

National Air and Space Museum East End Project - FAQ

The Smithsonian Institution has identified a need for a new project to address deficiencies with the restaurant addition to the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) National Mall Building. NASM is a contributing resource to the National Mall Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and this project is subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

What is Section 106?

Section 106 is the portion of the National Historic Preservation Act that requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their projects on historic properties and to provide the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. Section 106 requires Federal agencies to consider the effects on the undertaking on historic properties in consultation with historic preservation stakeholders and the public.

The Smithsonian Institution will conduct a series of public meetings as design progresses concerning Section 106 consultation, starting with an evaluation of the historic significance of the restaurant addition.

What is the history of the addition?

NASM opened to the public in 1976 as part of the Nation's Bicentennial celebrations. NASM originally featured a restaurant on the third floor with seats for 400 people, which was hard to find, and was never able to serve the volume of visitors to the Museum. Since opening, NASM has welcomed over 300 million visitors and has the highest visitation of the museums on the National Mall. Shortly after opening, the Smithsonian began planning for the restaurant addition, and brought back the original building architect Gyo Obata of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, to design the restaurant addition. The restaurant addition opened in 1988 and was in full operation until September 2017.

What are the deficiencies of the restaurant addition?

The age and capacity of the restaurant detract from the visitor experience, with long lines at peak periods spilling back into the Museum exhibit area. Conversion to fast food still did not meet demand. Inadequate mechanical systems migrate grease and good particles into the Museum compromising the collection. Inadequate cooling systems combined with the glass addition exterior results in significant heat gain and an uncomfortable interior for visitors. The restaurant addition consumes disproportionate energy resources to the Smithsonian's sustainability goals.

Why wasn't this project part of the current major Revitalization construction project?

The Smithsonian had initially planned to address the deficiencies in the restaurant at a time that would have coincided with completion of Revitalization. The decision was made to proceed sooner, during later phases of Revitalization project since the restaurant addition would already be inaccessible from the building interior.

What are the goals for this project?

The Smithsonian is developing plans for a new education center at the museum. The education center will be housed in a new facility to be constructed on the east side of the museum. It will feature programs and activities that inspire students to pursue innovation and explore careers in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) fields, and it will help teachers better utilize the Smithsonian's collections.