

Draft minutes; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Consulting Parties' meeting
June 17, 2009

Meeting began at 9:30 at the Pennsy Drive site of the Smithsonian Institution; Present were David Maloney and Andrew Lewis, DC Historic Preservation Office; Dreck Wilson, Association for the Study of African American Life and History; Patsy Fletcher, Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society; Sara Batcheler and Tom Luebke, Commission of Fine Arts; Ken Walton, National Capital Planning Commission; Peter May, National Park Service; George Oberlander, National Coalition to Save Our Mall; Brenda Sanchez, Sharon Park, Curtis Davis, Jane Passman, and Jud McIntire, Smithsonian. First and last initials used when specific comments are noted below.

The meeting objective was to work on refining the Design Principles by reviewing the competition models to extract characteristics that illustrated successful measures in order to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse affects on cultural resources.

The meeting began with an announcement that Curtis Davis, Project Executive, would be relocating to Houston, Texas, and would be leaving the Smithsonian at the end of the month. Thanks were issued for all of his hard work over the last two plus years and a unanimous response was issued that he would be very much missed by the Consulting Parties. Jud McIntire was introduced as the successor Project Executive. Jud, an architect with the Smithsonian, comes with a strong background in project management for the Office of Planning and Project Management.

The first item of discussion was to gain a better understanding of the expectations of the reviewing agencies as to what constitutes alternative concept designs. David Maloney reminded the group that the requirement for distinct concept alternatives is a legal requirement through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The design architects should be instructed to look at creative alternatives to respond to the Design Principles and to find resonance with characteristics of the site and urban context. The three concept proposals should not be simple modifications to the existing scheme but should be conceptually different on issues such as scale, massing, orientation, and/or detailing. Evaluation of the alternatives should seek to avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse effects on historic resources, an objective of the Section 106 review that is being done concurrently with the EIS.

It was decided that two documents would be helpful for the architects. First would be to refine the Design principles to reflect specific characteristics and secondly to develop a narrative that would elaborate on approaches to respond more specifically to the site and context. It was requested that the Consulting Parties have an early meeting with the architects as soon as they are under contract since they only have 12 weeks to develop these alternatives.

The Consulting Parties spent the bulk of the remainder of the meeting looking at the five models and how their concepts responded to the Design Principles. Ken Walton led the discussion based on his work since the last meeting to identify character-defining aspects of each submittal. Each project was discussed in terms of how well it integrated the site into the design, made overtures to enhancing

desirable views and vistas, how the massing and location on the site responded to the unique hinge and topographic qualities of the site, and how the public would arrive at, enter or traverse the site and building. These elements will be expanded upon in a narrative document.

There was quite a bit of discussion regarding how the concepts responded to the “hinge” nature of the site. The schemes that were tight to the orthogonal grid at 14th and Constitution but looser in form or landscape on 15th and Madison Drive seemed to have a more positive effect. Another issue was public access across the site. Schemes that had hard wall landscapes and to some extent deep sunken features often created more of a barrier to public access than those that allowed the gentle slope to remain accessible. A third area was that of entrance, particularly from the corner of 14th and Constitution Ave. where it is thought that many of the public would arrive. One thought is to have more specific analysis of pedestrian traffic flow. A fourth area was enhanced views and vistas from the site and various vantage points in and through the models. Ones that made overtures towards the monument were thought to be of interest, yet it was important not to have too dramatic a feature.

The Consulting Parties would like the Smithsonian to consider a mechanism for involving more of the public in an engaged way for assessing the alternative concept designs. Perhaps at the Tier II EIS Scoping Meeting in February, it would be possible to have a public discussion or a forum of some sort. This issue has come up at the last two meetings (web exposure, public information, etc.). Jud indicated that SI would look into this and try and come up with a format. It was noted that the museum has had several public discussions regarding the programming and desirability of the public to have a certain type of museum and for the jury of the competition to be made up of a broad segment of stakeholders. However, the Consulting Parties do not feel that they adequately represent the public in all aspects.

Summary: The Consulting Parties had a lively meeting with good dialog on alternative concept parameters and on how best to approach refining the Design Principles and putting a narrative together for guidance for the architects. Smithsonian agreed to give thought to how the public could be more engaged without overwhelming the staff. Sarah Batcheler volunteered to take the mark up sheets and work on refining the Design Principles as a draft for the next meeting. She hoped to be able to get a draft to the Consulting Parties a few days prior to the next meeting. The next meeting is July 15th.

Meeting concluded at noon.