

The National Mall has plenty of space for two new museums

BY JUDY SCOTT FELDMAN

The Smithsonian is trying to identify locations for two new museums: the National Museum of the American Latino and the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum. Where will they go?

In the authorizing legislation, Congress identified several potential sites on or near the National Mall. One prime option under consideration is to repurpose the historic Arts and Industries Building next to the Smithsonian Castle, but that building would be difficult to upgrade to modern museum standards.

The National Mall Coalition has a better idea.

Renowned local architect Arthur Cotton Moore has devised a compelling and viable solution for two new museum sites on the Mall. Moore has a long and respected reputation in Washington, having worked on innumerable new and preservation projects, including renovation of the Library of Congress. He is a longtime vice chair of the coalition.

In his solution, side-by-side new museums would be situated along the Mall's



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historic north-south axis, as defined by the 1791 L'Enfant Plan and the 1901 to 1902 McMillan Plan, the blueprints for the Mall. The north-south axis extends from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial; it intersects, at the Washington Monument, the east-west axis from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol.

Moore's two sites would create a new pedestrian destination on what is poorly utilized Mall acreage south of the Washington Monument across 15th Street from the

gerous pedestrian crossing. Importantly, Moore's concept creates two plots, each about the size of the National Museum of the American Indian, that not only are located on the existing historical Mall but also, in effect, would complete an unrealized "Washington Commons" element of the historic McMillan Plan that envisioned a lively cultural destination on this land. Because of the creation of a large Tidal Basin, it was never realized. Instead, the modern automobile took over this valuable Mall space.

The museum sponsors have a difficult choice to try to find space on the already full Mall or to locate somewhere else in the capital. We agree with the 24 members of the Senate who wrote Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III on Nov. 22, that the museums belong on the Mall to highlight "the untold and overlooked contributions" of both women and Latinos.

The senators' letter, however, is mistaken in one important respect. It states, "From our perspective, the National Mall is the two-mile park from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, bounded on the north and south by Constitution and Independence Avenues." This definition is inconsis-

tant. This area currently is occupied by crisscrossing access roads; those roads can be relocated. Because flooding is a serious concern at the Tidal Basin, the new sites would be raised on an embankment. The good news is the latest federal government climate change maps project that storm surge in 2050 would not inundate this higher ground. A pedestrian bridge elevated over the roads running between the Washington Monument and Tidal Basin would correct the existing dan-

Ultimately, any long-term solution for future Mall development, and the inevitable future museums and monuments, is for Congress to charter a new McMillan-type commission to update the McMillan Plan. A new comprehensive, forward-looking vision could again expand the Mall's boundaries, as the McMillan Plan did more than a century ago to include the Lincoln Memorial, and give new breathing space for the Mall to grow along with our evolving democracy.

For now, Moore's idea reveals a new opportunity for enhancing an underutilized area of the existing Mall, and provides an ingenious solution to enhancing the American story on this beloved stage for our democracy.

The writer is chair of the National Mall Coalition.

tent with the historic L'Enfant and McMillan plans' vision of the Mall as a unified landscape laid out across two axes, with the Washington Monument at its heart. Moore's proposed museum sites are exactly consistent with, and reinforce to important extent, the historic concept of the Mall cross-axis connecting the iconic symbols of American democracy.