

Date: August 9, 2023

Project: Construct Integrated Bezos Learning Center

Purpose: Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting #1

Panelists:

Name	Agency
Carly Bond	Smithsonian, Office of Planning
Christopher Browne	Smithsonian, National Air and Space Museum
Charles Obi	Smithsonian, Office of Planning
Mike Henry	Smithsonian, Office of Planning
Zena Howard	Perkins & Will, Principal

Attendees:

Name	Agency
Ann Trowbridge	Smithsonian
Jane Passman	Smithsonian
Sharon Park	
Marisa Scalera	Smithsonian
Alison Wood	Smithsonian
Ally Green	Smithsonian
Duane Blue Spruce	Smithsonian
SuChart Nuntasunti	Smithsonian
Jim Evans	Smithsonian
Larry Travis	Smithsonian
Bridget Lesniak	Perkins & Will
Kim Daileader	EHT Traceries

Andrew Lewis	DC Historic Preservation Office
Chris Shaheen	DC Office of Planning
Matthew Flis	National Capital Planning Commission
Lee Webb	National Capital Planning Commission
Stephanie Free	National Capital Planning Commission
Thomas Luebke	Commission of Fine Arts
Daniel Fox	Commission of Fine Arts
Carlton Hart	Commission of Fine Arts
Sarah Batcheler	Commission of Fine Arts
Turkiya Lowe	National Park Service
Caridad de la Vega	National Park Service
Partick Andriuk	Architect of the Capitol
Elizabeth Merritt	National Trust for Historic Preservation
Chris Cody	National Trust for Historic Preservation
Marie-Page Phelps	National Trust for Historic Preservation
Susan Wertheim	National Gallery of Art
Hillary Lord	National Gallery of Art
Jaima Kurry	National Gallery of Art
Rebecca Miller	DC Preservation League
Pat Tiller	Committee of 100
Elizabeth Waytkus	Docomomo
Todd Grover	Docomomo
Nick Diede	Seneca Group
Elaine Wine	Seneca Group

Presentation:

The First Consulting Party Meeting for the project to Construct an Integrated Bezos Learning Center (BLC) at National Air and Space Museum (NASM). Carly Bond from Smithsonian began the meeting with the agenda. Chris Browne then gave an introduction to NASM itself, the museum's long-term goals and objectives, and the scope of the BLC. C. Bond then described the Section 106 process and where the undertaking is in the process. She then presented the project Area of Potential Effect (APE) and identified the historic resources within it. She then outlined the contributing and non-contributing portions of the NASM site and building itself.

C. Bond gave a brief history of the museum history, the building alterations, and the Determination of Eligibility (DOE) that was updated in 2021. C. Bond updated the Consulting Parties on the project background and outlined the framework as determined by the executed Programmatic Agreement. The next slides highlighted the National Mall Historic District, its period of significance, how NASM falls within those criteria, and identified contributing viewsheds and vistas to the National mall Historic District.

The presentation then paused for the first round of questions.

First Question Break:

1. *D. Fox*: Can you go back to the significant and not significant chart for the Air and Space building, I want some clarification on these items. The north and south entry vestibules are those the items that are still to be constructed or is that just the existing [vestibules]?
 - a. *C. Bond*: There are some narrow vestibules that were installed circa 1994, underneath the overhang of the solid block of the building. I am glad you pointed this out because the larger revitalization project does include a new north vestibule for security screening on the Mall side.
2. *D. Fox*: So, the vertical glazing and ridged skylights on the first and second floors, can you clarify where those are? Obviously, you are not talking about the recessed glazed openings, the voids in between the solids, so what is this vertical glazing and ridged skylights?
 - a. *C. Bond*: You know, I don't know, that is a great question, I don't know where that is.
 - b. *D. Fox*: I would be curious to know what those are. As long as we are not talking about the east facade, where the new addition would potentially go. I'm trying to nail down what on that facade is or is not significant or contributing.
 - c. *C. Bond*: We will have to go back and review our DOE again and update you at the next meeting. But the east side does have a vertical glazing panel just like the west side does here. And there is an existing hyphen connection to what used to be the restaurant addition. Something that the design for the BLC has to figure out is how to connect to the Air and Space Museum itself.
 - d. *M. Henry*: I'm suspecting Carly and Dan, that the vertical glazing and ridge skylights could be perhaps referring to the glazing structures on either side of the zones in the building that have the shorter massing of the cubes on the south elevation. It could be that. They are basically lightwells in to the two levels of gallery in those sections of the building. They have ridged skylights and vertical glazing that rise to the first and second floors.
 - e. *D. Fox*: I wonder why those wouldn't be significant, but I guess we have to read more.
3. *D. Fox*: We talked about the significance of the pink color of what [the building] used to be clad with, obviously its clad with granite now. Did that change the significance at all, did you mention that?
 - a. *C. Bond*: I am glad you asked that. The selection of the granite that is going up on the building now is pink toned granite and of course the color and variety that that granite could provide, with horizontal features about the stone, the way it presents, was selected for its similarity to Tennessee pink. But that's also part of the reason why the Determination of Eligibility is on hold, because we need to evaluate the full effect of the construction project once completed on Air and Space.
4. *E. Merritt*: Why couldn't the National Mall's period of significance for Criterion C be expanded by amending the National Register documentation? The current period of significance for Criterion C seems a bit arbitrary.
 - a. *C. Bond*: That is a great question. I guess the National Mall Historic District could be amended again; reevaluated. So that's a good comment. I don't have a great response for you, that is a National Park Service document that we of course use for reference.

5. *A. Lewis*: I wanted to respond briefly to the two comments raised for far. I wanted to echo the comment that was made about the siding and what you addressed earlier. It was one of our primary concerns even though the efforts to match the original Tennessee pink marble were commendable, there is a distinct difference between what the museum looked like prior to the current renovation and what it looks like now. So, one of our biggest concerns and questions was whether or not it is enough of an alteration to affect its National Register eligibility. It's not only that, there's also entry pavilions proposed on the northside, I think the one on the south was eliminated [*C. Bond*: That's right], ok so a very large new addition on the north, and now we are also looking at the new learning center. The building is being altered significantly, so the Historic Preservation Office asked that we postpone making a final determination of eligibility until all of these changes can be considered. As for *E. Merritt's* question about the period of significance for the National Mall, that was an enormous effort to redraft the National Mall's National Register documentation. It was part of the National Mall [Master] Plan carried out several years ago now. But that was a really extensive effort that involved a lot of different parties and a lot of debate about what the appropriate period of significance would be. Unfortunately, I don't remember all the details as to why we landed where we did, but that [year] was agreed upon by the Park Service, by our office, and most of the consulting parties that participated. It's been a decade at least, so perhaps that could be revisited, but I just wanted to say that a lot of time and effort that went in to identifying the period of significance, including the period of significance extending to the present for Criterion A.

Presentation Continued:

Z. Howard presented the remaining slides addressing the contextual framework, site diagrams, setbacks and critical viewsheds and vistas that were being taken into consideration as the design for the BLC develops. She addressed the program that needs to be included in the building, as well as issues with the loading dock and other site constraints. *C. Bond* then concluded the presentation discussing the overall project schedule, next steps, and how the consulting parties can formally comment on the presentation.

Second Question Break:

1. *T. Luebke*: Thank you for the presentation. It is good to see this pushing along. We met about three weeks ago and talked on an introductory level. My concerns about the diagramming remain the same in that, it's all very well and good to talk about these maximum lines, and the McMillan setback, and the Fourth Street setback, etc. It's hard to imagine that there are many people who are looking at this from a judicatory point of view are going to support anything that goes up to those lines. It's moot as a basis [for design]. This needs some guidance, not so much about lines and setbacks, but actual guidance about what is the appropriate way to add to this building. What *Gyo Obata* did, who designed the original building and the addition which has now been torn down, was to design a pavilion in the garden that surrounded it. It was differentiated in form from the main building which has a series of blocks with connecting voids that are glass enclosed. The spirit, certainly not the design, but the spirit is probably where to begin. That this thing that is added on gets conceived of as an addition, a pavilion-like addition, to the building and it does not actually recapitulate the main building's parti of these masonry squares in a sequence of solid-voids. I think it's strange; to extend that idea is actually misguided, it starts to blur the distinction between the old and new. Furthermore, the more it pulls in as an object as opposed to an 'L' shaped piece, or something that starts to grab interior outdoor space (interior to the site but exterior space), it makes it actually larger on the site. I would advocate concentrating the volume to a more compact plan, which will reduce the impact of this thing as seen obliquely from any angle. Anything that starts to take away the blocky squareness would be a virtue. I'm sorry to see this kind of diagram; seeing the 'L' shape – I have very serious concerns about the appropriateness of that. The existing building has a very strong pattern of solid/void, but it also has a strong cross axis, articulated with the two ends with the glass pieces. I think that is where to connect – not into the solids. The solid pieces should be left untouched, if they can be. This is extremely basic guidance about where [the addition] goes and I want to get it on the table now, because this diagram is not much different than the competition design, so I am raising very serious concerns about its fundamental conceptual approach.
 - a. *C. Bond*: Thanks, Tom, I think all of your points are noted. And Zena, please chime in or Mike Henry, here. But, the red lines and the very blocky, sort-of, analysis that you're

seeing here really is just our starting point and really just taking into account the different setbacks we're working with along the street lines and, of course, the McMillan Plan line.

- b. *Z. Howard*: Yes, this is definitely a framework and hopefully is not taken literally as design yet. But the intent today is to put forth certain things that are critical [for us] to be mindful of as we advance the design and we do think things like the McMillan setback, massing on site, solid/void patterning, are not intended to be mimicked, as we evolve a design like this, but these are things we think are still valid to consider as part of the contextual framework. And we look forward, as we advance the design, Tom, to considering your comments moving forward.
 - c. *T. Luebke*: That's all very well and good, but a diagram is a diagram that shows an intent, and this shows an intent of extending the formal logic of the existing building. If you don't see that, I'm sorry, but that what this shows and I'm trying to say that I don't believe that it is an appropriate solution as an addition to this contributing structure. It exaggerates the scale of the addition. It is not something that will be easily supported. There are a ton of implications that come with this diagram. If this is your starting point you should show is like three others, because this is a perilous path to follow.
 - d. *Z. Howard*: I want to make sure I was clear, that this is not a starting point, but a framework of things around the Mall that we can consider as well in advancing our design. Your comments are very well received and this is why we are here. We will take that under advisement as we advance our design.
 - e. *M. Henry*: I don't think we are taking any objection to what you are saying. I have a strong sense, as you see how this is developing, you will see that we are already responding and things are getting softer and rounder, even now. I understand what you're saying, it's well received. This was just offered for context.
 - f. *C. Bond*: This was also offered to explain the difference between the north and south elevations of Air and Space and how the BLC has to be compatible with those solid and void patterns.
 - g. *T. Luebke*: I don't agree with that, yes it has to be compatible, but it does not mean that we are repeating it. To talk about the pattern of the Mall, these are all discrete, large, longitudinal boxes that have space around them, every one of them, including the National Gallery. When they do [additions] on the ends, they are different. So there has to be acknowledgement of this space that needs to be around [the addition]. It is not trying to be a continuous street wall along Constitution or Independence Avenue. Your diagram is showing that you are pushing [the addition] all the way out to the street; to me that's a fatal problem.
 - h. *Z. Howard*: All of these diagrams are meant to show different specific things that are happening along the Mall. None of them are meant to imply design only things we are considering. We will be able to make that very clear in future meetings. This is an analysis exercise at best at this point, analyzing the existing context. So more to come.
 - i. *T. Luebke*: Ok, thank you.
2. *A. Lewis*: I don't disagree with the points that Tom is making, I think no matter what you might have thought of the previous building, it was distinct from the museum. It didn't actually connect, except at the lowest point. I had the opposite reaction to the diagrams. I think they are very useful, and I want to say thank you for developing them. I am not talking about them from an architectural or aesthetic standpoint, but from a historic preservation standpoint. They are helping us to understand what the limitations are in terms of views and vistas, responding to the existing building, and being differential to it. Especially the ones looking west on Jefferson Avenue, again not in terms of architecture, but in terms of what something that would fit within that volume would do in terms of responding to the original building to still be read, clearly. That is going to shift from the north to the south side, depending from where you are looking at the building. These diagrams are very helpful in demonstrating the design framework that was spelled out in the programmatic agreement. From a historic preservation standpoint, I think they were very helpful, thank you for that.
 3. *A. Lewis*: I want to hear a bit more about the green space at the north. There has been a lot of emphasis put on that, in term of reflection of the space that is on the north side of the Mall, but if I am not mistaken, that is what is being referred to as 'the plaza' between the National Gallery of Art and the East Wing, which is buffered on its south side by rather dense vegetation. So, I'm not sure how much of that green space circled there is legible? Then some other illustrations showed this green civic space out front and I am wondering if

there has been more thought given to how that might actually be expressed. And how a greater connection between those two elements might work.

- a. *Z. Howard*: Thank you, since we have done these original diagrams, we have given more thought to that. The notion is that there is some kind of openness or open space that somehow relates. To your point, at the north at the end of the National Gallery there's vegetation, there's a lot of things going on, but relative to activity – there is an active, open green space there. We are evolving this [design], there are going to be alternatives as we move along the way. But we are thinking about how this [green space] can offer some kind of way to make the BLC addition distinct, and not sort-of pushed up against, the great point Tom made earlier, or just kind-of 'lobbed on,' I'll use that word, to the east end of Air and Space. So I think we can utilize a green space in many forms. It's evolving, it's not necessarily an exact reflection or mirror of trying to replicate what's on the north side but its edges and the way its expressing itself is evolving. But the intent is to have – is to think about – the goal and the mission of the BLC: a learning space open to all and how some type of space there could pull people and engage people and welcome people off the Mall in a way even prior to them sort-of entering the building. You don't have to enter the building necessarily to experience this learning [center]; there's a place that pulls you off the Mall to do that. I hope I'm answering your question but I'll pause and... hear from you.
- b. *A. Lewis*: I appreciate that. It's just that there were several slides that focused on it and I guess when you look at the mall, on the south side anyway, there's not really a precedent for something like that. It doesn't mean that that couldn't occur. I mean, the sculpture garden might be the most relevant. But that's within the elm panel, it's sunken and that sort of thing. Some of the renderings and diagrams you've drawn suggest almost [that] this green space is going to extend out, and I was beginning to wonder: are you proposing something north of Jefferson? But it looks like it is not. [*Z. Howard*: I see.]. It sort of suggests that it was reaching out further; projecting in front of Air and Space, so how prominent *that* space is going to be and how is that is going to relate to the existing museum. There is space on the west end of Air and Space where you have the sculpture but this seems to be extending out beyond those lines; sticking out beyond the red dotted lines that you've put here. There seemed to be an emphasis put on it and I was curious to learn more about what your thoughts were and was just pointing that out as something we want to consider in terms of how it would impact the larger context of the National Mall.
- c. *Z. Howard*: Absolutely, yeah, I see your question more now as it relates to this diagram, and again, the intent of this diagram is to show the quantity of stuff that has to go on the site, and so the green space is not necessarily intended to stretch along in that way. As a matter of fact, the space that is colored in right now is actually showing incorporating those site walls that are really important. So I think as we evolve this, the space is going to push and pull and change on each other but we're looking at healthy ways to incorporate those site walls and possibly new walls and new space that help underscore the importance of the existing site walls along the north of NASM. It's definitely going to change, but I think the way to interpret this diagram right now is all the stuff that kind of has to go on the site is shown here, not necessarily in the way it's going to formally be done.
- d. *A. Lewis*: Yeah, we look forward to learning more about that.
- e. *Z. Howard*: Absolutely.
- f. *M. Henry*: I think between Andrew's and Tom's comments it's pointing out the challenge that we, as a team, have and cramming in contextual information we're trying to convey that we're taking into consideration and conveying as well. Sometimes it can seem somewhat misrepresentative of what we're actually implementing, which will be disclosed at appropriate points as we develop this further. I think, in terms of this, specific green space shown on the north side, south of Jefferson Drive, is just incorporating where there have been existing planters and terraced planters. We have a similar green space in the grove of elm trees on the northwest corner, so there are some we're just trying to take and represent in some way, some basic way without speaking *too* much meaning to it, that we recognize there's something going on here that needs to be green. We recognize it shouldn't extend past certain boundaries but right now, we have it – we've *had* it, now under construction, a revitalization. But we've had planted terraces, terraced planters rather, in that area called the civic greenspace and a smaller area on the south, where the projected Astronomy Park

will be. In the terms of context, it isn't always meaning the architectural design development, conceptual development context, it's also as Andrew, you pointed out, thankfully, it's understanding what is going on here and what we have to respect and take into consideration, not just design but historic-wise. So we appreciate that.

4. *T. Luebke*: To what extent is the perimeter of terraces that historically were deployed around the entire site remain as an important part of the design? Do these stay or become subsumed into other park areas?
 - a. *C. Bond*: So that's analysis we have to take into account. Zena, do you want to let us know what your design team's thoughts are, at this point, about incorporating those into the green space?
 - b. *Z. Howard*: Yeah, Tom, it's both and, to an extent. Obviously access up to that terrace is pretty extensive, particularly accessible access, so we know there's no way to keep those terrace walls exactly as they are today around the entire site. We recognize that they're important in many ways, so in some ways and some places they're going to stay and some places they just need to go away to get access, and in some places, they're going to be reimagined in a contemporary way. It's a little bit of the three of those things working together as the design progresses. The astronomy park area that we need to get on site is, again – shown as a blob – sitting on the site somewhere, but that will be an intentionally designed, wonderful space that is also thought of in context with these terrace areas. We're thinking about these green areas, and how we can work those into the design in a refreshing way that harkens back to the terraces but we're not trying to replicate what's there. Hopefully that answers your question.
5. *T. Luebke (received in writing as the meeting ended)*: So what happens to the approved design to redo the terraces for access etc consistent with the rest of the renovation project?
 - a. The current construction project did not include changes to the east terrace beyond re-cladding the planter bed and retaining walls with granite, and replacing the terrace paving.