

REPORT ON REHABILITATION OF CARNEGIE LIBRARY

by Richard Busch
on behalf of the C100 Historic Preservation Subcommittee
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SUMMARY

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) met on October 5 for its regular monthly meeting where the Commissioners unanimously approved restoration, rehabilitation, and renovation plans for the historic Carnegie Library following reviews by all appropriate federal and local government agencies and outside organizations called for under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA). According to NCPC, the US Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) is expected to approve the project at its monthly meeting on October 19. The project is on the CFA's Consent Calendar.

From the beginning, this project has had wide government and local independent organization support, including that of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. In addition to NCPC and CFA, additional participating agencies and organizations have included the National Park Service, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), DC Department of Transportation, DC Preservation League, and the Association of Oldest Inhabitants of Washington, DC. The NCPC Commissioners collectively said it best at their October 5 meeting when they pointed out the significant value of this public/private partnership to the city, the general public, and historic preservation. Two Commissioners noted specifically how important it is to envision new life planned for this landmark by collocating its longtime tenant, The Historical Society of Washington, DC, founded in the 19th century, with its new one, Apple, a 21st century retail powerhouse.

BACKGROUND

The Carnegie Library, designed by architects Ackerman & Ross and constructed during 1899-1902, was a gift to the City of Washington, DC by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, one of many such buildings that he gave to cities across the United State to promote library systems. The building was open to all no matter what race and served as the city's Central Library until it outgrew its space and moved to a new library building, designed by Mies van der Rohe, a few blocks away at Ninth and G Streets, NW. In addition to being located on one of the city's major L'Enfant Plan of 1791 reservations, the Carnegie Library is listed in the *DC Inventory of Historic Sites* (1964) and on the *National Register of Historic Places* (1969). Following the departure of the library, the building was modified for use by the University of the District of Columbia and subsequently, since 2000, by The Historical Society of Washington DC. During the early 2000s, the Carnegie also housed the short-lived Museum of the City of Washington.

Mount Vernon Square is owned by the federal government, hence the federal interest in any proposals

effecting the Carnegie Library, but it is administered by the District of Columbia via Events DC, an independent instrumentality of the DC Government. Events DC, also a current tenant of the Carnegie building, has as its mission promotion of the District of Columbia to the nation and beyond. In early 2017, Events DC was approached by the Apple organization seeking to rent building space for one of its flagship stores, which would be a retail, events, and educational facility. In return, Apple proposed to underwrite cleaning and restoration of the building's exterior, and taking similar steps for store-related interior renovations and rehabilitation. Apple will become a building tenant along with Events DC and The Historical Society of Washington.

NCPC became the lead federal agency for compliance under the NHPA and NEPA in evaluating the Events DC/Apple proposal. NCPC issued an Environmental Assessment on July 7 for a 30-day comment period ending August 7, and subsequently issued a Finding of No Significant Impact following the close of the public comment period. That said, however, a series of mitigation measures were developed that NCPC believes will lessen the impact of the proposed work on the existing historic resource, some of which will benefit future visitors to the building. These measures are attached. The Environmental Assessment informed the Section 106 Review which concluded in September with the execution of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Events DC, Apple, The Historical Society of Washington, and the DCSHPO.

SUMMARY DETAILS OF THE AGREEMENT

The essentials of the approved project include the following, which Apple has committed to fund:

- Restoration of the Carnegie Library's exterior, including repair and cleaning of the stone, repair and replacement of windows and skylights, repair of the copper roof cladding, and removal of a non-historic clerestory addition;
- Rehabilitation of the building's interior, including removal of non-original infill construction throughout the building, insertion of a central atrium space, upgrade or replacement of various systems, and restoration of certain original features; and
- Replacement of the north entrance, stair, and landing which were put in place during a previous renovation in the Year 2000.

Other elements recommended by NCPC Commissioners and discussed at a Contributing Parties meeting in August 2017, were included in the final MOA:

- Events DC is to be responsible for care of the existing and future landscaping and pedestrian amenities in Mount Vernon Square, and for creation of exterior lighting and signage that is sensitive to the historic resource. The site will be reseeded and new sod put in place;
[Protection of existing landscaping was one of the Committee of 100's (C100) preliminary recommendations to NCPC, dated May 26, 2017, which called attention to the need for protection of the existing landscape, including mature trees]

- Events DC was tasked with development of signage that respects the historic character of the building and site; and considering ways that pedestrians might access the square in addition to those already existing from crosswalks at its four corners.

[Additional site access was another concern of the C100 stated in its preliminary comments. NCPC worked with the DC Department of Transportation (DCDOT) on transportation issues. DCDOT determined that given the already heavy volume of vehicular traffic on K Street and Mount Vernon Place, and the planned streetcar line extension that will run along K Street opposite the Carnegie building, no pedestrian crossing at Eighth Street, NW to the square was possible.]

- Modification of the slope of the south plaza from 5% to 2% and removing the nearby non-historic switchback ramp.
- ADA accessible routes will be provided from all four corners of the square and a new ADA lift will be located on the west side of the north exterior stair;
- Bicycle parking will be provided and a Capital Bikeshare installation may be located nearby;
- Appropriate signage for Apple and the historical society; Apple will have two signs on the south façade—new marble panels to match existing marble panels each with an internally illuminated white Apple logo (anchor points will be in existing grout joints); On the north elevation, a third Apple sign of an illuminated acrylic Apple logo with bronze trim applied to new glass will be located above the entrance canopy;
- One sign for The Historical Society of Washington of dark bronze material with cut-out lettering, will be located on the south plaza;
- Events DC will develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the DC government regarding future management and operations of Mount Vernon Square;

POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The Environmental Assessment (EA) provides a brief history of usages in Mount Vernon Square during the 19th century, starting in 1840, when a firehouse was built on the western part of the square facing K Street. In 1846, Northern Liberty Market was built on the square's eastern side. The market was demolished in 1872 after it became a public nuisance. The EA speculates that building remains, artifact deposits, and structural features could be present within the square.

To help determine any such presence ten hand auger excavations were conducted in areas surrounding the library building where some level of ground disturbance might occur during upcoming work. GIS-assisted analysis of historic maps indicated that as much as 10 feet of fill may be present on the south side of the building and 5 feet or less on the north side. Auger exploration found archaeological deposits along the northeast and east sides of the building. These areas will be explored as part of future site work.

ENFORCEMENT

NCPC's lead officer on this project, Lee Webb, was queried about enforcement of the project MOA. He provided the following:

As a signatory on the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for Section 106 on the Carnegie Library, NCPC will have a role, as well as the SHPO, to ensure that the applicant—Events DC, and their tenant Apple—both signatories to the MOA, are complying with the work as approved—including the exterior cleaning and restoration work—as well as the interior work inside the building, and the approved landscaping plans as well. NCPC also has an annual monitoring role under the MOA to inform the SHPO as to the status on the mitigation measures detailed under the MOA, to be completed by Events DC and Apple. NCPC would also share that annual monitoring report with the consulting parties, as requested.