

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY 

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Hon. Helen Rosenthal  
Council Member, 6<sup>th</sup> District  
The Council of The City of New York  
563 Columbus Avenue  
New York, NY 10024

Dear Council Member Rosenthal:

*Helen*

Thank you very much for your thoughtful letter of September 28, 2015 and for your support of the Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation (“the Project”). This Project will offer an unparalleled platform to leverage the Museum’s unique assets to educate the next generation of science teachers, scientists, workers, and citizens to ensure a scientifically literate nation—critical endeavors to ensure our City and nation’s workforce preparedness.

I’d like to take this opportunity to address the areas of concern raised in your letter, beginning with the community engagement process. As you know, the Museum strives to maintain regular and open communications with our neighbors. When we launched the design process for the Project, we faced a dilemma: we wanted to share our plans and seek feedback at that early phase of project planning, but we did not yet have a design or even a site plan to present. Thus—in our meetings to date with community-based organizations, advocates, neighbors, government officials, public agencies, and other interested entities regarding the Project—we and our design team have been listening. Your comments and those of the other community stakeholders and elected officials have and will continue to inform the project’s design and direction.

We share your belief in the importance of public park land and your desire to minimize the loss of existing trees. From the beginning, it has been clear that the design must do all of the following: meet the needs of the students and other visitors the Museum serves, respond to the needs of the Museum itself, and do so within the context of Theodore Roosevelt Park (“the Park”) and the surrounding neighborhood and historic district. The project will include extensive internal renovations and relocations, so that we can minimize expansion outside the Museum’s existing footprint. We expect to have a concept design to share soon that will reflect (i) a more modest building footprint than perhaps was suggested by the broader site under consideration and that covers far less park open space than may have been suggested in earlier presentations, (ii) consideration of the relationship and adjacencies of the new structure to existing Museum buildings facing west toward Columbus Avenue, and (iii) park space that is not just an entrance to a museum but equally a space that maintains the intimate character and feel of the existing Park.

Regarding accessibility, the Museum’s proposal for the reconfigured park space will provide mobility-impaired visitors with the freedom to enter and enjoy the Park without stairs, narrow

gates or other physical barriers. Entry into the new building also is expected to be at grade which will allow for those that are physically impaired to easily access the park and the Museum. You also expressed concern about congestion in the blocks around the Museum, and the need to manage the layover of school buses bringing children to the Museum. In 1999, the Museum developed a Transportation Management Plan in anticipation of the opening of the Rose Center for Earth and Space. The Plan has evolved – and will continue to evolve – over time in response to the Museum’s needs and to conditions in the surrounding neighborhood. The Plan addresses bus operations, including the safe loading and unloading of school children, demand management, use of the parking garage, and layover and dispatching activities. As part of the plan, the Museum has initiated a reservation system for school and camp groups. School groups apply in advance for a scheduled date and time for arrival, and the Museum is able to send the groups information on their trip, including instructions on public transportation options and bus operations. The Museum encourages school groups to arrive by subway, and publicizes information on its website on public transit services, including the Office of Pupil Transportation’s (OPT) Certificate of Free Transportation program which allows free round-trip travel on subways for school groups on educational field trips. As a result, the Museum is able to control school group attendance and school bus volumes to the best of its ability—and does not anticipate an increase in either due to the Project. However, in response to extensive conversations with our neighbors regarding their concerns and observations, and independent of the upcoming environmental review process, the Museum is evaluating and considering means to improve its current operations and their effects on surrounding roadways.

We look forward to working with you and your staff. When a concept design for the Project is ready for presentation to the community, we will be in touch to discuss ways to effectively inform and engage our neighbors.

Sincerely,

*With warm regards*

*Lisa*

Lisa J. Gugenheim