

**Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #16**

Date of Meeting: July 25, 2012
Project: Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Location of Meeting: 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, 5th Floor
Time of Meeting: 9:30 am – 12:00 noon

Attendees: Sharon Park, SI OFEO
Dreck Wilson, ASAALH and NTHP
Ken Walton, NCPC
Hal Davis, SmithGroup
Sarah Batcheler, CFA
Jennifer Hirsch, NCPC
Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Ann Trowbridge, SI OFEO
Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates
Daria Gasparini, Robinson & Associates
Amy Ballard, SI OFEO
Perry Wheelock, NPS
Louise Brodnitz, ACHP
Jud McIntire, SI OFEO
Patsy Fletcher, AAHGS
Jane Passman, SI OFEO
Phil Freelon, The Freelon Group
Rodrigo Abela, Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol
Rob Nieweg, NTHP
Lynn Chase, NMAAHC
James Perry, NPS
Steve Lorenzetti, NPS
David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Office
Kinshasha Holman Conwill, NMAAHC
Sarah Moulton, NCPC

MEETING SUMMARY

Sharon Park (SP), SI OFEO, brought the meeting to order at 9:50 am, stating that the objectives of the meeting were to discuss refinements to the landscape design, present exterior details such as the corona and paving materials, present progress on Section 106 mitigation, and discuss the schedule for future consulting party meetings.

SP noted that, moving forward, the Smithsonian will regroup the consulting parties on an annual basis, most likely in the fall. In the interim, updates will be distributed by the Smithsonian electronically or posted on the project website (www.nmaahceis.com). Introductions were made, and the NCPC and Smithsonian interns were welcomed.

SP acknowledged the hard work and collaborative efforts made by the consulting parties, noting that the group has been meeting since March 2005. SP urged attendees to take as a memento a set of gift books and, for those who missed the ceremony, a commemorative lapel pin from the groundbreaking. The museum is scheduled to open in November 2015, and work is currently underway at the site. SP introduced Kinshasha Holman Conwill (KHC), representing the NMAAHC.

KHC expressed gratitude to the consulting parties on behalf of the museum, adding that the project has been made better as a result of the consultation process. She compared the achievement of concluding Section 106 consultation and breaking ground on the museum with the exultation she experienced during a recent visit to the top of Mount Rushmore. The museum continues to build its collection and build its membership. She described a NMAAHC exhibit currently on view at the NMAH. KHC stated that the museum is very excited about the landscape design, especially about the process of choosing outdoor art for the site.

Design Presentation

Phil Freelon (PF), The Freelon Group, praised the museum for providing the kind of leadership that has allowed the design team to create something inspiring. He stated that input both from the museum and from the consulting parties has made the design better. He introduced Rodrigo Abela (RA), Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol, to bring the group up to date on refinements and advancements related to the landscape design.

RA stated that although work has begun on site, the landscape design is still in development. He outlined the five topics that would be presented – Art in the Landscape, Landscape Materials, Bridge Railing, South Water Feature Text, and Planting – and summarized the agency comments to date.

Art in the Landscape

RA noted that working with the museum, the design team has identified five locations for art – two in the north landscape, one in the west landscape, and two in the south landscape. The design team has considered both massing and size in considering potential locations. RA showed a slide illustrating the potential locations.

Landscape Materials

RA explained that the design team tried to keep the palette fairly simple, mostly using blacks and grays, to allow the building to be the centerpiece of the site. RA noted that the material selected for the promenade path matches the material of the perimeter sidewalks. Bound gravel will be used in select areas, including the café area. Precast concrete will be used in the reading groves.

Bridge Railing

RA stated that the guard rail used on the bridges in the north landscape will be canted to geometrically link them with the corona. The vertical members of the rail will be spaced far apart and linked with mesh to maintain transparency.

South Water Feature Text

RA showed a slide illustrating some of the quotations proposed by NMAAHC Director Lonnie Bunch for the south water feature. RA noted that although meaning and content are important, the quotations also have to work compositionally. The list has been narrowed down to three proposed quotations by Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary Church Terrell, and Frederick Douglass. RA reminded the consulting parties

that the south water feature will feature both still and moving water. The lettering will be bronze to make it more legible.

Planting

RA noted that the design team has been working to tie the plant palette back to the story of the museum, reiterating that the museum director envisions the museum as a lens through which to see the bigger American story. RA explained that, with this in mind, the design team kept coming back to the fact that the site is part of the Washington Monument Grounds. For this reason, the design team has chosen a plant palette that will integrate the building into its contextual landscape. RA noted that the plant palette has also been selected to amplify the themes of the reading groves. These themes include Spirituality, Hope and Optimism, and Resiliency. The Spirituality reading grove uses trees that flower white such as magnolias and dogwood. The Hope and Optimism reading grove features crocuses, which are among the first things that bloom in Washington's spring. The Resiliency reading grove features trees with muscular trunks such as live oaks and copper beech at the north entrance. RA added that the trees along the perimeter of the site will be elms, and that the design team is working closely with staff of the Smithsonian Gardens to select appropriate species. RA noted that one of the goals of the design is to extend the flowering season around the site as much as possible. Other features including evergreen hedges to conceal perimeter security features. The sedum green roof over the porch will be planted with one continuous field so that as viewed from above it blends in with the landscape. Blue flowering plants will be used in the north landscape as the color blue traditionally symbolizes welcoming. RA concluded the landscape presentation with a series of slides illustrating the seasonal colors.

Next, PF presented updates on the north and south egress courts, the northwest egress stair, and the oculus. PF explained that the north and south egress stairs are essential to providing safe exit, especially considering that so much of the museum is located below grade. The south entrance for large school groups has been relocated, and the south egress stairs are now continuous. The egress court features skylights to bring natural light into the lower levels of the museum. PF explained that in the event of an emergency, additional doors in the north egress court will be opened. Otherwise, the doors will remain shut and appear as a continuous wall. PF added that as the design progressed, it became apparent that an exit from the lower level was needed at the northwest corner of the building. A stairwell and railing was added at this location. PF noted that the design of the railing has been kept very minimal in order not to obscure views across the site. The oculus originally featured interior and exterior water elements. PF explained that the design has been refined, and the oculus is now smaller and only has a water element on the interior.

The design team has chosen cast aluminum for the material of the corona panels, which will have a permanent bronze color. PF explained that the filigree pattern will vary so that some panels are more open than others. The corona will have open areas, or "lenses," where the paneling will be removed entirely. PF and RA asked for questions or comments and shared samples of the landscape paving materials and a sample of the corona paneling.

Dreck Wilson (DW), ASAALH and NTHP, asked for the distance between the corona and the paving materials. Hal Davis (HS), SmithGroup, replied that it would be the height of the glass base, or about 18 feet.

Louise Brodnitz (LB), ACHP, asked if the bridge railing and the railing around the northwest egress stairwell are identical. RA explained that the vertical elements would have the same profile, but the rails would be spaced differently and the bridge railing would have a mesh barrier. LB asked what steps, if

any, would be taken to prevent the bronze lettering in the south water feature from developing a patina. RA replied that the design team is exploring using an alloy that has a bronze coloring and also using treated water that would prevent oxidation. LB expressed concern that there is nothing to prevent visitors from stepping into the water feature. RA replied that along the north side of the water feature is a wide bench that might dissuade people from getting into the water. Steve Lorenzetti (SL), NPS, stated that the NPS has had to deal with this problem even at commemorative sites such as the World War II Memorial. Sarah Batcheler (SB), CFA, stated that people will inevitably want to enter the water, but, despite this, the design works. LB commented that the planting palette relates to the Washington Monument Grounds, but does not relate to the Mall. She would like to see the south landscape relate better to the Mall. RA pointed out elements of the design that related to the context of the Mall.

SB commented that it is exciting to start thinking about art on the site, but noted that the potential location between the north water feature and Constitution Avenue is especially challenging. KHC noted that the museum has acknowledged and discussed the challenges of that location, adding that there may be a point at which it is decided that the location should be dropped. She commented that artists can often find creative solutions to such site constraints.

Andrew Lewis (AL), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, commented that the egress court on the east side of the site is highly visible and does not serve much of a purpose. He suggested adding art at this location. Lynn Chase (LC), NMAAHC, replied that this can be considered, but added that the museum does not necessarily want to encourage visitors to go down into the space.

Patsy Fletcher (PFI), AAHGS, asked if people will be encouraged to enter the stairwell at the northwest corner. PF replied that it will be used exclusively for egress and that the method of how it will be blocked off will be resolved, possibly through signage. PFI commented that she appreciates the combination of still and moving water in the south feature and is impressed by the plant palette. She suggested that the landscape incorporate aspects of African American gardens such as swept grounds. PW suggested having some of the pavers in one of the reading groves have a swept pattern. KHC added that there are artists who specialize in stone and ceramic who might be approached for something like that.

David Maloney (DM), D.C. Historic Preservation Office, noted that although he has not followed every evolution of the development of the landscape, he is very impressed with what has been presented. The design team has managed to keep the original intent of relating the landscape to the Washington Monument Grounds. He added that the special treatment of the reading groves offers opportunity for enrichment with permanent or temporary art. DM stated that overall he was very impressed with what the landscape design team has done.

Sarah Moulton (SM), NCPC, also asked if there was opportunity for temporary art in the landscape. KHC responded that the museum has certainly discussed it as it would allow for the participation of more artists.

DW stated that he has always liked the transparent quality of the corona and wondered if the trees around the site might interfere with views from the building. He suggested a no planting zone for tall trees within 50 feet of the building. RA responded that views have been considered from the very start of the landscape design process. Views have been kept as clear as possible, but trees are also necessary, especially on the west side, for providing shade.

DM stated that, although this is not a preservation issue, the choice of copper beech and live oaks may present some practical issues because they are very wide spreading. RA responded that they are working very closely with Smithsonian Gardens to find species that would work on the site and have the same effect. DM also commented that he did not think there was enough space at the north entry for people to line up. He thinks the space is tight. SP replied that studies have shown that 70 percent of visitors will approach the museum from the south where there is more space at the entry.

Rob Nieweg (RN), NTHP, thanked the Smithsonian for giving the NTHP an opportunity to participate in consultation. He stated that he is particularly interested in the seasonality of the site and wondered if the design team had studied the seasonality of the surrounding landscape. RA replied that the design team would take that into consideration. PW stated that the Washington Monument Grounds has a very simple palette consisting of elms, cherry trees, turf, and a very limited floral display. PW added that she appreciated the connectivity achieved by using white on the site. DM agreed that the palette of the Washington Monument Grounds is very simple, but noted that the McMillan Commission was very concerned about providing areas of shade and relief. He added that the Smithsonian Gardens has done a very nice job of humanizing the Mall. PW also commented that she has some concerns about overplanting on the site.

SL commented that as part of their mitigation, the Smithsonian is working with NPS to implement a planting plan for the Washington Monument Grounds. He emphasized that the two agencies should work together to coordinate planting on the Washington Monument Grounds with planting on the museum site. RA noted that they have been given the direction to plant at least 6-inch caliper trees. SL stated that NPS tends to plant smaller trees because they tend to do better. RA suggested that it would be nice if the sizes of the trees were coordinated.

LB urged the Smithsonian to develop maintenance guidelines so that in the future there is no uncertainty as to how the trees should be trimmed in order to maintain certain views. SL commented that NPS has had issues with historic viewsheds.

DW suggested that the historic wrought-iron railings found in places such as New Orleans would be used as a design source for the guard rails. SB commented that the design of the guard rails should not compete with the corona. DW suggested that the design would accent the corona.

PFI asked for clarification on how the “lenses” in the corona will be treated on the exterior. PF confirmed that the lenses would be visible from the exterior and that the openings relate to exterior views as well as the interior exhibition space. HD noted that the skin of the corona gradually gets more porous near the lenses.

PW stated that NPS has concerns about night lighting and emergency lighting. SB noted that the building will essentially be occupied until late in the evening due to cleaning crews, etc. AL noted that the Programmatic Agreement provides for continuing review of these elements of the design.

SP thanked the consulting parties for their comments and introduced Jud McIntire (JM), SI OFEO, to provide an update on construction.

Construction Update

JM noted that the museum is scheduled to open in November 2015. In order to accomplish this, the museum is using a parallel design and construction process. He noted that construction has begun on

site and that a staff trailer is located at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue. A visitor information trailer will also be located on site and is being delivered soon. PF noted that there is a “construction camera” feature on the museum website showing live footage of work on site.

DW asked if there have been any archaeological discoveries. SP replied that there is an archaeological report available that also documents the water intake tunnel. SP noted that there is a lot of fill material at the site and that the D.C. archaeologist indicated that unless human remains are uncovered, additional archaeological investigations are not required. SP also described the archaeological work by William Henry Holmes from the 1890s.

Progress on Mitigation

SP stated that several mitigation activities are underway and distributed draft reports on the Bulfinch Gatepost and the George Washington Sculpture by Horatio Greenough. SP noted that the Smithsonian will be updating the National Register nomination for the Bulfinch Gateposts and preparing a conservation plan. The Greenough sculpture will not be listed individually in the National Register because it has been moved, but it may be eligible for the D.C. inventory.

SP reiterated that updates will be distributed to the consulting parties electronically or posted on the project website. The 95 percent design is scheduled to be presented to the CFA on September 20, 2012, and to the NCPC on November 1, 2012.

LB asked about the status of the other National Register nominations. SP responded that the NPS directed the Smithsonian not to proceed with the updated nomination on the Washington Monument Grounds until the site is completed. The updated nomination will include all changes to the grounds since 1981 when the site was originally listed.

AL noted that the Programmatic Agreement requires that an annual report is distributed to all of the consulting parties and that there are annual consulting parties meetings. SP clarified that the Smithsonian plans to issue joint Section 106 and NEPA annual reports. The first one will most likely be distributed in October 2012. She hopes to have the next consulting parties meeting on site in the Smithsonian trailer. SP noted that the Smithsonian continues to take comments into consideration.

SP noted that next year, the museum will be transferring some of its larger exhibit pieces into the space. KHC added that the museum collection includes a segregated train car and a plane used to train Tuskegee airmen.

SP thanked the consulting parties and urged everyone to pick up their books on their way out.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.