

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
NCPC File No. 6331

June 22, 2010

Ms. Sharon Park  
Historic Preservation Officer  
Smithsonian Institution  
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 5001  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012

Dear Ms. Park:

Thank you for convening the June 8, 2010 meeting to discuss concerns raised by David Maloney, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) regarding the National Museum of African American History and Culture. We appreciate the Smithsonian's interest in addressing these matters at this stage in the museum design development. At the meeting, Mr. Maloney reiterated and underscored several points about adverse effects previously raised by other parties to the Section 106 consultation process for the Museum. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) staff recognizes that the Smithsonian is obligated to respond to these points in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act to facilitate the project's progress and to address adverse affects upon the qualities of the site and its surroundings. We also share some of the SHPO's concerns.

Following the June 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Smithsonian decided to defer submission of the concept design to NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts in order to respond to the SHPO's concerns. NCPC staff supported this decision in part because early resolution of broad Section 106 matters is critical in saving time in the project schedule as a whole. NCPC staff also committed to hosting a meeting with the State Historic Preservation Officer and the staffs of the National Park Service and the Commission of Fine Arts to discuss the SHPO's concerns and to facilitate and coordinate additional comments from these parties for use by the Smithsonian's design team. NCPC convened this meeting on June 16, 2010.

Themes common among the parties at our meeting included concern for unresolved broad design principles that would be best resolved prior to a formal public concept submission. These are:

1. The position of the proposed building mass on the site in relation to the adjacent buildings along the National Mall, the Washington Monument grounds, and the Constitution Avenue frontage generally.
2. The position of the proposed building masses on the site in relation to well-established reciprocal views between the Federal Triangle and the Washington Monument. The museum's placement and the design itself must respond to and allow for the important visual and spatial relationships between the Washington Monument and the Federal

Triangle. This does not diminish the importance of the building's need to respond to the primary Mall axis, as well.

3. The relationship of the proposed building mass to the topography and character of the Washington Monument Grounds. The relative lack of development of the landscape plan prevents us from understanding the relationship of the proposed museum to the surrounding landscape, and the ability of the landscape to ameliorate the perceived disconnect between the museum design and the Monument grounds. The landscape plan should be developed further and better integrated with both the building mass and the character of the setting.
4. The proposed pedestrian circulation to, through and within the museum site. The museum and its site design should accommodate the natural flow of pedestrians between Constitution Avenue and the Washington Monument Grounds and the monument itself. The currently proposed raised corners in the grounds at Constitution Avenue restrict such movement, prevent the visual approach and physical ascent to the monument from key locations at the corner of the Grounds, and are incompatible with both the naturalistic character of the Grounds and the more formal lawns of the Constitution Avenue museums.

We recommend that the Smithsonian consider a range of design responses to address the SHPO's stated concerns. The meeting participants felt that the project would benefit from further study of additional changes to the building's position on the site and to the building's geometry. NPS and CFA staff at the meeting expressed support for this further exploration while emphasizing that the project must also respond to the symbolic design of the National Mall. Further study will shed light on how these can both be accomplished.

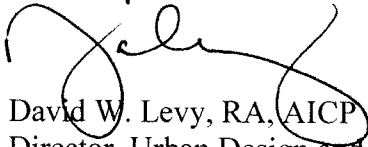
As the Smithsonian proceeds to consider design changes at this point, the group thought that the following additional information would assist the Smithsonian and the review bodies in analyzing the proposals:

1. The location of the 445' setback line from the center panel of the Mall marked on each of the site plans for all alternatives.
2. Additional pedestrian level views as the concept is modified that demonstrate the effects of the museum on the National Mall and Constitution Avenue, views and circulation between the Washington Monument and the Federal Triangle.

As a group we believe that the Smithsonian, by responding now to the identified adverse effects determined through technical analysis and review by the consulting parties will both minimize harm to the views and symbolic landscape of this important and historic setting while significantly furthering the goal we all share, which is to succeed with a design for the museum building that will be fully commensurate with the physical and symbolic qualities of the site.

We look forward to our continued close collaboration on this most important project. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Ken Walton at (202) 482-7261 or [ken.walton@ncpc.gov](mailto:ken.walton@ncpc.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Levy", written over a circular stamp or seal.

David W. Levy, RA, AICP  
Director, Urban Design and Plan Review