MINUTES

MEETING Consulting Parties Meeting #1
LOCATION Zoom

DATE/TIME Friday, September 14, 2023
PROJECT HMSG: Revitalize Building + Plaza

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## Introduction

Carly Bond, Acting Director of Historic Preservation for the Smithsonian Institution (SI), provided general introductory remarks about this meeting, SI’s first public Section 106 consulting parties meeting for a project titled “Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Revitalize Building and Plaza.” This meeting is being held in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of their projects on historic properties, consider the views of the public or “consulting parties” and to provide opportunities to comment.

Carly described the meeting agenda and noted the plan to break three times during the facilitated presentation for comments or questions and answers with the following five panelists:

- **Melissa Chiu**, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
- **Al Masino**, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
- **Marisa Scalera**, Smithsonian Gardens
- **Kristopher Takacs**, SOM | Selldorf Architects JV
- **Beka Sturges**, Reed Hilderbrand

### South Mall Campus Master Plan

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (HMSG) has been in the public eye over the last several years with two other projects, but this is a reminder that really these projects are phased under the effort to revitalize the entire HMSG campus.

- **Phase 1** was the Envelope Repair project, which first replaced the exterior precast panels of the museum building due to the concern that the panels could fall from the building due to the compromised original attachments.

- **Phase 2** is the Sculpture Garden Revitalization.

- **Phase 3** is the Revitalize Building and Plaza, which will require the museum building to close due to interior renovations and repair of the Plaza slab waterproofing. Phases 2 and 3 are structured so that after construction on the Sculpture Garden is completed and reopens, the museum building and plaza will then close for construction.

Carly then provided an overview of the Section 106 process including engagement with consulting parties and offered guidelines to provide constructive feedback in a respectful manner.

She noted that this project is affiliated with the South Mall Campus Master Plan, and that the renovation and restoration of the Hirshhorn Museum and Plaza walls were identified as key projects in the plan to rehabilitate historic resources. Moreover, this project is overseen by the South Mall Campus Master Plan Programmatic Agreement which concluded Section 106 consultation on the master plan and set out stipulations for how SI is to conduct Section 106 consultation on its implementing projects, and certain minimization measures.
Character Defining Features & Historic Significance
Carly summarized the HMSG’s architectural history and presented highlights about its historic significance.

- She explained that the Determination of Eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places determined that the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is an outstanding example of modernist architecture by a recognized master in the field, with a design that was closely tailored to its urban planning context as well as associated collection of Modern and Contemporary Art.

- The period of significance for the HMSG is placed at 1974, 1981.

- Carly then walked through the HMSG’s exterior and interior character-defining features, as well as other significant features not identified in the Determination of Eligibility but considered significant, including the building’s underground passage connecting below Jefferson Drive to the Sculpture Garden, the views under the drum, and the campus’ pure geometric forms.

- She explained the basis of the HMSG’s historic significance to the National Mall Historic District under National Register Criteria A and C, including Contributing Views and Visual Relationships.

Questions and Comments, Part I

- Thank you for that presentation. The background information was very helpful. Specifically, thank you for pointing out that there are some aspects of character-defining features that weren't addressed in the DOE. Oftentimes when the determinations of eligibility forms are prepared for academic purposes, they tend to be a little bit more general. And once you start applying or evaluating things for a specific project, you often find that the DOEs are short, and that you have to do a little bit more research to answer some questions about things that do and do not or may or may not contribute. As we did with the Sculpture Garden, we wound up going back to look at the later landscape changes that were applied. I also want to note that in the presentation James Urban's work was identified under the heading of contributing resources; I want to clarify that that is not yet, there is no determination that that has been made significant or considered significant. As well as changes to the lobby. And then you talked about even more recent ones, which I’m sure everyone's clear that those aren't significant. But the point I’m trying to make is that as we did for the Sculpture Garden, we might need to go back and do a little bit more research to identify contributing elements to help inform our Section 106 review of this project.

  Carly: Thank you for pointing that out. I see that the placement of our timeline under this heading was a little bit confusing. So that is right. Anything post-1981 is not considered contributing. That would apply to the lobby modifications as well.
Project Purpose & Need
Carly outlined the issues and deficiencies that SI needs the design for the project to address or resolve.

- In the last nine months, the Hirshhorn has had to close 7 times due to museum infrastructure failure including 6 instances of full closure to the public and numerous public program cancellations. These failures are connected to aging electrical, mechanical, water, and waste management systems; as well as failure of vertical transportation from elevators and the escalators.

- The project needs to address the following deficiencies and challenges:
  - Entry + Lobby Deficiencies
  - Vertical Circulation Deficiencies
  - Security Deficiencies
  - Mechanical Deficiencies
  - Structural Deficiencies
  - Thermal Envelope Deficiencies
  - Waterproofing & Stormwater Management Deficiencies
  - Fountain Deficiencies
  - Infrastructure Deficiencies
  - Visitor Amenity Deficiencies
  - Program Challenges
  - Collections Challenges

Project Goals & Scope
HMSG Director Melissa Chiu presented the project’s seven goals, which are in service of an anticipated increase in annual visitors to more than 1.5 million post-revitalization.

- **Project Goal #1** – Fulfill the Hirshhorn’s mandate to provide visitors with transformative art experiences by expanding gallery spaces and improving technological capacities to support current and future needs of the artists of our time.
- **Project Goal #2** – Improve accessibility and circulation for all users throughout the campus, entry sequences, and vertical transportation.
- **Project Goal #3** – Expand and improve amenities, operational, and programming space to enhance the visitor experience and to meet the needs of projected significant increases in visitation and to ensure the highest standards in collection stewardship and Museum operations.
- **Project Goal #4** – Ensure the Hirshhorn campus’ code compliance and significantly improve its energy efficiency, sustainability, and resiliency to maximize protection of collections, occupant comfort and safety, operations, and performance.
- **Project Goal #5** – Unify the Hirshhorn Building, Plaza, and Sculpture Garden as a campus that responds to the National Mall and larger Smithsonian context including landscape and the built environment.
- **Project Goal #6** – Strengthen the physical security of the site perimeter and entrances appropriate to the Hirshhorn’s public prominence and location on the National Mall.
- **Project Goal #7** – Respect the integral relationship between the Hirshhorn building and outdoor gallery spaces as an evolving platform for the presentation of modern and contemporary art.
Potential Scope of Improvement
Carly described the scope of improvements envisioned to address the project’s purpose and need, as follows:

- Accessible Entry From Revitalized Sculpture Garden
- Lower Level Expansion
- Plaza Revitalization
- Lobby Expansion
- Conversion of 4th Floor for Gallery Expansion
- Useable Rooftop

Currently 48% of the Hirshhorn Museum building is publicly accessible. If this project implements the full scope of improvements presented today, up to 74% of the Museum building can serve public use.

Questions and Comments, Part II

- Will there be additional public restrooms as part of this project?
  - **Carly:** Yes, there will be.
  - **Kristopher:** We are looking to boost amenities for visitors to the museum. Currently the restrooms are located in the Lower Level of the building so we’re looking at questions of accessibility and equity throughout the museum. That’ll be an important part of the synergy between architectural programming and then ultimately design for this project.

- It’s good that we’re finally getting to this project. There’s not a lot of detail yet to actually comment on. Sort of procedural. Are you going to show us more? The only thing that we can say otherwise is these things are reasonable. One thing I have some concern about is rooftop mechanical equipment. But are we going to be going into that now or what are we doing?
  - **Carly:** Today we’re just introducing the project and a lot of the background information that we’ve partially gone over. We don’t have any concept design yet developed. Today we’re focusing on the deficiencies we’ve just talked about, and what we’re considering under this project.
  - Alright, that’s fine. I just feel there isn't that much to say otherwise. We all agree that there’s a lot to be done on this property and it can be really improved. One of the things I had always hoped to see if it was possible was to create a connection to the Garden at the Lower Level of the existing building. In that, of course, they have an auditorium in the way. So that makes it more complicated. Anyway, thank you.
  - **Carly:** That will be the topic of our next meeting. We will present some massing studies or ideas to implement per the project scope. So, I hope you’ll be back for Consulting Parties Meeting #2.
• Regarding the proposed use of rooftop equipment, do you anticipate adding screening and what impact that might have to visual impacts?
  
  ○ **Kristopher**: We will be considering visual impacts very, very carefully as we entertain architectural and landscape strategies to meet the project mission that Carly described. We don’t have a concept design at this time, but I can assure you that there will be a careful analysis of impacts as you would require for an important project that requires a detailed Section 106 evaluation. Analysis of potential impacts on character-defining features and views will be at the forefront of our studies.

• **Carly**: Asked Kristopher to describe how the architectural team is structured and how the firms will work together.
  
  ○ **Kristopher**: The joint venture between SOM and Selldorf Architects, with the collaboration of landscape architect Reed Hilderband, was structured to bring together the experts experienced with many of the most complicated restorations of mid-century buildings—including ones designed by SOM in the 50s and 60s, and the HMSG facility itself—and the creativity and deep understanding of architecture in the service of art museums, which Selldorf Architects bring through their work around the country and around the world. We’re privileged to have this group of collaborators working together to support the museum under Melissa’s leadership and with the SI as a steward of this incredible public asset on the National Mall.

• **What limitations and options do we have in terms of addressing the question of elevators?** If I understand correctly, the only elevators are located in the pier that’s in the southeast corner of the site. Is that correct? I was thinking about the implications. Additional elevators are going to be required, and I guess that’s the first question. But if so, are the remaining three piers constructed in a way that would allow elevators to be introduced or do they contain things that wouldn’t allow them? I’m trying to figure out what the options might be in terms of introducing new elevators, if they’re going to be introduced into some of the other piers that could most likely require modifications. Space under the drum might have to be altered to become interior space.

  ○ **Carly**: We are aware of this technical challenge. The southeast pier contains both a passenger elevator and freight elevator. The other three piers including the southwest pier contain emergency staircases.

  ○ **Kristopher Takacs**: We are embarking on a journey to really look at every square inch of space within the enclosure of this facility at all levels. So that we can understand how to unlock it to achieve the goals that have been laid out for the project. There’s very limited space that actually connects from the Lower Level all the way up through the top of the building as the drum is elevated on the four piers. So the real estate that’s inside the peers is actually very precious. We’re going to need to be very creative in how we rethink that space to get the most out of it, including vertical shafts like elevator hoistways that need to go all the way up through the building. Not only on the interior but also visibility from the exterior.
○ Carly: One of the major scopes of expansion that we're going to be considering is potentially a lobby expansion. We are not sure what that could look like yet, but it could be an infilling of some of the space underneath the drum.

- **What are the primary views?** How do we evaluate views under the drum from the Mall? Views heading south versus views east west? Just want to point out the sensitivity. Apparently, you're already fully aware of that, but from a preservation standpoint, those views are going to be very, very critically important issues. I'm trying to figure out the most appropriate path forward.

○ Carly: Agreed.

### Plaza Evaluation

Carly summarized the draft report on the Significance and Integrity of the Hirshhorn Plaza. The report concludes the following:

- Landscape Architect James Urban acted as a significant bridge between landscape architects and practitioners of arboriculture and horticulture.

- Urban is recognized as an expert in the field of arboriculture and horticultural knowledge.

- While recognized by contemporaries, Urban's work is largely absent from scholarly publications that take a longer and broader view of historical achievements in the field of landscape architecture.

- Urban’s 1993 Plaza redesign does not yet meet National Register Criteria Consideration G (standards for the significance of properties less than 50 years old).

- Based on a lack of sufficient scholarly assessment of the career of a still-living practitioner of landscape architecture and arboriculture and of the Hirshhorn Plaza’s place within that career.

- Period of Significance should remain 1974, 1981.

- It should be noted that this conclusion is not based on any lack of aesthetic appeal, functionality, or sustainability of the design as implemented.
Schedule and Next Steps

- Carly presented the draft Area of Potential Effects (APE).
- Sculpture Garden Memorandum of Agreement stipulates the elements to be incorporated into the design of the revitalization project, including re-opening the underground passage and restoring historic fabric present in the passage; and to provide access to the underground passage via a reestablished opening to the passage stairs on the Plaza level.
- Carly described the Initial Section 106 Consultation Schedule and outlined next steps:
  - Site visit for Consulting Parties on September 22, 2023
  - Consulting Parties Meeting 2 will be held on November 14, 2023
  - Written comments are welcome through October 13, 2023, on the presentation material or the draft Plaza evaluation report. Direct written comments to preservation@si.edu.

Questions and Comments, Part III

Interested in attending the next Consulting Parties webinar.

- Carly: You will receive an email notification to register for the November meeting next month.