



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
143 S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106



IN REPLY REFER TO:

**MAY 06 2011**

H30 (INDE)

John M. Fowler, Executive Director  
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
Old Post Office Building  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 803  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Benjamin Franklin Life and Legacy Museum  
Independence National Historical Park  
Advisory Council Notification of Adverse Effect

Dear Mr. Fowler:

Independence National Historical Park [INDE], in partnership with the Independence Visitors Center Corporation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, proposes to rehabilitate the existing underground museum at Franklin Court. In accordance with provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act [36 CFR § 800.5] INDE is providing this letter to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) as notification that this undertaking will have an adverse effect on historical properties.

Situated in Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the underground museum is located within, and extends underneath, Franklin Court. Franklin Court is a roughly rectangular property in the center of the block bounded by Market and Chestnut, Third and Fourth Streets, and lies within the legislative boundaries of Independence National Historical Park (for project location see Sheet 1 of Enclosure 1).

Franklin Court consists of a large underground museum, five historic structures (printing office, newspaper office, archeology and architecture exhibit, Post Office and Eastern National Store), an open courtyard with an in-ground exhibit of the archeological remains of Franklin's home, and steel frame "ghost structures" of Franklin's home and printing office.

The complex opened to the public in the Bicentennial year of 1976. The innovative design by the firm of Venturi and Rauch, attributed to architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, was the fruit of an interdisciplinary collaboration involving architects, historic architects,

archaeologists and engineers. Today, Franklin Court is widely cited as a path breaking approach in the treatment of historic sites that has greatly influenced the theory and practice of historic preservation.

Since its opening, Franklin Court has proven to be one of the park's most popular destinations. Despite this heavy visitation the underground museum and its exhibits have not benefited from any major redesign or rehabilitation. The park's General Management Plan issued in 1997, however, called for the rehabilitation of the underground museum, the installation of new exhibits, and improved exterior signage. The current undertaking will implement these planned changes.

The proposed rehabilitation will result in a completely redesigned underground museum. The new design includes reconfiguration of the internal space of the existing structure and installation of all new interpretive exhibits. Structural alterations to both above and below grade portions of the building are planned. The project will also involve replacement of the failing HVAC system and installation of new security and life safety systems. The remodeled museum facility will meet all ADA requirements. The reconfigured museum will enhance the interpretive experience and better serve park visitors in the twenty-first century. Visitors will leave the redesigned facility with a richer appreciation of the life and legacy of Benjamin Franklin.

Access to the five Market Street houses and all court level features, including the ghost structures and archeology exhibit, will remain as they are in appearance and will remain free from admission charges. However, once the rehabilitated museum reopens, those wishing to visit the Underground Museum will, under authority of 16 USC 1a-2(g), be charged an interpretive program fee of \$5 for adults and \$2 for children. There will be no charge for school groups.

During the planning and design process for this project we carefully considered the potential effect of proposed alterations to the underground museum, on the Franklin Court courtyard, and the neighboring perimeter properties along Market, Chestnut, Third and Fourth Streets.

The underground museum does not contribute to the National Register significance of the park, nor is it included on Independence NHP's List of Classified Structures (LCS). The Market Street structures (314, 316, 318, 320 and 322 Market Street) are LCS listed and are nationally significant structures. The two ghost structures, and associated paving installed as part of the Venturi and Brown design are LCS listed and are listed as not significant.

Recognizing the architectural merit of the Venturi Scott Brown design, the Park's amended National Register Nomination, following the National Historic Landmark Theme Study entitled "Architecture in the Parks" (1987), contained a recommendation that Franklin Court be evaluated for National Historic Landmark eligibility at a future date. While such an evaluation has not been undertaken, and while the Venturi-Scott Brown designed landscape is not yet fifty years old, it is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion (c) as a site that "...represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction...." [36 CFR § 60.4].

The bulk of the proposed changes resulting from the current undertaking will be to the underground museum, which does not contribute to the National Register significance of the park. However, the new design, by Quinn Evans Architects, will alter elements of the original award winning Venturi and Rauch design. Modifications will be made to the museum's entry pavilion, which will be enlarged, and its above-ground appearance will be altered (for existing conditions see Enclosure 2). The seasonally used awning along the east pavilion wall, along with its supporting row of turned posts, will be eliminated. These elements will be replaced by a new vestibule that will enclose an entry area to the underground museum, an elevator, and a ground-level museum shop.

The National Park Service and our design partner, Quinn Evans Architects, have worked carefully to balance the need to preserve the unique historic character of this property with the need to incorporate the dictates of modern exhibit design and universal accessibility. The particular challenge has been to devise a configuration for the museum's court level entrance which preserves, as much possible, the intent of the original design while raising the visibility of the entrance so that visitors can better identify the building's point of entry. The attached design development drawings and architectural renderings represent our proposed solution to this problem (Enclosure 3).

We considered various design alternatives before arriving at the selected approach (for a sample of these alternatives see Enclosure 4). During this process discussions were held on at least eight occasions with Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, or their representatives. Through these exchanges the original architects have generously helped guide the new design to what we believe to be a sensitive resolution of the design challenges. Several principles have guided this work. Careful consideration has been given to the use of materials and color so as to tie the new entry into the existing wall of the museum, while, at the same time, visually differentiating the new construction from the original. The footprint of the new pavilion and canopy respects the original design by maintaining the same footprint as the existing awning. The redesigned canopy will continue to provide shelter for visitors, as the original did, while maintaining the original spatial relationship between the covered area and the adjacent ghost structure.

The views of a range of individuals and organizations have informed both the design process and our assessment of the potential effects of this undertaking. Consultation has included regular conversations with the staff of the Bureau for Historic Preservation. The park held a consultation meeting on March 23, 2010 to which 24 representatives of potentially interested groups were invited. The enclosed document, entitled *Notes from Consultation Meeting*, summarizes the views expressed at this meeting (Enclosure 5).

We solicited and received comments from interested groups and the general public on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) web site. We also received additional comments by postal and electronic mail. In total, we received and considered fifty individual pieces of correspondence. The enclosed document, entitled *Response to Substantive Concerns*, summarizes the concerns raised in this correspondence (Enclosure 6).

As noted above, the park also carried on a sustained dialog with the site's original designers. The current design for the site reflects a consideration of all substantive comments received during these consultations and incorporates numerous changes to design, treatment, and materials which addressed concerns identified by consulting parties.

We believe that our proposed design successfully achieves a balance between respect for the site's original vision and changes required to more successfully serve needs of contemporary visitors. Despite this success, when we apply the criteria of adverse effect we find that the necessary changes to the Venturi-Scott Brown design do alter the character of the courtyard's original design and, therefore, represent an Adverse Effect under the terms of the Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act [36 CFR § 800.5]. By letter dated April 27, 2011, the Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation (the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania) has concurred with this determination (see Enclosure 7).


In consultation with the SHPO and with our identified consulting parties (see Enclosure 8) we will be working to develop a Memorandum of Agreement specifying the future actions we will implement to mitigate the adverse effects we have identified. We have proposed, and the SHPO has agreed, that the basis for the mitigation of the adverse effects of this undertaking will include the following measures:

- Produce HABS/HAER photographic documentation of the site prior to construction.
- Produce a publication (printed, electronic, or both) that documents the evolution of the Venturi-Scott Brown design for Franklin Court, its implementation, and its importance in the developing field of historic preservation.

The final mitigation plan will be developed following continued consultation with the SHPO and our other consulting parties.

We are requesting that the ACHP review the information outlined in this letter, and the attached documentation, for the purpose of determining if the Council wishes to join the consultation process for this undertaking. If the ACHP chooses to participate, we would appreciate a response within 15 days of receipt of this notice. Should you require additional information, please contact Dr. Doris Fanelli, Chief of the Division of Cultural Resources Management, at (215) 597-7087 or e-mail: [doris\\_fanelli@nps.gov](mailto:doris_fanelli@nps.gov).

Sincerely,

  
Cynthia MacLeod  
Superintendent

Enclosures:

1. Franklin Court Museum Construction Drawings, Sheets. 1-43.
2. Existing Museum Entrance.
3. Architectural Renderings, 2 sheets.
4. Design Alternatives.
5. Notes from Consultation Meeting.
6. Response to Substantive Concerns.
7. SHPO Concurrence with Finding of Adverse Effect.
8. List of Consulting Parties.