



NYC Parks

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**City of New York
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POSITIVE DECLARATION

NOTICE OF INTENT TO PREPARE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

<p><u>PROJECT:</u> American Museum of Natural History Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation CEQR: 16DPR004M</p>	<p><u>LEAD AGENCY:</u> New York City Department of Parks & Recreation The Arsenal, Central Park 830 Fifth Avenue New York, New York 10065</p>
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DATE ISSUED: March 2, 2016

TYPE OF ACTION: Type I

PROJECT NAME AND LOCATION

The American Museum of Natural History (the Museum) is seeking discretionary actions in connection with a proposed new building, the Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation (the Gilder Center). 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 the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYCDPR). 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.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation would be a five-story, approximately 180,000 gsf addition on the west side of the Museum complex facing Columbus Avenue. 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.

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 the latest digital and technological tools, connected to scientific facilities and collections;
- Innovative spaces devoted to the teaching of science—including for middle school, early childhood, family, and adult learners and teachers;
- Spaces for carrying out cutting edge 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;
- Exhibition facilities in new areas of scientific study;
- Expansion of the natural history library from a world-class repository to a place of adult and public learning;
- Thirty new connections into ten existing Museum buildings on multiple levels, improving circulation and better utilizing existing space;
- Enhanced visitor experience and services;
- Improved building services; and
- A more visible and accessible entrance on the west side of the Museum complex.

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.

It is anticipated that the proposed project, if approved, would be built and operational by 2020, with its first full-year of operation in 2021.

REQUIRED APPROVALS

The Museum and its original buildings were created pursuant to New York State statutes passed between 1869 and 1875; then, 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 park use, and no further legislative action or disposition of property is required. Since Theodore Roosevelt Park is City-owned mapped 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 NYCDPR pursuant to the Museum's lease, from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for City funding, and from the New York State Urban Development Corporation (d/b/a Empire State Development (ESD)) for State funding. The new location of *The New York Times Capsule* requires the approval of New York City Public Design Commission.

The Museum is a New York City Landmark and is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Therefore, prior to making its determination, NYCDPR must obtain a report and approval from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, and ESD is required to undertake a historic preservation review in consultation with The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation's Office of Historic Preservation.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT EFFECT:

An Environmental Assessment Statement for the proposed project was completed on March 2, 2016 and is expressly incorporated herein. 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 of the Rules of the City of New York (CEQR), the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, as the lead agency for the referenced project, has determined that the proposed project may have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement is required to evaluate and disclose the extent to which impacts may occur and will be prepared before NYCDPR makes a decision regarding approval of the project. Aspects of the proposed action that may require evaluation of potential environmental impacts include:

- (1) Changes to land use, zoning, and public policy;
- (2) Changes to open space resources related to the reduction and change in existing open space in Theodore Roosevelt Park;
- (3) Incremental shadows that may affect Theodore Roosevelt Park or any other publicly accessible open spaces, or any sunlight-sensitive architectural and/or natural resources in the area;
- (4) Changes related to historic and cultural resources, including the demolition of three existing buildings on the Museum campus;

- (5) Changes related to urban design and visual resources, including the pedestrian's experience of public space;
- (6) Changes related to natural resources, including removal of trees;
- (7) Impacts related to potential pathways for human exposure from hazardous materials;
- (8) Changes related to transportation (including traffic, pedestrians, transit users, vehicular and pedestrian safety, and parking supply) due to an incremental increase in Museum attendance and a change in access/egress patterns attributable to the Gilder Center entrance along Columbus Avenue;
- (9) Changes related to air quality due to emissions from vehicular traffic and new fossil-fuel-fired HVAC systems (if any);
- (10) Changes related to noise;
- (11) Changes related to public health;
- (12) Changes related to neighborhood character due to the introduction of new travel patterns, a new structure, visual resource changes, and reconfigured parkland; and
- (13) Construction impacts related to open space and park users, traffic and transportation, air quality, noise and vibration, hazardous materials, natural resources, and historic resources.

Accordingly, NYCDPR directs that a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) be prepared in accordance with 6 NYCRR 617.9(b) and Sections 6-08 and 6-09 of Executive Order No. 91 of 1977, as amended.

PUBLIC SCOPING:

Public Scoping is a process whereby the public is invited to comment on the proposed scope of analysis planned for the DEIS. A Draft Scope of Work has been prepared outlining the proposed content of the DEIS.

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

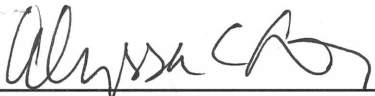
NYCDPR requests public comments on the Draft Scope of Work, including issues and analysis topics to be included in the scope of work; methodologies for analysis (such as the size of a study area, the type of data to be gathered, or the type of analysis to be conducted); alternatives to the proposed project;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

Copies the Draft Scope of Work, Environmental Assessment Statement and Positive Declaration 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:

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The Positive Declaration has been prepared in accordance with Article 8 of the Environmental Conservation Law.



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