

National Museum of African American History and Culture, Consulting Parties' meeting July 15, 2009

Meeting began at 9:30 at the Smithsonian's office of Planning and Project Management 5th floor conference room. Present were David Maloney and Andrew Lewis, DC Historic Preservation Office; Martha Catlin, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; Tom Luebke and Sarah Batcheler, Commission of Fine Arts; Ken Walton, Nancy Witherell and Christine Saum, National Capital Planning Commission; Perry Wheelock, National Park Service; Judy Scott Feldman, Coalition to Save Our Mall; Felicia Bell, US Capitol Historical Society; Dreck Wilson, Association for the Study of African American Life and History; Patsy Fletcher, Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society; Mike Bellamy, Brenda Sanchez, Derek Ross, Sharon Park, Harry Rombach, Jane Passman, Amy Ballard, Jud McIntire, and Doug Hall, Smithsonian, OFEO; Kinshasha Holman Conwill and Lynn Chase, Smithsonian NMAAHC.

The meeting objectives were to familiarize the consulting parties with activities undertaken by the Museum, the Security Study and preliminary findings of the GeoTech report in addition to continuing to refine the Design Principles.

The meeting began with a power point presentation by Kinshasha Holman Conwill, Deputy Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The presentation covered the development of the collection, collaborative efforts with other institutions, the outreach in various major cities for the Treasures program, and a timeline for fundraising. The collection now exceeds 7,000 objects including a Jim Crow rail car with leads on a Tuskegee Aircraft and the possibility of raising a sunken slave ship. There are also any number of textiles, fashions and fragile memorabilia that are coming into the collection. The conservator's road show-type meetings have produced information on many fine local and family examples of potential items for conservation or purchase, although the goal of the museum is not to remove important local collections from their environments. One of the major activities now is to train owners how to best care for their collections through some useful guidance found on the museum's website. Fundraising has begun on the quiet level and memberships will begin in the next year to build constituency. The architects are expected to be on board by the end of September. There was lively discussion about the various items that the museum hopes to display in the various galleries.

Doug Hall, Associate Director of the Smithsonian's office of Protective Services (OPS) gave an overview of the threat assessments that had been done and information that has been transmitted to the architects in an effort to develop the three alternatives with as seamless a sense of security as possible. Due to the location of the site on the Mall and in proximity to the White House and the Washington Monument, there will be a high level of protection necessary. The goal is to eliminate bollards to the greatest extent and to minimize the perimeter fortress effect that has plagued earlier public architecture. The criteria for protection is to be measured as a performance based design as opposed to a prescriptive basis, and so while setbacks have been offered for planning purposes, there is no set final number of feet for setbacks that have been imposed. The museum will respond to OPS's two major concerns, one for separating staff and collections from the public by access control and the other is blast mitigation through layout, orientation, facility hardening and glazing treatments. There was discussion about thoughts to close surrounding streets (none anticipated) about parking (basically, none to be

provided), would there be exterior entrance security creating lines at sidewalks (no as all screening would be inside under cover), need for anti-ram devices (yes, hopefully designed within building perimeter walls, features and not bollards). There were also questions about impacts from the recent tragedy at the Holocaust Museum, which in fact followed approved procedures although at the cost of a security guard's life, but not other fatalities. The consulting parties were reassured that the integration of security features is a design priority and responsive to the goals of the Design Principles.

Brenda Sanchez, Design Manager for the Museum, presented the summary of the preliminary GeoTech report. The architects will bring on their own engineering consultants as designs get underway to ensure that there is strict coordination with the Tier II EIS and the preferred alternative design, once adopted. The preliminary report from an independent geological firm reports that the soil is as expected from the Tier I analysis (soil, fill, sand and gravel), with bedrock not being reached until approximately 59 feet below grade. There were 5 soil borings and 3 water borings taken on the site. Water is found from 4-16 feet below grade. The water and soil both have a number of contaminants that must be handled as part of the site work. In addition, there are a number of known utility lines that must be moved and a number of unknown current and possibly abandoned lines that will require location and possible relocation. The site, previously, has not been included in the FEMA 100 year flood plain, and Smithsonian is waiting on the outcomes of the work at the 17th Street Levee project to evaluate future impacts/improvements on the site. It is expected that since the project currently goes down two levels that slurry wall construction is likely in an effort to reduce the dewatering of the site. This will be further assessed as the architectural team comes on board. There were lots of questions including could captured water from the site be used for plant irrigation (that is one of the green goals of the Smithsonian) and what type of monitoring will be done to ensure that there is no collateral damage to other structures, including the Washington Monument. The Smithsonian reiterated its commitment from the Tier I EIS that there will be extensive cooperation with neighboring properties to ensure the best monitoring possible at all phases of testing, digging, and construction. The public scoping meeting to launch Tier II EIS will be in the fall once the architectural team is on board.

There was a short break and afterward the group reviewed the Design Principles editing done by a team lead by Sarah Batcheler. The basic concepts of the Design Principles remained in three categories (Mall, Washington Monument Grounds, Urban Context) with a simplification and consolidation of elements to provide three principles under each category. There is now greater clarity with more specific direction regarding placement of the mass of building elements, fluidity of pedestrian movement across the site, focus on entrances and cross axial views to the monument, White House, Post Office Tower, etc. There was discussion on the Mall section (A.1) regarding whether or not there was a hierarchy of respect to previous plans. Judy Feldman handed out a copy of a summary/excerpt of the 1902 McMillan Commission discussing the need to landscape the Washington Monument Grounds appropriate to the monument to create a Monument Garden. Judy was asking if the McMillan Plan goals should take precedence over later designs, such as the current curvilinear security walls and pathways. David Maloney expressed the need to look at the evolution of the site and the layering of various designs which now comprise the current landscape. Perry Wheelock mentioned that the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) is being finalized for the monument grounds which will classify the significance of the

current landscape. The notion of hierarchies in the principle is to establish the Mall, Monument and vistas to the Capitol and White House as more important than any individual adjacent building.

For A.3, the group felt that the discussion of the “hinge” intersection at the cross axis of the Mall as well as the fluid landscape of the monument was better expressed than before but that the “pivotal” element is the monument itself and not the NMAAHC site/building. Also the site is somewhat different from the Mall in that it has a lower elevation which makes the setting somewhat unique. B.3 discussion was on modifying the language to eliminate the word “a completely new” and just stick with the notion that the landscape can be designed but should not be so different that it is unrelated to its environment. Pedestrian access was emphasized as a characteristic that needs to be incorporated somehow through or around the site.

The section C on related urban context clarified that the relationship of the mass of the museum building (C.1) was best served to be in relationship to the predominant massing of the other museums of the row and not moving south to be in line with existing plazas or terraces of other buildings. C.3 reiterated the concern expressed before that the location of 14th street provides an opportunity to anticipate entrances or approaches to the building that may not necessarily be at the midpoint of the site. There are definitely some diagonal relationships that make this site unique that should be considered.

Summary: The three presentations were very informative and generated good discussion regarding the relevance of the information to future planning efforts by the architects and impacts on potential designs. The revisions to the Design Principles are strengthening them without putting more restrictions on any concept design that might be developed. The Design Principles will have some further refinements and the group agreed to meet again in September to work out the narrative for the October anticipated meeting with the architectural team. Sarah Batcheler agreed to revise the Design Principles and get them electronically to the Smithsonian for general distribution. Martha Catlin again asked for the Smithsonian to find a way to give notice that the Tier II Scoping Meeting in the fall would be a public meeting and that public relations would be served to have more information about the process and the development of three concept designs for agency review would be a good idea. The consulting parties through the Office of Planning and Project Management will work with the Museum to see what information is best to post regarding timeframes and public hearings.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15. Next meeting anticipated for September 16th to prepare a narrative for the architects describing goals for avoiding, minimizing and mitigating adverse effects as outlined in the design principles.

