

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture  
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #6**

**Date of Meeting:** July 28, 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:** 9:30 am – 12:00 noon

**Attendees:** Ann Trowbridge, SI OFEO  
Sharon Park, SI OFEO  
Jud McIntire, SI OFEO  
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH  
Alan Harwood, AECOM  
Ken Walton, National Capital Planning Commission  
Patsy Fletcher, AAHGS  
Jane Passman, SI OFEO  
Brenda Sanchez, SI OFEO  
Perry Wheelock, National Park Service  
Judy Scott Feldman, National Coalition to Save Our Mall  
John Talkington, SI OPS  
Felicia Bell, USCHS  
Sarah Batcheler, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts  
Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office  
Judy Robinson, Robinson & Associates  
Rodrigo Abela, Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol  
Phil Freelon, The Freelon Group  
Hal Davis, SmithGroup  
Peter Cook, Davis Brody Bond Aedas  
Melissa Hatcher, AECOM  
Kelan Dyer, SI OFEO  
Elsa Santoyo, SmithGroup  
Tom Whitley, Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington, D.C.  
Tim Kerr, Robinson & Associates  
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates  
Louise Brodnitz, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
Lynn Chase, NMAAHC  
David Levy, National Capital Planning Commission

**Meeting Summary**

Sharon Park (SP), SI OFEO, brought the meeting to order at 9:35 am. SP began by stating that the design team has accomplished a considerable amount of work over the last two months. She noted that the Smithsonian is very pleased with how the design has evolved and believes that the current concept achieves a high level of minimization.

SP reminded the consulting parties that the design team started with the Plinth, Plaza, and Pavilion alternatives. These alternatives were refined and an additional scheme – the Blended Alternative, was developed. SP noted that at the last consulting parties meeting in May, the design team presented an evolved Blended Scheme, which featured a midblock entrance and two “butterflies” or “clerestories” on Constitution Avenue. SP remarked that the overriding concerns regarding this scheme were the scale

and mass of the corona, blocked views of the Washington Monument and the Federal Triangle, the landscape, and the lack of fluidity across the site. The Smithsonian received a letter dated June 7, 2010, from David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Officer, outlining his concerns about the scheme presented at the May consulting parties meeting. This was followed by a set of coordinated response letters from the D.C. HPO, the NCPC, and the CFA. SP commented that after reviewing consulting parties' comments and the comments put forth in the agency letters, the design team has further refined the design.

### **1. Design Team Presentation**

Phil Freelon (PF), The Freelon Group, began the presentation by noting that the design team has received a lot of feedback and has responded with what he feels is a considerably improved concept that features a reduced mass and footprint, a condensed program, and a more fully developed landscape. As a starting point to the discussion, PF outlined the various comments previously made by the agencies.

Next, Peter Cook (PC), Davis Brody Bond Aedas, discussed the program, providing snapshots of where it was originally and where it currently is with the current scheme. PC explained that the program space has been organized into four categories – public/non-collections space, public/collections space, non-public/collections space, and non-public/non-collections space. PC added that while the baseline program was approximately 356,000 square feet, today the program is significantly smaller at approximately 312,000 square feet. PC noted that the program of the current scheme is about 44 percent above ground and 56 percent below ground.

PF continued by providing an overview of the baseline alternative. It aligned with the centerline of the museum buildings along the National Mall and was located 64 feet from the McMillan setback. The butterfly or clerestory elements were set back 50 feet from Constitution Avenue. Next, PF described the Plaza Scheme. It broke the program into two buildings (with a lower support building along Constitution Avenue), it created a plaza that allowed for pedestrian flow across the site from Constitution Avenue, and it featured an oculus that provided light into the lower concourse level. PF discussed how the agencies asked the design team to investigate the possibility of rotating the corona. PF explained that this was studied and given consideration by the design team, but the consensus was that it was not the strongest idea.

Next PF compared the volume of the baseline alternative with the volume of the current scheme. PF noted that the height of the baseline alternative was 103 feet to the top of the corona and 113 feet to the top of the penthouse. By repositioning some of the programming, the design team was able to reduce the height so that the current scheme measures 83 feet to the top of the corona and 97 feet to the top of the penthouse. The footprint of the baseline alternative was reduced by eliminating some of the circulation space between the corona and the walls of the galleries and by more efficiently designing the core space. PF explained that by doing this, the design team was able to reduce the footprint of the baseline alternative by 17 percent. PF noted that by lowering the height of the corona and condensing footprint, the volume of the current scheme is 34 percent less than the volume of the baseline alternative.

PF noted that while the baseline alternative was in alignment with the other museum buildings along the National Mall, the current scheme is positioned farther south on the site, about 32 feet from the McMillan setback. PF compared this location with the other buildings along the Mall.

PF concluded his section of the presentation with a series of slides illustrating the effects of reducing the volume of the corona on various views. The same set of slides also illustrated the reduced-volume corona with two tiers versus three tiers.

Rodrigo Abela (RA), Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, spoke next and discussed the landscape, explaining the thinking behind the current concept and describing what it will feel like being on the site. First, RA reviewed previous comments made by the consulting parties and the agencies. Next, RA explained how the design team studied the 2003 NCPC concept plan for the Washington Monument Grounds and the elements of this plan were picked up in the current landscape scheme. These elements included the scale and broad sweeping arcs of the paths as well as the gentle topography. RA added that the design team tried to relate the current landscape scheme to the greater context of the Washington Monument Grounds while also embracing and supporting the building.

RA explained that the armature of the landscape design consists of two broad sweeping paths leading from Constitution Avenue – one from 14<sup>th</sup> Street and the other from 15<sup>th</sup> Street. RA described the water features as softer and less rigid. The water feature on the south is slightly angled, pointing toward the Washington Monument and directing people around the building. RA explained that a small stream of water – 12 to 18 inches wide – connects the south water feature with the oculus on the north. The water serves to activate the path with sound and movement. The design team describes the water feature on the north as a rain garden. It serves as part of the site’s stormwater management system. RA added that the site now has a soft, subtle topography with seat walls carved into the landscape. RA described the primary circulation routes through the site, adding that the path from Constitution Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street is the primary entrance to the building. This path will be wider and a different material than the path from 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

RA continued, stating that there is a second layer of smaller canopy trees on the site and that this idea was taken from the NCPC concept plan. The purpose of this second layer of trees is to help create smaller, more intimate seating areas on the site. Trees are used to frame views. There is an area of high-intensity-use lawn around the building as well as dedicated hardscape seating areas. These include an oval-shaped area on the west and an area on the south, which is intended for use by the public and will not be tied to the museum program. The oculus will also have a seating area and features an engraved glass rail. RA concluded by stating that the design team would like to introduce a palate of low shrubs and perennials on the site to help block views, create private, intimate seating areas, and break up the perimeter security.

SP thanked the design team for the presentation and asked for comments and feedback.

## **2. Discussion**

Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, began the discussion by stating that the current concept represents a significant improvement. He added that from a Section 106 standpoint, the reduced volume of the corona takes a step forward in terms of minimizing adverse effects. AL appreciated that the design team looked at a variety of alternatives. He commented on what he saw as other improved features of the current scheme. These included the alignment with the cornice of the Commerce Building, opened views to the Washington Monument, and the elimination of the “butterflies” along Constitution Avenue. AL noted that the site succeeds in connecting with Constitution Avenue, the landscape responds to the topography of the Washington Monument Grounds, and the location of the corona respects the McMillan setback. AL stated that while he was skeptical about moving the corona south, the renderings of views from the National Museum of American History (NMAH) indicate that while the building creates a frame, it is not too far south.

AL asked for a clarification of the treatment of the penthouse, noting that it did not appear in some of the renderings. PF responded that the penthouse will occupy most of the area atop the corona, adding that the best views will be from the west and from the south. AL also asked about the rendering of the oculus, which indicated both a water component and seating. PF stated that the design is still being worked out. AL commented that on the south, the entrance seems limited and may become a choking point. He questioned if another entrance could be provided. PF clarified that the Smithsonian requested a maximum of two entrances and that the entrance is still being developed. PF added that there will also be a staff entrance from the southeast corner of the porch. AL noted that the service entrance is a very prominent feature in the landscape and urged the Smithsonian and the design team to consider sharing a loading dock with the NMAH. AL reiterated that all four sides of the building are important public facades. Hal Davis (HD), SmithGroup, responded by stating that the design team is looking at a variety of possibilities for the service entrance.

Next, Sarah Batcheler (SB), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, provided feedback on the presentation, stating that overall the current scheme represents a big step forward. SB called attention to the fact that the Commissioners preferred the scheme in which the corona was aligned with the centerline of the museum buildings along the National Mall. She noted, however, that with the reduction in volume, moving the building to the south doesn't seem to have as much of an impact. SB also asked for more information on the penthouse.

SB commented on the successful aspects of the current scheme. She noted that the current scheme distills the essence of the original design idea, the landscape is much improved, and the water features are less formal. SB added that on the south the geometry of the path from 15<sup>th</sup> Street is awkward and that the junction of the two paths on the north needs further study.

Ken Walton (KW), National Capital Planning Commission, commended the design team for addressing the issues previously brought up by the NCPC and added that he is happy with the progress made up to this point. KW added that the current landscape scheme is a better solution for the site, but asked for more information on the penthouse and further study of sharing the NMAH service entrance.

Perry Wheelock (PW), National Park Service, commented that the NPS is pleased to see a reduction in volume, but asked for more analysis of how the corona relates to the facades of the other museum buildings along the Mall in terms of setbacks. PW added that she is especially concerned about the porch element. PW asked if the security line along 15<sup>th</sup> Street could be moved farther in on the site. PW observed that the NCPC concept plan illustrates a solid row of street trees along Madison Drive and along 15<sup>th</sup> Street. PW urged the design team to maintain eye-level views across the site, expressing concern that the introduction of shrub layers might cut off these sightlines. PW requested that if shrubs are used that they are tightened up and kept close to the building rather than along the perimeter. SB added that if the shrubs are intended to hide the perimeter security, they will have to be taller than the security feature, which may interfere with sightlines.

David Levy (DL), National Capital Planning Commission, added that the NCPC staff is very pleased to see the changes and improvements that have been made to the design.

Judy Scott Feldman (JSF), National Coalition to Save Our Mall, agreed with previous comments that the shift south and the reduced volume are improvements. JSF added that the landscape design makes a good attempt at creating places for people to gather, but questioned whether the Smithsonian will permit public gathering in these places. SP responded by stating that she believes the space around the building will be open 24/7. JSF clarified that she was referring to permitted activities. Louise Brodnitz

(LB), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, stated that she thought the use of the grounds should be formalized. (LB clarified her remarks in an electronic mail message dated August 11, 2010. She stated that the site has traditionally been the location of permitted events. By “formalizing” its use, she meant that it should be made clear whether permitted events will be allowed on the site. If, as a result of the construction of NMAAHC, permitted events would no longer take place on the site, then that change in land use should be evaluated as any adverse effect would be and consulted on regarding potential resolution of any adverse effect.)

JSF commented that she reviewed the agency letters, noting that it was clear to her that the agency concerns generate quick action by the Smithsonian and the design team. She questioned the number of meetings that have not included public involvement. JSF stated two issues that particularly interest the Coalition – the definition of the museum site and the soil conditions of the Washington Monument Grounds. JSF asked the consulting parties to take up these issues, adding that the ACHP declined to take up the issue of the definition of the site when it was presented to them by the Coalition. JSF added that George Washington University is sponsoring an “ideas competition” for which the Washington Monument Grounds are defined as between 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> streets and between Constitution and Independence.

LB stated that the ACHP had responded to the Coalition’s concerns in a letter that she hoped addressed the issue of the definition of the site in the context of the design of the museum building. LB explained that if the Coalition had pragmatic concerns about the NMAAHC project as it relates to the site, the ACHP supported bringing them up with the consulting parties. However, the ACHP’s position is that the abstract idea of how the site is defined is already being addressed in the NMAAHC Section 106 process.

SP responded to the comments made by JSF by stating that interim meetings with the Smithsonian and the agencies were necessary for the preparation of presentation materials. SP added that she feels the process has been open and transparent. JSF commented that the definition of the site and the soil conditions are not issues that the consulting parties should let stand. SP noted that the Keeper of the Register defines the boundaries of the historic site. SP reiterated that the design principles, upon which the assessment of effects are based, were written to encompass the character-defining features of the Washington Monument Grounds, the National Mall, and the greater urban context including the Federal Triangle. SP added that in this sense, it does not matter what the boundaries are because none of the character-defining features will be overlooked. SP clarified that geotechnical studies are underway and that the Smithsonian is absolutely committed to protecting the Washington Monument. JSF noted that the Coalition is not concerned with the effects of the museum building on the Washington Monument Grounds, rather it is concerned with the status of the soils under and around the Monument. JSF added that the condition of the soils is a critically important historical issue and that the Section 106 process for the museum should be broadened to include it. LB disagreed, stating that the issue can be taken up with the ACHP, but should not be part of the NMAAHC Section 106 process. JSF agreed to take up the issue with the ACHP.

Patsy Fletcher (PFI), AAHGS, commented that she is pleased that the corona is no longer a behemoth and that the water features are less symmetrical. PFI added that the landscape appears open and inviting. PFI noted that at the beginning of the process, there seemed to be consensus that underground programming be avoided. PFI asked to hear the Smithsonian’s opinion about the amount of underground programming being considered. Lynn Chase (LC), NMAAHC, replied that the museum is comfortable with where the building currently is in terms of its size and the amount of underground space. She added that the design team is still considering ways to bring light into the concourse level.

SP added that another design issue being worked out involves the proportionality of the tiers of the corona. She added that the height might be lifted slightly to allow more freedom in the programming and that this will be done without additional impacts. SB noted that the presentation showed a corona with two tiers and a corona with three tiers and that the latter seems to work better. PF clarified that the design team is currently in the process of studying the height and the proportion of the corona. AL added that the porch element will have to be revised as decisions are made about the height of the corona. PF noted that the consensus seems to be that a three-tiered corona is preferable. JSF questioned if there had been any thought given to varying the height of the tiers to compensate for distortion due to parallax views.

Dreck Wilson (DW), ASAALH, asked if the total square footage of the Plaza Scheme included both structures, the corona and the support building. PC clarified that it did, stating that all of the original schemes, including the Plaza Scheme, were an attempt to contain the original program requirements. DW asked if the landscape model could be brought to the next meeting. RA confirmed that it could. DW encouraged the design team to make the 14<sup>th</sup> Street service entrance disappear, stating that it does a disservice to the east edge of the corona and to the pedestrian experience along 14<sup>th</sup> Street. DW asked if there was pedestrian circulation around the north water feature. RA explained that there is pedestrian circulation on the north along Constitution Avenue, along the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Street paths, and to a certain extent from the lawn south of the rain garden. DW commented on the scale and proportionality of the bridge over the south water element and asked the design team to take a further look at this feature. DW concluded by stating that he would like to see sculpture incorporated into the site. LC commented that the NMAAHC is actively collecting sculpture and that the museum also likes the idea of using it on the site. LC added that although there has not been specific talk about it, the idea is on their radar. LC noted that currently the museum is more focused on creating story-telling areas on the site. DW replied that sculpture can create spots on the site to gather and that there doesn't have to be a distinction. RA added that with the reduction in the footprint of the corona, the spaces in which to put landscape elements, such as sculpture, are greatly improved. JSF reiterated that maintaining public access to the site is critical and agreed that sculpture can be used to create intimate and powerful gathering spaces.

PFI asked what would be etched on the glass surrounding the oculus. PF replied that this is a curatorial issue that the design team can not yet specifically address. PW added that the NPS has considerable experience with outdoor sculpture and that etched bas-relief (e.g. at the World War II Memorial) works better than etched text.

Felicia Bell (FB), USCHS, commented that she initially liked the "supersized" corona and added that she was concerned about the reduction in program and the amount of underground space. She noted, however, that she was reassured to hear that the curators are happy with the programming. FB appreciated that the landscape and site is being looked at as museum space that can be used for music, dance, and the performing arts. She added that the water features are welcoming and that she is glad to see more green space on the site.

KW asked about the status of the cooling tower. PF clarified that it will still be on the site. Brenda Sanchez (BS), SI OFEO, noted that the cooling tower is being studied in various ways.

### **3. Update on Effects Matrix**

Judy Robinson (JR), Robinson & Associates, began the discussion of the effects matrix by stating that it is a tracking tool for the Section 106 process. JR noted that the matrix has been used successfully to identify adverse effects and minimization, which the design team has folded into the current scheme. JR clarified that comments on the current scheme will be added to the matrix and that it will be posted to

the SmithGroup sharepoint site. The consulting parties were encouraged to review the matrix and submit additional comments after the meeting.

JR pointed out changes to the matrix since the last consulting parties meeting. The Plaza Scheme was added and evaluated based on the design principles, and the star values – used to demonstrate magnitude of effect – were edited based on previous feedback. JR noted that minimization included revising the penthouse, reducing the volume, improving views of the Washington Monument, and improving the relationship between the landscape design and the Washington Monument Grounds. JR encouraged the consulting parties for additional comments on the current scheme for integration into the matrix.

DW noted that he finds the matrix to be a useful tool and questioned if it would be included in the EIS. SP responded that it will be included in the appendix. Alan Harwood (AH), AECOM, confirmed this and clarified that the analysis will also be incorporated into the narrative of the EIS. SB commented that she finds the matrix to be wordy and requested the analysis be condensed into an executive summary. AH noted that it is important as a stand-alone document as a record of the Section 106 process. AL agreed with SB that he would like to see a summary comparing the different schemes.

JSF commented that all of the schemes could potentially have less impact if the site is considered part of the National Mall rather than the Washington Monument Grounds. SP noted that it has always been agreed that a building on this site would have adverse effect. JR added that the Smithsonian's legal charge under Section 106 is to use National Register documentation as a basis for identifying effects.

JR concluded the discussion of the matrix by stating that it will be updated and made available for distribution and review.

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

SP announced that the next consulting parties meeting will be on September 15<sup>th</sup> and that the revised and updated effects matrix will be discussed at this time. SP noted that the Smithsonian will be presenting the current scheme to the NCPC on September 2<sup>nd</sup> and to the CFA on September 16<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 am.

#### **Action Items**

- The design team will investigate alternatives to the 14<sup>th</sup> Street service entrance.
- The design team will study the proportion and height of the corona.
- The design team will study the junction of the paths on the north side of the site.
- The design team will study the southern extension of the 15<sup>th</sup> Street path.
- Robinson & Associates will add running headings to the effects matrix and incorporate comments on the current scheme.