TO: Nilda Mesa, Director  
New York City Mayor’s Office of Sustainability  

FROM: Alyssa Cobb Konon, Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Parklands  

DATE: March 2, 2016  

RE: Notice of Lead Agency Designation; Positive Declaration; Notice of Scoping  
American Museum of Natural History  
Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation  
CEQR No. 16DPR004M  
Project area: Upper West Side, Manhattan  
Community District #7  

In accordance with Executive Order 91 of 1977, as amended, and the Rules of Procedure for City Environmental Quality Review, found at Title 62, Chapter 5 (CEQR) and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and its implementing regulations as set forth in 6 NYCRR Part 617, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR) proposes to assume the role of lead agency for the environmental review of the project as described below.  

The assumption of lead agency status is consistent with the underlying mandate of CEQR that the appropriate lead agency should be the agency “primarily responsible for carrying out, funding or approving an action,” as well as with the criteria listed in Sections 5-03 (h) and 5-05 of the Rules of Procedure for CEQR. The affected property is park land under the control and jurisdiction of NYCDPR.  

NYCDPR is conducting a coordinated environmental review for the proposed project. Your agency has been identified as a potentially involved or interested agency for the review and approval of the proposed action. If you have questions or issues concerning this agency’s assuming lead agency status for this project, please contact us by Friday, March 18, 2016. If we do not hear from you by this time, we will assume that you have no objections.  

Project Description:  

The Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, proposed by the American Museum of Natural History (the Museum), would be a five-story, approximately 180,000 gsf addition to the Museum, which is located on the superblock bounded by West 81st Street, West 77th Street, Central Park West, and Columbus Avenue, in the Upper West Side neighborhood of Manhattan (Block 1130, Lot 1). The Museum is located within Theodore Roosevelt Park, which is City-owned parkland under the jurisdiction of NYCDPR. The proposed project would also include approximately 38,000 gsf of renovations to existing space (for a total of 218,000 gsf of new construction and renovation)
and alterations to an approximately 31,100 square-foot adjacent area of Theodore Roosevelt Park.

The proposed project would integrate the Museum’s scientific research, collections, and exhibitions with its educational programming, and would also upgrade and revitalize the Museum’s facilities to address critical needs. Collection storage spaces, the research library, and laboratories for gene mapping, 3D imaging, and big data assimilation would be located adjacent to immersive exhibition galleries and interactive education spaces for children and adults in family and school groups. The Gilder Center would be designed to reveal the behind-the-scenes work of the Museum and integrate it into the visitor experience, to serve as a platform for the partnership between scientists and educators, and to offer spaces where students of all levels and ages can engage in the process of scientific research and discovery. Functionally, the proposed project would improve the connectivity, spatial logic, and function of the Museum’s interior spaces and service areas.

The Gilder Center would largely be set within the area currently occupied by the Museum; three existing buildings within the Museum complex would be removed to minimize the footprint on land that is now open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park, to about 11,600 square feet at grade. In the adjacent area of Theodore Roosevelt Park, paths, trees and other landscaping would be modified, removed or relocated to accommodate the proposed project. The character of the park along Columbus Avenue is anticipated to be similar to the existing paths and landscaped areas, primarily designed for walking and quiet activities. The area in front of the new entrance would (as it currently does), provide an entrance point to the Museum, although with the project it would at times be more populated and active with Museum visitors. The New York Times Capsule would be relocated as part of the proposed project.

Further details about the proposed project are set forth in the attached Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS).

Positive Declaration and Notice of Scoping

Based on the preliminary review of the EAS and its supporting analysis, NYCDPR, as lead agency, has determined that implementation of the above action may have a potential for significant adverse impacts on the environment and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) must be prepared. Accordingly, NYCDPR has issued a Positive Declaration for CEQR No. 16DPR004M. A copy of the Positive Declaration is attached to this Notice.

This Positive Declaration is accompanied by the EAS and a Draft Scope of Work for the preparation of a DEIS, which are also attached to this Notice. Copies of the Positive Declaration, EAS and Draft Scope of Work are available for public inspection at the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, The Arsenal in Central Park, and at St. Agnes Library, 444 Amsterdam Avenue; and can be obtained online at http://nyc.gov/parks/amnh-gilder or by contacting NYCDPR at the address below.
Questions or comments regarding the lead agency designation, the Positive Declaration or the proposed project should be directed to:

Owen Wells, Director of Environmental Review
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
The Arsenal, Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue, Room 401
New York, New York 10065
Telephone: 212-360-3492
Fax: 212-360-3453
Email: owen.wells@parks.nyc.gov

A Public Scoping Meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 6, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. at:

American Museum of Natural History
LeFrak Theater
Enter at Weston Pavilion entrance
Columbus Avenue and West 79th Street
New York, New York 10024

NYCDPR requests public comments on the Draft Scope of Work, including issues and analysis topics to be included in the scope of work; methodologies for analysis (such as the size of a study area, the type of data to be gathered, or the type of analysis to be conducted); alternatives to the proposed project; and special conditions or concerns that the NYCDRP should consider.

Oral and written comments on the Draft Scope of Work can be submitted at the Public Scoping Meeting. Guidelines for public participation will be available at the meeting. Written comments will also be accepted by NYCDPR at the above address, fax number, or email address until 5:00 PM on Wednesday, April 20, 2016.

Attachments:
- Distribution List
- Positive Declaration
- Environmental Assessment Statement
- Draft Scope of Work
NYC DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
Carl Weisbrod, Chair, New York City Planning Commission
Robert Dobruskin, Director, Environmental Assessment and Review Division

NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner
Naim Rasheed, Director, Traffic Engineering & Planning
Marjorie Bryant, City Planner
Margaret Forgione, Manhattan Borough Commissioner

NYC DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Emily Lloyd, Commissioner
Angela Licata, Deputy Commissioner, Sustainability
Terrell Estesen, Director, NYC Environmental Protection, Bureau of Environmental Planning and Analysis
Mitchell Wimbish, City Planner, NYC Environmental Protection, Bureau of Environmental Planning and Analysis

NYC POLICE DEPARTMENT
Michael Falcon, Deputy Inspector, 20th Precinct

MAYOR’S OFFICE
Anthony Shorris, First Deputy Mayor
Alicia Glen, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development

NY CITY COUNCIL
Melissa Mark-Viverito, Speaker
Helen Rosenthal, Council Member, District 6
David Greenfield, Chair, Committee on Land Use
Julissa Ferreras, Chair, Committee on Finance
James Van Bramer, Chair, Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Mark Levine, Chair, Committee on Parks and Recreation
Latonia McKinney, Director, Finance Division

BOROUGH PRESIDENT & BOROUGH BOARD
Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President; Chair, Manhattan Borough Board
Matthew Washington, Deputy Borough President
Jessica Mates, Chief of Staff
Jim Caras, General Counsel and Director of Land Use
COMMUNITY BOARD 7
Elizabeth R. Caputo, Chair
Penny Ryan, District Manager

NYS SENATE
José M. Serrano, NYS Senator, District 29

NYS ASSEMBLY
Linda B. Rosenthal, NYS Assembly Member, District 67

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY [APPLICANT]
Ellen V. Futter, President

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION
New York Public Library, St. Agnes Library
DPR files and DPR Website