



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: September 12, 2013

PROJECT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE National Museum of African American History and Culture Constitution Avenue and Madison Drive between 14th and 15th Streets, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 6331
	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.42(64.00)42823
	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of final revised site plans
	PROPOSED ACTION Approve
SUBMITTED BY Smithsonian Institution	ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar
REVIEW AUTHORITY PL 108-184 per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Smithsonian has submitted a proposed change to the landscape design previously approved by the Commission in November, 2012. In the previously approved design, the north entry consisted of a "blue threshold" in the form of a water feature meant to evoke the Tiber Creek Canal that once flowed along Constitution Avenue. The water feature included bridges and guardrails, emphasizing the idea of crossing a threshold. The entry was intended to both evoke the past through use of the color blue, a symbolic and important color in African-American history. It also symbolized rising up from that past toward a hopeful future, celebrating all that was left behind.

Due to the need for value engineering of the landscape design, an alternative design was designed that eliminated the water feature, bridges & guardrails, replaced the blue from the water feature with blue flowering shrubs, and highlighted the entry sign atop the security wall to announce arrival and passage.

The Commission of Fine Arts objected to the flowering shrubs and security wall, saying that resulting design strategy lost its conceptual narrative. The Smithsonian responded with a third alternative design that introduced a granite entry wall that defines the threshold with curving lines consistent with other paths within the site and on the Washington Monument Grounds.

As visitors pass through this entry sequence, they will symbolically rise up from a past with strength, following an upward path toward the future. This experience is complemented by a wide, polished, horizontal top surface, inviting reflection of that past.

KEY INFORMATION

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) recommended approval of the curved wall and other landscape features, while requesting further refinement and material selection of certain elements of the design to complete the approval.

The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DCSHPO) has indicated that there is no further need for consultation on this design change for purposes of the Programmatic Agreement.

The sculptural granite entry wall will provide perimeter security and is within the building yard of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

In the originally designed site plan, the "rain garden" water feature was controlling water quality through filtering. This system was removed from the project two years ago and replaced by a "water feature" that fulfilled aesthetics/narrative purposes only. It was this system that was approved at the final design submission. The Smithsonian has provided a comparable solution that meets DDOE's approval with more efficient use of the space available.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission: **Approves** the changes made to the final site development plans for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, at the southeast corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	November 2012 – Approval of Final Site and Building Plans. 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 Section106 review

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.

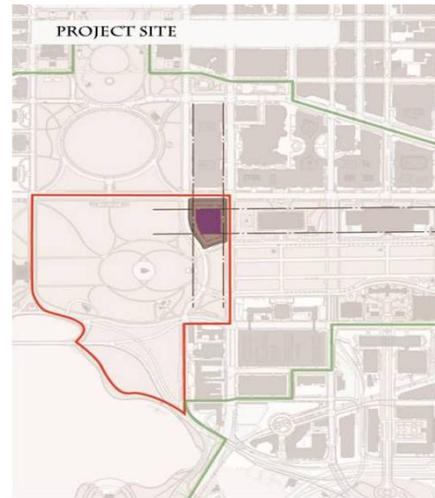


Figure 1: Site Plan

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.

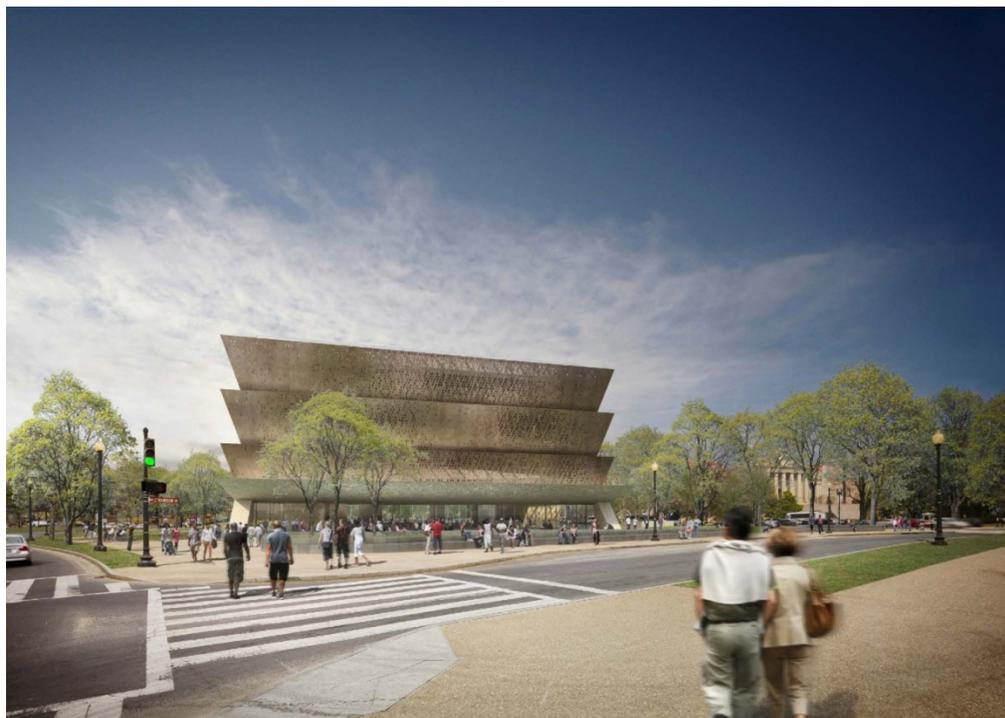


Figure 2: National Museum of African American History and Culture

Proposal

The Smithsonian is requesting approval of a proposed change to the landscape design previously approved by the Commission in November, 2012. The change has been made as a result of value engineering.



Figure 3: November 2012 Proposed "Blue Threshold"

The previous design included a water feature, bridges & guardrails on the north side of the site, that were intended to symbolize the Northwest Passage. An interim design developed in early 2013 eliminated these elements, replacing the blue from the water feature with blue flowering shrubs, and highlighting the entry sign atop the security wall to announce arrival and passage



Figure 4: February 2013 Proposed “Flowering Shrubs”

In the original design for the aquatic garden, the intention of the north entry was to serve as an important threshold to the visitor experience – one that both reflected upon the past with the evocation of the Tiber Creek, as well as marking the crossing toward the future by emphasizing the idea of the path & the journey. In the current design proposal, the focus is on recalling the conceptual narrative that tied the north entry to the rest of the site, while concurrently strengthening the existing formal character along Constitution Avenue. This respects conceptual themes that have been consistent throughout the design process these themes are:

STRONG | POWERFUL | SOLID | UNIFIED | FLUID

The proposed design is focused upon the introduction of a sculptural granite entry wall, one that defines the threshold with sinuous, fluid lines generated from the connection to the other paths within the site and to the Washington Monument & Mall beyond. The strong form & presence of the wall react to the formal edges along Constitution Avenue, and the adjacent double allée of trees support this connection as well. As visitors pass through this sculptural entry, the focus is on rising up from a past with strength, and following an upward path toward the future. This is further emphasized by a wide, polished, horizontal top surface, inviting reflection of that past. The leading edge of the wall matches the 17 degree angle of the corona, tying the site together as a whole.



Figure 5: Current Proposal “STRONG | POWERFUL | SOLID | UNIFIED | FLUID

The North Entry has been re-designed to reinforce the threshold to the site and enhance the experience of rising up and reflecting on history as visitors enter the site. The rising path brings visitors into the world of the museum where the Oculus acts like a beacon in the landscape signaling entry and a place of welcome.



Figure 6: Current Proposal The top surface emphasis the strength of reflection

The landscape has been designed to fit into the overall context of the Mall as part of a composition that frames the Washington Monument. At the north edge, the design holds several alignments that reinforce the character along Constitution Avenue. The sidewalks along the north edge just north of the NMAAHC security wall align with the security walls at NMAH to the east. The sidewalks & planters in the design align with the adjacent sidewalks and planters to the east & west. The double allée of trees along NMAAHC's north border align with the existing double allée of trees at the north edge of the Washington Monument grounds, and the trees at NMAH to the east.

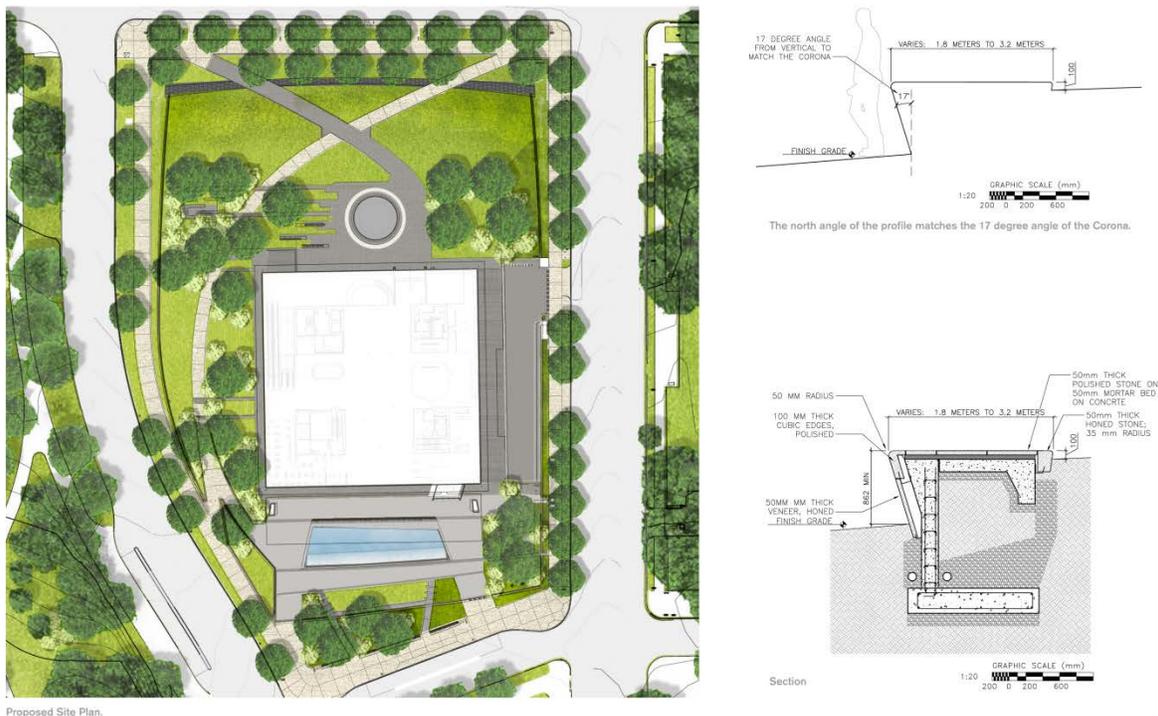


Figure 7: Site plan and security wall details

Stormwater Management

In the originally designed site plan, the “rain garden” was controlling water quality through filtering into the soil. The “rain garden” was also going to control the “rate” of water being discharged from the site; however, “rain gardens” are typically less efficient at providing quantity (rate) control for larger areas. This system was removed from the project two years ago, and replaced by a “water feature” for aesthetics/narrative purposes only. At the same time, and instead of the “rain garden,” the Smithsonian added on the west side of the site a very large underground vault for detention (slow rate of discharge to the city storm drain) and another to treat water quality. So while less poetic than the “rain garden”, environmentally, the system have provided a comparable solution that meets DDOE's approval and is a more efficient use of their limited space.

II PROJECT ANALYSIS/CONFORMANCE

Analysis

The proposed design respects the themes of STRONG | POWERFUL | SOLID | UNIFIED | FLUID that have informed the development of the design since the project's inception, reflects features of the approved building design (by repeating the 17 degree angle of the corona) and the curved paths located elsewhere on the site. As a perimeter security element, the wall is consistent with NCPC policies that call for perimeter security elements to be designed in a way that responds to the architectural and landscape context in which they are located, and to be located within the building yard and not in public space. The proposed design has been approved by the Commission of Fine Arts at their July 2013 meeting, and the DC SHPO has determined that the proposal will require no further consultation under Section 106 for purposes of the Programmatic Agreement. **Staff therefore recommends that the commission approve the changes made to the final site development plans for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.**

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 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. An outline of mitigation efforts completed to date will be produced this month.

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.

The Programmatic Agreement (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 final design submission. The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DCSHPO) will have no further consultation on this security wall design change topic for purposes of the programmatic agreement. The yearly Section 106 update will be held this month.

Coordination with Local Agencies

The Smithsonian has continued to consult extensively with both local and federal agencies as they have moved forward with each phase of construction.

In its meeting of 18 July 2013, the Commission of Fine Arts approved curved wall and other landscape features, while requesting further refinement and material selection of certain elements of the design to complete the approval.