

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK  
ASIA TRAIL, PHASE 2—ELEPHANT TRAIL  
3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C.

*Delegated Action of the Executive Director*

March 30, 2007

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996, I approve the preliminary site and building plans pursuant to 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d) for the Asia Trail, Phase 2, which comprises renovation of the existing elephant house and development of three new elephant habitat areas, as depicted on NCPC Map File No. 2.00(38.00)-42203.

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The Smithsonian Institution has submitted preliminary site and building plans for the renovation of the existing elephant house facility and habitats in the north central area of the zoo, directly adjacent to Asia Trail Phase 1, along the Olmsted Walk. The project site is revised from the concept submission of February 2006 and involves less land area for the Phase 2 design than conceptually described. The existing building renovation and a 5,300 square foot two-level addition are intended to restore viability to the existing historic structure while retaining the character and significance of the original building. The addition is a discrete expansion for key functional requirements of animal care and keeper management objectives dealing with the exhibition of a herd of approximately eight animals.

The existing facility is the 22,000 square foot Elephant House built in 1937 and designed by Edwin Hill Clark. The project site area originally included 8 acres in 2006 but the preliminary design has reduced the site to 3.6 acres, with no modification of the Olmsted Walk. The building addition is a discrete expansion for key functional requirements of animal care and keeper management and also has, in its preliminary design, a green roof that will extend its design towards an LEED rating for gold certification, which the Smithsonian wishes to achieve.

The material surfaces of the addition and renovated areas have been selected to differentiate from the older existing building finishes and will be compatible with:

- Features, scale, and proportions that are more harmonious with the existing structure.
- Massing revisions to protect the integrity of the existing historic property.
- Exterior material finishes that reflect a better comparative relationship to the original elephant house through the use of precast concrete at the north and west façade addition areas and recycled stone at the Olmsted walk façade.
- Improved material differential within the interior, with focus on maintaining key existing detail features of the present building.

The project qualifies as a delegated action for review due to its qualities as a small project in the District of Columbia, with an area of less than 50,000 square feet of floor area, where the proposal is consistent with the Commission approved facility master plan.

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this project at its meeting on February 8, 2006, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated by all agencies participating. On January 24, 2006, Smithsonian Institution staff met with the DC SHPO to discuss the proposal. The meeting concluded with the understanding that the undertaking would have an adverse effect in terms of historic preservation and that the DC SHPO would work to define further mitigation and assist to develop a satisfactory Memorandum of Agreement. Additional meetings have occurred regarding the project historic affects. The present preliminary site and building plans reflect further mitigation efforts as identified by the DC SHPO, and supplementary efforts will continue toward a final project Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement that will comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for renovation.

The Smithsonian design team has been reminded by the NCPC staff that project review process of Asia Trail Phase 1 and 2 in 2003 found that construction noise effects will occur at the project site and perimeter. To minimize the potential impacts resulting from noise during the construction stages of the Phase 2 project, the Smithsonian project staff have agreed that the following measures will be undertaken during the final project review submission process and the applicant will provide best management practices, as necessary to meet the District noise standards, for the development of a construction noise mitigation plan to be supplied to the Commission staff during the project final submission process. This plan submitted by the Smithsonian Institution shall address actions to include noise barriers, if necessary, to attenuate excessive construction noise in proximity to sensitive noise receptors identified by the noise reduction plan and in compliance with District of Columbia noise standards. The plan will be certified to comply with the District of Columbia noise regulations by an acoustic engineer, of the applicant's choosing. The plan also will provide construction specifications requiring the selection and identification of truck routes to minimize noise impacts to identified sensitive noise receptors, truck staging or dwelling areas, and all other construction staging areas. The noise attenuation plan also will include all anticipated construction work hours of operation during a normal work week, and specify anticipated extraordinary work times that may be reasonably foreseen for the project construction.

NCPC staff had analyzed Asia Trail Project Phases 1 and 2, in conformance with the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), with a prepared Environmental Assessment (EA) in December 2003 that was completed by the Smithsonian Institution with input from NCPC. That document evaluated the use of the existing elephant house and introduction of new habitat areas. Staff concluded the NEPA compliance review with a prepared Finding of No Significant Impact signed by the Executive Director in February 2004 based on adoption of the EA. Staff, in additional review of the Finding, has determined that the preliminary site and building plans are consistent with the analysis of environmental effects in the EA and the Finding of 2004.

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Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP  
Executive Director