

Date: July 24, 2024

Project: Construct Integrated Bezos Learning Center

Purpose: Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #4

Panelists:

Name	Organization
Carly Bond	Smithsonian Institution (SI)
Tina Mendez	Director, Bezos Learning Center
Ralph Johnson	Perkins & Will
Zena Howard	Perkins & Will
Elizabeth Kennedy	Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architects
Kim Daileader	EHT Traceries
Michelle Tessier	HLB Lighting
Mike Henry	SI

Attendees

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Stephanie Free	National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)	Kristi Tunstall Williams	General Services Administration
Matthew Flis	NCPC	Susan Wertheim	National Gallery of Art
Andrew Lewis	DC Historic Preservation Office	Elizabeth Halprin	Architect of the Capitol
Thomas Luebke	US Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)	Erkin Ozberk	DC Office of Planning
Sarah Batcheler	CFA	Katharine Cline	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Dan Fox	CFA	Jason Theuer	National Park Service
Carlton Hart	CFA	Rebecca Miller	DC Preservation League

Hannah Soltys	Saving Places	Morgan Breene	Saving Places
Christopher Cody	Saving Places	Jeff Winstel	WMATA
Todd Grover	Citizen	Eric Hartlove	Whiting Turner
Sharon Park	Citizen	John Edwards	Citizen
Monica Nichta	SI	Jane Passman	SI
Kara Katsarelis	SI	Caitlin Garlow	SI
Dawn Rogala	SI	Charles Obi	SI
Alison Wood	SI	Jim Evans	SI
Millie Latack	SI	Marc Sklar	SI
Duane Blue Spruce	SI	Marisa Scalera	SI
Bridget Lesniak	Perkins & Will	Renato Tonelli	Perkins & Will

Presentation:

At the fourth Consulting Parties Meeting for the project to Construct the Integrated Bezos Learning Center (BLC) at National Air and Space Museum (NASM) C. Bond from Smithsonian began the meeting with the agenda and project description. C. Bond then reviewed the criteria of adverse effects, as defined by 36 CFR 800.5(A)(1); she then went through the preliminary effect assessments for the undertaking. The presentation then paused for the first round of questions.

First Question Break:

A. *Lewis*: Thank you for that detailed description of the draft. I really appreciate it and generally agree with the findings. I was curious to see if others agree about the affect determinations as they relate to the design of the building and also was hoping that we could get clarification of what the basis of the adverse effect is for the materials and lighting. There has been a great deal of support for the design, so we are not suggesting any kind of avoidance that would require a major redesign at this point, I want to make that clear, but now that the museum has been restored, as much as possible, with the new siding and cladding and the restaurant is gone, I think the pure geometric form of the building has become a lot more obvious. I walk by it pretty often, especially from the south side. There have been comments in previous consulting parties' meetings about how the design of the new addition competes, I think is a fair assessment, with the design of the museum. So, while it is certainly compatible and differentiated to a degree, it certainly respects the height and massing, I am still concerned about how it is differentiated, which is what the Secretary of the Interior recommends, but it's the degree of differentiation. I know one of the comments that was made in an earlier meeting was that people are going to assume that this is the entrance to the museum and so I am not entirely convinced that the design is not going to have an adverse effect in that sense. As far as the materials are concerned, I am not entirely sure what your rationale was for arguing that there is an adverse effect there. If I understood correctly, is it the lighting? But in several meetings in the past, I have asked repeatedly for a rendering that might allow us to evaluate what the façade would look like, and if you could go

to page 17 (and I do appreciate that NASM has been refined in the graphics, so it doesn't look like a stacked bond any more, it shows its monolithic appearance, and this is much more appropriate what we are looking at). This particular elevation shows the contrast of the materials used to clad the addition versus the historic building. I have asked in the past for a rendering of that new addition showing what it would look like if it were more monolithic. The size of the joints could be reduced, perhaps they are not canted, the lighting itself is pretty dramatic, as you have pointed out. I'm still curious to see what that might look like and if that would perhaps help minimize the adverse effect that I believe you said was stemming from materials. You covered a lot of other ground, I have talked a lot, I will stop now but I do want to point out that I'm curious to hear what other people's thoughts are on these topics and also the view from the Capitol. It has been identified as an adverse effect. I'm not entirely sure that it is going to be enough of a change to rise to the level of adverse effect, but I'm curious as to what others have to say on that.

C. Bond: Thanks Andrew. Yes, I'm also curious to hear from others so we can have a conversation about this. I will start with, and Kim please chime in, but to your point about materials: I think at this point for our effect analysis this really is stemming from that integrated façade lighting, which does a lot for the form of the building but there is no precedent for that on the National Mall Historic District. Perhaps having that level of lighting does call attention away from Air and Space and not keeping it as the primary feature of the site, in accordance with that PA design framework. And the materials are still really to be determined. We think we know we want it to be a metal, we are going to talk more about that in our meeting today, but since this is a draft assessment, a lot of these have a little asterisk noting where we still have to work on some issues and we have some more consultation to do on them, but I would offer that as an initial response of materials.

K. Daileader: I completely agree, I think the dynamic lighting is a question mark factor. It has no precedent on the formal setting of the National Mall, and to me I think that element of the façade is almost what's tipping you over, Andrew, when you say the addition is competing a little bit too much with NASM. It is making it a kind of lit-up beacon. But this is also, as Carly said, very preliminary and as we get further into design and gather more information perhaps that lighting is dimmer than people are anticipating, and it could not result in an adverse effect. We wanted to go the safe route right now and identify it as one.

A. Lewis: I appreciate that about the lighting. It's not only the lighting, but it's the design in general. In the elevation we looked at you can say "which one of these is not like the others" so it sort of stands out. The question is whether or not the museum remains the primary feature on the site, this image calls that into question. And while the lighting certainly contributes, it's not just that. Again, I'm not arguing that this is something that should result in a major redesign, but the notion of using the monolithic background, might that help to better relate the two together? Certainly, others may disagree, but until we see a rendering that gives us an idea, it's difficult to make that call. I'm curious to hear if others believe there is an adverse effect relating to the design, not just the lighting.

T. Luebke: Good afternoon. Interesting questions being raised. I want to put forward the idea that there is a concept here, its dynamic, it's a twenty-first century design for an addition to a twentieth century building whose framework is practically the end of the nineteenth century, in a plan that's from the eighteenth century. I think there is a very strong conceptual basis for the design as executed in terms of everything about the dynamic, swirling quality of it. The Standards ask for differentiation, and we definitely have it here. I would be fearful of trying to bring them closer because what it would do is perhaps make the new building less compelling in its execution of its fundamental design and make it feel like it is trying to mimic a completely different design from a completely different era. This is really to address Andrew, everything about it contributes to the extremely deliberate differentiation and to compromise that *is* actually a compromise. Now, I'm trying to focus this within the context of Section 106, I am not sure where to go with it, but I would caution against trying to water it down, so it doesn't feel so different. The Air and Space Museum is so big, it is such a strong formal statement in its own right, I don't think we have to worry

about anything competing with it. It feels like it's 1,000 feet long, it's probably 700 feet. It is so massive and resolved with very clear entrances and two sides and with the pavilion being added to it, I think the subordination [of the addition] is pretty clear by the massing and materiality so that it doesn't replicate the main building. The one thing I want to say about the terraces and the design of the ... there is kind of a platform that is a little strange. This object doesn't feel particularly grounded over here. It's just sitting on a platform. I am not sure whether that platform belongs to the formal system of the addition and its swirling dynamic geometry; or does it somehow harken back to the original terrace design. It seems to be a little bit of both and if it is, I guess my problem is that it is not really doing either one well enough. It feels like sort of a terrace, sort of dynamic, but it's neither; it doesn't do a good job either way.

C. Bond: Can you clarify if you are talking about this area (the area above the garage ramps)?

T. Luebke: Yes. It is situated in a way where you get these gaping holes on the east over the garage, I don't know what the clearances are, but it seems like a very unresolved thing. You have to have an attitude about the landscape that you are preserving, and then which system does [that terrace] belong to. This is exactly what I was talking about with the skin of the addition itself. It is kind of averaging out; it's kind of terrace, it's kind of dynamic. When you start to compromise the one in favor of the other, try to move the design to negotiate, it compromises the character. So, I would ask for more differentiation here of the terrace itself. And if you go to the plan, why is there so much paved area around the observatory. When you compare it to the north side, there is just this enormous triangle of paved space, really broad. I don't understand what it is doing there. It seems there has been a reduction in green area. Can you show the original terrace plan? I'm wondering what it's like in comparison in the character of green. Ok, so it was basically a sloping lawn. It was a lot greener, and the terracing was much further back, thank you for clarifying that. It is something to think about. The original design is completely lost, in the southeastern area you are losing green, but the design is again completely lost. I guess the question is to what extent do we need this rather unarticulated broad area. I don't know what it's for. There is no reason why that band of trees, tapering down to nothing, needs to be like that. I question it in terms of the loss of green and the site and how these lines come together. It is something that the Commission mentioned too, It circles on the south side of the observatory in this very awkward conjunction of curving lines, all coming together at one awkward point. We are looking for clarity, I guess.

C. Bond: So, there is another programmatic piece of this project that we haven't been able to share widely yet because the design of it is behind the step where we are for Bezos Learning Center. It is an Astronomy Park, which is an outdoor exhibit area that would be changing to a certain extent for public use and engagement around the observatory. That is why there is more paving in this area, but Elizabeth is there anything you want to add about Tom's comment about the overall reduction in greenery on the site?

E. Kennedy: Well a large part of the enlargement of the terrace has to do with the accommodation of that Astronomy Park program, which is not shown on here, but the five or six elements that comprise that program are fairly large, they are meant for physical engagement, they are not just visual elements. People will move through them, touch them, look through them, telescopes and other elements. That is not fully represented here. There is the challenge with the substructure/infrastructure, the architecture team can also address this with some authority. But the main aspect of the loss of that green has a lot to do with the programming for the Astronomy Park itself.

T. Luebke: Ok, well that's news, but interesting to know. There is no way to evaluate it without ever having been presented with program or the design for that. I guess I will just leave the comment standing. There is a substantial reduction in green and I am afraid you are moving towards an extremely harsh, physically

uncomfortable place. This is south facing, there is a lot of reflective glass. The larger point is you have to develop a sense of what is the intervention and what is the spirit of the original design. It all comes together at this east side and I don't know how you need to resolve it, but it feels like you haven't actually managed to be clear about which system belongs to which. Sorry, I shifted into design a bit, but it is related to the facts of the undertaking from a historic preservation review. I look forward to working with you more on it. Thank you.

S. Free: Thanks for the presentation. I think we agree with a lot of the discussions so far. Going back to the lighting, that is something that came up in concept review in our Commission [hearing] that needs a little bit more study. Looking at the views from the Capitol, that will not be as impacted unless the lighting is really so excessive that the addition stands out quite a bit, so studying that a bit more will provide insight as to whether that really is an adverse effect. To Tom's point about the greenery, we also received a comment from the Commission on breaking up the paving on the Astronomy Park as well, with some plantings and to reintroduce that original greenery that was with the original terrace and balancing that with the program. I think we had also requested more information on the program for the outdoor spaces to look at how maybe you can balance both the program and the greenery aspects of that is also worth some study to evaluate whether that would have an adverse effect. Our last comment, to Andrew's point, I think we would also agree that the design itself may be an adverse effect. It is differentiated and distinguished from the original building, per the Secretary's Standards, and we have been supportive of the design, and we are supportive of it, but to say that it has no adverse effect on NASM might seem like a little bit of a stretch. But you are doing things like minimizing the scale, so it's much more like a pavilion, like the prior addition. So those steps you are already taking, if we determine an adverse effect are a means to mitigate that. Thank you.

C. Bond: Thanks, Stephanie.

S. Wertheim: I have a similar reaction as Tom was voicing. To me it's confusion on the terrace ground level. But the rendering from the northeast maybe isn't doing it a lot of favors because it is emphasizing the canted wall. The way the terraces work, they are very layered and linear, to hide all the exit stairs, then there had to be safety rails added to keep people off. This does seem a little confused. There is something dynamic with the circular plaza, the swirling plaza between the building and the main building, but I think maybe there are too many things happening in a little space. Again, it could just be the angle of this rendering. How is it going to be inviting? I see people up on top on the plinth over the garage entrance, there are some stairs, but how are you going to find [it]. What's the program activating that plaza? There is no food, right? Will there be projections on the building wall so you will be watching? What is going to drive you in? I don't believe your perception of it from the Mall, which I think is where most of the visitors are coming [from], I don't think you get so many from Fourth Street, but the Mall, you are not going to totally perceive that swirl. I don't know what to say about how to fix that, but I think it's confused design-wise. What's the most important idea here that you are trying to get across? It is sort of a forecourt, because is it half of an arc or the shape of the pavilion is relying on that being obvious to people, so it just seems a little unresolved and confusing. I agree with Tom, it needs more attention. The whole landscape design is pretty important, as you have been describing. The other question I have: is adverse effect relative to what was there before or what exists now that the former pavilion was demolished? Because from the Capitol, I don't think ... you almost had to have an arrow to say "you can see this little part of it" and to me that does not seem very adverse. So, is that a problem that you can see something from the Capitol? Why does that make it adverse? Because you don't want to see anything? Do you follow my question?

C. Bond: I do, and others please chime in, and sorry this rendering is a bit blurry, but you will actually be able to see the addition from the Capitol steps but the restaurant addition that was there before was not a character defining feature to Air and Space as it was constructed outside of its period of significance. That said though, the National Mall does have a rolling period of significance under Criterion A, so anything that

we do here affects that setting and how the Mall continues to contribute under that criterion. So, it kind of goes hand-in-hand with other discussions consulting parties have had that maybe our initial analysis of the design of the BLC has no adverse effect on Air and Space is incorrect, and we need to take another look at that. Does that answer your question?

S. Wertheim: No, I think my question is, is that just because there is a structure added to the big, massive block of Air and Space... any change is adverse? Is that correct, because I don't think this is necessarily adverse. Like it is an effect but what is adverse about it?

C. Bond: Well, it is adverse or its not. There is no middle ground in the regulations, but it sounds like other consulting parties are in agreement with your comment, that maybe our analysis was a little conservative on this end. But that said, there are a lot of things that are still unresolved: the appearance of the glass, materials, and colors, and all of those other items. We need more consultation on some key issues.

K. Daileader: Yes, I would agree with Carly. I think at this point we were being very conservative of our assessment with all the resources, especially with the Capitol Grounds, until we have further detail of what exactly the differentiation of the color of the materials of this building versus the adjacent building. Will this really stand out when you are on those Capitol steps, or will it blend in? That could make the adverse effect go away or it retain one. So, at this stage we are being conservate in saying that yes it could possibly have an adverse effect.

C. Bond: I think we are ready to move to send the part of the presentation, but Andrew, if you could put in that chat exactly the rendering you wish to see, that would be great.

Presentation Continued:

E. Kennedy presented the updated larger landscape design and connection with the larger NASM site and the National Mall. M. Tessier reviewed the site lighting concept and then R. Johnson reviewed the updated architectural design of the addition. C. Bond closed with next steps and schedule.

Second Question Break:

T. Luebke: I think this has worked out quite nicely in general. The way that that piece curves at the base; it is so much more unified as a form. This goes back to the question of are you going to differentiate or are you not. The question of the skin integrated with the dynamism that is a part of the fins and lighting, which is what I think is one of the most lively and intriguing parts of the design. It would be sad to lose that. Having said that, the one thing is, I do not understand why that upper form [at the south entrance] is now dead vertical. It's a dynamic, moving piece; is it somehow deferential to the whole building? I just don't get it. It should be canted like everything else, maybe not at the same angle. You had shown it before but there were a lot of other issues, and what you have is much better resolved, but the vertical for that curving piece strikes me as odd. Again, it's like it belongs to this other system. I'm not sure that the angle that you have on the first one is [correct], I just find it odd, there is no logic to it. This thing is merging and swirling and coming out of wherever it's coming out of; the orthogonality of it just seems illogical.

C. Bond: Ralph, do you want to address Tom's comment?

R. Johnson: Yes, I think that's an interesting comment. I think if I was to do an angle, I would do the opposite of what we originally proposed.

T. Luebke: I don't know what's right, I just would study it. Honestly, it's a minor point. The design is working out very nicely. And by the way, the stair tower behind it is perfectly fine being orthogonal; it is just a quiet box.

R. Johnson: It emphasizes the plain more, not what is happening behind it. But we will take a look at it.

T. Luebke: Yes, thank you

S. Free: Thanks for the updates, I think this is progressing in the right direction. I really appreciate the continuation of the curve on the building, that is really an improvement. In all of the renderings we have seen, it really shows how important the landscape is, as well as the building, and the public space within these views. I think we need to better understand the program for both spaces, the Astronomy Park and the Learning Courtyard before we can provide some more meaningful feedback on the design updates. I think we need to understand how people are going to use the space before we can evaluate what is being proposed in there. Based on what we have seen today, our initial response would be: more shade. More shade is needed to make this an inviting space in both the Learning Courtyard and the Astronomy Park because this is a very important aspect of the project. Making [the spaces] as inviting and comfortable for people to occupy is going to be essential to its success. Thanks.

C. Bond: Thanks Stephanie, we have Tina Menendez here from Air and Space to talk a little bit about the Astronomy Park programing.

T. Menendez: Sure, in terms of the Learning Courtyard and the Astronomy Park, the point at least on the east side of this building is to actually have a front porch sort of presence and engage learners from all ages off of Independence and off of Fourth, so that they can actually see the space as a space that they are welcome in and that they will interact with astronomy in a way that is tactile but also immersive. I know that I am asking you to envision something that you cannot see right now, but in terms of the observatory, we want to make sure that folks know that this is a space for them to come and engage and rest. Whether it is for a little bit of rest before they go into the museum or if it is to inquire about some of the activations that we are going to have in place. We will be programming these spaces in terms of actual educators that will be outside to help engage with these folks, but we also have astronomers that will be activating the observatory. With the Learning Courtyard, it is also a space to create a sense of place and rest, but also learning, so we could activate that space. We envision activating that space with youth, with folks out there reading stories, or doing some study, and then we also want it to be a space where not everything is constantly activated, where you can sit and relax and enjoy, maybe get a breather from all of the stimulation that you just had inside of NASM. We envision a lot of these spaces where we can activate them with actual tactile things, but we also want them to be spaces where folks can reflect and spend time and rest.

A. Lewis: Thanks. You had asked me to put in the chat about my earlier request to be sure it gets addressed and while I was trying to type and simultaneously listen, I noticed slide 38, though don't move off this slide just yet. What we are seeing here in this refinement, is exactly what I was asking for. If you compare the previous, the joints are between whatever the modular is, are incredibly deep. They are wide. I don't exactly what it is that is making them so pronounced, but if you compare it to the update, those have largely been reduced, and while they are still visible, they are addressing the concern that I had. If you could go to 38, and I think it was 41, and several others where you had the previous proposal comparing with the update. The joints don't really show up at all, perhaps it is largely a function of the renderings, but it is illustrating the point I was trying to make, so I feel like the direction you are going is, at least the rendering suggests, is addressing the concern I have. I don't know if someone can speak to that in more detail. Is there an actual width, or where the joints painted, or how are they being designed? Is this just a question of the rendering again, or has there been some significant change that would result in this?

R. Johnson: You are right. We did reduce the height of the joint, the size of the joint, to one inch.

A. Lewis: Ok I think it is illustrating the idea that I was trying to suggest. I don't think that there is any question that this is still differentiated; I don't think there is any question about the concept being watered down or anything, it is still very much there. The fins are still there, which I was never was suggesting that those be eliminated. I think that is actually an improvement and helps the addition relate a little bit more to

the original design. I don't know that another rendering is necessary, but just reducing the width is sufficient. Thank you for that.

C. Bond: So, Ralph, you said the joint in this update is one inch?

R. Johnson: Yes.

C. Bond: And what was it in the previous images we are showing?

R. Johnson: Twice that, two inches.

C. Bond: Ok, so that's great feedback on the direction we are going. We have something in the chat from Dan Fox, Commission of Fine Arts. Dan is saying that CFA staff is recommending that we consider adding in a design development submission to the Commission before coming back for final. So, we will certainly follow up with you all about that. Another thing that came into the chat previously, that I did not get to before, from Elizabeth Halpin, from the Architect of the Capitol. She was asking if Smithsonian was going to be providing a formal notification to different consulting parties that represent some of the historic resources that have been analyzed in the assessment of effects report, like the Capitol Grounds or National Gallery? We have not provided a formal notification to those consulting parties, so we are seeking your feedback right now, collectively with the rest of the consulting parties, but if anyone has any concerns that they want to talk to Smithsonian about, please do reach out. While we are waiting to see if anything else comes in today, for the site visit that we mentioned, our intention is to have different color samples for the metal cladding, as well as the mullion system for the glass, and glass tints, so there will be a lot of material to cover. That will be an exciting step in consultation. Ok, I don't see any more comments, so we are going to conclude our meeting. We want to thank you for your time and look forward to meeting with you again in September, hopefully at the site, in support of the Construct Integrated Bezos Learning Center. Thank you everyone.