

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #1**

Date of Meeting: November 18, 2009
Project: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Location of Meeting: 600 Maryland Ave, NW – 7th Floor
Time of Meeting: 9:30 am – 12:00 noon
Purpose of Meeting: Section 106/Consulting Parties Meeting #1

Attendees: Hal Davis, SmithGroup
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH
Brenda Sanchez, Smithsonian Institution
Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates
Brian Sieling, SI/NMAAHC
Elsa Santoyo, SmithGroup
Martha Catlin, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Judy Scott Feldman, National Coalition to Save Our Mall
Amy Ballard, Smithsonian Institution
Doug Jacobs, National Park Service
Perry Wheelock, National Park Service
Stephanie Dyer-Carroll, EDAW
David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Harry Rombach, Smithsonian Institution
Patsy Fletcher, AAHGS and D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Jud McIntire, Smithsonian Institution
Felicia Bell, U.S. Capitol Historical Society
Kenneth Walton, National Capital Planning Commission
Christine Saum, National Capital Planning Commission
Jane Passman, Smithsonian Institution
Lynn Chase, Smithsonian Institution
Nancy Witherell, National Capital Planning Commission
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates
Zena Howard, The Freelon Group
Sharon Park, Smithsonian Institution
Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
Sarah Batcheler, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
David Adjaye, Adjaye Associates
Phil Freelon, The Freelon Group
Rodrigo Abela, Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol

Meeting Summary

Sharon Park (SP), Smithsonian Institution, brought the meeting to order, reviewed the objectives of the meeting, and provided an overview of the agenda. Introductions were made by all participants.

1. Presentation by Architectural Team

Philip Freelon (PF), The Freelon Group, opened the architectural team's presentation by providing background on the project, which he described as the District's "project of the century." PF spoke of the sense of openness in the design and the idea of the building as a

“knuckle” between the contextual commemorative zones. On behalf of the design team, he expressed interest in continued Consulting Parties discussion and input.

David Adjaye (DA), Adjaye Associates, presented the key principles that guided the development of the competition design. DA spoke of the design team’s effort to identify the “guiding DNA” or “founding molecules” that embody the transformation experienced by the African American culture. Important design references were illustrated in a mosaic of images. One important source was the caryatid element traditionally used in the architecture of Central and West Africa. The design’s “corona” embodies this reference and serves as a link between the diaspora and their African heritage. DA spoke of the deeply spiritual character of the African American culture and used the image of a dancing figure with upheld arms to capture the motifs of triumph, celebration, and hope. Patterns and stripes and a porch element are incorporated into the design as a reference to the agrarian origins of the African American journey.

DA described the contextualism of the design stating that, in principal, it is a podium building that does not obstruct the link between the urban edge and the pastoral Mall. Compositionally, the design is a rectangle that serves as an articulated end point to the series of monumental buildings along the Mall. DA noted that building alignments were generated by the lines that extend through the Mall site. DA explained that while the edification model with its elevated steps was used for other monumental buildings along the Mall, this design acknowledges the values of transparency and openness.

Rodrigo Abela (RA), Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, followed with a brief presentation about the design’s landscape elements and a description of how they are integrated into the site. RA noted that the mass of the building is set back behind the “porch” element, which is elevated to lend transparency at the ground-floor level. The west side of the building is pulled in to create a transition area between the building site and the open Mall. RA noted that the south porch opens up onto reflecting pools. RA highlighted the fact that the design features a “working landscape” that contributes to the building’s sustainability.

DA continued the discussion of the building’s efficiency, describing how the “corona” – essentially a perforated screen – acts as an energy-efficient double façade system. DA noted that he thought this would be the first LEED certified building on the Mall.

DA finished with a floor-by-floor description of the design. Below grade are located loading docks and service areas. At the ground level is the “great room,” which serves as a gateway place or public square area. The grade change at this level is handled by a gentle incline, and a “petrified forest of timbers” accentuates the space. The mezzanine level wraps around the great room and is the location of a café and offices, among other uses. Circulation spirals around the content, contributing to the “journey experience” of the visitor. A series of seven “lenses” frame views from the building and also act as orientation elements.

The architectural team’s presentation concluded with a viewing of an animated “fly through” video of the competition design. The presentations were greeted with applause.

SP thanked the architectural team, suggested a 10 minute break, and described the second half of the meeting as a discussion of the Design Principles and a chance for the architectural team to get preliminary input from the Consulting Parties.

2. Presentation of the Design Principles and Discussion of Areas of Consideration

SP opened the second half of the meeting and introduced speakers David Maloney, Perry Wheelock, and Tom Luebke.

David Maloney (DM), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, explained that rather than going through the Design Principles point by point, he would generally respond to the design description. DM stated that he agreed with the characterization of the project as the “building of the century.” DM expressed concern that from a practical standpoint the site chosen for the museum was not a good location for a major national museum. The site is within the Washington Monument grounds and is erroneously characterized as a “transitional” or “knuckle” site between the Mall and the monument grounds. DM observed that the best architecture on the Mall doesn’t overpower. Rather, what is important is the overall effect of the unified composition of buildings. DM described how the Washington Monument site follows the “temple in landscape” tradition and that it is important to see the obelisk in its iconic three-quarter view. DM noted that the “founding molecules” identified by the architectural team – the caryatid, porch, etc. – are ultimately derived from a humanistic tradition and urged DA not to use Classical, rationally-oriented derivatives. There is precedent on the Mall – with its Egyptian and Gothic Revival buildings, among others – for “human oriented” architecture. DM encouraged the architectural team to think creatively about the alternative designs.

Perry Wheelock (PW), National Park Service, provided background on the National Park Service and its role in the preservation of landscapes. PW mentioned that the NPS deals extensively with both designed and vernacular landscapes. The landscape of the Washington Monument grounds is characterized by simple ground planes, strong vertical elements (primarily elm trees), and no shrub layer. PW urged the architectural team to review the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) prepared for the Washington Monument grounds by the National Park Service.

Tom Luebke (TL), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, reminded the architectural team that the comments they would be hearing from the Consulting Parties were a culmination of much debate and discussion over the period of a year and that the Design Principles are an encapsulation of these discussions. TL indicated that there are enormous contextual forces at play with this site and the building has an enormous spatial burden to carry. TL was concerned that the relationship between the building and the Washington Monument is not in any way explicit. It is a north-south oriented building and could be located anywhere. The design should in some way recognize the monument. TL concluded by urging the architectural team to look more closely into the specific issues related to context.

SP summarized certain key issues – visitor experience, the 14th Street entrance, movement through the site to the Washington Monument grounds, full vertical views of the Washington Monument, set backs – and opened up the meeting to additional comments.

Dreck Wilson (DW), Association for the Study of African American Life and History, was concerned about the concept of spirituality as it related to the water features and voyage. DW requested the designers to more dynamically and more profoundly include the element of water. DW was concerned about the building’s monochromatic scheme.

DA responded by stating that they worked with a way of understanding materials and texture as a driver of color, or “color atmospheres.” DA also noted that the building would be seen through a refraction of light.

Martha Catlin (MC), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, complemented the architectural team on the presentation. MC clarified the consideration of alternatives – stating that alternatives

are studied to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects. MC indicated that this is the heart of S106 consultation and is not an empty exercise. Rather, the process is a matter of thoughtfully taking into consideration the views of those who have dedicated much time and thought to the project. MC requested DA to identify for the Consulting Parties those elements of the competition design that are critical and essential. SP suggested that this be part of the January forum.

Judy Scott Feldman (JF), National Coalition to Save Our Mall, pointed out the significant features of the Mall landscape including open space, views, and symbolism. JF stressed that Save Our Mall was interested in the ideals of the McMillan Commission plan for the Washington Monument and distributed a booklet on “A Vision for the National Mall.” JF was concerned about the size of the design and asked that the open space characteristic of the site be given preference. JF requested clarification of the “lens” concept, questioning if the corona blocked views from the building. JF acknowledged the National Park Service CLI and noted that Save Our Mall recently completed a five-year study of the Mall from the citizen’s prospective.

Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, noted that he found the front porch element exciting and echoed the comments previously made by MC about Section 106 compliance.

Patsy Fletcher (PF), Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society and D.C. Historic Preservation Office, was concerned about the design’s massing and suggested that it could be less intrusive. PF echoed the comment made earlier by DW that the design seems monochromatic.

Judd McIntire (JM), Smithsonian Institution, indicated that he enjoyed the “fly through.”

Felicia Bell (FB), U.S. Capitol Historical Society, indicated that she is warming up to the design, although it makes her think more about Africa than America. FB reiterated earlier comments about the water features, suggesting that it be agitated and not complacent. FB noted that she would like to see the design be open and welcoming and not convey power and authority.

Kenny Walton (KW), National Capital Planning Commission, was concerned about the issues of setback, height, and views. KW indicated that the “corona” blocks views of the Washington Monument from the intersection of 14th Street and Constitution and urged the architectural team to minimize this effect as best as possible.

Christine Saum (CS), National Capital Planning Commission, reinforced the comments that the Consulting Parties want to see alternatives and that the site is not a “hinge,” but on the Washington Monument grounds. CS suggested a less formal approach on the Washington Monument side of the building. CS was concerned that the project was already a well-developed “house of cards” and questioned if elements could be changed or modified in the alternatives.

Nancy Witherell (NW), National Capital Planning Commission, indicated that she was struck by the agreement heard among the comments. NW agreed with earlier comments that there should be a less formal water element. NW reiterated the importance of the vernacular character of the Washington Monument grounds.

Sarah Batcheler (SB), U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, was excited to be engaging with the design team. SB noted that the design felt insular and did not agree with the characterization of the building as engaging. SB urged the design team to identify the essence of the building that could not be changed.

PF presented the architectural team's next steps and indicated that they will continue with the NEPA/S106 review process, continue with program verification, and start with conceptual design and three alternatives.

DA indicated that the architectural team sought to make a humanist architecture and concluded that, as they proceed, the team will wrestle with the concerns brought forward by the Consulting Parties.

3. Closing

SP announced that the Tier II Scoping Meeting would be held on December 10, 2009, from 5:30 to 8:30 at the Smithsonian Castle. SP noted that there would not be a Consulting Parties Meeting in December, but the group would reconvene on January 20, 2010, with a review of the public meeting and a progress report on the development of alternatives.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.