

PROJECT	Smithsonian Institution- Revitalization of the Historic Core (RoHC)	MEETING DATE	12/14/2021
ORGANIZER	Smithsonian Institution, Carly Bond (moderator)	TIME	3:00pm-5:00pm
LOCATION	Virtual/Zoom		
PANELISTS	Carly Bond- Smithsonian Institution Sharon Park- Smithsonian Institution Christopher Lethbridge- Smithsonian Institution Ann Trowbridge- Smithsonian Institution Brenda Sanchez- Smithsonian Institution Marisa Scalera- Smithsonian Institution Matthew Chalifoux, EYP-Loring Faye Harwell, RHI (Rhodeside and Harwell) Kirk Mettam, Silman Michael Galway, EYP-Loring		
SUBJECT	Consulting Parties Meeting #3 Part 2- Draft Assessment of Effects		

MEETING MINUTES

Purpose – This was the second part Consulting Parties Meeting 3 for the Revitalization of the Historic Core (RoHC) project of the Smithsonian Institution. The Historic Core includes the Smithsonian Institution Building (SIB, also known as “The Castle”) and the Arts and Industries Building (AIB). The meeting was held in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This meeting focused on the presentation and review of the draft Assessment of Effects on Historic Resources which was posted on the project website on 19 November.

The meeting was assembled virtually and included a slide presentation, which has been posted on the RoHC project website. Attendees were asked to post questions or comments in the chat during the presentation. The majority of questions and comments were reviewed and responded to verbally during breaks in the presentation. The following is a list of the questions and comments with a summary of the responses.

Questions and Comments

Written

1. Q: Should any interior character-defining features be listed for either building? For example, the interior courts of the AIB, the great hall of the Castle, materials of major spaces, etc?

R: In the slide presentation the issue of building interiors is addressed in the sections covering the Castle and the AIB. The Smithsonian does not conduct Section 106 consultation on interior building changes because interior projects are not subject to NCPC review. (See Public Law No.

108-72, 117 Stat. 888, which deems the Smithsonian a federal agency for the purpose of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for projects in the District of Columbia requiring NCPD review and approval.)

Counsel for NCPD, an attendee of the meeting, supported this position, stating that NCPD does not review work on interiors.

2. Q: If the building egress and areaway projects involve demolition of historic fabric (e.g. brick or stone wall materials for new doors etc.), they will most likely result in adverse effects. Please clarify whether historic fabric will be demolished as part of these projects. Please also clarify again why the AIB areaways are proposed to have "no adverse effect" while those on the Castle are proposed to have an "adverse effect."

R: This question was asked in the initial section of the presentation, which was focused on analysis of the effect on the site and landscape, not the buildings. See question 14 for a discussion of the assessment of effect on the buildings.

3. Q: It seems that the AIB areaways will have an adverse effect on setting. It's perhaps not wise to rely on plantings as a long-term screening strategy.

R: We appreciate that the review agencies do not consider plantings in analyzing the visual impact (effect) of a proposed design. Even without plantings we believe that the AIB areaways have been designed to avoid negatively impacting the AIB setting. They are set away from the public pathways and the only element that will be above grade, protective railings, will use a design and materials that are complementary to the building and the site.

We would like to add that while plantings may be ephemeral and too risky to include as part of an analysis on many sites that the plantings on this site, managed by Smithsonian Gardens, are unlikely to fall into disrepair.

4. Q: You indicated at the beginning that these effect determinations are preliminary pending final designs, correct? In other words, the effect determinations can be reconsidered after designs are final.

R: Yes, the Assessment of Effects that has been posted and that is being reviewed in this meeting is preliminary. We are looking for feedback through this meeting and submitted comments (due 7 January). As appropriate the effect determinations may be revised after the close of the public comment period to allow the RoHC to continue through the NCPD review process. The Assessment of Effects will continue to be updated in consultation as the design develops.

5. Q: Do we know if the 1991 cooling towers was determined to be an adverse effect?

R: The 1991 cooling towers, located on the southeast corner of the National Museum of Natural History site, were reviewed and there was a determination of No Adverse Effect.

6. Q: I don't understand the statement that the 9'-8" wall above the sidewalk at the corner won't affect the view of the museum. I do think that the location of the cooling towers here will have an adverse effect on the setting of NMNH.

R: In considering the view of NMNH we believe that the primary focus of the south elevation is on the center pavilion and entry. The enclosure will impact views of the center pavilion, but from a very oblique angle from the west. This viewshed is already significantly blocked by the gardens that wrap the corner of Madison Drive and 12th Street NW, plantings that will be reintegrated after the enclosure is constructed. SI will reconsider and reanalyze this effect assessment.

7. Q: I hadn't seen the double egress doors on the east and west elevations of the AIB. Will all the egress doors be double-leaf doors?

R: At present the four new egress doors are all shown as double-leaf doors. This is based on the life safety analysis that has been completed to date during the Schematic Design phase. In the next phase of the design process, we will be refining the life safety analysis for the AIB utilizing a performance-based modeling tool. Based on past evaluations we believe that this will result in alterations to the life safety plan which may allow the doors to be reduced in size. We do want to point out that these doors are providing egress for not just the public areas of the building, but also for the new basement level.

8. Q: DCSHPO recommends that photo simulations be developed to further evaluate the visibility of the rooftop mechanical vents proposed for the AIB and their potential to result in adverse visual effects.

R: SI agrees with this recommendation. Additional photo simulation views will be developed for the proposed AIB rooftop mechanical flues and vents.

9. Q: For the AIB new emergency exits all are recessed (except the northeast one) below grade and thus use steps to reach the grade level. Has there been consultation with experts regarding accessibility for visitors and staff who use wheelchairs and thus the need for appropriate ramps?

R: As presented elsewhere today the project includes proposed modifications at both the north and south entrances to the AIB to provide universal access and egress for staff and visitors. The new emergency exits will only be accessible on the inside of the building by using steps, up from the basement, down from the first floor. Accommodations for individuals that cannot utilize stairs in the event of an emergency, such as areas of refuge, will be provided as required by code.

10. Q: Please clarify the statement that executive branch agencies are not subject to National Historic Preservation Act. This has not been our experience.

R: SI apologizes for this misstatement. Executive branch agencies are subject to the National Historic Preservation Act. SI is a trust instrumentality of the United States government, and only subject to the NHPA per Public Law No. 108-72, 117 Stat. 888, which deems the Smithsonian a federal agency for the purpose of compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for projects in the District of Columbia requiring NCPD review and approval.

11. Q: Are there new mechanical vents going in and how much larger will the modified existing roof vents be? (This question was regarding the SIB- Castle.)

R: The proposed design utilizes existing mechanical penthouses on the West range, Main Roof and East Wing. There is a louvered cupola on the East Wing that will be reused without changing the size. The penthouses on the West Range, on the Mall side of the building, will be enlarged, making them wider to the south, not changing the visible impact from the Mall. Four existing penthouses on the Main Building roof, which are located behind the North and South Towers will be increased to meet the air intake requirements of the building. The existing penthouses are visible from a limited area, typically near the building looking at a tight oblique angle. The expansions will not increase their visibility.

The existing penthouses are clad in copper to blend in with the historic roofing materials. The reworked penthouses will utilize a similar design strategy.

12. Q: Blast window reproductions will be difficult to match. Will diamond muntin pattern be applied on the exterior and interior? Mock-ups will be needed.

R: We concur that matching the muntin pattern of the historic windows will be a significant challenge. During the Schematic Design phase, the design criteria for the windows was finalized and the criteria have been slightly lowered from past studies. We believe that blast compliant windows can be designed that will include a through muntin design, not applied muntins on the exterior and interior of the glazing. We are aware of similar windows that have been fabricated that we believe provide a precedent for this project. This design will be explored early in the next phase of the project.

SI agrees that mock-ups will be a critical tool in the design development and review process.

13. Q: Removal of historic fabric for new basement windows and new basement doors will cause adverse effect as will introduction of banks of windows that were not there historically.

R: SI will reconsider and reanalyze this effect assessment. The preliminary “no adverse effect” assessment considered that the openings are below-grade, in some cases modify existing masonry openings, and that the proposed design will meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for new additions by differentiating the fenestration pattern.

14. Q: Comment: Please acknowledge the adverse effect of lowering the basement floor as part of the excavation.

R: Lowering of the basement floor of the Castle was not reviewed as a specific design action. SI will incorporate text for the basement lowering into the “Excavation Beneath the Castle” design action. There is an associated construction related potential adverse effect.

15. Q: The introduction of new basement windows will remove/destroy historic fabric. This also appears to be the case for the new doors. Destruction of historic fabric meets the criteria of adverse effect regardless of whether the new windows or doors will be visible.

R: Noted, please see the response to question 14 above.

16. Q: Do any of the preliminary determinations of effects presented in today's meeting differ from those included in the previously released draft Assessment of Effect report? Just want to clarify whether there are any differences.

R: No. The presentation today utilized the draft Assessment of Effects document that is posted on the project webpage.

Verbal

17. Q: As part of the Section 106/ NEPA process projects are required to explore alternatives. The Mall Underground concept developed by the National Mall Coalition is offered as a comprehensive, Mall wide solution for various issues including energy reduction, sustainability, and flood mitigation. We believe that the RoHC project as well as other Smithsonian initiatives around the Mall would benefit by utilizing the Mall Underground as opposed to addressing similar issues site by site.

R: The RoHC project will be addressing critical conservation and preservation issues, particularly for the Castle. It is important that this work move forward as quickly as possible. The Mall Underground is a concept that has not advanced into any actual planning or design work. It is also very important that the Castle, as the iconic symbol of the Smithsonian, continue to serve as the Visitor Center and gathering place for visitors.

Throughout the design process of the RoHC project to date alternatives have been considered and shared through the Consulting parties' meetings.

Flood mitigation is an issue for some Smithsonian sites, primarily on the north side of the Mall, not the South Mall Campus. There is a comprehensive plan that has been developed by the Smithsonian to address all properties and buildings.

18. Q: Please clarify the organization of the Assessment of Effects. Is it organized by the seven criteria (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, association)?

R: The presentation today follows the order that is in the document that has been posted on the project webpage. It groups design issues within categories: Site General, Site AIB, Site Castle, Below Grade Construction, Cooling Towers, AIB, Castle, and Cumulative Effects.

END OF MEETING

The draft Assessment of Effects on Historic Resources and the slide presentations from Part 1 of Consulting Parties Meeting 3 (11/14/2021) and Part 2 (12/14/2021) are available on the project webpage. Written comments are welcome through January 7, 2022, to BondC@si.edu.