

# The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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August 9, 2017

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Subject: Thoughts/ Recommendations Following July 26, 2017, Section  
106 Consultation Meeting on Proposed Smithsonian South Mall  
Campus Master Plan

Dear Ms. Spofford:

As we approach the 3rd anniversary of the South Mall Campus Master Plan public reveal and responding to the July 26 public consultation meeting on the same, the **Committee of 100 on the Federal City** offers our continuing thoughts on this important project.

- Reiterating the Committee of 100's Bottom Line Position To Date: While many elements of the South Mall Master Plan are admirable, The Committee of 100 remains resolutely opposed to: 1) the destruction of the Haupt Garden, pavilions, and Renwick gates, 2) loss in whole or part of the Hirshhorn plaza perimeter walls, and 3) destruction of the Lester Collins designed Hirshhorn sculpture garden. These points have been expressed in detail in previous letters and in aural testimony during public consultation meetings and do not require further rationale here.

- Too Many Variables for Meaningful Consultation: The helpful *Assessment of Effects Matrix* developed for the July 26 consultation meeting reveals among the four Design Alternatives currently in play somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 distinct Action Options potentially applicable, in whole or in part, to each of the four. While well-executed, the *Matrix* makes clear an almost insurmountable challenge with the current consultation process. Assessing and commenting on every possible permutation and nuance among the design alternatives and every

action option and providing meaningful advice on each is infeasible. Further, asking the National Capital Planning Commission to sign a programmatic agreement allowing the Smithsonian to move on to the next phase of the Master Plan based on so many variables is simply not credible. We appreciate that the South Mall Master Plan is a concept plan and that the Smithsonian needs to keep options open. But it is also arguable that, at even this stage, it is simply too unsettled and in flux for meaningful consultation or signing a programmatic agreement – even for a master plan. We need to reduce the number of alternatives and actions before concluding this current phase of consultation. Or perhaps it is too early in the process to seek a signed programmatic agreement.

- Lack of Documentation/ Information for Consulting Parties on Major Design Issues: 1) ***Castle Seismic Retrofit*** is a case in point. The July 26 consultation meeting revealed that the Smithsonian only recently contracted a seismic retrofit engineering study for The Castle. As such a major element in the master plan relies on the study and its recommendations, how can consulting parties and the National Capital Planning Commission make meaningful recommendations/ decisions on the Castle seismic question without this report's conclusions and recommendations? 2) ***Leaking Underground Roofs of the Sackler Gallery, African Art Museum, and S. Dillon Ripley International Center***. This critical issue is the primary driver for destruction of the Haupt Garden. Yet, consulting parties are not provided documentation that the issue has been studied and that viable remediation alternatives explored. The inference is that full excavation is the only repair alternative. Are there other viable solutions; were they considered? As example, the Italian government deployed a variant of curtainwall grouting to mitigate successfully a similar "leaking" situation in the underground, 1st century Domus Aurea (Nero's Palace) under the Palatine Hill in Rome - all without excavating from above. Was this technique considered in the Quad? 3) ***Better Visitor Access***. The rationale for many proposed master plan design concepts is based on the assertion that visitors and tourists are befuddled and have difficulty figuring out how to get in, out, among, and between historic museum buildings in the Quad and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. This concern is the basis for many master plan proposed design elements (many of them problematic) including: destruction of the battered Hirshhorn plaza walls; demolition of the Jean-Paul Carlhian pavilions; removing the Renwick-designed gates along Independence Avenue; cutting a door in the east elevation of the Freer Gallery; creating some sort of passageway through the sadly-vacant Arts and Industries Building; and, creating what is called "The Dip" – a new exterior entrance below grade on the east side of the Castle. On what analyses/ studies was the visitor confusion conclusion based? What alternatives were considered? Are these available to consulting parties? 4) ***The Arts and Industries Building***. It has been asserted throughout consultation that the Congress forbids using the A&I for many of the visitor amenities/ purposes proposed for the new underground public spaces in the master plan – rather reserving it for the inchoate Museum of the American Latino. We have contacted committee and sub-committee staff – both House and Senate – for verification of this. None has been forthcoming; no one with whom we have spoken is familiar with this. Given the recent and significant expenditure of public dollars restoring the exterior of the A&I, it seems unconscionable to leave it sitting empty for the foreseeable future. Too, so many of the functions planned for the Quad underground visitor center and offices could easily (and more cost-effectively) be accommodated in the A&I Building.

• ***Historic Properties are Not the Problem:*** At the July 26 consultation meeting, a number of attendees expressed reservations about the potential negative impacts to historic properties in light of proposed retrofitting of Quad mechanicals and delivery systems. Two Smithsonian staff responded with some variant of, “Look, you must understand how difficult it is to do this.” We agree! But the statements reveal a deeper problem that permeates the master plan – that somehow the historic properties are getting in the way of the overall South Mall Master Plan design concept. As further evidence, at an even earlier consultation meeting and speaking to the question of demolishing the Carlhian pavilions, one of the same Smithsonian representatives stated, “They (speaking of the pavilions) are just in the wrong place.” This is a seeming pervasive and troubling mindset. It is not the job of the significant historic properties to somehow accede to the overall new design concept. Rather, it is the job of the masterplan design to accommodate respectfully the significant historic properties all the while meeting the desired new program. The preferable solution must be an “And/Also” not “Either/Or” as American architect Robert Venturi was fond of saying. Somehow, this matter needs to be rectified better as we consider all the design options/ alternatives.

We appreciate your consideration of and attention to the above issues. If we can provide additional information or answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the address or email in the cover letterhead. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chairman

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