



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: November 1, 2012

PROJECT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive between 14th and 15th Streets, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 6331 NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.42(38.00)42654 APPLICANT'S REQUEST Final approval of site and building plans
SUBMITTED BY Smithsonian Institution	PROPOSED ACTION Approve with conditions
REVIEW AUTHORITY PL 108-184 per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	ACTION ITEM TYPE Staff Presentation

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Smithsonian has submitted final site and building design plans for a new museum building to house the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the former grounds of the Washington Monument between Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive, NW and 14th and 15th Streets, NW. The 401,447 SF museum will contain state-of-the-art galleries, offices for program and administrative staff, and an education center.

KEY INFORMATION

Since the preliminary design submission in November 2011 and the final foundation plans in April 2012, the Smithsonian has completed the support of excavation and made substantial progress on the foundation excavation. The Smithsonian has also addressed the comments raised by the Commission at its review of the preliminary design in November 2011.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission: **Approves** the final site and building plans for the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), at the southeast corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, DC.

Notes: that since the treatment of the corona has not been finalized and is an important element of the design, further analysis needs to be undertaken to determine the final finish and color of the corona panels. Therefore, the Commission **delegates** the final approval of the corona finish to the Executive Director upon staff evaluation of the full scale corona mock-up.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	April, 2012 – Approval of Final foundation and vertical transportation cores November 2011 – Approval of Preliminary Design, Final Site Utility, and Support of Excavation, Excavation and Dewatering Plans. April, 2011 – Approval of Revised Concept Design September, 2010 – Approval of Concept Design
Remaining actions (anticipated)	– Continued Section 106 review

Prepared by Ken Walton
Oct 30, 2012

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The site is located on the National Mall at the end of a row of museums along Constitution Avenue NW and Madison Drive, NW between 14th and 15th Streets, NW. The site is BOUNDED BY Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive, NW and 14th and 15th Streets, NW, immediately northeast of the Washington Monument. The site occupies approximately 5.0 acres of open space on the National Mall. The National Park Service transferred administrative jurisdiction of the property to the Smithsonian, effective June 1, 2007. Operation and maintenance of the site was transferred to the Smithsonian in September of 2011.

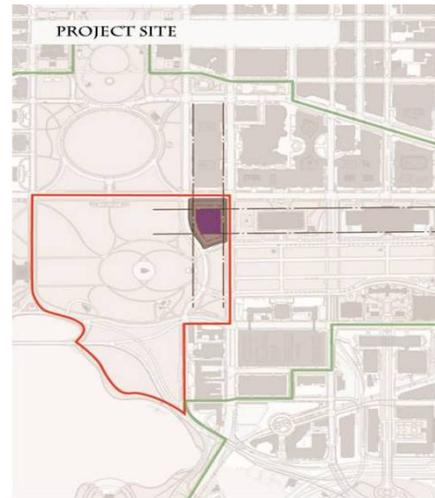


Figure 1: Site Plan

Background

Public Law 108-184 (December 2003) created the NMAAHC, and authorized the Smithsonian Institution Board of Regents to designate a museum site from four potential sites (narrowed from an initial twelve.) After a site selection process that included consideration of recommendations from the Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian's Board of Regents selected the Washington Monument site. Congress authorized the National Park Service to transfer jurisdiction to the Smithsonian for the purpose of constructing a building to house the new museum. The Tier I Environmental Impact Statement quotes a 2003 report titled "The Time Has Come: Report to the President and Congress" as saying the project is needed to "provide a national meeting place for all Americans to learn about the history and culture of African Americans; establish an Institution that can respond to the interests and needs of diverse racial constituencies; and build a national venue that can serve as an educational healing space to further racial reconciliation."

The museum will be dedicated to the collection, preservation, research, and exhibition of African American historical and cultural materials reflecting the breadth and depth of the experience of individuals of African descent living in the United States.



Figure 2: National Museum of African American History and Culture

Proposal

Final approval is requested for the museum site and building plans. The Smithsonian received preliminary design approval on NMAAHC from the Commission with the request to address a number of specific areas as the final design developed. During the past year, the design has reached almost 100% and there were several early packages for site utility and Support of Excavation (SOE) that were submitted consistent with the Commission's preliminary design approvals.

The application for final design has progressed to complete the design details of the Corona, refined the details for the glass enclosed first floor and entrances, established egress courts for the lower levels, adjusted the height and roof details of the museum and concentrated on the landscape design. All of the refinements have been in an effort to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts to adjacent historic resources as outlined in both the Final EIS Tier II and the Programmatic Agreement which were in place prior to the Nov, 3, 2011 preliminary design approval. All of the subsequent refinements have been reviewed by staff.

The position of the building is the same location as presented at the preliminary design submission except for the lowering of the top edge of the corona by two feet to bring it into alignment with the parapet of the Commerce Building. The building remains at 216 feet on a side and the base of the building is still set back from the 445 foot McMillan line by 19'-8" with the porch on the south extending 24'-5" beyond the McMillan line and less than the entrance and stair projection of the nearby National Museum of Natural History. The size of the building has increased to 401,447sf. This increase is contained below grade with no impact to the previous view of the above grade pavilion/corona.

The roof design has been simplified by eliminating the sawtooth skylights shown previously. The mechanical equipment is set within the four cores (elevator and service cores) and hidden under a simple grille.

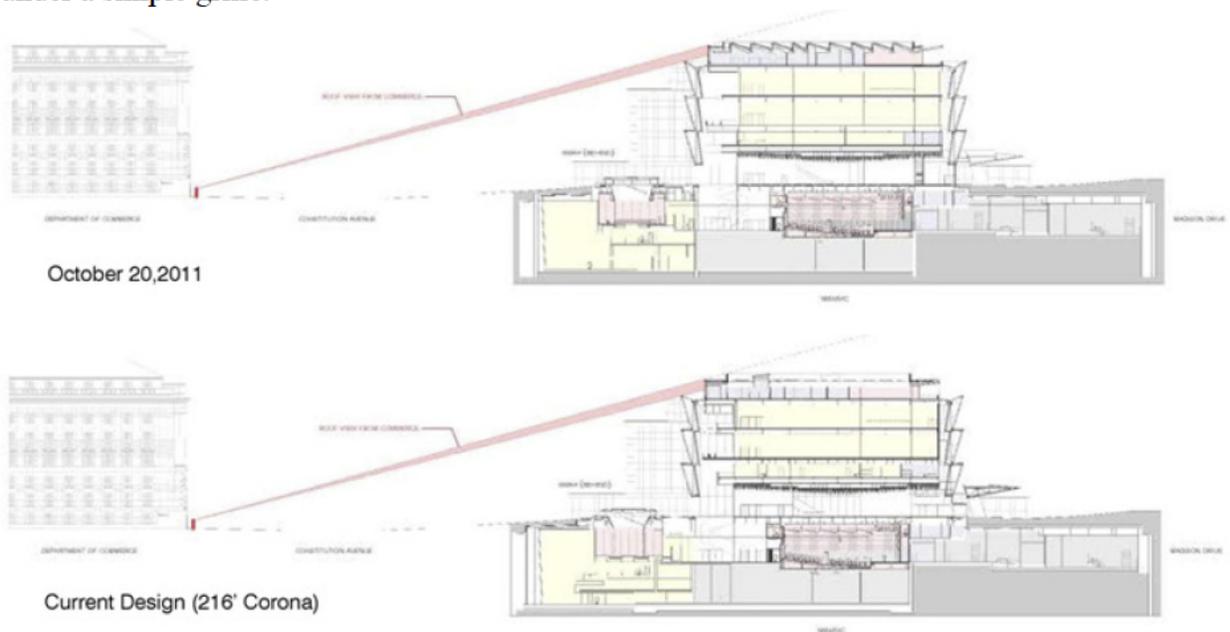


Figure 3: Roof View from the Commerce Building

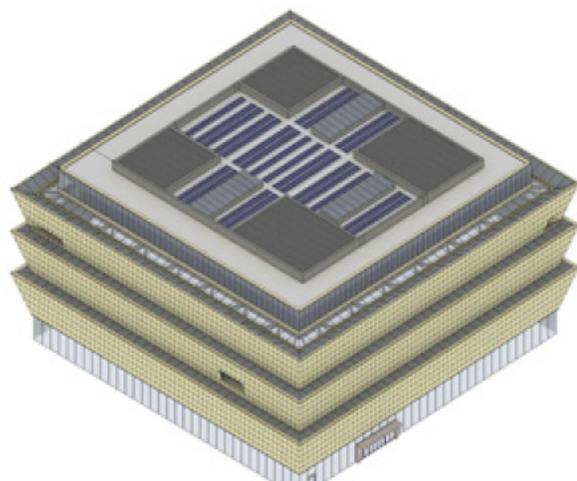


Figure 4: Roof Skylights and Solar Panels

Three skylights now rest between the cores in combination with a rectilinear pattern of flat photovoltaic panels. All the elements are set behind a parapet and are not visible from site vantage points along the public right of way.

The location of the South Plaza entry doors and vestibule, the primary Mall entrance to the museum, has been shifted east to align with the southwest interior core with several visual and functional benefits. Moving the entrance creates a clear public view to and from the Central Hall without the obstruction of security and screening devices. Visitors will now also have a larger queuing area inside the building for the screening process.

New to the design at both the north and south entries to the building have a canted vestibule that reflects the 17 degree angle shared by the Washington Monument cap and the Corona, and establishes a clear entrance portal to the museum. The stone framing of the north and south entries are compatible with the paving materials, merging the inside and outside of the entryways. The staff entrance on the south has been placed adjacent to the screening area and can accommodate groups together through the security screening. The earlier bridge configuration for this secondary entrance has been eliminated which has helped refine the design of the East Court.



Figure 5: South Plaza Entry



Figure 6: North Entry

The East Egress Court has been developed to support the lower level public activities, egress and smoke evacuation. The staircases have been widened for egress; operable wall panels for the required emergency air intake have been added, and a linear pattern of inset floor skylights are provided to bring natural light to the lower level cafeteria. Simple metal blade pickets have been used to define a minimalist railing system.



Figure 7: East Egress Courtyard

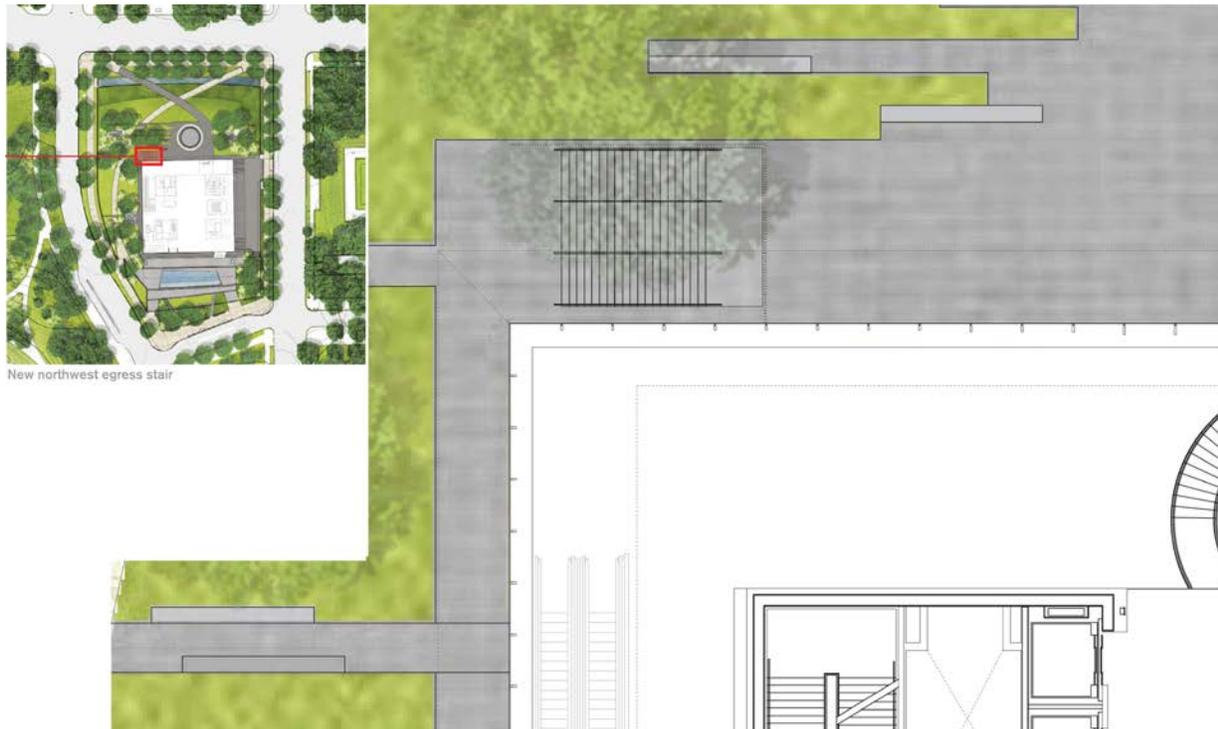


Figure 8: New West Egress Courtyard

A West Egress Stair has been added to the northwest corner of the building for emergency egress for the additional occupancy load from the History Gallery below. This has been treated in a minimalist fashion and pulled close to the building to avoid obstructing the view from the north looking across the site to the Washington Monument. Simple blade rails have been used consistent with other railings on the site.

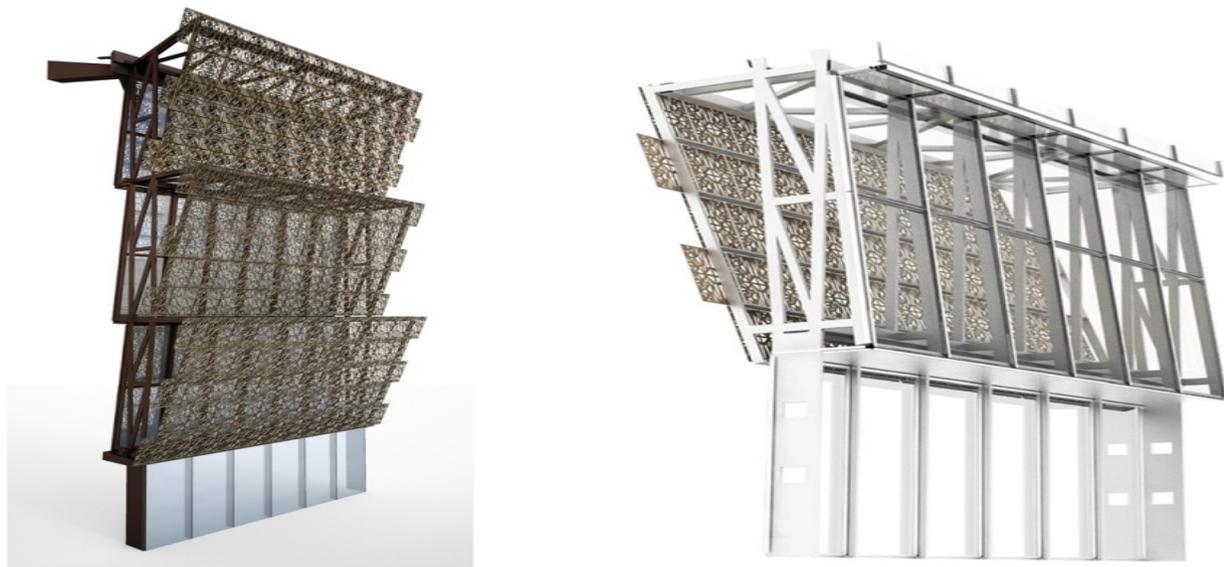


Figure 9: Corona Panel Support System

The corona panel support system has been modified from the suspended cable system to vertical trusses. Budget was the major driver for the change in the system. Facilities maintenance also contributed to this decision.

The landscape includes a number of features that help interpret the museum and its mission. There are reading groves; several water features similar to those shown in the preliminary design presentation; and locations for statuary and art elements, the Oculus on the north and the outdoor seating area on the south. Most of these features were included and reviewed in the preliminary design and approved with comments for continued review by staff. These were to refine the food cart shelter and guard booth and to work with the District Department of Transportation to open sidewalks as soon as possible. The shelter for the food cart has been eliminated due to only seasonal use. In addition, the water features have been improved, selection for areas for art, selection of paving materials and a planting palette that will give life to the site throughout the four seasons.



Figure 10: Five Areas for Art

Five areas for art/statuary have been identified in the landscape and are intended to correspond to areas where there may be permanent or rotating installations. While the art is not yet selected, it is intended that the subtle lighting of these future elements will be incorporated in the design and will be further reviewed by staff. The most dramatic feature on the north is the previously submitted Oculus, which now has been modified to remove the water element from the exterior. The basic feature symbolizing a lantern will retain its approximate size and location with the inclusion of a seating bench around the perimeter. This makes a welcome feature at the north entrance and provides views down into to the history gallery and views up from below to the Washington Monument.

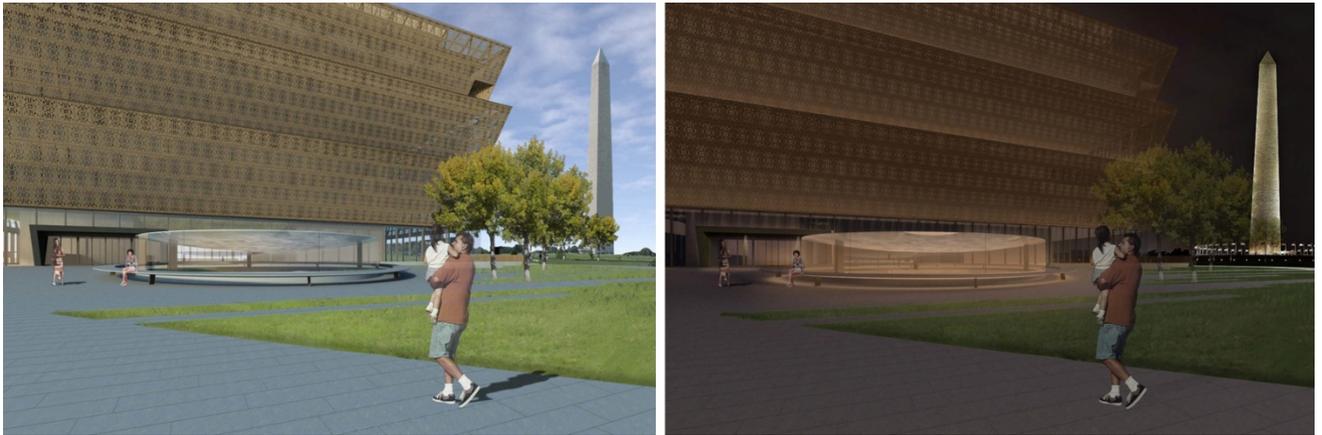


Figure 11: North Landscape View to Oculus

For the water features, the north water feature is a tribute to the Washington City Canal/Tiber Creek which once was located at the edge of the site. There remain two paths to “cross the water” and enter the site. As mentioned, the Oculus is no longer an exterior water feature but remains as a subtle reference to a lantern of welcome, a reminder of the Underground Railroad routes. The south water feature has been studied for inclusion of an upper band of active water and a lower pool of still water. It is anticipated that there will be three quotes by famous African Americans detailed in bronze letters against a dark granite background of the pool. There will be a low seating bench at the north edge of the pool. The reflections of light will be captured by the underside of the porch canopy above the south entrance.



Figure 12: South Water Feature

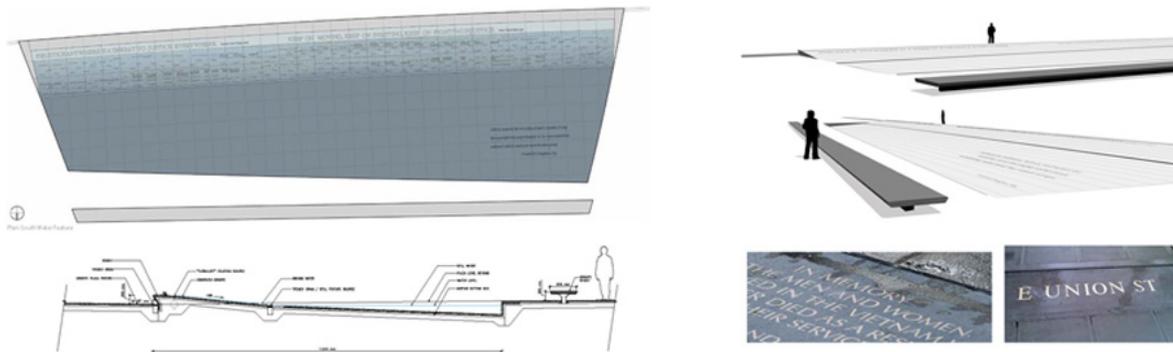


Figure 11: South Water Feature Plan, Section and Details

Over the last year, there has been an extensive study of the planting materials that will appropriately respect the vocabulary of trees on the Washington Monument Grounds and responding to significant thematic colors and tree/plant selections for the museum itself. The understory of trees in the garden seating area and the three groves –Spirituality, Hope and Optimism, and Resilience- are all white flowering trees, such as cherry and dogwoods, which will provide shade and intimate meeting spaces.



Figure 13: Reading Groves Spirituality, Hope and Optimism, and Resilience

The white flowers will signify the spirituality of the African American culture. The color blue symbolized protection and passage into a safe place in; African American Culture and blue flowering plants are to be planted in the aquatic garden to create a symbolic welcome threshold to the museum site. At the end of winter, a field of blue crocuses across the site will welcome the spring and be in full bloom for African American History Month. The selection of trees, including a copper beech at the north entrance and oaks near the Resilience reading grove, will be strong elements in the landscape. The security elements will be integrated into mixed evergreen hedges along 14th street. Other discreet security elements will be integrated into low walls along walkways and seating areas. The rich palette of planting materials will provide color throughout the seasons.

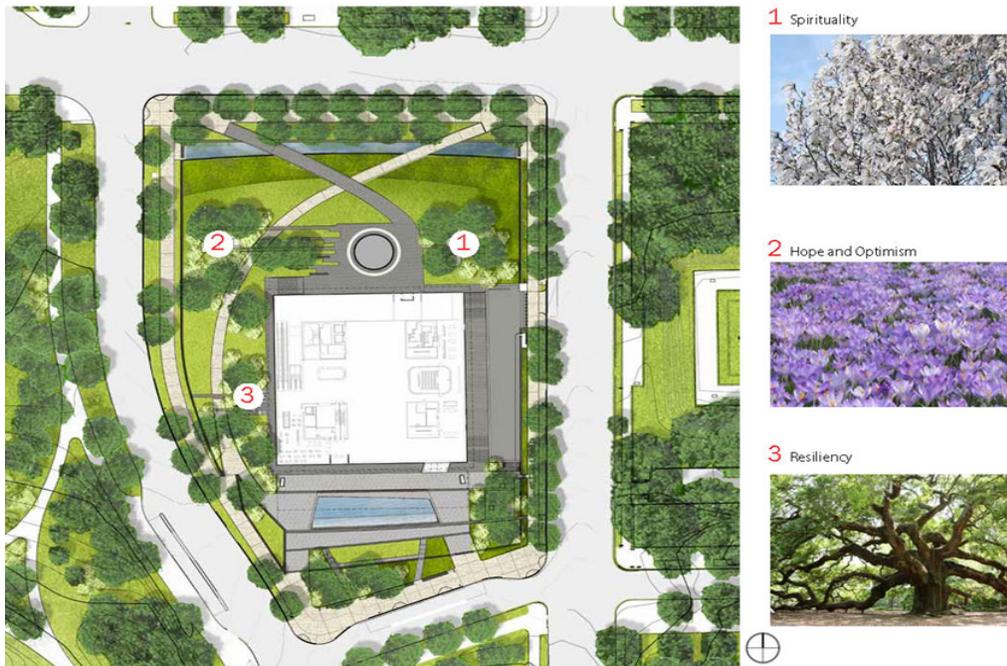


Figure 14: Reading Groves Location and Landscape Color

The selection of paving materials, light to dark shades of grey will serve as a neutral background for the building. The perimeter sidewalks will reflect the exposed aggregate concrete used by the National Park Service while the main promenade path on the site will be in a warmer tone. The North Entry Plaza will include stone bands that are meant to resemble wooden planks forming a series of thresholds to cross over to the entry. The southeast seating area and the Resiliency Reading Grove will have bound gravel for stability and texture. Seating benches on site and in the groves will be formed in a warm concrete. The interior stone flooring of the museum's central hall will reflect the exterior materials that will flow from one to the other and wrap around the entrances to tie the composition together.



Figure 15: Site Materials and Finishes



Figure 16: Building Materials and Finishes

Exterior building materials stay predominantly as described at the preliminary design submission. The glass first floor base will be clear and outboard of the support elements. The Corona will be of cast metal panels with a durable factory applied metallic finish in a golden bronze color. A full size mockup of two bays of the Corona will be fabricated for inspection prior to final fabrication. Metal railings and incidental metal elements on the site will be a dark metal for blade and rails and a bronze mesh will be used for transparency for panels in railings, such as at the north bridges over the “canal” water feature and at the observation deck on the porch roof.

II PROJECT ANALYSIS/CONFORMANCE

Analysis

Final approval is requested for the NMAAHC site and building plans. The museum is a fast track project, meaning that construction is initiated before design is completed. The support of excavation work previously approved by the Commission has been completed.

The design has reached almost 100% design development and currently the construction documents are at 65% completion. Minimal changes have been made to the building design since the November 2011 preliminary design submission. There has been a slight reduction in the height of the corona, and some changes to the exterior skins structural system. Staff recommends that the Commission approve the final plans, but that staff continues to work with the Smithsonian on the color of the corona.

The corona will be of cast metal panels with a factory applied metallic finish in a golden bronze color. A full size mockup of two bays of the corona will be fabricated for inspection prior to final fabrication.

The landscape design has been developed to accommodate a number of features that help interpret the museum and its mission. These features include: the reading groves similar to the preliminary design; several water features; locations for art and statuary elements; the Oculus on the north; and an outdoor seating area on the South. Simple metal blade pickets have been used at stairs, and opening around the site to define a minimalist railing system. The plant pallet has been finalized, and over the last year there has been a study of the planting materials to reflect an appropriate landscape that respects the vocabulary of trees on the Washington Monument Grounds and responding to significant thematic colors and tree/plant selections for the museum itself. The trees in the garden seating area and the three groves –Spirituality, Hope and Optimism, and Resilience- are all white flowering trees, which will provide shade and intimate meeting spaces. The white flowers will signify the spirituality of the African American culture. The color blue was symbolic of protection and passage into a safe place in African American Culture; blue flowering plants are to be planted in the aquatic garden to create a symbolic welcome threshold to the museum site. At the end of winter, a field of blue crocuses across the site will welcome the spring and be in full bloom for African American History Month.

At the preliminary design submission the Commission had only a few comments:

1. “Refine the food cart shelter and guard booth design in coordination with NCPC staff and other federal review agencies”
2. “Continue coordination with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the National Park Service (NPS) to assure that the 14th Street and 15th Street sidewalks are reopened to the public as soon as construction safety permits.

As such, the shelter for the food cart has been eliminated, and the Smithsonian resolved the transportation issue with a construction traffic plan, and continued Staff will continue to coordinate with DDOT, NPS, and NCPC to complete the public space permit process.

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The project is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, in particular the Visitors Element. Visitors often come to the National Capital Region to enjoy the many national symbols and memorials and to learn more them about American heritage and culture. They come to commemorate important public events, to petition their elected government officials, to conduct business and to do research. The nation’s capital averages almost 20 million domestic and international visitors each year and consistently rates as one of the nation’s most popular tourist destinations. Visitors to the region are particularly interested in the major federal visitor attractions located along the National Mall that tell the story of American history, display invaluable artifacts, and celebrate the artistic, technological, and scientific achievements of our society. In 2002, the Smithsonian recorded 24 million visits which included visitors who live in the area and from outside the region.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures require completion of the NEPA process at the preliminary design stage. In compliance with this requirement, NCPC and the Smithsonian have completed a two-tiered Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Commission adopted the Tier I and II NEPA Records of Decision at the November 3, 2011 meeting.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The Smithsonian led the Section 106 consultation process under NHPA for the design and construction of NMAAHC. Through this consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer and other consulting parties the Smithsonian determined that the construction of the NMAAHC would have an adverse effect on historic properties, most notably on the view to and from the Washington Monument and Federal Triangle.

As a result of the Section 106 review process, the Smithsonian executed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) with the DC SHPO, NCPC, NPS, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The PA described the mitigation efforts undertaken to reduce the adverse effects of the design and construction of NMAAHC and to enhance views to and from the Washington Monument and Federal Triangle.

The PA also outlines the process by which Section 106 consultation will continue as the design is refined. The Smithsonian has held three Section 106 consulting Parties meetings since the preliminary design submission.

Coordination with Local Agencies

The Smithsonian has consulted extensively with both DDOT and NPS in securing necessary permits for the project, including agreement on temporary street and sidewalk closings and overall traffic control plans for each major phase of work.

In its meeting of 20 September, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the final proposal with the exception of several components to be submitted for further review, and provided the following comments. They requested the opportunity to review a mockup of the panels to evaluate the appearance of alternative finishes as seen from a distance, the panel system as seen from inside the building, and the sculpting of the panels as an ensemble. Regarding the design of the egress court on the east side of the building, they suggested designing the wide runs of stairs to be less prominent in relation to the museum's main entrances; they also noted that the metal fins used as areaway guardrails present a new element in the vocabulary of the building and should be designed to minimize their visual impact. The Commission requested that the pool and inscriptions at the south entrance be studied in a mockup to ensure that the quotations are legible under varying conditions of light and water. They also recommended that the locations identified for the installation of artwork throughout the site be provided with appropriate structural, electrical, and other technical support.

In addition to these comments for the refinement of the final design, the Commission requested presentations on the selection and details of all inscriptions, as well as the overall system of signage and wayfinding elements. In its conditional approval of the final design, the Commission delegated the final review of exterior elements such as perimeter security, flood control mechanisms, landscape details, ancillary structures, and lighting to the Commission staff. A copy of the Commission's letter to the applicant is attached.