

Board of Directors

Theodore Prudon
PRESIDENT
Robert Meckfessel
PRESIDENT-ELECT
Meredith Arms Bzdak
VICE-PRESIDENT
Todd Grover
VICE-PRESIDENT
Flora Chou
TREASURER
Katie Horak
SECRETARY

T. Gunny Harboe
Eric Keune
Anna Mod
Robert Nauman
Robert Pullum
Michelangelo Sabatino
Monica Schaffer
Barry Solar
Bradford J. White
Barbara Yanni

Liz Waytkus
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Docomomo US Chapters

Chicago/Midwest
Colorado
DC
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Michigan
Mid Tex Mod
Minnesota
New England
New Orleans/Louisiana
New York/Tri-State
Northern California
North Texas
Oregon
Philadelphia
Southern California
Western Washington

Friend Organizations

Houston Mod
Indiana Modern
Landmark Columbus
Modern STL
NC Modernist
Palm Springs Modernism Week

November 19, 2021

Carly Bond
Historic Preservation Specialist
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Planning, Design & Construction
Architectural History and Historic Preservation
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 5001
Capital Gallery MRC 511
Washington, DC 20013

Dear Ms. Bond,

Docomomo US appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback for the Section 106 Consulting Parties review of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum (NASM) Restaurant Addition Replacement.

As we mentioned in our comments to the first Section 106 review of the NASM Restaurant Addition Replacement discussion, Docomomo US did not participate in previous Section 106 discussions for the National Air and Space Museum building renovation. In our response from last year, we stated that we could not make a determination on the NASM restaurant addition without additional research and the Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the Museum and the addition. We appreciate documentation for both elements and the current museum renovation plans have been shared with our organization.

The background research presented in the NASM DOE is fascinating and the four decades long effort to realize the museum and its supporting functions is unlike any history with relationship to Modern architecture that we know of. The fact that so many architects were at one point associated with this project and that only one, Gyo Obata for Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum (HOK), was responsible for the design of both the museum building and its restaurant addition. A few other facts in the DOE stuck out to us in relationship to the restaurant addition and its significance.

The first is that the museum as originally designed by HOK in 1962 (fourteen years before the museum would open) "represented a building of 775 feet in length, 260 feet in depth, and ninety-seven feet in height...[and] the building contained a public cafeteria on the east side of the third floor overlooking the U.S. Capitol." Nearly nine years later, forced by economic constraints, the Smithsonian had to pull back the design so that, "the new building amounted to approximately half of the volume of the earlier iteration, although the

corresponding exhibit design had been reduced by only one third. The revised total dimensions measured 785 feet long, 225 feet wide, and 85 feet tall, or almost exactly the size of the National Gallery of Art.”

While the building was value engineered (to the detriment of the technical elements of the design), what was lost was the inclusion of the public cafeteria in what seems to be the same exact location the Smithsonian agreed to place the restaurant addition just six years later in 1982. It is hard to know from the documentation provided but we wonder if the restaurant addition was planned for and designed by Obata in the 1970s for a later date. Regardless, the timing seems moot when the restaurant was in fact built in its original 1962 location by the original architect.

We agree with the 2016 DOE recommendation that the National Air and Space Museum is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C, and Criteria Consideration G. We understand the National Register guidance for Criterion C recommends that the period of significance be limited to the date of construction but certainly a building project that evolved over the course of decades, through eight terms of President including: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan should be considered for an extension of the period of significance.

It is also perplexing why the DOE states, “the National Air and Space Museum is significant under Criterion C as an outstanding example of Modernist architecture by a recognized master in the field [Obata]” and yet the restaurant addition that is designed by the same “master in the field” is not significant for the same reason.

The suggestion, under Criteria G, that the “restaurant addition has not yet attained the level of significance needed” is equally perplexing given the museum was deemed exceptional specifically under Criteria C as a work of Modernist architect. How does this exceptional merit not also apply to a design by the same architect, and one planned for nearly sixty years ago? The DOE provides no specific details regarding the level of significance of the original design to suggest the restaurant addition does not rise to the same level. We do not find it is enough to just say it does not rise to the same level without providing specific details of its significance.

We do not find validity to the statement that the restaurant addition is operationally and functionally separate from the museum for all these reasons. In reviewing the National Park Service (NPS) Functionally Related Structures – General Criteria, the program states:

For rehabilitation projects involving more than one certified historic structure where the structures are judged by the Secretary to have been functionally related historically to serve an overall purpose, such as a mill complex or a residence and carriage house, rehabilitation certification will be issued on the merits of the overall project rather than for each structure or individual component. [36 CFR Part 67.6(b)(4)]

The NPS criteria states that buildings owned by separate owners will receive separate reviews. This is not the case with the restaurant addition as both buildings are owned by the Smithsonian Institution. The restaurant is not a new building but an addition to an existing building, it is physically joined/interconnected, and it maintains one common entrance through the museum to access the restaurant services. The restaurant addition is located on the same property and the way we read the DOE, the restaurant was always meant to be part of the services provided by the museum to visitors and was designed in its original 1962 location. The restaurant addition functions together with

the museum for an overall purpose to support visitors as a part of the museum's services. The NPS makes clear in its criteria that different functions of a business are considered functionally related if for an overall purpose.

We think it is important to point out that construction began in 1972, making the museum just a few months away from being constructed 50 years ago in 2022. The National Register criteria notes that properties DO NOT need to meet Criteria G if construction for the "resource" began over fifty years ago, but the completion overlaps the fifty-year period by a few years. Again, we would point back to the DOE, which states the original NASM design included the restaurant on the east side of the museum overlooking the U.S. Capital. While construction of the restaurant was in fact delayed due to funding and appropriations, the DOE argues that the significance of the museum dates to this original 1962 design by Obata for HOK. Criteria G designation would not need to be applied based on this extension due to construction and completion dates.

We do not agree with the DOE findings that there is a lack of post-modern context for evaluation of the restaurant addition and thus its significance cannot be determined. We are also not convinced that the restaurant addition is post-modern in its design. While the completion dates point to a time when architects were deploying post-modern forms and ideas, the stepped back pyramid shape includes very little post-modern design details and its minimalness and use of glass looks to be of the late modern style. The restaurant design regardless of its style is clearly a representation of the evolution of Obata's design approach. And certainly, an institution such as the Smithsonian Institution, would have the resources to determine such a context and where the design falls in the modern spectrum.

In conclusion, we recommend the Smithsonian Institution reconsider the restaurant addition to be significant under Criteria C and G based on its functionally related relationship to the overall purpose of the museum, its merit as an outstanding example of Modernist architecture by a master in the field, and because the restaurant was designed by the same designer as the original building. We recommend revising the DOE to extend the period of significance to 1988 before moving on to evaluating the proposed project's adverse effects on the resource and any mitigation efforts.

Sincerely,



Todd Grover
Vice President Advocacy
Docomomo US



Liz Waytkus
Executive Director
Docomomo US

cc: Sharon Park, Smithsonian Institution; Jaime Loichinger, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; Marcel Acosta; National Capital Planning Commission; Lee Webb, National Capital Planning Commission; Steve Callcott, D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board; Theo Prudon, President, Docomomo U.S.; Todd Grover, Advocacy Chair, Docomomo U.S., Kirby Vining, Committee of 100 on the Federal City; Rebecca Miller, D.C. Preservation League; Betsy Merritt, National Trust for Historic Preservation;