

**ANACOSTIA MUSEUM -  
ADDITION AND RENOVATION  
1901 Fort Place, SE**

Report to the Smithsonian Institution

July 1, 1999

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***Abstract***

The Smithsonian Institution proposes to renovate the Anacostia Museum for African-American History and Culture located in Fort Stanton Historical Park in the Southeast quadrant of the city. The proposal expands the existing 18,000-square-foot museum building by approximately 3,000 square feet to bring it into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and life safety code requirements, and redevelops the site to complement its park setting. The additional space will allow the Smithsonian to reconfigure the museum's interior spaces to enhance existing exhibit space, provide ADA-compliant vertical and horizontal circulation system, provide safety code compliant restroom facilities and other amenities. It would also allow the renovation of the north and south façades of the museum to express the facility's cultural heritage, emphasize its primary entrance, and provide a secondary employee entrance for employees and library visitors. Other improvements include expansion of the library and installation of a new elevator near the library and the secondary entrance. The National Park Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the project and determined that it will have no significant environmental effect on the surrounding community.

***Authority***

Section 5 of the National Capital Planning Act of 1952, as amended (40 U.S.C. 71d), and D.C. Code, sec. 5-432 (in-lieu of zoning).

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***Commission Action***

The Commission:

- **Takes responsibility** for the scope and content of the Environmental Assessment dated March 1999, prepared by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution, for the proposed addition and renovation of the Anacostia Museum, 1901 Fort Place, SE, Washington, D.C.
- **Approves** the preliminary and final site and building plans for the addition and renovation of the Anacostia Museum, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 10.27(38.00)-40646.

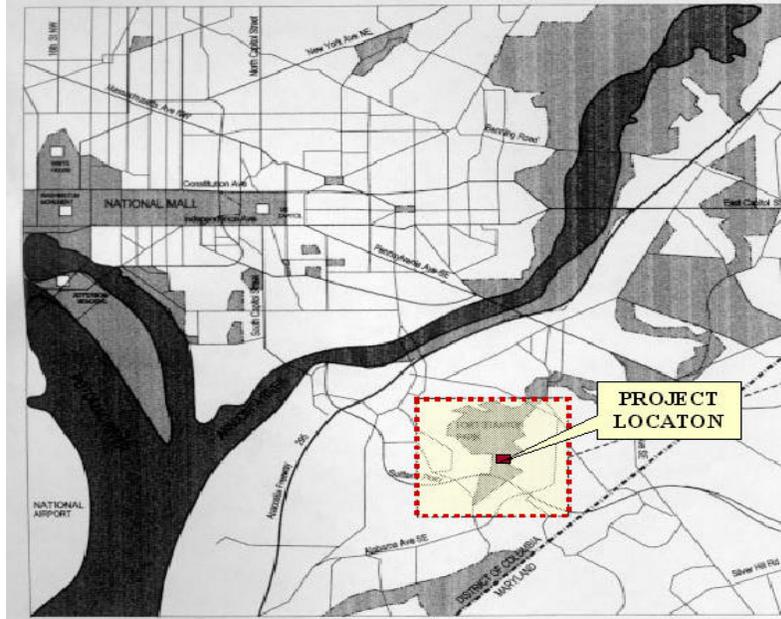
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**BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

*DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL*

The Smithsonian Institution has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the addition and renovation of the existing Anacostia Museum, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 10.27(38.00)-40646.

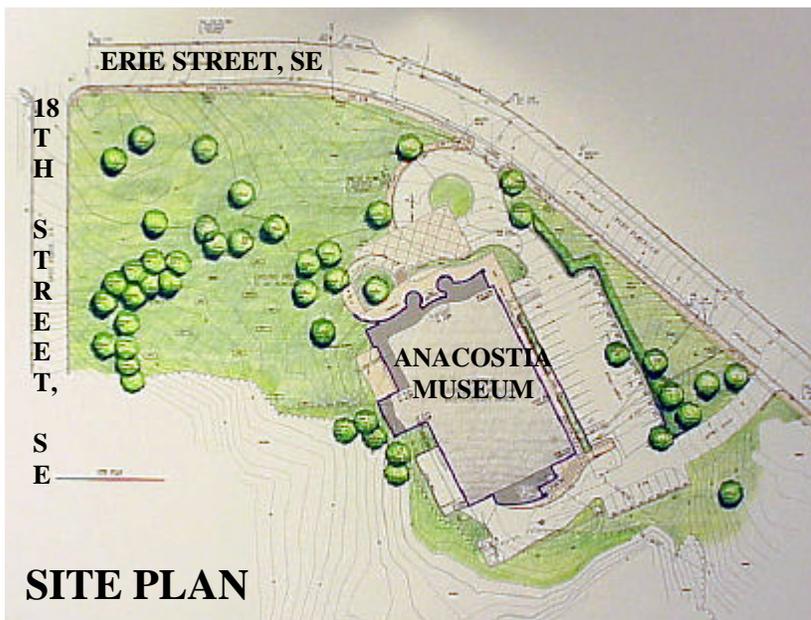
The Anacostia Museum for African-American History and Culture started in the late sixties as a community-based museum. Over the years, it has grown into an internationally recognized resource for educational programs, exhibitions, and research activities related to African-American history and culture. As a result, the museum needs additional space to accommodate existing programs and new initiatives.



**VICINITY MAP**

The Site

The museum is prominently located in Southeast D.C., in the mid-south section of



**SITE PLAN**

Fort Stanton Park (part of the Fort Circle Park System). The museum is surrounded by large open spaces and is sited on high grounds overlooking a scenic view of Fort Stanton Park to the north. Erie Street and Fort Place provide primary access to the museum from the north and east, while 18<sup>th</sup> Street marks the western boundary of Fort Stanton Park. A bus passenger drop-

off circle on the north side of the building provides linkage to ADA-compliant access to the museum's main entrance. The site has an existing 38-car parking lot on the northeastern/eastern side of the museum between the museum and Fort Place. A service road from Fort Place provides delivery vehicle access through the southern edge of the parking lot to the receiving area located at the south facade of the building. Several existing mature trees located to the west, northwest, and south side of the building mark the museum's site boundary.

### The Building Program

The primary objective of this proposal is to create a museum that provides an organized system of interior and exterior spaces that are functional, accessible, and ADA compliant. To achieve this, two additions to the existing building and a complete reconfiguration of the internal circulation system have been proposed. This proposal would add approximately 3,000 square feet of new space to the existing 18,000-square-foot building. The building program includes:

- Improving the turning circle for buses in the museum's front drop-off area.
- Creating a better grade level transition from the bus drop-off to the main entry level of the museum.
- Redesigning the front facade of the museum to express the museum's cultural heritage.
- Increasing the size of the exhibit area.
- Increasing the size of the library and providing new library floors to accommodate future installation of space saver shelving units.
- Repairing the existing building to meet fire and safety codes and ADA compliance.
- Reconfiguring the external access to the building and internal vertical and horizontal circulation to be ADA compliant.
- Installing new restrooms and staff locker room facilities.
- Installing new heating and ventilation systems.
- Adding one new elevator within the area of the rear addition.
- Providing a new entrance at the south end of the building for staff, non-museum visitors and library users

### Design Concept

Beyond the much-needed repair of the existing building for fire and safety codes and ADA compliance, the design concept for the museum reflects its cultural heritage and new international status. To ensure that the new museum building embodies this goal, the following objectives form the bases for the new design:

- Unification of all parts and functions of the existing building.
- Adaptation of the new design to relate to the existing building and its park setting.
- Reflection of the mission of the museum in the new building by incorporating its community roots and African heritage.

The new building design consists of: the addition of two new sections that impact the exterior appearance of the building; and the reconfiguration of existing interior spaces to remove cluttered work spaces, improve circulation, provide better public restroom and staff locker-room facilities, and increase the size of the library.

The north addition will provide:

- A better bus drop-off area.
- ADA-compliant access to the museum at its two main points of entry.
- An energy efficient main entrance for museum visitors
- A facade that captures the essence and roots of the museum.
- A larger exhibition area.
- Better restroom facilities.

The south addition will provide:

- A secondary entrance that will serve as the primary entrance for staff, non-museum visitors, and library users.
- A new elevator and stair for vertical circulation and access to the library.
- A larger second-floor museum library.

#### *CONSULTATION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION*

Staff met with Smithsonian staff in two early consultation/informal reviews for the project. At the meetings, Commission staff expressed concern about the following issues:

- The scale of the diamond symbol applied to the vertical structures on the new front façade.
- The size of the stairs leading from the bus drop-off circle to the main entrance.
- Termination of the edge of the paved area adjacent to the flagpoles and the curved access ramp located at the front entrance.

Smithsonian staff explained the origin of the diamond symbol and the relevance of its application to the cultural heritage of the museum, and agreed to widen the stairs at the front façade and curve them to express the form of the adjacent retaining wall. They further agreed to curve the edge of the paved area adjacent to the flagpoles to softly terminate at the curved wall of the access ramp. Staff was pleased with the response of the Smithsonian and had no other areas of concern.

#### *EVALUATION*

Staff has reviewed the preliminary and final site and building plans for the addition and renovation of the Anacostia Museum for African-American History and Culture and finds the proposal to be consistent with the mission of the museum. This proposal will allow the museum to take advantage of its setting in historic Fort Stanton Park. Staff supports the Smithsonian proposal to redevelop the museum and appreciates the need to externally express the African cultural heritage of the museum on the front facade. The proposal

meets its objective of providing a safe work environment that is ADA compliant by providing a well designed access ramp at the north entrance and a new elevator at the south entrance. Other objectives met include:

- The provision of a larger exhibit space, which should enhance the visitors' museum experience.
- The expansion of the library to meet the community's need for education and research in African-American history and culture.

Staff notes that the Smithsonian has responded very quickly in submitting revised drawings that incorporate changes suggested by Commission staff. Therefore, staff commends the Smithsonian for the prompt response and recommends that the Commission approve the preliminary and final site and building plans for the addition and renovation of the Anacostia Museum.

### *COORDINATION*

#### Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 9, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

#### Commission of Fine Arts

In their meeting of February 18, 1999, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved the conceptual design for the addition and alteration of the museum building. CFA concluded that the exterior modifications and additions are in character and most fitting to the mission of the museum. CFA gave final approval to the project in their meeting of June 17, 1999 with no further comment.

### *CONFORMANCE*

#### Comprehensive Plan

As noted earlier, the museum is located in Fort Stanton Park, which is part of the Fort Circle Park System. The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan designates this park for Historic Park use. Two applicable policies in this element specify:

Historic Parks...should be established and preserved as important legacies of national historic and architectural significance. Special efforts should be taken to provide for the interpretation of their history, and they should be properly maintained to provide for controlled use, which respects their historical integrity. Ancillary

areas and uses such as access, visitor and multi-purpose areas should not detract from the historical association of the site.

The Fort Circle Parks System should be enhanced, and the important scenic and historic elements of Civil War Forts and panoramic views should be preserved...

#### National Historic Preservation Act

The Smithsonian Institution has determined, with the concurrence of the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office, that the project would have *no effect* on historic architectural resources. The museum is not a historic building; however, it is sited in a historic park on land with potential archaeological interest. The Smithsonian will conduct a Phase I archaeological survey and, if deemed necessary, will continue with a Phase II survey to determine if significant cultural resources are present.

#### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service (NPS) has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) is required for the proposed project because of its location on NPS property. The Park Service prepared an EA in early May 1999 and released the document for review, and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact on June 17, 1999.

The developed EA analyzes three alternatives for acquiring the needed additional space for the museum renovation and expansion plan:

- The no action option.
- Horizontal additions to the front and rear of the existing structure.
- Vertical expansion.

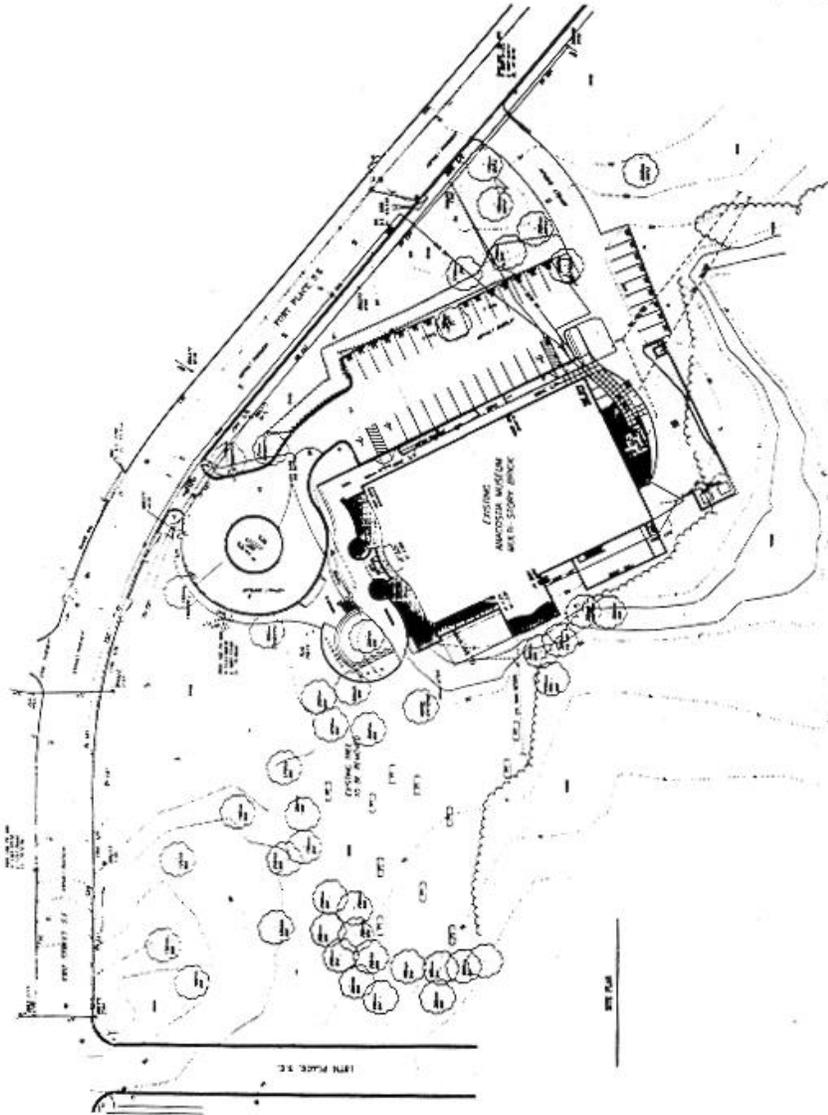
The document examined physical and visual impacts of the alternatives on park resources and museum operations, including mitigation of any potential impacts.

No significant environmental effects are anticipated as a result of implementing the project at the proposed location. Effects were evaluated for soils and geology, water resources, endangered and threatened species, air quality, socioeconomics, land use, noise, historic/cultural resources, and utilities. In addition, transportation and parking impacts were investigated with the finding that no significant effects would occur in the vicinity of the immediate community or on park resources.

In review of the transportation impacts, the project may generate a very small increase in the number of vehicles accessing and exiting the site. However, any such increase will be within the capacity of the proposed project's parking and roadway modifications.

Stormwater drainage will be modified by the proposed project but will not increase the runoff rate by more than 10 percent. Storm water quality controls that include two sand filter concrete vaults located under the parking area will be implemented. The

stormwater flow rate will be reduced and the system performance will exceed the minimum discharge requirements established by District of Columbia Regulations.



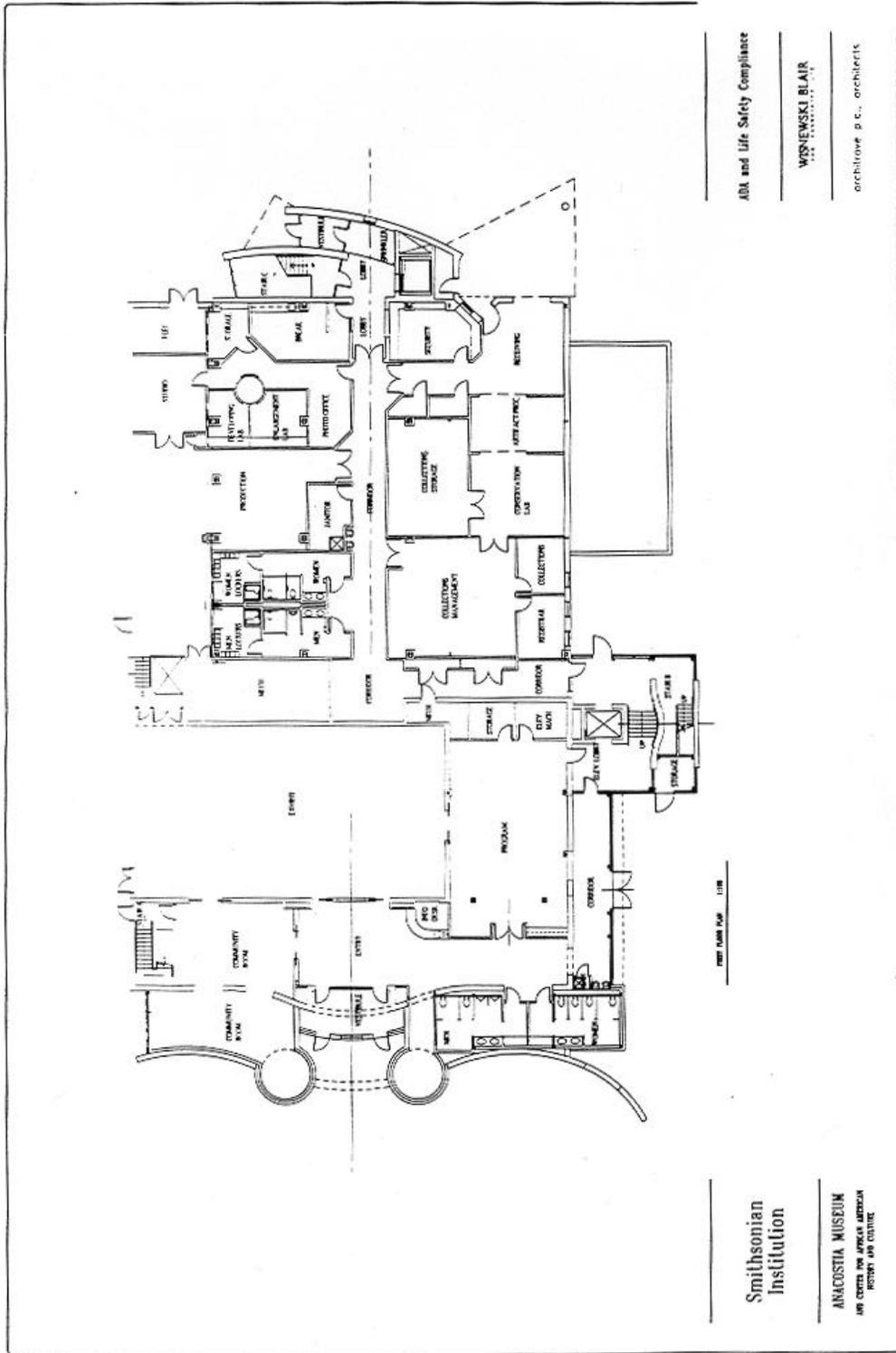
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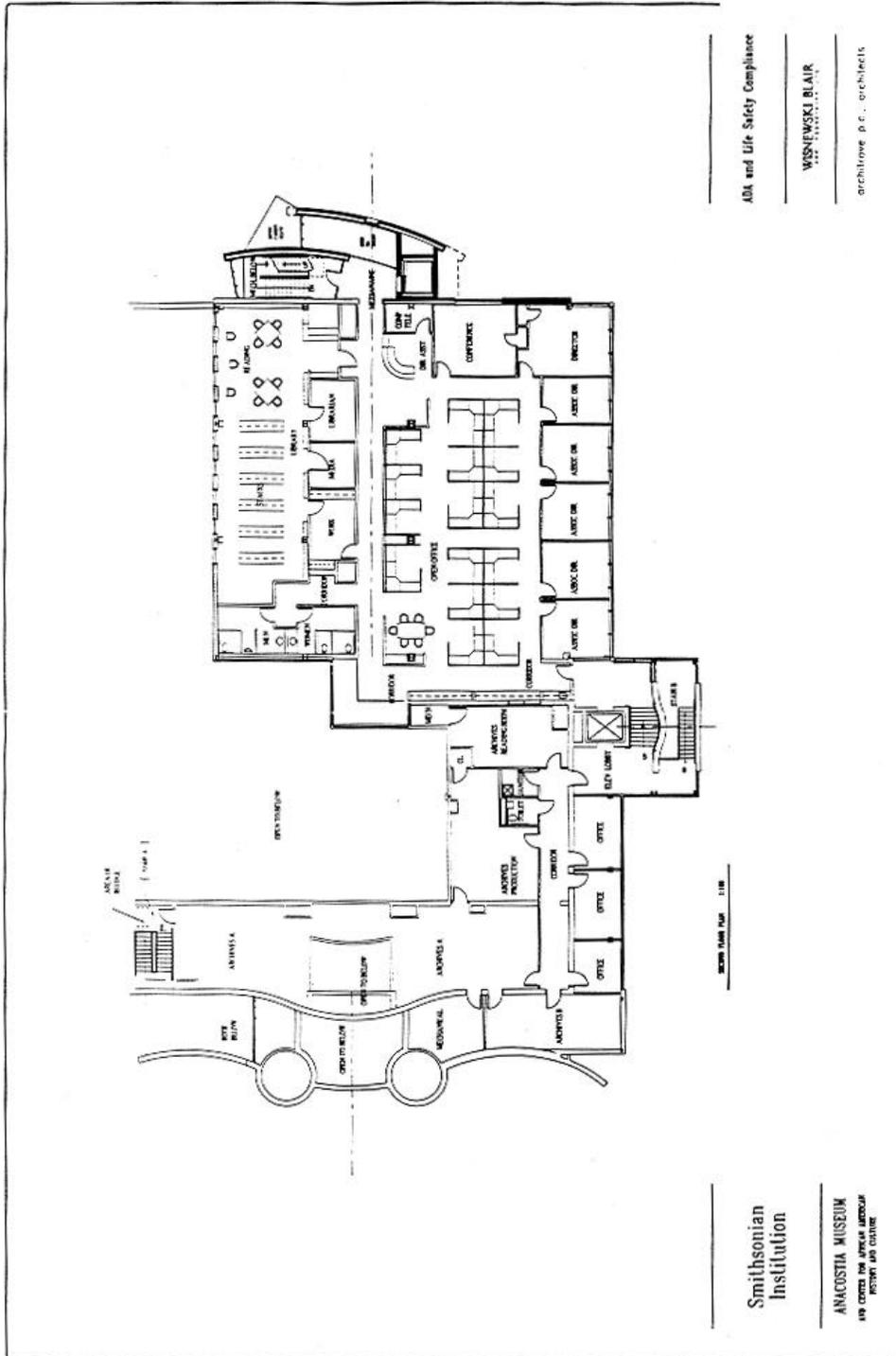
WISNIEWSKI BLAIR  
ARCHITECTS

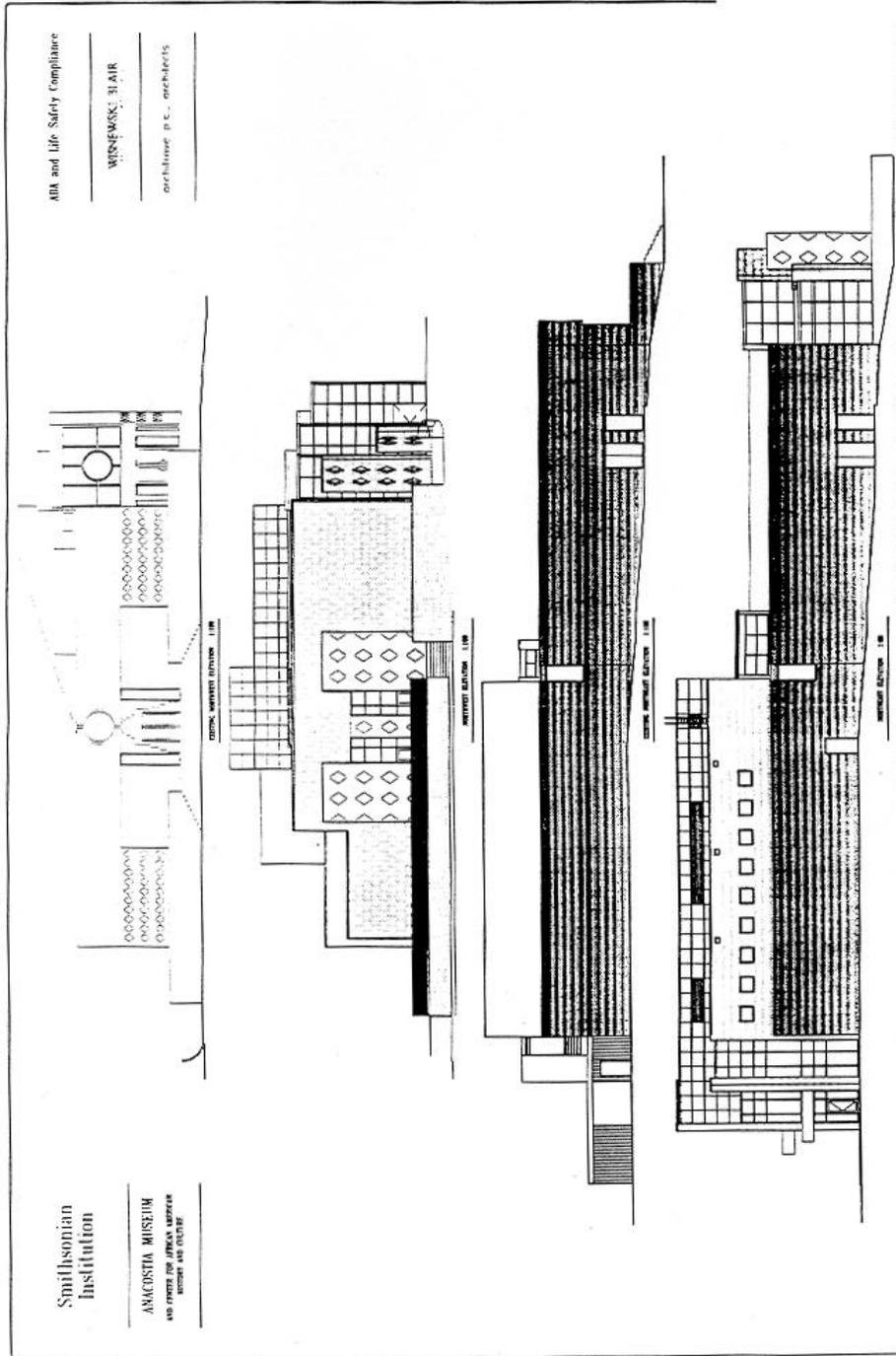
architects P.C., architects

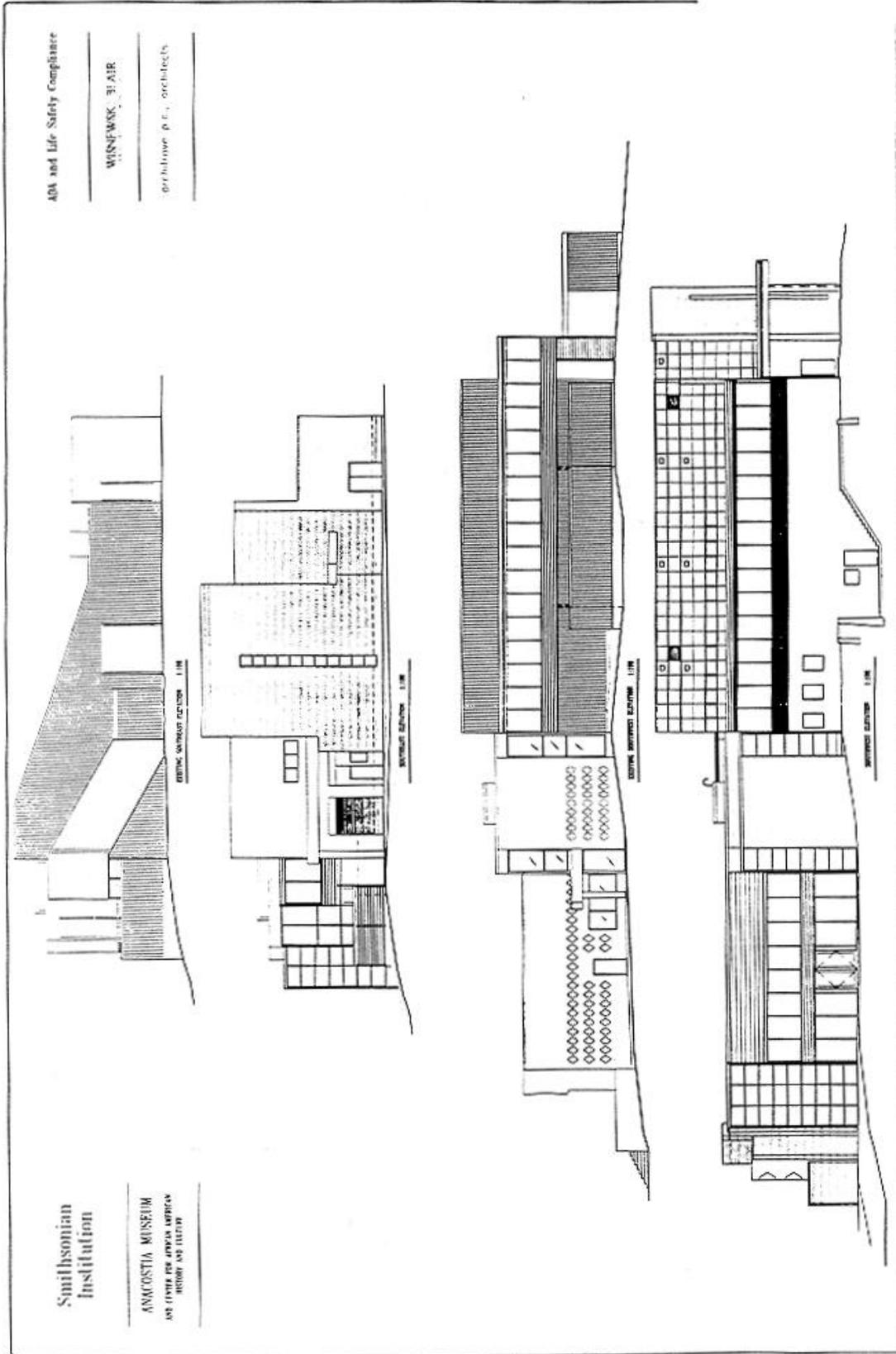
Smithsonian  
Institution

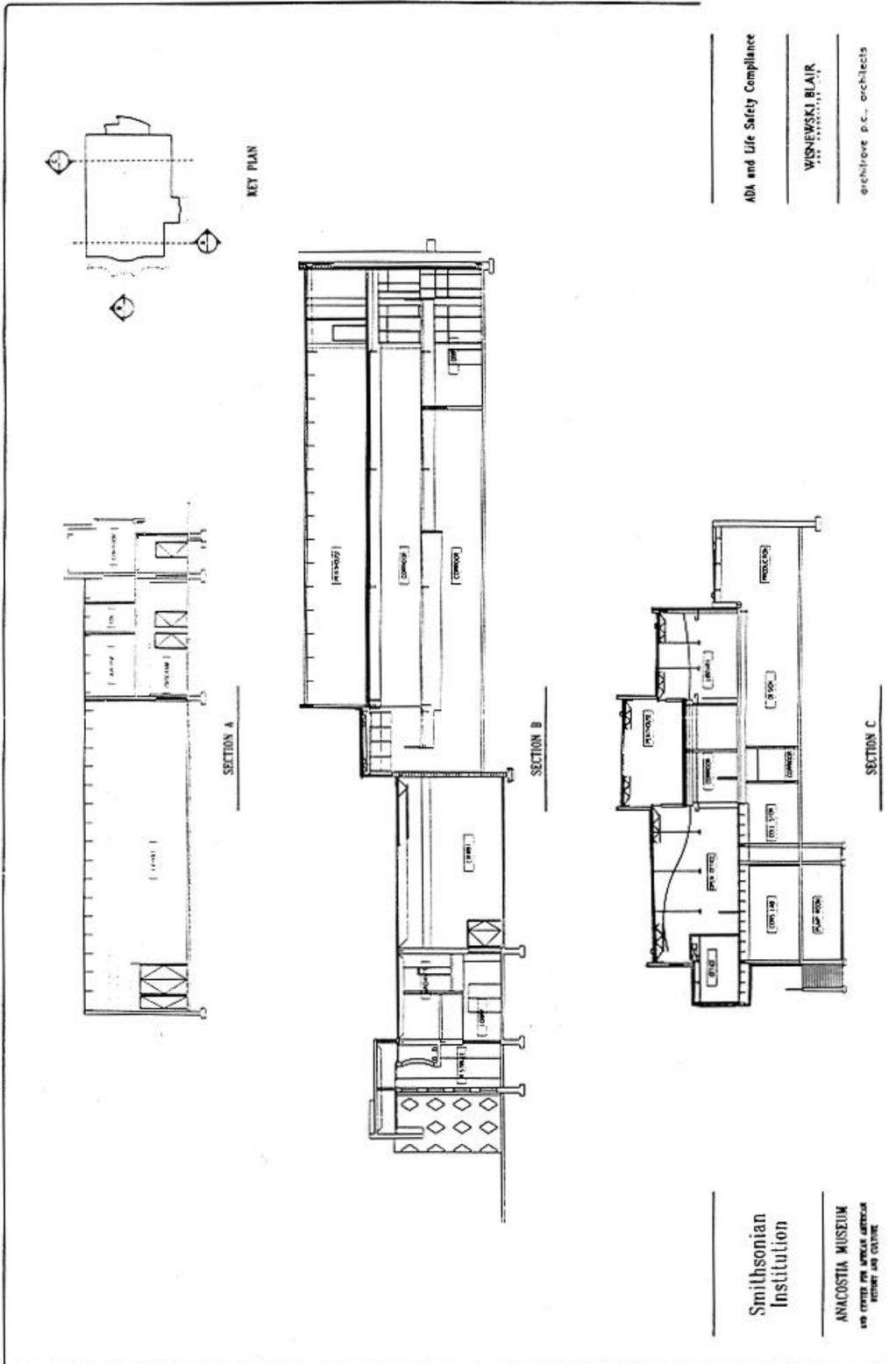
ANACOSTIA MUSEUM  
1800 CENTER FOR AMERICAN HISTORY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004











ADA and Life Safety Compliance  
WISNIEWSKI BLAIR  
architects p.c., architects

Smithsonian Institution  
ANACOSTIA MUSEUM  
AND CENTER FOR AMERICAN HISTORY  
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