



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Park Site / NPS Unit: Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine
Issue: New Education / Administration Facility
Date: Revised, April 2009

Background

Fort McHenry's 5,700 square-foot visitor center was built in 1964 to accommodate 250,000 visitors annually. Current visitation is over 600,000 and the building cannot meet the park's visitor service or administrative needs. Visitor service space in the building is approximately 3,600 s.f. and the auditorium seats 70. On a typical spring day, 30-40 buses may visit the park and long lines form for information, the audiovisual program, the bookstore, and restrooms. In April and May, only 50% of visiting school groups can access the auditorium for the primary interpretive AV program, due to overcrowding and lack of capacity and scheduled viewings. The exhibit area is small and cramped, and the restrooms do not meet ADA requirements. There are often lines formed outside the restrooms. The current "Mission 66" era visitor center sits on the park's cultural landscape, and its removal would help restore the historic scene. Moreover, the park is forced to house office functions in the historic Star Fort, which is having a detrimental effect on the park's primary historic resources; the new building would allow all offices currently in the Fort to be consolidated to the new facility, greatly improving preservation of the historic buildings. A determination of non-eligibility to the National Register has been made for the current visitor center building.

The park's 1988 Amended Master Plan / Environmental Assessment identified the need for a new visitor center. A *Development Concept Plan / Environmental Assessment (DCP / EA)*, *Cultural Landscape Report (CLR)*, and *Alternative Transportation Study (ATS)* were completed. The purpose of these reports was to develop recommendations for, and assess impacts of, a new Education / Administration facility. A boundary survey was also completed. All studies recommended and supported the placement of a new Visitor Center/Administrative Headquarters on park land, on the eastern end of the current parking lot, but outside the historic 1814 reservation boundary. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), supporting this location, was signed by the Northeast Regional Director in February of 2005.

Due to the leadership and commitment of Senator Paul Sarbanes (now retired) and Senator Ben Cardin (then a member of the House), both of Maryland, \$11,060,000.00 was included in the 2005 Transportation Reauthorization Bill (SAFETEA-LU). SAFETEA-LU funds require a 20% match. The City of Baltimore committed \$1,460,000. The State of Maryland committed \$1,459,904. Fort McHenry added \$950,000 in collected fees to the overall project.

In 2006, the park hired GWWO Architects, Inc. of Baltimore to design the new facility. Schematic design was completed in Summer 2007. The NPS Development Advisory Board approved the building concept in November 2005 and the architectural and exhibit design in June 2007. The park seeks an environmentally sustainable facility and is pursuing at least silver-level LEED certification for the building.

Current Status

In April 2009, the General Construction Contract was awarded to Forrester Construction Company of Rockville, MD. The construction schedule is 18-months. This includes construction of the new building, demolition of the old visitor center and old maintenance shop, and restoration of the cultural landscape.

A “Ground Breaking” ceremony is scheduled for April 27th at 10am.

Project Contact

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