

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING**  
**URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** March 10, 2011

**Meeting No.:** 124

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**Project:** National Great Blacks in Wax Museum

**Phase:** Introduction

**Location:** 1601 East North Avenue

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**PRESENTATION:**

Peter Cook, of Davis Brody Bond Architects, provided an overview to the project, which is an approx. 134,000 square foot expansion and renovation to the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum that would encompass the entire 1600 block of East North Avenue as well as the interior of the block. Dr. Joann Martin then described her husband's founding of the museum, the mission and function of the museum, and its goals for expansion, including community development and business incubation in addition to the museum's exhibits. The museum expansion was planned for three phases; Phase 1 is the construction of the shell, core, partial fit-out, landscaping, and memorial garden. Phase 1A is the remaining fit-out, rooftop park, and public space, Phase 2 is the Children's Museum, and Phase 3 is the Conference Center.

Mr. Cook then reviewed the goals and recommendations presented by the Planning Department, as well as goals that were established with the client, including reinforcing the mission of the museum, realizing a sustainable pattern of development, creating identity, discovery, and surprise, and engaging the neighborhood.

Carrie Barton of EHT Traceries presented the Historic Assessment study. Of the block of houses and buildings along North Avenue, the end buildings would be saved and the facades of four houses east of the former fire station would be preserved as well; all other buildings were in either too bad of shape or were not deemed worthy of preservation.

The architects continued with a detailed presentation of the plans and drawings.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:**

The Panel complemented the design team for a very thorough overview and presentation of the project and the client for their vision. It was recognized that, while this is a great beginning, there remain several issues that need to be addressed:

Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Context. The Panel agreed that keeping the end buildings made sense, but questioned the value of saving the few facades along North Avenue. It was felt that eliminating these facades would allow a better and more unified new façade along

North Avenue that, rather than creating a “facadectomy” could incorporate the memory of the rowhouses in their rhythm and scale. While the Panel cautioned to not replicate the rowhouses in their forms, it was suggested that the addition of vertical elements along North Avenue would help to balance the overwhelmingly horizontal treatment of the façade. Additionally, the Children’s Museum seemed to consume the firehouse and diminished its perception as both an anchor and its historic integrity.

Museum Identity, Entrance, and Active Presence on North Avenue. The spiral parti was a strong concept and viewed as an exciting experiential form that also organized the museum functions. However, the Panel felt that there was a disconnect between the spiral, the entrance, and North Avenue, and recommends that the spiral be better integrated into the entrance lobby and expressed on the front façade to create a clearer and stronger identity and sense of entry. As currently shown the entrance is diminutive and is overshadowed by the glass connector along the former mansion building. The addition of color and graphics along North Avenue was also suggested. Further, it was recommended that some type of café be incorporated along North Avenue that served the museum but also activated the block-long museum.

Providing enhanced pedestrian and/or visual connection between the project’s open space and existing community streets / Engage the Neighborhood. Panel members were particularly concerned with the open space in the center of the block. While issues of safety and access are recognized, the connection to the surrounding community, and the ability for museum goers to experience the exterior gardens, was weak and minimal. This brings to question the public nature of the project as described by the design team. It was recommended that the location of the parking, the number of parking spaces, and the through road be reconsidered. Better pedestrian entrances from Broadway and Bond Streets are needed; currently these are tight and uninviting. Also, moving the exterior gardens closer to the building would improve their ability to function as outdoor rooms rather than buffer spaces, as well as be integrated into the entry sequence and spiral concept. Larger open, gathering areas was also recommended rather than buffer landscaping. Finally, concern was expressed that no rear access is provided to the surrounding blocks of houses; this not only increases the need for residential parking on the surrounding blocks (which would impact visitors to the museum) but also diminishes activity and sense of community along this edge, even to the point of creating the solid walls along the residential edge. Although current conditions are marked by a number of vacancies, if the project is to foster community development, this interior site space needs additional study.

#### Miscellaneous.

1. While the use of the glass tubes and large expanse of glass is seen as a bold statement, the Panel needs additional information on the materials. Concern was also expressed regarding the large glass walls in the exhibit areas, and that this could conflict with exhibit design and artifact preservation.
2. The roof garden is an exciting part of the building, but there is concern that presently shown it is too large a space to be activated. Again, the idea of rooms would help to create a better balance to this area.
3. How the building meets the sky needs further study. The view from the building was shown but not how the building is seen from afar. A vertical-scaled element that can be seen from a distance might be considered.

4. The service area is too exposed and needs additional study.
5. The Panel was concerned about the limited amount of sunlight for the Memorial Garden.

**PANEL ACTION:**

Introduction only - No Action needed.

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**Attending:**

Joanne Martin – Great Balcks in Wax Museum  
Marie Washington, Jackie Washington – EBEI  
Peter Cook, Robert Anderson – Davis Brody Bond Aeadas  
Carrie Barton – EHT Traceries  
Addison Palmer, Tony Cortea - STV  
Nina Harper – Oliver Community Association  
Ana Serra – Buro Happold  
Ed Gunts – The Sun  
Jay Brodie – BDC

Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel \*  
Tom Stosur, Wolde Ararsa, Tamara Woods, Stacey Montgomery, Anthony Cataldo, Melvin  
Hicks, Bob Quilter – Planning

\* Panel member Emily Eig - recused