

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture  
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #5**

**Date of Meeting:** April 21, 2010  
**Project:** Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture  
**Location of Meeting:** 600 Maryland Avenue, NW – 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
**Time of Meeting:** 9:00 am – 12:00 noon

**Attendees:** Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, AECOM  
Jane Passman, SI OFEO  
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH  
Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office  
Louise Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
Brenda Sanchez, SI OFEO  
Sarah Batcheler, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts  
Ken Walton, National Capital Planning Commission  
Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts  
George Oberlander, National Coalition to Save Our Mall  
Mark Isaksen, National Park Service  
Perry Wheelock, National Park Service  
Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates  
Sharon Park, SI OFEO  
Melissa Hatcher, AECOM  
Elsa Santoyo, SmithGroup  
Peter Cook, Davis Brody Bond Aedas  
Don Hawkins, Committee of 100 on the Federal City  
Christine Saum, National Capital Planning Commission  
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates  
Amy Ballard, SI OFEO  
Kelan Dyer, SI OFEO  
Jud McIntire, SI OFEO

**Objective:** For the consulting parties to be updated on the four alternatives and to complete the matrix exercise as part of the Cultural Resources analysis of effects as outlined in the EIS.

**Meeting Summary**

Sharon Park (SP), SI OFEO, brought the meeting to order at 9:15 am. SP began by asking Perry Wheelock (PW), National Park Service, to introduce her colleague Mark Isaksen. Next SP reviewed the agenda and the objectives of the meeting, noting that there were four alternatives under consideration. SP reiterated that the purpose of the meeting was to thoroughly analyze the potential effects of the four alternatives on cultural resources and to determine which alternatives minimize adverse effects. Identifying further minimization and mitigation will largely occur later in consultation during the process of developing the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). SP noted that feedback from the consulting parties will give guidance to the design team and help identify a preferred alternative.

**1. Presentation of Alternatives**

SP introduced Peter Cook (PC), Davis Brody Bond Aedas. PC stated that his objective was to describe where the design team was at the time of the last consulting parties meeting and where they are today

in the design concept phase, noting that his presentation would be very brief because of the full agenda. He commented on the importance of going back to review the comments made at the last consulting parties meeting. Comments the design team responded to included making the model available, generating viewshed analyses, and integrating the Bulfinch Gateposts into the model and renderings.

Next PC presented each of the four alternatives, highlighting what has changed since the last meeting. In the Plinth Scheme not much has changed. The corona element measures 118' feet to the top of the angled elements of the corona and aligns with the National Museum of American History on the north and south. The porch element, which aligns with the base of the National Museum of Natural History on the south, is also consistent with the setbacks of the museum buildings along the National Mall.

In the Plaza Scheme, the siting, bulk, and massing have not changed. The corona element is in alignment with the steps of the National Museum of Natural History. The heights and internal arrangements are similar to what has been presented before.

In the Pavilion Scheme, the corona was originally lower and had a wider footprint. The design team explored modifying the scheme to make it more pure. Changes included moving the corona back to the center of the site, increasing the height, and reducing the footprint. PC noted that in this scheme, 50% of the program is below grade whereas the other schemes have 35-40% of the program below grade. One challenge to having so much program below grade is how to bring in natural light.

In the Blended Scheme, the corona is pushed south but remains in alignment with the National Museum of Natural History. Some of the program is brought above grade by lifting up the landscape at the northwest corner of the site. This element, which is currently the cafeteria, opens up viewsheds and allows natural daylight to filter in.

SP thanked PC and asked if there were questions or points of clarification.

Louise Brodnitz (LB), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, asked for clarification as to what scheme was changed since the last meeting. PC clarified that at the last meeting the design team did not present a "pure" scheme with the corona as a single element that met the setback requirements. LB asked if the Blended Scheme has changed. PC replied that it has not.

Ken Walton (KW), National Capital Planning Commission, asked for clarification of the issues relating to light. PC noted that the design team is working to bring natural light into the museum and to create spaces that allow views out. George Oberlander (GO), National Coalition to Save Our Mall, commented that in a museum type structure natural light is not always an imperative. Brenda Sanchez (BS), SI OFEO, remarked that people need natural light.

PC pointed out that initially the plinth element of the Plinth Scheme was rendered with glazing facing Constitution Avenue and noted that the glazing has been eliminated to accommodate galleries that have now been programmed within that space. Thomas Luebke (TL), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, asked if the plinth element is a full occupied floor. PC confirmed that it is. TL commented that it is hard to argue that the plinth element is a "porch," noting that it is not a light element that extends into the landscape. PC noted that the plinth element can be considered a "porch" on the south.

KW asked if the penthouse on the Pavilion Scheme fills the programmatic needs of the museum or if the design team would have to add additional height. Elsa Santoyo (ES), SmithGroup, replied that the penthouse does not entirely solve the programming issues of the Pavilion Scheme. TL asked if the

penthouse elements house mechanical units. BS replied that they do not. TL noted that as they are currently designed, the penthouse elements feel like additions, noting that the Commission saw them as obtrusive. TL asked if they could be better designed to be symmetrical with the corona so that they do not feel like add-ons.

Sarah Batcheler (SB), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, questioned if the top of the corona at 118' is equivalent to the cornice of the Department of Commerce building. ES replied that it is not. There was additional discussion of the relative building heights of the alternatives.

Christine Saum (CS), National Capital Planning Commission, asked if the penthouse elements can be occupied. The design team replied in the affirmative. Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, noted that all of the penthouse elements are shifted to the north. TL commented that there is a balance to be achieved as to what is below grade and what is in the penthouse elements. TL suggested centering the penthouse elements.

SB remarked that these questions have to do with programming and asked if, from the design team's point of view, each scheme realistically works with the program. She asked for confirmation that the consulting parties were not being shown a scheme that does not belong. BS replied that all of the schemes being evaluated work with the program, but reiterated that the museum wants to avoid putting people below grade. SB asked for verification that all four schemes can be considered viable from a Section 106 standpoint. Jud McIntire (JM), SI OFEO, replied that they are all viable alternatives.

GO noted that if the project is still in the design phase, the program is adjustable.

KW asked about the location of the corona element in the Blended Scheme. BS replied that the Blended Scheme is 127' from the southern edge of the site and the Pavilion Scheme is 179' from the southern edge of the site – about a 50' difference.

PW questioned if the design team has explored moving the program in the Blended Scheme from the northwest corner of the site to the northeast corner. ES replied that the design team is looking into this. SP noted that the more program that is placed on the northeast corner, the more impact there is on the service drive. BS remarked that the idea behind placing the program on the northwest corner was to open up views to the Washington Monument from inside the site and noted that moving program to the northeast would block this view.

Don Hawkins (DH), Committee of 100 on the Federal City, remarked that the penthouse element should be symmetrically placed on the corona to follow the precedent of the other buildings along the National Mall.

CS noted the building heights exceed the 130' recommended height. This was followed by a general discussion of the derivation of the building heights. SP noted that the design team would be advised to double check their dimensions to make sure that there is no problem.

SP thanked everyone for their comments.

## **2. Matrix Analysis**

ES opened up the discussion of the matrix analysis of the alternatives and provided background on the derivation of the viewsheds. ES noted that the viewsheds are a result of the Tier I EIS analysis, discussions with the National Capital Planning Commission, and discussions with the U.S. Commission of

Fine Arts. The viewshed matrix illustrates existing conditions and presents the schemes side by side to simplify comparison.

Judith Robinson (JR), Robinson & Associates, informed the consulting parties that the effects matrix would be populated as comments were given. An electronic version of the matrix would then be distributed to members of the consulting parties, particularly those who were not able to attend the meeting. JR suggested approaching the matrix topic by topic across the spreadsheet.

The first category of the Design Principles for consideration was the General Composition of the National Mall. JR noted that the first item under this category is the most global and deals with the large scale aspects of the L'Enfant and McMillan plans – reservations, principal streets, the National Mall greensward, views, etc. TL questioned if this item was meant as a finding in the introduction of the Design Principles. AL commented that, although global, it was meant as a specific item of the Design Principles to be evaluated. TL asked if the star system should be used during analysis to differentiate between minor, moderate, and major effects. SP replied that the star system could be used, but also requested narrative. LB noted that there was a sentence from the Design Principles missing from the matrix. AL concurred. JR responded that the matrix will be corrected.

The next item for consideration was long views within the National Mall. JR referred people to view number three and view number four on the viewshed matrix, noting that these renderings give a sense of the long views under discussion. ES noted that the trees shown in view number three are those on the National Museum of American History site. TL commented that the alternatives all have a considerable impact on the long views from Madison Drive and that this condition is not conveyed in the viewshed matrix. He noted that there are other points along the drive where the view is not blocked by trees, such as the north side of Madison Drive. AL remarked that the key for this evaluation is the long views, citing the view from the National Gallery of Art as an example. TL requested more renderings documenting the views from within the National Mall landscape and from 17th Street and Constitution. SP noted that the model can also be used for this analysis. SB also commented that she would like to see additional views. DH remarked that the images in the viewshed matrix seem to have been manipulated. ES confirmed that they have not been manipulated; the images were taken in the fall. ES commented that the coverage of the elms along the National Mall is dense. SP asked if, considering the long views looking west, it is fair to conclude that none of the schemes seem to have a major effect due to the tree screening. TL stated that he would disagree. He pointed out that the images in the matrix are backlit, which alters the perceived effect, and reiterated his request for better images. SP noted that she did not want the discussion to get derailed and urged the consulting parties to use the model to evaluate the long views.

AL commented that the Plaza Scheme projects the farthest south on the site and has a major effect on long views. JR explained that the design team tried not to do too many static views and that the model is a good tool for this analysis. SB commented that the discussion has centered on long views from the east looking west and noted that the Commission is also interested in long views from behind the Washington Monument. SB proposed that all of the schemes have an adverse effect because they all impact the long views from behind the Monument. LB disagreed, stating that it was not clear that all the schemes have a major adverse effect. TL remarked on the established center line of the museum buildings along the National Mall, noting that only one scheme respects this hierarchy. Because of this, TL argued that three of the four schemes (excluding the Pavilion Scheme) should get three stars. AL asked for thoughts on comparing the Blended Scheme with the Plinth Scheme. Allowing that the Plaza Scheme has a three star effect because of how far south it extends on the site, he commented that he can't discern the difference between the Blended and Plinth schemes. AL questioned whether the

setback of the plinth element in the Plinth Scheme made it comparable, in terms of adverse effect, to the Blended Scheme. BS provided distances of the schemes from the corners of the site. There was general discussion regarding the height of the plinth element. AL noted that the Plinth Scheme has less mass projecting south than the Blended Scheme. LB commented that another aspect to look at in terms of long views is the fact that in some of the schemes, the program is separated into two above-grade components. LB suggested that, in order to move the analysis forward, the group identify which scheme is best – has the least adverse effect – for each category in the matrix.

The next item for consideration was distant views from higher locations such as Arlington Cemetery, the Old Post Office tower, the Washington Monument, and from the air. This discussion led to an analysis of panoramic views that open and widen on approach to the Washington Monument Grounds from the National Mall and the Ellipse. JR noted that there are renderings in the viewshed matrix to help with this analysis. SB commented that each of the schemes has equal impact from Arlington Cemetery. AL commented that because of the location of the corona element in the Plaza Scheme, the Plaza Scheme has the greatest impact on panoramic views that open and widen on approach to the Washington Monument Grounds. TL agreed, stating that although all of the schemes have effects on the Washington Monument Grounds, the less protrusion south the better. PW remarked that the landscape treatment will be very readable from the top of the Washington Monument. SB noted that the Plaza Scheme has the most paving. TL noted that the two components of the Plaza Scheme, as well as the plaza itself, read as one mass the farther one gets from the site. SB noted that in evaluating distant views, the four schemes all have equal impact from Arlington Cemetery and from the Old Post Office tower, but different impacts from the Washington Monument and from the air. SB questioned if the water elements in the various landscape schemes will impact the cultural resources of the Washington Monument Grounds. PW replied that it depends on their size, noting that the water element in the Pavilion Scheme is very prominent. CS remarked that it also depends on the character of the water element. In the Plinth Scheme, the water elements are described as being less formal on the north side of the site and more formal on the south side. CS suggested that it should be the other way around to blend with the character of the Washington Monument Grounds and the character of Constitution Avenue. This comment was followed by a general discussion of how the water features have been described by the design team. PW remarked that in general there is a very formal, rectilinear approach to the water elements in all the schemes, which is not compatible with the character of the Washington Monument Grounds.

AL commented on the effects of the penthouse elements on the distant views from high locations, stating that the penthouse elements affect the way the masses of the buildings are perceived from the Old Post Office tower. AL suggested that one way to minimize or avoid adverse effects on the distant views is to modify the treatment of the penthouse elements. This is also key to avoiding effects on the view from the top of the Washington Monument. JR asked if there were comments related to panoramic views from the Ellipse. AL noted that all of the schemes have major impacts on views toward the National Mall from the Ellipse and that the Plaza Scheme is the worst. TL commented that in this respect the best is the Pavilion Scheme and the worst is the Plaza Scheme. SB asked about the distance of the building mass from the south curb in the various schemes. This was followed by a general discussion of the setbacks. AL requested a rendering that illustrates in detail how far each of the schemes extends south.

The next item for consideration was impacts on the cross-axial organization of the National Mall. SB remarked that the Pavilion Scheme has the least adverse effect and that the Plaza Scheme has the greatest adverse effect. SP noted that because the Plinth Scheme is one dimensional, north and south, it has more of an adverse effect relative to relationships with the Washington Monument.

The next item for consideration was the impacts on the “hinge” site. AL questioned if the Plaza Scheme was a negative or positive in terms of how it relates to the hinge. TL questioned if in thinking about the hinge, it was better to have the landscape “wrap” around the building or if it was better to mark a change in the landscape through the placement of an object on the site. AL commented that he didn’t think the Plaza Scheme was successful related to the hinge. SB noted that the view to the Washington Monument created in the Plaza Scheme is not from the corner of 14th Street and Constitution. Rather, the view is from the plaza after you enter the site. CS remarked that no matter the scheme, the “aha!” moment of viewing the Washington Monument from Constitution Avenue is essentially shifted to 15th Street. KW argued that the Plaza Scheme relates to the hinge as a transition because the plaza element actually creates a transitional space between Constitution Avenue and the Washington Monument Grounds. SB remarked that hinge may not be the best word to describe the quality being analyzed; she thinks of the hinge as a sweeping movement across the site. JR described the hinge as a built element between the Washington Monument Grounds and the urban edge. PW referred to the Tier I EIS analysis and noted that alternatives two and four could be regarded as more successful hinge massings. TL commented that he can’t consider a scheme that opens the view to the Washington Monument – such as the Plaza Scheme – to have more of an advantage in terms of the hinge. KW noted that once inside the Plaza Scheme, the view to the Washington Monument is framed, which is an enhancement. LB commented that the Blended Scheme acts more as a hinge. TL disagreed, but noted that it is an issue of semantics. AL noted that in several of the schemes, the north end of the site becomes an important space and questioned why. He noted that this space competes with the Washington Monument Grounds and creates a forecourt to the Department of Commerce building. DW disagreed, stating that the north side of the site could be a vigorous and important space, not just a forecourt to Commerce. LB agreed, stating that a plaza on the urban north side might not be an adverse effect. KW remarked that a north entry might address the NCPC Framework Plan goal for connecting 14th Street. AL commented that he would like to see the “front yard” of the building be on the south side. SB noted that the museum has indicated that 70% of visitors will approach the building from the south and that the main entries are on the south. Because of this, setting up a grand entry plaza on the north may not be the best solution. SB asked if the visitor percentages were based on the way people generally enter Smithsonian museums. JM replied that the numbers were extrapolated from visitor approaches to the National Museum of American History. SB commented that her sense is that the building is going to be a destination museum and that the National Museum of American History is not. Therefore, it might be expected that more than 70% of visitors may approach from the south. There was additional discussion of the studies that have been done on visitor approaches and the orientation of the building. There was additional discussion on the semantics of the “hinge.” ES commented that the design team has studied how the National Gallery of Art caps the east end of the National Mall and is thinking about creating a similar response on the west end. PW noted that the landscape conditions on the east end of the National Mall are very different from the landscape conditions on the west end. She commented that making an “end point” to the National Mall at this site would be an adverse effect. TL reiterated his point that every single building along the National Mall shares a common center line.

The discussion then moved to the second category of the Design Principles – the Context of the Washington Monument Grounds – and impacts on the scale, design character, and preeminence of the Washington Monument. AL commented that the Washington Monument Grounds are curvilinear and picturesque while the structures are very rectilinear. DH noted that the Pavilion Scheme has the least impact. SB remarked that the landscape design of all the schemes follows a singular approach and that it is hard to relate them to the Washington Monument Grounds because none of them do. SB noted that the amount of paving in the landscape design for the Plaza Scheme is a negative effect. TL commented that the Washington Monument Grounds has several free-standing built elements and questioned if it is

easier to imagine a single building sitting on the site – an object within the grounds – rather than something with a more complicated massing. SB noted that several issues/effects can be resolved through landscaping. AL agreed that the landscape design is key to relating the building to the Washington Monument Grounds. AL asked if the water features could become more curvilinear to relate the schemes more successfully with the Washington Monument Grounds. DW noted that water features are foreign to the Washington Monument Grounds and questioned if creating more picturesque water features would really help. AL noted that the water features could relate the formality of the building with the informality of the Washington Monument Grounds. AL commented that the idea of using the water elements to represent the idea of a crossing or passage has potential, but the idea of walking around expanses of formal water elements is less successful. SB noted that in the Pavilion and Blended schemes, the water elements are more formal on the south side and asked if there was a way to reverse this. PW commented that there are many ways to use water elements, but from the perspective of the NPS water poses many challenges. PW suggested integrating water elements into a curved pedestrian system rather than having them act as a barrier. AL noted that one method of avoiding or mitigating adverse effects is to design the landscape to be more compatible with the Washington Monument Grounds. SP questioned if there was a sense that the Blended Scheme achieved fluidity on the site and if it was successful enough to justify moving the corona element south. KW noted that improving the view from Constitution Avenue is a good thing. SB commented that the curved path in the Blended Scheme is successful in that it is harmonious with the Washington Monument Grounds but questioned whether a curved path might be even more successful somewhere else on the site. DH noted that the curved path creates a distinct sense that the north end is the back of the building. KW commented that a visual connection to the Washington Monument Grounds is more important than pedestrian connection. KW noted that having a plaza on the north side of the site creates a successful connection with the Washington Monument Grounds. PW noted that it would be best to see a looser, curvilinear landscape both on the north and on the south. AL noted that in order to achieve that, the building has to be centered on the site. KW commented that if the building is going to be pushed off the center line, it is better to be pushed south rather than north. PW commented that the Blended Scheme has the greatest impact on the Bulfinch Gatepost because the gatepost is located at the apex of the lifted corner of the cafeteria. DH commented that the gateposts reflect the traditional massing of the museums along the National Mall and that the corona deals with massing in an entirely different way.

The discussion then moved to the third category of the Design Principles – the Relationship to Adjacent Architectural and Urban Context. TL noted that the impacts on diagonal, non-cardinal views have already been discussed. The discussion mainly focused on the compatibility of the four facades and the roof, the service/support functions, and the perimeter security to the adjacent architectural and urban context. LB noted that the Plinth Scheme is the most compatible because the plinth element reads as a base and that this relates to the traditional forms – a “temple on a plinth” – that characterize the other buildings along the National Mall. SB disagreed, noting that the plinth element of the Plinth Scheme does not read as base, rather it reads as a porch because it is elevated above the head. TL noted that this site has two contexts to which it must relate – the urban context and the Washington Monument Grounds. LB commented that the way the base of the corona touches the ground is important and that the schemes in which the building rises straight from the ground without a base are less compatible with the adjacent architectural context. TL noted that water elements could potentially be used to integrate perimeter security into the site. SB noted that the schemes that integrate a planting strip between the sidewalk and the loading dock/service entrance are more successful. Having the drive directly adjacent to the sidewalk is not desirable. AL commented that the glass cafeteria component of the Blended Scheme does not relate to adjacent contexts. TL reiterated that for many blocks along Constitution Avenue the setback is free of structures. TL noted that formally, the glass cafeteria component of the

Blended Scheme is very interesting, but it is also unprecedented. AL remarked that, looking north, the cafeteria component of the Blended Scheme creates an artificial mound.

SP noted that the consensus seems to be that the Pavilion Scheme seems to have the least adverse effects and asked for a summary of comments. DH remarked that an essential difference between the building and the museums along the National Mall was that it lacks a sense of permanence and solidity. SP disagreed, stating that she considered the design a 100-year building. SB noted that one issue raised by the Commission relates to the treatment of the west facade. Currently, the schemes treat the west facade, which faces the Washington Monument Grounds, as a side elevation. In fact, the west facade has the biggest exposure to the Washington Monument Grounds. SB noted that this should be addressed in some way without diminishing the idea of the entrance facades. SB commented that the Pavilion Scheme has more ability to do this, while the Plinth Scheme has the least. GO remarked that from the Coalition's point of view, the Pavilion Scheme is the least obtrusive. TL noted that the consensus from the Commission was that the Pavilion Scheme is the most successful. TL commented that there is a real potential to use the landscape design to mitigate some of the issues and integrate the building into the site. SP noted that the team is working on adjusting the penthouse in the Pavilion Scheme to meet programming needs and is working out some of the issues related to getting more light into the lower levels. SB noted that one issue the Design Principles do not discuss is lighting. SP responded that this will be a very important component of the MOA and that lighting will be worked out as a refinement of the preferred alternative.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.

#### **4. Next Steps**

The minutes of the meeting will be transmitted to the design team as soon as possible. The next meeting for the consulting parties will be Wednesday, May 19th, from 9:30am to noon, unless otherwise noted by email.

#### **Action Items**

- The design team will confirm that the height of the building does not conflict with the allowable heights in the District of Columbia.
- The draft effects matrix, filled out in narrative, will be sent to the consulting parties for review and comment.