

GARAGE INFILL FOR MUSEUM SUPPORT SPACE
AND FOR THE SMITHSONIAN EARLY ENRICHMENT CENTER
Smithsonian National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Constitution Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets, NW,
Washington, D.C.

Finding of No Significant Impact

APR 30 2009

I have evaluated the preliminary and final site and building plans for the proposed garage infill project at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.24(38.00)42750.

The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer has reviewed the project plans in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and has determined that the project will not have an adverse effect on the National Museum of American History or the National Mall.

Consequently, after review of the environmental assessment, I have determined pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508), and Section 10 of NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, that the project would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.



Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director

Background

The Smithsonian National Museum of American History (NMAH) proposes to infill the existing underground garage of the NMAH Building on the National Mall to create additional office space for museum support staff and space for the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center (SEEC). The proposed project will permanently remove 65 parking spaces from the garage and 10 surface parking spaces from the west side of the building.

NCPC has participated in the development of NMAH's environmental assessment as a cooperating agency and has evaluated the potential impacts of the proposed site and building improvements on the environment. NCPC has adopted NMAH's environmental assessment for the project. This environmental documentation is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508], the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, and NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures (adopted April 1, 2004).

The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC-SHPO) has reviewed and completed its analysis of the project determining there is not an adverse effect resulting from the undertaking. The DC-SHPO has issued its conclusion as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and has completed compliance reviews for the project.

The environmental assessment and comments about the environmental assessment analysis are made available for review at NCPC offices in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Commission's implementing Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies. No comments were received for this environmental assessment.

NCPC's requirements for a FONSI are set forth in the Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, Section 10(E).

The Proposed Action

The proposed action is the infill of the existing underground garage space with museum support offices and the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center. The proposed infill site occupies approximately 30,000 square feet of programmatic space, of which approximately 24,500 square feet is within the parking garage area. The garage is located along the southern edge of NMAH at Floor One (parallel to Madison Drive, NW and beneath the entry terrace facing the National Mall). Glass entry pavilions will be located at the far east and west ends of the space to accommodate required program uses, convey natural light, and create a strong visual impression at the two entrances.

The existing garage currently houses 65 parking spaces and accommodates two roadways: Roadway 1 runs from east to west through the garage; Roadway 2, just to the north, runs from east to west, down to the Lower Level loading dock. Roadway 2 will remain unaffected in the proposed project. The project will allow museum operations to continue efficiently while also fulfilling long-term goals of returning floor space on public museum floors to visitor experiences and needs.

There will also be changes to the East Yard configuration. The SEEC modular building will be removed. The existing driveway approach (from 12th Street, NW), will be reconfigured to

accommodate a circular drive for convenient daycare center drop-off, while maintaining roadway clearance for access to the lower level loading docks. The existing playground will eventually be reconfigured.

Alternatives considered in the environmental assessment review

The environmental assessment examines four alternatives in detail: the proposed action, the no action alternative, the east addition alternative and the west addition alternative.

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.

Applying the standards, factors, and analysis here, the Executive Director must make the assessment of whether approval of the proposed project will “significantly” affect the human environment based on the environmental assessment.

Potential impacts

The environmental assessment analyzed the impacts of each alternative on vegetation, wildlife, air quality, water supply, stormwater runoff, solid waste creation, energy requirements, transportation, recreational facilities, economic resources, historic and aesthetic features and environmental justice. The proposed alternative is below grade with exposed glass entryways sensitively designed in context with the building and the site. The combination of removal of the SEEC modular building and its concrete pad, along with the introduction of a new turn-around drop-off at the east access drive will create approximately the same amount of impervious surface as the existing site condition. The proposed alternative results in a permanent loss of 75 parking spaces and thus reduces the number of employees driving to the site. Therefore, NCPC staff has found no significant or adverse environmental impacts with the proposed action.

