

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY
WEST FAÇADE MODIFICATION**

Constitution Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets, NW
Washington, DC

Finding of No Significant Impact**JUN 29 2011**

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508), and the National Capital Planning Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, I have evaluated the preliminary and final building plans for the west façade modification at the National Museum of American History, located on the National Mall on Constitution Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets, NW, in Washington, DC, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.24(38.00)43358; and the May 2011 Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the Smithsonian Institution (Smithsonian) for which NCPC was the lead federal agency; and I have determined that the west façade modification project as proposed will not have a significant impact on the human environment. The EA is adopted and incorporated by reference into this Finding of No Significant Impact. No comments on the EA were received.

Proposed Action

The EA analyzes a No Action Alternative and Build Alternative 1 for potential environmental impacts that could result from the proposed modifications to the west façade of the National Museum of American History (NMAH). Alternative 1 is identified as the preferred alternative.

Alternative 1 involves the installation of a new window assembly on level 1 in the west façade of the NMAH. Below level 1 in the building's west wing is the lower level cafeteria with a wide expanse of glass and views to the west. Alternative 1 proposes to install new windows above this existing line of windows. The new windows will align with the width of the lower level cafeteria window. The vertical mullions of the new windows will align with the vertical mullions of the existing window and the window system has been designed to follow the joints of the marble panels on the building. The center section of the window system will be vision glass while the remaining sections will be spandrel glass.

The proposal for the new window opening along the west façade of NMAH arises from the Smithsonian's plan to create an exhibit gallery and gathering place or public plaza on level 1 of the museum's west wing and to afford visitors natural light and views into the museum as well as out towards the National Mall. The corresponding area in the museum's east wing has a window that provides natural light. The new windows will strengthen the visual connection to the National Mall and enhance visitors' experience of the NMAH. The new window will be located in the museum's level 1 west public plaza, the largest non-exhibit space in the museum. With

the addition of the new windows the Smithsonian intends to create a space that will engage visitors in a wide variety of activities, special events, and performances.

Along with the installation of new windows at level 1, Alternative 1 includes alterations to the large ribbon window centered on the west façade and adjacent to the terrace on level 2. Within the north side of the vertical ribbon window is a single door opening to the outdoor terrace. This door will be replaced and an additional door will be installed on the south side to provide an additional terrace access point. A section of the existing planter will be removed for the installation of this door. New paving at the terrace will match the existing pavers.

Standard for evaluation

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an Environmental Assessment is sufficient and an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared if the environmental assessment supports a finding that the federal action will not significantly affect the human environment. The regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality define “significantly” as used in NEPA as requiring consideration of both context and intensity of impacts as noted by 40 CFR §1508.27.

Potential Impacts

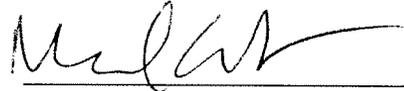
There will be no significant environmental impacts as a result of the proposed action. The EA does identify a few areas where there will be short- and long-term minor adverse impacts caused by the proposed action and ways to mitigate these impacts. The EA also indicates that there will be beneficial impacts as a result of the proposed action. Beneficial impacts include improvements to visitor experience of both the NMAH and the National Mall as additional views and vistas will be provided. In addition, the west façade modification project will contribute to the non-exhibit public space of the museum and encourage a mix of uses in the museum.

The EA analyzed 10 environmental impact topic areas. These topic areas are generally categorized as: air quality, water, noise, energy conservation, solid waste, transportation, economic resources, historic resources, visual resources, and environmental justice. According to the EA, the west façade modification project will generally result in minor, short-term impacts to air quality, noise, solid waste, and transportation. Minor, long-term impacts were identified in relation to historic resources.

There are numerous historic properties within the vicinity of the NMAH due to its location on the National Mall, a National Register Historic District. Historic properties directly adjacent to NMAH include the L’Enfant Plan for Washington, DC, the Washington Monument, the Bulfinch Gatehouse and Gateposts, and the National Museum of Natural History. The Smithsonian also considers all of its major buildings on the National Mall contributing elements to the National Mall Historic District.

Potential impacts to historic resources were considered in the EA and through the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Smithsonian and the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) have determined that the west façade modification project will have an adverse effect on historic properties. On March 2, 2011, the Smithsonian and the DC SHPO entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in order to avoid,

minimize, and/or mitigate these adverse effects. Stipulations in the MOA to mitigate the effects include the storage of all original stone that is removed so that the Smithsonian can reuse the stone if the façade is restored in the future. Other mitigation includes the restoration and relocation of the “Gwenfritz” sculpture by Alexander Calder to its original site outside the window and the reconstruction of the site-specific reflecting pool above which the sculpture was originally situated. This MOA is incorporated by reference into this Finding of No Significant Impact. With the implementation of these mitigation measures, the west façade modification project will not have a significant impact on the human environment



Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director