

American Museum of Natural History
Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation
Application to Landmarks Preservation Commission
Project description

The Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, proposed by the American Museum of Natural History (the Museum), would be an approximately 193,530-gross-square-foot (gsf) addition located on the Columbus Avenue side of the Museum campus, which is located on the superbblock 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 Gilder Center would be 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. Because the building would be integrated into the Museum complex, an additional approximately 41,595 gsf of existing space would be renovated to accommodate the program and make connections into the new building, for a total of approximately 235,125 gsf of new construction and renovation. The Museum is located within Theodore Roosevelt Park, which is City-owned parkland under the jurisdiction of the City of New York Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks). Alterations also would be made to portions of Theodore Roosevelt Park adjacent to the building site. The Museum is a designated NYC Landmark, a portion of which is classified as an Interior Landmark. The entire site – Museum and Theodore Roosevelt Park – are wholly contained within the Upper West Side Central Park West Historic District.”

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 Weston Pavilion entry building and Buildings 15 (the former power and boiler house) and 15A (an addition to Building 15), which are both used for science collections and research.

The project would address critical external and internal needs in furtherance of the Museum’s purposes: encouraging the study of natural science, and providing popular instruction and recreation with the goal of advancing general scientific knowledge. The proposed project would make necessary improvements to the Museum’s ability to integrate scientific research, collections, and exhibition with its educational programming, and would also upgrade and revitalize the Museum’s facilities. Functionally, the proposed project would improve the connectivity, spatial logic, and function of the Museum’s circulation, interior spaces and service areas.

In developing the architectural concept, Architect Jeanne Gang worked from the inside out, seeing an opportunity to reclaim the physical heart of the Museum complex at its center and to complete connections between and among existing Museum halls and the new space. From Columbus Avenue, visitors would access the building through the park at grade and enter a central exhibition hall that would link the west side of the Museum to all other parts of the campus, thereby enhancing accessibility and completing the east-west axis of circulation and exhibition spaces envisioned in the original master plan for the Museum. The Gilder Center would, for the first time, create a north-south connection on the west side of the campus.

The proposed project would result in the expansion of the Museum's footprint by approximately 11,600 square feet at grade in 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, designed for walking and quiet enjoyment. The area in front of the new entrance would (as it currently does), provide an entrance point to the Museum. *The New York Times Capsule* sculpture, currently located in a small entry terrace adjacent to the Weston Pavilion, would be relocated as part of the proposed project.

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 NYC Parks pursuant to the Museum's lease, from the City Department of Cultural Affairs for City funding, and from Empire State Development (the New York State Urban Development Corporation) for State funding. The new location of *The New York Times Capsule* requires the approval of the City Public Design Commission. The Museum is located in Manhattan Community District 7.

NYC Parks' determination regarding the proposed Gilder Center project under the Museum's lease, and issuance of any necessary permits, are subject to City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR). NYC Parks, as lead agency, has determined that implementation of the proposed Gilder Center project may have the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts and, therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared. A key purpose of CEQR is to incorporate environmental considerations as early as possible into the government decision making process. One of the areas of environmental consideration under CEQR is the potential for impacts on the character or quality of important historical, architectural and cultural resources, such as the New York City landmark-designated American Museum of Natural History complex or the surrounding Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. In this regard, the CEQR EIS and NYC Parks' determinations will be informed by LPC's consideration of the proposed Gilder Center project.

More information about the Museum complex is included in the attached Historic Preservation Background Report dated August 2016, prepared by Higgins Quasebarth & Partners.