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**COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE**

# Smithsonian focuses on National Mall sites for new Latino, women's history museums



The Smithsonian Institution has narrowed its search for two proposed museums to a pair of sites near the Washington Monument.

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By Daniel J. Sernovitz  
Senior Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal  
Oct 27, 2022



The Smithsonian Institution's governing board has narrowed its search for a pair of new museums to two sites by the National Mall as it nears a year-end deadline to designate where the proposed American Latino and American Women's History museums should be built.

Its preferred locations include: undeveloped land across the National Mall from the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture; and an undeveloped site by the Tidal Basin bordered by Raoul Wallenberg Place, Maine Avenue and Independence Ave. SW. Both are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The Smithsonian, in an announcement Thursday, said legislative action is necessary before its board of regents can make its final designations. The museum operator has until the end of the year to do so based on congressional legislation passed in December 2020 authorizing the search.

The Smithsonian said its preferred locations, narrowed from a larger pool of 14, are "considered the two optimal sites with the greatest potential based on site-selection evaluative criteria combined with stakeholder input."

Advisory groups including the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and National Capital Planning Commission have panned the Smithsonian's search process. Some board members have strongly suggested the Smithsonian and its advisers, including Baltimore's Ayers Saint Gross, consider redeveloping existing properties or more carefully consider sites not directly along the Mall rather than pursuing new construction on the Mall, already home to a number of museums and where undeveloped land is dwindling. The Smithsonian is not bound by the boards' recommendations, however, which proved to be a source of contention at a September CFA meeting. CFA Chair Billie Tsien said during that meeting she believes the Smithsonian has overlooked

other viable options including redeveloping the Department of Agriculture's Jamie L. Whitten Building and the Department of Energy's James V. Forrestal Building.

"I feel quite frustrated because I feel that this is a very piece-by-piece, museum-by-museum, constituency-by-constituency series of choices that has no overall sense of planning to it, and I would say that, for me, it is essentially lip service in terms of looking at the Whitten and Forrestal sites," Tsien said during a hearing. "While it does not sit on the Mall, it gives the possibility that there could be a larger sense of planning than simply responding to various constituencies, for various museums as they come up."

Representatives for the Smithsonian contended their short list of locations most closely lines up with the criteria established by supporters for the two proposed museums. What's more, options like redeveloping the Forrestal Building at 1000 Independence Ave. SW come with their own complications. Forrestal specifically would require extra demolition costs.

"What concerns us most with the site is the extraordinary cost of the redevelopment," Kevin Gover, undersecretary for museums and culture at the Smithsonian, told the CFA during its Sept. 15 meeting. "Not so much to the Smithsonian," he added, "but more tellingly, we think in excess of \$1 billion to relocate the Department of Energy from its current home."

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