

Preservation and Parks & Environment Joint Committees Resolution concerning the American of Museum of Natural History's Proposed Gilder Center

September 21, 2016

American Museum of Natural History. Application to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission for the construction of a new building on its campus adjacent to Columbus Avenue at West 79th Street within Theodore Roosevelt Park.

Regarding the park design, the following facts and concerns were taken into account in arriving at our conclusion:

- While considered historically significant, the park is not a designated part of the individual landmark of the Museum buildings, but is a part of the surrounding Historic District..
- There is no separate master plan for Theodore Roosevelt Park. As a result, the design of the park has evolved over time in response to the museum's physical expansion.
- The new Gilder Center will be set back from the street, intended to be read as a building in the park, not as a structure defining the perimeter of the block.
- The entrance to the park at 79th Street and Columbus will be expanded.
- Construction of the new Gilder Center will result in a loss of one quarter acre of parkland, a notable reduction from the half-acre originally proposed.
- 7 existing mature trees will be removed (preserving two mature trees from the original design), and one tree will be relocated
- 6 new canopy trees (12'-14" caliper) and 13 new understory trees (6" caliper) will be planted. These will take 20-30 years to mature.
- The design for the paved and planted open spaces seeks to accommodate several distinct uses:
 - i. Fully accessible visitor circulation to and from the museum.
 - ii. Active play space
 - iii. Areas of quiet respite.
- The curvilinear design elements are intended to reinforce and enhance the curvilinear nature of the building.

The Preservation Committee and the Parks & Environment Committee of Community Board 7/ Manhattan believe that the proposed re-design of the area of Theodore Roosevelt Park adjacent to the new Gilder Center is reasonably appropriate to the historic character of the museum buildings and of the Historic District.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Preservation Committee and the Parks & Environment Committee of Community Board 7/ Manhattan **approve** the new park design. The Committees strongly urge the applicant to investigate additional ways to separate museum visitor circulation and congregation activities from areas used by park visitors

*Preservation and Parks & Environment Joint. Committees: **10-0-0-0.**
Full Board Non-Committee members: **8-0-0-0.***

Regarding the building design, the following facts and concerns were taken into account in arriving at our conclusion:

- The American Museum of Natural History is an individually designated landmark
- The original 1870's master plan for the museum superblock has guided the development of the museum, evolving over time.
- The new Gilder Center will be located at 79th Street and Columbus Avenue, providing a fourth visitor entrance to the museum and completing the east-west axis of the original master plan..
- Each new addition to the original museum building has always been respectful of its context time, adhering to the museum's high-quality design and material standards, but employing an architectural vocabulary and structural elements reflecting its own contemporary period.
- Three existing, non-contributing buildings will be demolished to make way for the new structure.
- 80% of the new Gilder Center will occupy space within the existing footprint of the museum.
- The new structure will be five stories tall, aligning with the roofline and floor levels of the adjacent museum buildings.
- The curvilinear shape of the building in plan and in the Columbus Avenue façade picks up on the secondary vocabulary of curvilinear architectural elements (turrets, rounded corners, arches, etc.) found throughout the rectilinear design of the buildings within the museum complex.
- Conceptually, the design was inspired by the effects of flow and time on geological structures, a metaphor for the museum itself, which explores the history of life on earth.
- In plan, the new structure steps back from the street wall of the adjoining building to the south, with a metal-clad rectilinear reveal at the joint between the two structures, then steps back again to meet its adjoining neighbor to the north.
- Internally, the new Gilder Center will clarify and substantially improve access to and circulation within the museum, connecting 10 separate museum buildings at 30 different points.
- It will provide at-grade, barrier-free ADA access to the museum.
- A five-story atrium space will be created at the new building entrance, with staircases, elevators and bridges at various levels to physically achieve these connections.
- It will also create visual clarification of the museum's collections and research components, revealing interrelationships previously obscured.
- The multi-story open space will incorporate skylights to provide natural lighting throughout.
- The Columbus Avenue façade will be clad in the same Milford Pink granite used at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial entrance on Central Park West, sourced from the same quarry. Its finish will vary, ranging from smooth to rough-faced. The glazing will be fritted to discourage bird hits.
- The north and east facing secondary facades of the Gilder Center will be visible from the north, seen as a backdrop to the lower existing glass and copper-clad structure at the south side of the Ross Terrace, to the west of the Rose Center.
- The side and rear facades will be clad in the same traditional plaster employed on secondary facades around the museum campus, punctuated by a large oval window opening several stories up. The plaster will be striated in texture, colored to approximate the Milford Pink granite. Copper cladding, limestone and utility brick will also be incorporated, relating to the existing adjacent structures.
- The project is being designed towards LEED Gold certification.

The Preservation Committee and the Parks & Environment Committee of Community Board 7/ Manhattan believe that the design of the new Gilder Center building is reasonably appropriate to the historic character of this individual landmark and of the Historic District. The Committees commend the applicant on the inspired design, which we find visually and spatially exciting.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Preservation Committee and the Parks & Environment Committee of Community Board 7/ Manhattan enthusiastically **approve** the design of the new Gilder

Center building. The Committees strongly urge the applicant to maximize alternative fuels and work to achieve a zero carbon footprint.

Preservation and Parks & Environment Joint Committees: 9-1-0-0.

Non-Committee Full Board members: 7-1-0-0.