

COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. 6331



THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive between 14th and 15th Streets, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

September 2, 2010

Commission Action Requested

Approval of comments on concept design pursuant to Public Law 108-184 and 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d).

Commission Action

The Commission:

Comments favorably on the concept design for the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), at the corner of 15st Street and Constitution Avenue, Northwest Washington, DC as shown on NCPC Map File No 1.42(38.00).43001

Commends the Smithsonian for its extensive coordination that has resulted in program relocation, modifications to the circulation around the galleries, and site improvements that have resulted in a lower profile building and reduced visual and physical impacts of the building on the site.

Recommends that in the continued development of the site and building designs, the applicant consider the following:

Property Lines and Service Access

The District of Columbia Department of Transportation and the District of Columbia Office of Planning have raised questions about both the property line and planned service access along 14th Street, NW. The museum site presents service access challenges because all sides front onto important streets. The Smithsonian should clarify any outstanding property line questions as the project design proceeds, and further study placement of the service access along 14th Street to demonstrate the need to place the access at this location as well as any potential impacts of placing it here.

Future Massing Development

The scheme as rendered does not show a design for the skylight elements. These may be required in further design iterations for the lower level gallery spaces. The building yard on the north side of the site between Constitution Avenue and the building face should continue to read as landscape rather than building. The addition of any skylights and further development of the bridges on the north side should be studied carefully to assure that this area will continue to read as landscape rather than building. Additionally, further study of the porch element on the south side of the building should demonstrate in more detail how this element will affect lot coverage overall and views along the Mall at the south side of the museum site.

Perimeter Security

Although the Smithsonian has begun to study integrating perimeter security elements into the museum building's landscape, much work remains to be done to assure that the potential physical and visual impacts of security elements on the museum site and on adjacent and nearby areas are minimized as the design proceeds.

Further Night Lighting Study

Further visual depiction of the building's nighttime appearance and site lighting should be submitted to indicate the intent and character of the project's lighting (both internal and external) pertaining to its potential affects on the surrounding visual environment. The Smithsonian should examine both the nearby Constitution Avenue and 15th Street area as well as significant viewpoints from the Washington Monument, the National Mall, and other key points referenced in the Consulting Parties Design Principles.

Landscape

The 2003 NCPC approved Olin plan shows an allée of trees along 15th Street, consisting of one species of shade tree on the western side of the sidewalk and a different species on the eastern side. Final species selection for the western side should be done in consultation with NPS. The Olin plan also shows the northern boundary of the parcel consisting of an informal, "natural" style of tree canopy reminiscent of a transitional forest zone. When submitting the next design iteration details to NCPC, all shrub and perennial planting areas should be clearly delineated and show specific plant species under consideration.

Encourages that in the continued development of the site and building designs, the applicant continue to study and analyze the geotechnical conditions at the project site and the surrounding Washington Monument grounds, to assure that the impacts of excavation and dewatering on site do not impact the Washington Monument foundation.

Deborah B. Young
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission