

Final Meeting Notes; NMAAHC Consulting Parties May 20, 2009

Meeting began at 9:10; Present were Dreck Wilson, Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Patsy Fletcher, Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society, Martha Catlin, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Sara Batcheler and Tom Luebke, Commission of Fine Arts, Nancy Witherell and Ken Walton, National Capital Planning Commission, Doug Jacobs, and Perry Wheelock, National Park Service, Judy Feldman, National Coalition to Save Our Mall, Brenda Sanchez, Sharon Park, Curtis Davis, Amy Ballard, Harry Rombach, Jane Passman, and Jud McIntire, Smithsonian. First and last initials used when specific comments are noted below. Highlights listed as captured by notes.

The objective of the meeting was to review the Design Principles in relation to the Freelon Adjaye Bond (FAB) concept design, to determine, through a dialog process, whether or not principles needed to be added, deleted or modified. The design principles were written out on flip charts and notes were made as the discussion proceeded. The revised principles, which will be developed over several meetings, can then be a starting point for discussion with the selected architects when they come under contract in September. Three concept designs need to be developed by the architects for consideration in the EIS. It is anticipated that these three concepts can be a variation on the theme of the original concept with modifications to enhance aspects of the design principles that have not been fully addressed.

Sharon Park (SP) opened the meeting with a review of the last meeting which assessed some of the most obvious similarities and differences of the six competition submissions. This was a good review for those who had missed the meeting. Curtis Davis (CD) presented a set of powerpoint images of close ups of the FreelonAdjayeBond(FAB) model with a more fulsome description of some of the design goals which had been difficult to view from the 11 x 17 printed copies of the competition boards distributed at the last meeting. There was an opportunity to go to the 7th floor during the break to see firsthand the FAB model. The consulting parties have requested that the next meeting be out at the Pennsy Drive storage facility where the other models are stored to have an equal opportunity to review those models and boards. CD mentioned that the Geotechnical studies and Security Studies were being concluded and would be shared with the Consulting Parties later, probably in the July meeting.

The general discussion lead-off by Tom Luebke(TL) recapped from the last meeting that the FAB scheme does have a building that fit with the row of monuments, it is iconic with its corona, the plan works well as a museum building and many of the design principles were adhered to. However the scheme is lacking in a number of elements that can and should be considered as the architects develop alternative concepts. That led to the following discussion:

The FAB submission does not appear to respond to its specific site in a unique way. The building could have been placed on any relatively flat site in an orthogonal plan of the city. The building does not appear to be well integrated to its site, particularly along Madison Avenue. The landscape design objectives are not clear from the material at hand.

There was discussion about the axial layout of the building as very one directional which did not seem to open views from within the building. Perry Wheelock (PW) and others agreed that the FAB submission

does not respond to the transitional hinge nature of the landscape as the site transitions from the formal Mall to the more picturesque Monument grounds.

The FAB submission, while it may have veiled views from the bronze screening elements to directed endpoints, it does not seem to respond to obvious views and vistas identified in earlier analysis. The building appears too inward looking and too private. Some consideration to highlighting diagonal views from the edges of the corona could be investigated. There was agreement among the Consulting Parties that this would be an important advancement in meeting the need to capture these views and vistas.

Sarah Batcheler (SB) reiterated that the projection of the plinth base and corona towards the south does have a visual impact on the long vista down the Mall to the Washington Monument grounds. A shift north of the corona and the shortening of the projecting plinth should be considered. The plinth reinforces the disengagement of this public space from the ground plane as a visual barrier.

PW was concerned that the inability to move freely across the site as a pedestrian due to what appear to be the rigid formality of elements in the landscape. The existing grass field reinforces that this site is part of the original Monument grounds. Integrating pedestrian access to the site is one way to be more responsive to the character of the site.

Martha Catlin (MC) reminded us that the outline of effects on the historic resources is the work of Section 800.4 and 800.5 and that the Consulting Parties ought to be taking a very broad view in terms of reassessing these impacts, making sure that the area of potential effect is still the right boundary, and that we should be looking now at the effects of this and other alternative concept designs. In terms of assessing impacts, the character of Constitution Avenue was looked at.

The response of the Constitution Ave. façade, particularly at grade, could use more consideration of developing a unique entrance based on anticipated pedestrian flow and as a public amenity response for the bookstore and café after hours. Nancy Witherell (NW) of the National Capital Planning Commission was concerned with the very formalized symmetry of the Constitution Ave. central entrance as a response to the future Aquarium entrance across the Avenue. Since this museum is the first structure on Constitution Avenue as one moves east, there is the opportunity to see this building in the context of open green space. This context begins with Constitution Gardens and traverses the wide expanse of open field of the monument. It is recommended that the architects explore the transition from open space to the row of formal buildings along the Avenue. Ken Walton (KW) was concerned with views from the rooftop that seemed to have unclear objectives in terms of incised angular paving elements and impact of roof projections over the central atrium. This treatment seems to draw the eye away from the monument and needs further study. Dreck Wilson (DW) was also concerned about the reciprocal views from the monument to the rooftop of the museum.

The intensity of night time lighting of the museum, as seen in one of the presentation boards, is a concern and will be a general note for any of the alternatives. Also, the shininess of material (if it is to have a shine) will be an important material aspect and this generated some general discussion. PW reiterated that the Washington Monument and the Capitol are and will remain the major night lighted elements with more modest lighting of the other buildings on the mall.

Judy Feldman (JF) requested that the Consulting Parties keep in mind the idea that the McMillan Plan had a formal plaza and landscape design for the Washington Monument which might some day be constructed. The museum design and site, she requested, should be compatible with the potential changes. This museum will be here for a long time and should respond to the goals of the Mall Plan. SP responded that while we can keep these in mind, it may be difficult to anticipate major changes to the Washington Monument in the future and that our design principles are in response to the Area of Potential Effect as outlined through our rigorous process to date. MC asked that the Smithsonian find a way to engage the public more specifically in the work of the Consulting Parties. SP mentioned that there will be more information regarding the public scoping meeting for Tier II early next year, but MC said that more visibility on a website would be helpful and would reflect the good work of the group. SP mentioned that we are working to get something on the museum's website, but it is taking more time than we expected. However, any of the Consulting Parties may publish information regarding the process on their own websites or newsletters. Patsy Fletcher, (PF) said that her group was putting information in their newsletter periodically and getting good response.

Summary: The objectives of the meeting were met in having a dialog with the Consulting Parties and with suggestions of ways that the architects can consider refining the design concept selected by the Smithsonian. The critical areas for consideration are better site integration, reduction of intrusion into the viewscape from the Capitol Building down the Mall, enhanced views and vistas from within the building, and context study along Constitution Avenue. The next meeting will be in Landover, Maryland at the Smithsonian's Pennsy Drive facility on June 17th from 9:30-12:00 with vans leaving from 600 Maryland Avenue around 9:00. Instructions and signups will be sent to the members of the Consulting Parties.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15.