



Commission Action

June 6, 2019

PROJECT

Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Revitalization

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
700 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC

SUBMITTED BY

Smithsonian Institution

REVIEW AUTHORITY

Approval
per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)

NCPC FILE NUMBER

7889

NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER

1.16(38.00)44927

APPLICANT'S REQUEST

Approval of comments on concept design

ACTION TAKEN

Approved comments on concept design

The Commission:

Supports the Smithsonian's intention to revitalize the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden to improve the visitor experience and public engagement, and accommodate the museum's mission and contemporary programming needs.

Finds that components of the revitalization can reinforce and improve the connections between the National Mall, Sculpture Garden, and Museum.

Finds the revitalization must balance visitor experience, program needs, and historic preservation considerations.

Visitor Access and Experience

Supports improvements that enhance accessibility to and through the sculpture garden for visitors of all abilities.

Notes the museum site and sculpture garden were originally connected by a tunnel beneath Jefferson Drive, but the tunnel was closed in 1993.

Supports re-opening the tunnel connection between the museum and the garden to improve connectivity between the two areas.

Finds that each of the design alternatives to bring more light to the stair opening of the tunnel connection has historic preservation challenges, including introducing new materials with the skylights, or potentially altering the historic monumental Plaza entrance stairs.

Supports the applicant's preferred approach to expand the stair opening to the top of the monumental Plaza entrance stairs, without bisecting the stairs, which allows for the desired daylight into the stair entrance and tunnel.

Requests the applicant work with the National Park Service regarding potential alternatives for Jefferson Drive that improve the pedestrian crossing.

Finds the inclusion of trees and plantings throughout the garden enhance shade and are important to visitor comfort.

Programming

Notes the museum and garden has a need to accommodate interactive art, larger sculpture, and other contemporary installation, in addition to the bronze sculpture collection displayed today.

Finds the sculpture garden should be revitalized to accommodate new, flexible and varied opportunities for museum programming.

Historic Preservation

Notes the Hirshhorn Museum Building and Sculpture Garden have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the complex was designed by noted architect Gordon Bunshaft.

Finds the sculpture garden design has changed substantially over time in response to improving visitor access and environmental comfort.

Notes that the Bunshaft elements have been determined to contribute to the eligibility of the garden, including the sunken plan, concrete perimeter and inner partition walls, reflecting pool, south and north stairs, and the setting for display of rotating sculpture, and that later alterations are not character-defining features.

Notes that the Lester Collin design elements, introduced to the garden in 1981, will need to be re-evaluated as part of the Section 106 consultation process to determine if they now contribute to the significance of the sculpture garden.

Finds the sunken garden space is a fundamental feature of the original Bunshaft design and the proposed revitalization will not alter the relationship of the garden's elevation to the National Mall.

Reflecting Pool

Finds the reflecting pool is a fundamental feature of the original Bunshaft design, which relates to the north window and balcony of the Hirshhorn Museum.

Requests the applicant provide additional details regarding the proposed pool modifications, including the design of the proposed stage and pedestrian paths, to demonstrate the impacts of any changes on the historic character of the pool and the visitor experience.

Recommends the applicant explore a pool alternative that retains the historic character-defining dimensions of Bunshaft's pool design.

Walls

Notes existing perimeter and inner partition stone aggregate walls are contributing elements to the garden design and directly relate the sculpture garden to the museum building.

Supports the efforts to replace the failing original perimeter aggregate walls of Bunshaft's design with in-kind materials, to maintain these character-defining elements.

Notes the design proposes to remove the remaining Bunshaft design interior partition walls including the central partition wall, and the walls and ramps introduced by Collins in 1981, as part of the new revitalization.

Notes the design proposes the introduction of new stacked stone walls that will act as a new backdrop for displayed art.

Supports the introduction of new walls to define space in the garden and serve as a backdrop for the sculpture collection. The new walls should always be lower in height than the concrete perimeter walls, forming a distinctly different secondary system of organization.

Recommends the applicant continue to explore ways in which the new stone walls can be compatible with the historic perimeter materials, but differentiated, through material, color tone, or stacking pattern.

Supports the reconfiguration and introduction of the overlooks to improve the connectivity of the garden with the National Mall.

Julia A. Koster
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

