



NYC Parks

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**City of New York  
Parks & Recreation**

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## STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

*by*

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

*regarding the*

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
RICHARD GILDER CENTER FOR SCIENCE,  
EDUCATION, AND INNOVATION**

**Date Issued:** December 4, 2017

**CEQR No.:** 16DPR004M

**SEQR Classification:** Type I

**Lead Agency:** New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks)  
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**Location:** Manhattan, New York  
Community District 7  
Block 1130, Lot 1  
The project area is on the west side of the American Museum of Natural History complex and Theodore Roosevelt Park located on the superblock bounded by West 81st Street, West 77th Street, Central Park West, and Columbus Avenue.

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### **A. Introduction**

Pursuant to City Environmental Quality Review, Mayoral Executive Order No. 91 of 1977, and the City Environmental Quality Review Rules of Procedure found at Title 62, Chapter 5 of the Rules of the City of New York (CEQR), and the State Environmental Quality Review Act, Article 8 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law and its implementing regulations found in Part 617 of 6 NYCRR (SEQRA), this Statement of Findings has been prepared to demonstrate that (1) NYC Parks has considered the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project and has weighed and balanced those environmental impacts with social, economic and other considerations; (2) the procedural requirements of CEQR and SEQRA have been met; (3) consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations from among the reasonable alternatives available, the action is one that avoids or minimizes to the maximum extent practicable the adverse environmental impacts; and (4) adverse environmental impacts will be

avoided or minimized to the maximum extent practicable by incorporating as conditions those mitigative measures that were identified as practicable in the EIS.

## **B. Procedural History**

Under SEQRA and CEQR, NYC Parks is the lead agency responsible for conducting the environmental review for the proposed Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation project. An Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) for the project was prepared. Based on the preliminary review of the EAS and its supporting analysis, NYC Parks determined that implementation of the project might have a potential for significant adverse impacts on the environment, requiring an EIS to be prepared, and issued a Notice of Lead Agency Designation; Positive Declaration; and Notice of Scoping on March 2, 2016, accompanied by a Draft Scope of Work.

To receive public comments on the Draft Scope of Work, a Public Scoping Meeting was held on April 6, 2016 and written comments were accepted by NYC Parks through April 20, 2016. The Final Scope of Work, including a summary of comments received and responses to those comments, was issued on April 25, 2017. NYC Parks determined that the proposed project would have the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts on the following areas of concern: Land Use, Zoning and Public Policy; Open Space and Recreational Resources; Shadows; Historic and Cultural Resources; Urban Design and Visual Resources; Natural Resources; Hazardous Materials; Transportation; Air Quality; Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Noise; Public Health; Neighborhood Character; and Construction Impacts. Therefore a detailed assessment of likely effects in these areas of concern was prepared and disclosed in the EIS.

NYC Parks issued a Notice of Completion for the Draft EIS (DEIS) on May 18, 2017, at which time the DEIS was distributed and made available for public review. The DEIS, in conformance with the Final Scope, described the proposed project, presented the proposed framework for analysis, and assessed the potential for project impacts. The 2014 *CEQR Technical Manual* served as a guide on the methodologies and impact criteria for evaluating the proposed project's potential effects on the various environmental areas of analysis. The analyses in the DEIS concluded that the proposed project would have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts related to transportation, historic and cultural resources, and construction. A public hearing on the DEIS was held on June 15, 2017. Public comments were accepted at that hearing and throughout the comment period, which remained open until 5:00 PM on June 26, 2017. NYC Parks issued a Notice of Completion for the Final EIS (FEIS) on November 15, 2017, at which time the FEIS was distributed and made available for public review. The FEIS includes a description of changes to the proposed project that were made between the DEIS and the FEIS, including refinements to the construction schedule and logistics plan and commitments regarding construction noise source and receptor controls, as well as a summary restatement (and copies) of each substantive comment made on the DEIS and a response to each substantive comment. The analyses in the FEIS concluded that the proposed project would have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts related to transportation and historic and cultural resources. The FEIS also identified mitigation measures to minimize those impacts to the maximum extent practicable.

The American Museum of Natural History (the Museum or AMNH), a not-for-profit educational corporation, and its original buildings were created pursuant to New York State statutes passed between 1869 and 1875. An 1876 State statute set aside the entire site of Theodore Roosevelt Park for the Museum and authorized the City's then Department of Public Parks to enter into a contract (the Museum's lease) granting the Museum exclusive use of the buildings erected or to be erected in the park. Thus, the Museum is a permitted use in the park, and no further legislative action or disposition of property is required for the Gilder Center project. Moreover, since Theodore Roosevelt Park is City-owned parkland, the project site does not bear a zoning designation and is not subject to the New York

City zoning resolution. However, the proposed project requires approval from NYC Parks pursuant to the Museum's lease.

Funding for the project has been appropriated by the City of New York, through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), and by the State of New York, through the New York State Urban Development Corporation (d/b/a Empire State Development [ESD]).

The Museum is a New York City Landmark (NYCL) and is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places (S/NR). Therefore, this Statement of Findings is based on a report and approval from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). LPC issued its Binding Report on November 2, 2016, approving the proposed design of the Gilder Center and modifications to the existing Museum complex and site, subject to LPC's further review and approval of final Department of Buildings (DOB) filing drawings.

ESD is required to undertake a historic preservation review in consultation with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). OPRHP has reviewed the proposed project and will continue to consult regarding the proposed design and connections to the surrounding Museum buildings, as set forth in a Letter of Resolution (LOR) to be signed by the Museum, OPRHP, and ESD.

The relocation of *The New York Times* Capsule requires the approval of the New York City Public Design Commission (PDC), which undertook a Conceptual level review on September 19, 2016 and noted that the proposed new location is respectful and appropriate. A further application to PDC is required for review and approval of the relocation, including the methods and procedures for moving and reinstalling the artwork.

### **C. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION**

The Gilder Center would be an approximately 105-foot-tall, approximately 203,000-gross-square-foot (gsf) addition located on the Columbus Avenue side of the Museum campus. Because the building would be integrated into the Museum complex, an additional approximately 42,000 gsf of existing space would be renovated to accommodate the program and make connections into the new building, for a total of approximately 245,000 gsf of new construction and renovation. Alterations also would be made to adjacent portions of Theodore Roosevelt Park. Approximately 80 percent of the square footage of the project would be located 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 (approximately a quarter acre). The three existing buildings to be removed are the Weston Pavilion, the Museum's current west-side entrance, and Buildings 15 (former power house) and 15A (an addition to Building 15 originally used as a boiler house), which are both currently used for science collections and research.

The Museum 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 in Theodore Roosevelt Park, which is City-owned parkland under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. The site for the proposed project is on the west side of the Museum complex facing Columbus Avenue. The site is located in Manhattan Community District 7.

### **D. FACTS AND CONCLUSIONS RELIED UPON TO SUPPORT THE DECISION**

Based upon and after considering the FEIS for at least 10 days after issuance of the Notice of Completion of the FEIS, NYC Parks hereby adopts this Statement of Findings.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The Gilder Center is designed to address critical external and internal needs in furtherance of the Museum’s statutory mission of encouraging and developing the study of natural science and providing popular instruction with the goal of advancing general scientific knowledge.

At a time when science underpins many pressing societal issues—human health, climate change, and biodiversity conservation, among others—there is a critical need to enhance the public understanding of and access to science. The country and the City face challenges in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields, both in educating students and in supporting teachers. Next Generation Science Standards, K-12 science curriculum content standards developed by states to improve science education in the U.S., emphasize learning science by doing science—engaging in actual, hands-on, discovery-based science research (referred to as “authentic research”). There is a need for advanced technologies and equipment to be made available, and for science teachers to have access to professional development programs that deliver the practical experiences in inquiry-based science required to equip and to facilitate student learning back in their classrooms.

Total Museum attendance and utilization has grown over the past 20 years, from approximately 2.77 million annually in 1994<sup>1</sup> to approximately 5 million in 2015, including an annual average of approximately 500,000 visitors in school and camp groups, as well as thousands more who participate in after-school programs, family visits, and professional development programs for teachers. Over that period, the Museum’s scientific research enterprise and educational programming have expanded dramatically to include new areas of study and innovative educational programs. As a result of this strong growth and expansion of programs, portions of the Museum’s facilities are overcrowded and inefficient. There is a shortfall of instructional space and some existing spaces are out of date, fragmented, and difficult to access. Circulation through the Museum complex is confusing due to dead-end pathways and narrow connections that lack clear sightlines. The research collections have grown to include more than 33 million artifacts and specimens, requiring additional capacity and improved storage conditions. Visitor services are insufficient to meet demand and the Museum’s operational service facilities are undersized and outdated.

## **SPACE PLANNING AND GOALS**

Prior to making the decision that a new building was needed, the Museum undertook a comprehensive space planning initiative, which included a series of evaluations of its existing spaces, identification of its highest priority needs, and consideration of alternatives for achieving some or all of those needs. The Museum made substantial investments in its facilities to renovate, reorganize, and revitalize existing space. Even with these improvements within the existing footprint of the Museum, the space planning effort identified the need for the construction of an addition to the Museum to effectively address the key deficiencies described above, as well as to meet the scientific, educational, and other programmatic needs of the Museum. Accordingly, the goals and objectives of the proposed project are:

- Accommodate growth in science and education programming and exhibits: provide immersive exhibition space, new and modernized classrooms, labs, and other learning environments that use technology to relay complex scientific concepts relevant to today's highly complex and science-based societal issues, as well as space for hands-on, interactive learning aligned with national educational standards.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiscal Year 1994, i.e., from July 1, 1993 to June 30, 1994.

- Improve the Museum’s circulation and connections: improve the Museum’s overall circulation and flow for the growing number of visitors by creating new, well-organized and easily accessible north-south and east-west connections among buildings, eliminating dead end pathways, and designing entries and spaces that are accessible to children, strollers and the mobility-impaired.
- Enhance and integrate the Museum’s science, exhibition and educational programming: connect new and existing galleries in ways that highlight and reinforce intellectual links among different scientific disciplines and place educational experiences in the context of current scientific practice by creating adjacencies among classrooms, exhibits, collections, and library resources.
- Provide greater access to the Museum’s scientists and scientific resources: provide opportunities for family and general learning and structured school visits led by the Museum’s scientists and educators, leveraging Museum collections and resources to situate science learning in the context of current research by providing hands-on access to the advanced tools and methods for gathering data and making scientific observations.
- Provide greater access to library resources: reveal a key scholarly asset for the Museum’s scientific staff and for visiting scholars from all over the world by making library resources more accessible to visitors, including new access, assistance in navigating printed and digital information, and opportunities for public programming.
- Improve and expand collections storage and visibility: provide new, state-of-the-art space to display actual specimens and artifacts that scientists use to investigate and answer fundamental questions, identify new species, and formulate new research questions and directions, and to accommodate continuing growth in the Museum’s collections.
- Enhance the sustainability features of the Museum: consistent with the Museum’s commitment to reducing energy usage and carbon footprint in its existing facilities, address sustainability and the efficient use of energy, water and space as an integrated part of the design process.
- Provide multi-disciplinary and flexible spaces for science and education: support customized programs and curricula while exposing learners to constantly developing research tools and initiatives by providing spaces that are flexible in both use and physical arrangement, and that can draw on the full spectrum of the Museum’s multi-disciplinary resources.
- Provide a new Columbus Avenue entrance: provide a revitalized entrance that activates the Columbus Avenue side of the Museum and welcomes visitors and neighborhood residents into a high-quality civic setting that uses design, scale, and proportionality to create an inspiring visitor experience and sense of place.
- Upgrade visitor and operational services: provide space in the new building for visitor services, such as restrooms, elevators, a restaurant and a gift shop, to accommodate growth in Museum attendance, and upgrade and modernize operational services, including loading, storage, food service, utility connections, and service areas.

## **PROJECT DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE GOALS**

The proposed project is designed to reveal the behind-the-scenes work of the Museum and integrate it into the visitor experience, to create an authentic and direct encounter with science. It would showcase the active scientific research collections underlying the Museum’s exhibitions and educational programs and connect scientific facilities and collections to innovative exhibition and learning spaces for students of all ages and levels. Collection storage spaces and the research library would be co-located with immersive galleries and interactive education spaces for children and adults in family and school groups, transcending traditional boundaries between scientific research, education and exhibition.

The Museum’s education facilities, serving school and camp groups, after-school programs, family visits, and professional development programs for teachers, would be substantially improved by the proposed project’s comprehensive addition and modernization of educational spaces. Upon completion of the project, approximately 75 percent of the Museum’s classroom facilities will be new or renovated,

allowing the Museum to offer programs and facilities that align with national educational standards and offer high-quality STEM learning.

The Central Exhibition Hall would orient visitors and invite the public to experience the Museum. It would link the west side of the Museum to all other parts of the campus on multiple levels, redistributing visitor flow and improving circulation. Entry into the new building would be at grade, and all elements of the building will be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Among the major new features that would be included in the proposed project are:

- A physical articulation of the Museum’s full, integrated mission of science, education, and exhibition, that will provide visitors with cross-disciplinary exposure to the natural world;
- New kinds of exhibition and learning spaces infused with advanced digital and technological tools, linked to scientific facilities and collections;
- Connections with clear sightlines that would accommodate increased attendance and improve visitor flow and circulation;
- Innovative spaces devoted to the teaching of science—including for middle and high school, early childhood, family, and adult learners and teachers;
- Spaces for carrying out scientific research—particularly in natural sciences—and facilitating public understanding of this vital scientific field;
- Increased storage capacity and greater visibility and access to the Museum’s world-class collections;
- Exhibitions and interpretations of new areas of scientific study;
- Improved access to the natural history library for visitors, creating a dynamic hub that would connect users with its many unparalleled resources and help them navigate flows of information, both printed and digital;
- Enhanced visitor experience and services;
- Improved building services;
- Sustainable systems and high performance/energy-efficient technologies; and
- A more visible and accessible entrance on the west side of the Museum complex.

The Gilder Center’s architecture is intended to inspire a sense of discovery, by creating openings among buildings, circulation spaces, and program elements that allow visitors to see the activities inside, and physical access through continuous, connected spaces that would allow visitors to traverse the integrated science, exhibition, and educational program areas. The design would advance crucial aspects of the Museum’s original master plan while reflecting a contemporary architectural approach that is responsive to the Museum’s needs and the character of the surrounding public park and neighborhood. It would include five stories above grade (approximately 105 feet tall; taking into account mechanical and elevator bulkheads, a portion of the rooftop would reach 115 feet), and one below-grade, situated between buildings of different heights, diverse architectural styles, and varied relationships to the surrounding park and city. The building mass and proportion would carefully respond to this multilayered context, maintaining the height and scale of the existing Museum buildings. The lighting plan for the park and the new building would be in keeping with the surrounding area and consistent with other sides of the Museum complex. The Museum would seek the US Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification level for the proposed project.

Paths and landscaping in an approximately 75,000 square-foot portion of Theodore Roosevelt Park adjacent to the building site would be modified to accommodate the proposed project and to provide more areas for seating and public access. The proposed project’s landscaping modifications and improvements are intended to address an increased number of Museum visitors in the park and ensure park users would continue to have access to areas for gathering, play, and respite, as well as pathways for Museum entry and traversing the park. The area in front of the Gilder Center would (as it currently does through the

Weston Pavilion) provide an entrance point to the Museum. Given increased attendance and utilization it would be more heavily utilized by Museum visitors, and could therefore at times be more populated and active, with visitors sometimes queuing for entry on the Museum's more heavily visited days.

As noted in the Project Identification section above, 11,600 square feet of the at-grade footprint of the Gilder Center would be outside the existing built area of the Museum. As part of the initial design effort, the Museum reduced the building footprint with the goal of minimizing the number of trees and the amount of public open space that would be impacted. Subsequent refinements have reduced the size of the proposed below-grade service area and modified the design of the service drive with the goal of preserving two trees. AMNH is developing plans to protect and conserve these two trees, a Pin oak and an English elm. It is currently expected that the proposed project would require removal of seven trees and relocation of one tree in Theodore Roosevelt Park. To accommodate construction logistics, four newly planted, smaller caliper trees (two on the sidewalk and two in the bike lane traffic islands) would be temporarily moved prior to commencement of construction and replanted (or replaced after completion of construction). Construction would be performed in compliance with an approved tree protection plan and NYC Parks tree protection protocols. Any trees that are removed and not transplanted would be replaced, consistent with NYC Parks rules and regulations, which would include nineteen new trees that would be planted post-construction as part of the landscape plan for the western portion of the Park.

The proposed open space plan incorporates two enhancements that would result in a net increase in the amount of publicly accessible space in the park. Specifically, as part of the proposed project, the enlarged, approximately 27,137-square-foot Margaret Mead Green lawn, which is currently fenced and not open to the public, would be made available for managed public access in a manner consistent with and supportive of the current character of Theodore Roosevelt Park. In addition, a portion of the lawn area adjacent to the Columbus Avenue sidewalk between West 78th Street and West 79th Street would be made available for public access. Further, in conjunction with the proposed project, the Museum has committed to provide one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per year for a minimum of 10 years for the management and maintenance of Theodore Roosevelt Park.

## **POTENTIAL FOR SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION**

The analyses in the FEIS concluded that the proposed project would not have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts related to land use, zoning and public policy; open space and recreational resources; shadows; urban design and visual resources; natural resources; hazardous materials; air quality; greenhouse gas emissions; noise; public health; and neighborhood character. The proposed project would have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts related to transportation, including construction-period transportation, and historic and cultural resources, each of which are discussed below. Because of the extent of the attention devoted to Open Space and Hazardous Materials/Public Health during the DEIS comment period, those topics are also addressed below. Responses to those and all other comments on the DEIS are included in the FEIS.

### *OPEN SPACE*

With respect to open space and recreational resources, the reduction in available open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park and other modification to the landscape of the park would not result in a significant adverse impact. The project will occupy approximately 0.27 acres of open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park. An approximately 75,000 square foot adjacent area of the park would also be reconstructed, providing more areas for seating and gathering, improved circulation, new and revitalized plant beds, and infrastructure improvements. In addition, the project will also create new public access to open space

within the park, resulting in a net increase in publicly-accessible open space. The overall quality of open space in the rebuilt portion of the park would thus be improved.

Nearby sections of the park and other open spaces in the area could accommodate the largely passive recreation activities displaced from the affected area. The surrounding community would remain well served by open space, with an anticipated ratio of 3.68 acres per 1,000 residents, well above the City's planning goal of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents and the community district median of 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents. The project would reduce the total and passive open space ratios by less than one percent compared to the future without the proposed project, far less than the *CEQR Technical Manual's* five percent threshold for a significant adverse impact.

While the project would increase the number of Museum visitors and stimulate more activity on the Columbus Avenue side of the complex, this change would not overburden park facilities, as the reconfigured park paths would accommodate the anticipated pedestrian flow and there is a substantial supply of accessible open space in the immediate vicinity. While NYC Parks has determined that the proposed project will not have significant adverse open space impacts, the proposed project includes enhancements that will result in a net increase in publicly accessible open space, along with an annual \$100,000 contribution from AMNH for the management and maintenance of the park for at least 10 years. Therefore, even if the proposed project had been determined to have significant adverse open space impacts, these enhancements would comply with the mandate of SEQRA/CEQR for practicable mitigation.

The project would directly affect seven canopy trees in the park that would be removed and one understory tree that would be relocated. The project has been designed to allow for protection and conservation of two mature trees, a Pin oak and an English elm, in front of the Museum entry. All work would be performed in compliance with Local Law 3 of 2010, an approved tree protection plan, and NYC Parks' tree protection protocols. Any trees that are removed and not transplanted would be replaced, consistent with NYC Parks rules and regulations.

#### *HAZARDOUS MATERIALS AND PUBLIC HEALTH*

With respect to hazardous materials and public health, the proposed project would have no significant adverse impacts. The types and levels of contamination present on the site are typical of those found throughout New York City. The environmental conditions on the site were studied in a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment and a Phase II soil, groundwater and soil vapor investigation. Potential exposure to hazardous substances will be controlled through the implementation of remedial measures that are commonly used at construction sites throughout New York City, as further described in the Remedial Action Plan (RAP) that was approved by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and included in the FEIS. These measures would be implemented prior to, during, and following construction of the proposed project to control or avoid the potential for human or environmental exposure to hazardous materials.

#### *TRANSPORTATION*

No significant adverse impacts were identified for transit, vehicular and pedestrian safety, and parking. Significant adverse traffic impacts were identified at one intersection during the weekday PM peak hour, and at three intersections during the Saturday peak hour. The project will add a minimal amount of traffic to these intersections, and all of the identified significant adverse traffic impacts can be mitigated with the implementation of standard traffic mitigation measures (e.g., signal retiming). A significant adverse pedestrian impact was identified at one crosswalk during the Saturday peak hour. Widening this crosswalk prior to building completion would mitigate the projected pedestrian impact. New York City



Department of Transportation has reviewed the proposed mitigation measures and agreed they are reasonable and feasible.

### *CONSTRUCTION*

Construction of the proposed project would result in temporary disruptions in the surrounding area, which would be minimized by a substantial number of measures that AMNH has agreed to implement. Between the DEIS and FEIS, AMNH modified the construction schedule and logistics plan and committed to implement additional noise control measures to reduce the magnitude and duration of noise that would occur at nearby receptors. As a result, while construction noise would still be noticeable and potentially intrusive at times, there would not be any nearby receptors at which the duration and magnitude of construction noise would constitute a significant adverse impact. Because receptor control measures (i.e., storm windows and air conditioning units at residences that do not already have air conditioning) were previously considered for 101 West 79th Street and 112 (118) West 79th Street based on the findings of the DEIS, AMNH will make an offer of these measures to residents of those two buildings. A significant adverse traffic impact was identified at one intersection during the weekday PM construction peak hour. The identified significant adverse traffic impact can be mitigated with the implementation of standard traffic mitigation measures (e.g., signal retiming). No other significant adverse construction period impacts were identified.

### *HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES*

The proposed project would not adversely impact archaeological resources, as LPC and OPRHP have determined that the project site does not possess archaeological significance. The proposed scale, massing, and materials of the Gilder Center have been designed to respect the historic Museum setting and surrounding historic context, and the LPC approved the proposed design of the Gilder Center and modifications to the existing Museum complex and site, subject to LPC's further review and approval of final DOB filing drawings. However, demolition of Building 15, a former power house built in 1903-1904, would constitute an unavoidable significant adverse impact on architectural resources. The building was constructed as part of the 1874-1935 development of the Museum (although highly altered subsequently) and is included as part of the State and National Register listing of the Museum. Measures to partially mitigate the project's adverse impacts on architectural resources will be implemented in consultation with OPRHP and are set forth in a draft LOR to be signed by the Museum, OPRHP, and ESD before construction commences. To avoid damage to nearby historic Museum buildings during site preparation and construction, a construction protection plan (CPP) will be developed in coordination with LPC and OPRHP and implemented in consultation with a licensed professional engineer. The CPP will describe the measures to be implemented during construction of the Gilder Center to protect the historic Museum buildings, including monitoring the buildings for cracks and movement and installation of physical protection as appropriate at the buildings surrounding the building site (Building 17, 7, 1, and 8). With these measures, the impact would be mitigated to the maximum extent practicable. As the significant adverse impact would not be fully mitigated, the proposed project would result in an unavoidable adverse impact on historic resources.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

The analysis considered eight alternatives to the proposed project:

#### *Alternative 1: No Action Alternative*

The No Action Alternative would not accomplish any of the objectives of the proposed project. The Gilder Center would not be constructed and the portion of the park in front of the Weston Pavilion would

retain its current design. Substantial spaces for science and education programming, exhibits, and collections would not be created, and constrained circulation within the Museum would not be improved.

#### *Alternative 2: Reuse of Administrative Space Alternative*

Alternative 2 would not achieve the objectives of the proposed project. Under this alternative, some of the project's proposed program elements would be located within existing administrative space rather than within newly constructed areas, and a portion of the Museum's administrative functions would have to be moved off-site. This alternative would exacerbate the existing problem of spaces that are fragmented and difficult to access, and would not improve circulation or the connectivity, spatial logic, and function of the Museum's interior spaces. Important program elements of the proposed project, such as the cohesive design of exhibition and education spaces, the Collections Core and the Invisible Worlds Theater, would not be accommodated under this alternative, since adequately sized and located space would not be available. Without improvements to circulation and the added space of the proposed project, this alternative would not address the attendance growth expected to occur with or without the proposed project, leading to additional crowding in the Museum. Under this alternative, while some additional visitor services (such as restrooms and restaurant space) could be provided, they would not likely be located where most useful to Museum visitors, due to the dispersed nature and inconvenient locations of many existing administrative spaces, away from the predominant areas of visitor activity. The Museum's service and delivery yard would remain undersized and outdated. Therefore, compared to the proposed project, there would be a loss of connectivity of scientific, exhibition, and education programs.

Compared to the proposed project, this alternative would not result in a significant adverse impact to historic resources or construction-related transportation impacts. However, like the proposed project it would continue to result in a significant adverse transportation impact.

This alternative also was determined to be beyond the capabilities of the project sponsor, since the Museum does not own or control off-site space for relocation of its administrative functions. Under SEQRA/CEQR, sites which a private applicant like the Museum does not own or does not have a right to use are not required to be considered as alternative sites, rendering this alternative not applicable on that basis alone.

#### *Alternative 3: Expanded Footprint Alternative*

Alternative 3, which avoids the demolition of Building 15 (a contributing building to the S/NR-listed Museum complex) by extending the development area farther into Theodore Roosevelt Park, would generally meet the goals and objectives of the proposed project, but would require a greater loss of public open space. The proposed project's significant adverse transportation impacts would not be expected to be reduced or avoided with this alternative, nor would the significant adverse construction-period traffic impacts identified for the proposed project be avoided.

#### *Alternative 4: Infill Alternative*

Alternative 4, which would avoid the demolition of Building 15 (a contributing building to the S/NR-listed Museum complex) and the loss of open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park by constructing above Building 17 and abutting Building 15, would not meet the objectives of the proposed project. Unlike the proposed project, Alternative 4 would exacerbate existing problems with the Museum's congested and confusing circulation and would not provide visual and physical integration of the science, education, and exhibition programming. Retaining Building 15 would also result in a less efficient layout than the proposed project, accommodating less program space and fewer program elements.

Alternative 4 would affect pedestrian views from the Ross Terrace and the north side of Theodore Roosevelt Park and be less compatible with this area of the Museum's form, scale, and massing than the proposed project. Similar to the proposed project, Alternative 4 would result in significant adverse impacts related to transportation, historic resources, and construction-period traffic.

*Alternative 5: Reduced Footprint Alternative A*

Alternative 5 would avoid the loss of open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park by limiting new construction to the area occupied by existing Museum buildings and adding an additional level below-grade, but would not meet the project objectives. Alternative 5 would exacerbate the Museum's congested circulation and would not include some of the proposed project's important program elements and design features. The bulk at the rear of the new building would affect the pedestrian experience on and views from the adjacent Ross Terrace and from the north side of Theodore Roosevelt Park, and also would cause additional shadows on the Ross Terrace. Like the proposed project, Alternative 5 would result in significant adverse impacts related to transportation, historic resources, and construction-period traffic. Alternative 5 also has the potential for temporary construction noise impacts not identified with the proposed project, due to the need for increased excavation activities.

*Alternative 6: Reduced Footprint Alternative B*

Alternative 6 would avoid the loss of open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park by limiting new construction to the area occupied by existing Museum buildings and adding two additional levels above-grade, but would not meet the objectives of the proposed project. This alternative would exacerbate the Museum's congested circulation and create additional points of crowding and delay. Overcrowding reduces visitor access to programs and exhibits, undercutting the Museum's ability to fulfill its mission of disseminating scientific knowledge.

The height of this alternative would be out of scale with the existing Museum complex, as compared to the proposed project, and the bulk at the rear of the new building would affect the pedestrian experience on and views from the adjacent Ross Terrace and from the north side of Theodore Roosevelt Park, and also would cause additional shadows on the Ross Terrace. Like the proposed project, Alternative 6 would result in significant adverse impacts related to transportation, historic resources, and construction-period traffic.

*Alternative 7: Ross Terrace Alternative*

Alternative 7, which would avoid the demolition of Building 15 and the loss of open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park by moving the development site to the Ross Terrace above the AMNH garage, would not meet the project objectives. Further, the existing 30,745 square feet of public open space on the Ross Terrace would be eliminated. This alternative would exacerbate the Museum's congested circulation, would not include some of the proposed project's important program elements, and would result in substantial building mass in close proximity to the Rose Center.

The height of this alternative and its location atop Ross Terrace would result in new incremental shadows in additional areas of the park not affected by the proposed project's shadows, and would adversely affect the historic character of the Museum. Compared to the proposed project, construction of this alternative would result in greater disturbance to the Museum and the neighborhood, due to temporary disruption of the north side of Theodore Roosevelt Park (including the dog run), the Museum parking garage, and other Museum operations. Similar to the proposed project, Alternative 7 would result in significant adverse impacts related to transportation, historic resources, and construction-period traffic. This alternative has the potential to result in construction-related noise impacts and additional construction-related traffic

impacts due to the temporary closing of the garage and relocation of its functions, including school bus operations.

#### *Alternative 8: Off-Site Alternative*

Alternative 8 would not meet the project objectives. By locating some exhibition, collections, and classroom space off-site, this alternative would create a small new museum of limited scope, without addressing any of the existing on-site deficiencies. The off-site location would not offer access to the bulk of the Museum's collections, library materials, exhibition spaces, and other on-site scientific resources for students, teachers, families, and other visitors. Operational services would not be upgraded and the Museum's service and delivery yard would remain undersized and outdated.

This alternative also was determined to be beyond the capabilities of the project sponsor, since the Museum does not own or control off-site space for development of a new facility. Under SEQRA/CEQR, sites which a private applicant like the Museum does not own or does not have a right to use are not required to be considered as alternative sites, rendering this alternative not applicable on that basis alone. If such an off-site property could be found, the potential impacts resulting from the development of a new building in that location would need to be analyzed and would have consequences in the surrounding area, some similar to those of the proposed Gilder Center and perhaps others that differ. For example, wherever the project is built, construction activities would be disruptive to nearby uses and residences, and visitor and staff travel would place demands on local transportation services. An alternative site is unlikely to have equivalent transit access and consequently could have substantially higher auto usage. Thus, an off-site alternative would not necessarily minimize impacts, but instead could relocate them.

### **GROWTH INDUCING ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

The proposed project and related actions are specific to the project site only. While the proposed project would result in improvements to the existing cultural, educational, and scientific uses on the project site, the Museum has been one of the top visitor destinations in New York City for decades, and Museum visitors already frequent businesses in the study area. Aside from the surrounding parkland, the area is heavily developed, with the level of development controlled by zoning, including contextual regulations. Any development in the surrounding historic district would also require review and approval by LPC. Therefore, the proposed project would not be expected to induce new growth in the study area. In addition, the proposed project would not include the introduction of new infrastructure or an expansion of infrastructure capacity that could result in indirect development.

### **IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES**

The natural and man-made resources that would be expended in the construction and operation of the proposed project are considered irretrievably committed because their reuse for some purpose other than the proposed project would be highly unlikely. While the proposed project would result in the commitment of certain man-made and natural resources, it would also result in substantial long-term educational, scientific, recreational, cultural, and economic benefits.

### **E. CONCLUSION**

NYC Parks has determined that the benefits of the Gilder Center project outweigh its limited adverse environmental impacts. Overall, the proposed project would provide new innovative educational, science research and exhibition facilities, and would result in much needed improvement to the Museum's facilities, in furtherance of the objects and purposes of the Museum. In addition, the project would provide for enhancement of the adjacent area of the park, including additional seating and gathering areas, improved circulation, new and revitalized plant beds, and infrastructure improvements. New public

access to open space within the park would also be created, resulting in a net increase in publicly-accessible open space. The overall quality of open space in the rebuilt portion of the park would thus be improved. The balance of benefits and impacts, combined with the need to sustain the long-term viability of the Museum as a center for the study and teaching of natural history, provides a compelling rationale to proceed with the proposed project.

Unlike the Museum's existing classrooms, the Gilder Center would offer classroom and laboratory spaces that are designed for specific age groups, providing learning environments that reflect and support specific developmental needs. With the new facilities provided by the proposed project, the Museum would increase the capacity of out-of-school programs, work with schools more deeply, and engage schools and districts for longer periods of time. The dedicated new education spaces would expand the Museum's ability to provide advanced science learning to New York City public school students, especially in middle schools and high schools. These spaces would make science visualization tools and techniques available to help students start to work with and make sense of complex scientific concepts, computational science, and genetic and microbial studies. The proposed project would also provide new and greater public access to library resources, including new space for public programming, adult learning and teacher education.

The Gilder Center would provide more access to the Museum's collections through the new Collections Core and related programming, as well as totally new immersive learning experiences in the Insectarium, Butterfly Vivarium, and Theater. The Collections Core in the Central Exhibition Hall would be a critical resource for Museum scientists and would provide educational opportunities and visibility to a fundamental aspect of science at the Museum. The Central Exhibition Hall would provide a large civic space that would orient visitors and showcase the Museum's offerings, and would make connections and create routes through the Museum to address the overcrowding that currently reduces visitor access to programs and exhibits undercutting the Museum's ability to fulfill its mission of disseminating scientific knowledge.

Neither the No Action Alternative nor the other alternatives discussed in the FEIS, including the alternatives discussed in Chapter 21, "Response to Comments," and this Findings Statement would accomplish the goals and objectives of the proposed project. Further, Alternatives 2 through 8 would have the potential to result in significant adverse environmental impacts as described in the FEIS and this Findings Statement.

On balance, the benefits of the Gilder Center project outweigh the few areas of significant adverse environmental impacts, which, with one exception, can be fully mitigated by the measures identified in the FEIS and summarized in this Findings Statement. As discussed above, the proposed project would result in a significant adverse impact on historic resources that would be partially mitigated.

For these reasons and based on the analysis described in the FEIS and on the preceding written facts and conclusions, NYC Parks believes that the required commitments of resources and materials are appropriate.

**CERTIFICATION OF FINDINGS**

Having considered the relevant environmental impacts, facts and conclusions disclosed in the EAS, DEIS and the FEIS, including the comments on the DEIS and responses thereto, and having considered the preceding written facts and conclusions, this agency certifies that:

- (1) the requirements of SEQRA, and its implementing regulations, 6 NYCRR Part 617, and the requirements of CEQR, as set forth in Executive Order 91 of 1977, as amended, and the Rules of Procedure for City Environmental Quality Review, have been met and fully satisfied;
- (2) consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations of state and city policy from among the reasonable alternatives thereto, the proposed action is one which minimizes or avoids significant adverse environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable, including the impacts disclosed in the FEIS and set forth in this Findings Statement, while still substantially meeting the purpose and benefit of the project; and
- (3) consistent with social, economic and other essential considerations of state and city policy, the significant adverse environmental impacts of the proposed action disclosed in the environmental impact statement process and set forth in this Findings Statement, have been minimized or avoided to the maximum extent practicable by incorporating the identified mitigative measures as conditions to this decision.

*Alyssa Cobb Konon*

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Alyssa Cobb Konon  
Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Development  
New York City Parks & Recreation

12/4/17  
Date