah Batcheler (SB), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, asked if this was a fruitful discussion for the meeting. SB commented that after seeing the many diagrams prepared by the team, she understands that the site is being treated as a transition site. She thinks this is appropriate and urged the attendees to set aside the technical definition of the landscape. JSF agreed that this was not a discussion for the meeting, but was concerned that she hadn't heard a response to the issue since the last meeting.

AL noted that he appreciated the design team's analysis of the landscape because it will play a very important role in tying the museum site to the Washington Monument Grounds. AL asked if the water features in any of the schemes will have a curvilinear element. RA replied that the grading of the site makes shaping the water features difficult.

Thomas Luebke (TL), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, noted that he considered the landscape analysis very thorough and agreed that characterizing the site as a transition zone is appropriate. Regarding the Plinth scheme, TL commented that he thought it was an improvement over the competition design, but he had concerns about the strength of the base. He remarked that the building was fighting the site and that landscaping might mitigate this. Next, TL commented on the Plaza scheme stating that it was more modernist, featuring "pieces within a field." He stated that the corona in this scheme has the best proportions. He had concerns about the location of the corona element on the site because it pushes into the east-west axis of the Mall. He noted that the plaza creates opportunities, but at a certain expense. He remarked that the plaza only episodically frames the Washington Monument Grounds. Regarding the Pavilion Scheme, TL commented that in some ways it is the most comfortable, pure, conservative alternative. However, he thought a more slender and less chunky corona would be better. He noted that this scheme offers the most opportunity for the landscape to mitigate between the building and the site.

Dreck Wilson (DW), ASAALH, remarked that he liked the massing of the Pavilion scheme because he thought it was the most contextual. He noted that this scheme also presents a better "front yard" for the buildings to the north. Regarding the Plaza scheme, DW commented that the plaza is a nice feature and that the open space relates thematically to the "middle passage."

Brenda Sanchez (BS), Smithsonian Institution, noted that the open space in the Plaza scheme will bring a lot of activity to the Constitution Avenue side of the site.

TL responded that the plaza activity may, in fact, be isolated. He questioned whether any other buildings along Constitution are located that close to the street.

SB commented that the altered competition scheme (the Plinth scheme) has been changed for the better. With the other alternatives, SB thought it was nice to have the corona without the plinth. SB commented that the Pavilion scheme almost reads like an innovative office building and that maybe altering the proportions would help. Regarding the Plaza scheme, SB commented that the plaza will be windy and that it also creates a problem with definition of entry. The education wing in the Plaza scheme looks like an ancillary building and has an uncomfortable relationship to the other buildings on Constitution Avenue. SB also had concerns about pushing the corona to the south.

Louise Brodnitz (LB), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, asked if it was necessary for the corona to be square, rather than rectangular. PF responded that the square form is related to the caryatid.

Patsy Fletcher (PFI), AAHGS, asked regarding the Plaza scheme if the two buildings could be flipped. PFI noted that if the plaza was on the south, there might be better pedestrian flow. PF stated that the design team thought the corona would be disconnected from the Mall if the two buildings were flipped.

SB commented that the Pavilion scheme is too static and that the design loses a lot of its power. RA responded that the landscape might alleviate some of the rectilinearity of the scheme.

JSF expressed concern that the Plaza scheme is too introspective and that it doesn't bring life to the Mall.

HD noted that one advantage of the Pavilion scheme is that it opens up a lot of land on the Mall side and on the Constitution Avenue side.

SP noted that there will be two processes going on at the same time – the matrix analysis of the adverse effects of the three alternatives and the continued development of the schemes. SP asked if the design team had any benchmarks for their process. PF responded that the design team has been continuously working on blocking the alternatives and that they should soon have plug-ins to reflect the topography.

SP concluded this portion of the meeting noting that the design team has done a very thoughtful job and that the three schemes foster a real dialogue.

KW noted that he thought the design team did a good job of addressing the concerns raised by the consulting parties.

Citing concerns about the location of the corona and the relationship of the building massing to Constitution Avenue, DJ added that he thought the Plaza scheme was too problematic to warrant further development without critical rethinking.

3. Schedule Review and Matrix Development

SP noted that the next consulting parties meeting will take place on March 17 and that it will be a working meeting to begin development of the adverse effects matrix. The criteria for evaluation used in the matrix will mirror the matrix used for the Tier I EIS evaluation that was developed using National Park Service guidelines.

Judith Robinson (JR), Robinson & Associates, noted that the criteria are good because they evaluate both global and specific issues.

AL commented that the Design Principles need to come into play with the analysis of adverse effects. JR responded that the matrix analysis will be a first step followed by an analysis using the Design Principles.

SP noted that this exercise will help in identifying a preferred alternative and that a template and the Tier I EIS matrix will be on hand for the next meeting for reference.

AL asked if the design team plans to have another iteration of the alternatives before the next consulting parties meeting. Jane Passman (JP), Smithsonian Institution, responded that this may be possible. SP commented that she wants to get the analysis started noting that for the Tier I EIS the process took several months.

JM noted that analysis of the alternatives should be completed before the preferred alternative is taken to the National Capital Planning Commission.

BS clarified that there will be progress documents/sketches available from the design team for the next consulting parties meeting.

4. Next Steps

The Smithsonian Institution in coordination with the EIS/Section 106 consultants will prepare the following handouts for distribution at the next consulting parties meeting: a matrix template for evaluating adverse effects of the three proposed alternatives, copies of the Tier I EIS adverse effects matrix, and progress documents/sketches illustrating the current status of the alternatives.

SP adjourned the meeting at 11:45 am.