

COMMITTEE OF 100 ON THE FEDERAL CITY
1307 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

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October 17, 1980

Mr. Jerry R. Shipplett
Acting Chief, Facilities Planning
and Environmental Branch
Planning Division (WPJF)
GSA-NCR
7th & D Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20407

Dear Mr. Shipplett:

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Smithsonian Institution Quadrangle Development.

The Statement seems to provide adequate documentation for the Smithsonian's need for the additional space and service requirements outlined in the proposed development and makes a valid case for providing most of those services within the Quadrangle. However, we do not agree that the proposed solution is the best possible one. Some of the alternatives seem much more desirable from a functional and esthetic point of view.

The solution as proposed poses several problems. The new buildings, or "pavilions", are quite disruptive to the garden. They intrude on the space and are in no way compatible with the existing buildings on the Quadrangle. We cannot agree that they are "background garden ornaments". They are buildings, and as such make definite architectural statements. Nor do we understand how adding two additional styles of architecture to the three disparate styles now in existence can "unify the Quadrangle". There is no historic dictate to enclose the Quadrangle with additional buildings. If there is need to define the southern boundary of the Quadrangle and to screen the Forrestal Building, it can be accomplished much more effectively with planting and still maintain the historic openness to Independence Avenue. Even a wall with occasional openings would be far more effective and appropriate. It would retain an open feeling and the garden would be contained.

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The alternative described in Sections 2.8.2 and 4.8.2 (Locate Eastern Art Pavilion Between the Freer and Smithsonian Building) seems a much more reasonable solution. The positive impacts are well noted on page 228; however, the stated negative impacts demand comment. Items 1 and 2 can be solved by simply making the surface building smaller. It can be designed simply as a true garden pavilion providing space only for a stair, an elevator, information desk and an area to display the various exhibits on view below. Items 3 and 4 can easily be resolved with planting.

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Under "Negative Impacts to the Program", Item 1 does not make sense. Walking up one flight of stairs in the National Gallery certainly has no negative impact in that building; therefore, there should be no negative impact in walking down one flight in the Eastern Art Pavilion. Item 2 is no more difficult than designing the "pavilions" for the proposed solution. Item 3 is addressed in the following paragraphs.

It is difficult to believe that the Museum of African Art can have a "presence" on the Mall if it is located in a far corner of the Quadrangle and is mostly under ground. Only signs and literature could delineate its location, since its visual impact would be marginal. A much stronger presence would be felt if the Museum were located downtown, especially near the National Collection of Fine Arts. There are several existing buildings in this area that could house the Museum - the Tariff Commission, Landsburgs Furniture Store or the LeDroit Building complex. Location in this area would not only strengthen that museum complex but would emphasize the importance of African art and its association with American art. A much stronger case can be made for African art's influence on modern art than can be made for its correlation to Asian art.

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At this time neither American art nor African art is represented on the Mall. The NCFCA (newly named the National Museum of American Art) is the only museum exclusively devoted to American art. The availability of historical buildings nearby provides an opportunity to associate the two collections both with the nation and with the city.

Eighth Street, the pedestrian core of the housing proposed by Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, can become a strong link between the monumental Mall, the American Museum complex, and the newly revitalized downtown retail core of the city.

Since the Museum of Eastern Art will undoubtedly be viewed by the public as an extension of the Freer, why should a separate presence be necessary? Only that which is required to circumvent the bequest should be considered. The use of an underground extension for the Freer is appropriate. Good examples of this kind of building exist: The Yale Library; William Morgan's underground houses

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in Florida; and the AIA proposal for the extension of the Capitol. A good argument can be made that an underground building constitutes a valid architectural style.

Placing the Museum of African Art near the NCFCA would diminish the need for above ground structures in the garden area. The Freer extension could become a predominantly underground structure. An above ground pavilion could be designed to be appropriate to the tranquility of the garden area which could then be maintained south of the Castle.

Sincerely,

Marion K. Schlefer

(Mrs.) Marion K. Schlefer

cc: Mr. Frank Gilmore
Mr. J. Carter Brown
Mr. David Childs
Ms. Lucy Franklin