

## Introduction

The design of the new building provides an exciting opportunity to respond to the symbolic landscape and uniqueness of this nationally significant site. The original Washington Monument site, of which this five acres is a part, is not just a grassy carpet. It is a site characterized by both landscape and architectural elements. The larger Washington Monument site is defined by hard boundary road edges to the grassy turf, the articulation of rising slopes that form the mound of the Monument's base shaft, the crisp geometry of the shaft of the Monument, and the intertwined elliptical approach paths to the monument. The site is given a naturalistic character by the groves of trees around the site, the tucking of the Sylvan Theater into the site and the small scale of the architectural elements in and near the monument, such as the gate posts and the two stone lodges. The portion of the former Monument site that is the NMAAHC site is also characterized by hard edges for the roads and sidewalks as well as the grove of trees at 14<sup>th</sup> and Constitution that form a softened and screened gateway vista to the Washington Monument. The site is bordered by the urban context of the Federal Triangle complex. It is seen from the White House, President's Park, Ellipse, and other points as part of the built urban edge. It is seen from above from the Old Post Office tower. The site is part of a larger urban context of the City of Washington which is defined by monumental civic architecture, generally with a uniform height limit.

**DESIGN PRINCIPLES:** The building should respond to these aspirational principles:

- 1. Urban Design Principle:** The NMAAHC building will be part of a visual chain, framework, or necklace of individual buildings along the Mall, the Ellipse and President's Park and Federal Triangle. It will be a building set off by its unique landscape, seen from all directions and, therefore should be jewel-like in its quality of expression.  
Goal:
  - The building, in massing, setback, height, configuration and form, should respect the context of the site. The historic setting, the open landscape, the urban environment, and the surrounding buildings of a variety of scales, heights and materials provide an exciting opportunity for this building, both inside and outside, to be part of the past as well as visionary for the future.
- 2. Historic and Cultural Resource Protection Principle:** The vista of the Mall between the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building is of itself iconic, and therefore the building should be respectful of the double row of elm trees separating the existing buildings from the greensward of the Mall and stay visually behind this screen.  
Goals:
  - Establish an indirect correspondence to the Washington Monument, with a design that is expressive of the inherent values of the museum yet not detracting from the iconic dominance and stature of the Monument.
  - Acknowledge the hinge aspect of the location at the intersection of two major axes—the ceremonial 14<sup>th</sup> St. gateway and the Mall between the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building.
  - Provide a transition to the Monument grounds, such as a tree buffer.
- 3. Visitor Use and Access Principle:** The building will celebrate, as an expression of civic art, which changes over time but has a lasting place in history, the linkages with symbols of democracy, history, open space, and freedom of expression. The structure should be

appropriately stately and formal, yet should invite active use of the site as part of the civic culture of the museum and the City.

Goals:

- Explore opportunities for landscaping and integration of outdoor programmed space, including use of the topography.
- Establish safe, clear visitor access routes.

4. **Functional Principle:** As a stellar 21<sup>st</sup> century museum building, the building will utilize best sustainable practices and incorporate security design with all elements projecting a welcoming environment for the visitor.

Goals:

- Screen service areas and loading from view, preferably below grade.
- Explore innovative ways of providing for the museum's program on the site, and opportunities for connections (physical and symbolic) with the National Museum of American History.