



Information Presentation

Commission Meeting: September 1, 2022

PROJECT

New Smithsonian Museums

Site Evaluation Study

Washington, DC

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SUBMITTED BY

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The purpose of this information presentation is to provide a final update on the Smithsonian Institution's (SI) site evaluation study for two new museums: the National Museum of the American Latino and the American Women's History Museum. The study covers both museums. The presentation will review the current list of sites under consideration, as well as an overview of the program and massing studies for each site. The Board of Regents (BOR) must carry out site selection in consultation with, among others, the Chair of NCPC. As such, NCPC has an advisory role. Pursuant to the enabling legislation, the BOR must identify sites by December 2022. SI is seeking feedback from the Chair by September 15, 2022. Staff will prepare a letter for the Chair's signature, based on the comments below and comments from the Commission meeting.

In December 2021, 26 initial sites were presented. Those were narrowed down to 14 "Tier 1" sites in March 2022, which were advanced for additional study. At the July 2022 briefing, SI discussed a short list of four focus sites. These include three previously-identified sites, and one new site. The four sites are identified below:

1. Arts and Industries Building - 900 Jefferson Drive, SW (Smithsonian Institution)
2. Northwest Capitol site – bounded by Constitution Avenue, First Street, Pennsylvania Avenue, and 3rd Street, NW (Architect of the Capitol)
3. Tidal Basin site – location bordered by Raoul Wallenberg Place, Maine Avenue, and Independence Avenue, SW (National Park Service)
4. South Monument site – bounded by Raoul Wallenberg Place, Jefferson Drive, 14th Street, and Independence Avenue, SW (National Park Service)

Staff has prepared initial comments on the four focus sites. Additional suggestions for other sites are also described. As noted in previous discussions, there will likely be other museums over the medium and long term, including the National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture. If any of the focus sites are ultimately unavailable or not viable, it will be necessary to consider other locations on or adjacent to the National Mall.

Focus Sites

It is clear with the selection of the four focus sites that the desire to locate on the National Mall and the significance this brings is a very high priority for both museums. Unfortunately, there are very few available unencumbered sites left on the National Mall. These sites, while prominently located, each have their own specific, and sometimes significant, challenges, as described below:

The Arts and Industries Building (AIB) is a clear front-runner. AIB offers the prominence and visibility of a site directly on the National Mall, within the Smithsonian's South Mall Campus. As it is already under SI jurisdiction, the building could perhaps most quickly reach occupancy as a new national museum. The site is also not located within the Reserve. As a reminder, Congress established the Reserve as a "no build" zone. Two other focus sites, noted below, are located in the Reserve. SI's analysis appears to show a majority of either museum's programs could fit within the building or in adjacent areas excavated and integrated into the facility. Through the South Mall Campus Master Plan, NCPC has already expressed support for some amount of excavation, particular between AIB and the Quadrangle. Excavation to the north under Jefferson Drive and the National Mall should be avoided due to the potential for impacts to National Park Service property. The national landmark designation of AIB creates challenges for implementation, but the building's architecture and history as a museum space create an opportunity for an innovative design team willing to take it on.

The Northwest Capitol is a strong candidate site. The location on the National Mall, near the U.S. Capitol grounds, and along Pennsylvania Avenue has significant prominence. This site has an opportunity to create perhaps the most functional open space of all the focus sites, which in turn would connect to Pennsylvania Avenue and the many events and activities which activate this nationally symbolic corridor. Like AIB, this site has the benefit of not being located within the Reserve. While the location is an incredible asset, impacts to the setting of the U.S. Capitol, important viewsheds and security needs will require careful study if a building is planned for this site.

The Tidal Basin site yields a number of significant challenges. The site is located within the Reserve and was not specifically identified in the enabling legislation. The site is not identified in any NCPC plans for a potential museum, including the *Legacy Plan* or *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*. Most significantly, a building at this location has the potential to alter views within the primary north-south vista extending from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. These views are critical to maintain as they contribute to the visual importance and hierarchy of these nationally-symbolic monuments, memorials, and public buildings. The introduction of a building at this location would likely impact views to the Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial, as well as the settings of these iconic structures. Finally, the site is an actively-used recreational space and also an important staging area for events on the National Mall. The elimination of this space for these functions will impact a variety of users. As such, we would strongly encourage the Smithsonian to avoid these significant constraints and consider other sites.

The South Monument site is also significantly challenged. Like the Tidal Basin site, this location is also within the Reserve. SI's analysis indicates the site is too small to accommodate the

necessary museum program without off-site space or multilevel excavation that would be challenging and costly to implement. The small block size could also impact the layout of any building floorplates and exhibition space. According to the Smithsonian's analysis, the resulting building massing appears much too large for the relatively small site area. Other constraints during the design process will likely further restrict the height and building envelope: These include preserving the viewsheds to the Washington Monument and the preservation of the setback defined by the McMillan Plan. Setbacks on other frontages will be necessary to preserve a landscaped setting consistent with other museums on the Mall. As such, the museum program and building do not appear to reasonably fit at this location, and we recommend considering other sites.

Another Approach

While the four focus sites are the Smithsonian's current priority, each site brings its own set of challenges, and therefore it is important to keep other options on the table. If these various site constraints are ultimately found to be insurmountable, or if the underlying jurisdiction cannot be transferred to the Smithsonian, another approach could be considered: During this unique moment in history, with three museums¹ on the horizon and a contraction of office space, the Smithsonian should consider opportunities on Independence Avenue which is already home to several museums in addition to the Smithsonian Castle, Haupt Garden, and the Eisenhower Memorial.

The Smithsonian could think boldly about expanding the South Mall Campus to include the Department of Energy site (Forrestal Building and surroundings), which is located immediately south of the Castle. This site, cleared or repurposed, could accommodate multiple museums, each with its own distinct architectural character. This large property, adjacent to the existing Smithsonian museums, offers increased density and heights, sweeping views, and placemaking opportunities not present in other Mall sites. The location also avoids the many challenges presented by the focus sites, including size constraints, impacts to critical viewsheds and existing memorials, historic preservation impacts, and the elimination of recreational spaces. The consolidation of federal office space resulting from the shift to increased telework suggests now could be the time to work with the General Services Administration and the Department of Energy on such an opportunity.

The Commission has previously emphasized that we are quickly reaching a point where there will not be any available sites left on the National Mall. As such, we strongly encourage the Smithsonian to look at Independence Avenue and 10th Street, as significant opportunities for multiple museums immediately adjacent to the National Mall. The Whitten Building remains a site worthy of further consideration. In past briefings, several Commissioners offered other suggestions, including areas around Union Station, the Federal Triangle, and Pennsylvania Avenue. Decades of planning have already been done for these areas, providing a foundation for the Smithsonian to set a new direction.

¹ The National Museum of the American Latino, the American Women's History Museum and the proposed National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture, recently authorized for study

ATTACHED:

- Overview and Map

PROJECT TIMELINE

Previous actions	December 2021 – 1st Information Presentation March 2022 – 2nd Information Presentation July 2022 – 3rd Information Presentation
Remaining actions (anticipated)	Future - Review of site and building plans for proposed museums

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Washington, DC

Information Presentation

Smithsonian Institution

Background

- In December 2020, H.R. 133 was signed into law, which establishes two new museums within the Smithsonian Institution – American Women’s History Museum and National Museum of the American Latino
- Legislation provides that the Smithsonian Institution Board of Regents (BOR) designate sites for the museums within two years (December 2022)
- The Smithsonian Institution has initiated the site evaluation study, which will include consultation with NCPC Chair, among others
- The study will cover both museums and will occur concurrently
- SI provided briefings in December 2021, March 2022 and July 2022

Background

- The Board of Regents must consult with, among others, the Chair of NCPC.
- NCPC has an advisory role.
- Chair can provide letter with recommendations to Board of Regents.
- Following site selection, NCPC will have approval authority over site and building plans for the museums in accordance with the Planning Act.

Focus Sites under Consideration

