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Lisa Gugenheim
American Museum of Natural History
200 Central Park West
New York, NY 10024

September 28, 2015

Dear Ms. Gugenheim,

I wanted to let you know that I met with one group of 79th Street residents as well as a group of 80th Street residents last week and spent several hours listening to their concerns about the Museum's proposal for the Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation. As you may know, several groups are joining together to have a Town Hall to grow community awareness of the issue and discuss the museums plans. I plan to attend on October 6th, to listen to their concerns.

As I made clear to the residents, I support the Museum and its expanding educational endeavors. I am proud to have had a hand in allocating \$16 million for the new building. At the same time, I also support neighboring residents in their efforts to fully understand the Museum's intentions and to raise concerns and contribute ideas as their favorite park evolves. With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to express some of my thoughts on the community engagement process moving forward and to relay some of the comments and concerns the residents I have met with have expressed to me.

Open lines of communication between the Museum and its neighbors are essential. At this moment your website includes a general outline of the project but very few details about how their neighborhood will be affected and what the process is for making their voice heard. The process should be as transparent as possible to facilitate a good working relationship between the Museum and its neighbors. I understand you have held dozens of meetings with individuals and groups from across the community and look forward to working put you in touch with even more. As you are taking their comments into consideration, please highlight the comments that you are focused on. Please give the community a sense of when you will have new information. I'd like to co-sponsor a Town Hall when you are ready to present your drawings--to further let the community know that you will listen to their feedback at that juncture as well. Could you please let folks know about the formal Community Board and LPC process and timing so they are confident their comments will be heard in a meaningful way.

Currently, the primary cause of concern, as you know, is the loss of parkland. As exciting as the new educational center is, the expansion as proposed seems to come at the price of a substantial portion of Theodore Roosevelt Park. Residents want to know that every effort has been made to repurpose current space prior to increasing the Museum's footprint on parkland. The Museum's past efforts to enhance your surroundings, such as your renovation of the 77th Street Plaza and the Terrace above the parking garage, have set a high standard and I look forward to seeing you exceed it. As such I implore you to look at the expansion as an opportunity to create a new vision of park space rather than simply reduce the size of Roosevelt Park. As one of the residents I spoke to put it, one shouldn't have to choose between supporting the Museum and supporting the Park.

In addition to the general unease over the potential loss of parkland, the residents I met with raised three main areas of concern that I agree should be taken into consideration:

1. **Accessibility:** The part of Roosevelt Park that lies directly in the proposed footprint of the Center is cherished by the community in large part because it is exceptionally accessible to and those with mobility impairments. The design for the new entrance to the Center on Columbus Avenue at 79th Street should not just meet the letter of accessibility laws but make it a priority to create an atmosphere in which all community residents truly feel welcome. The efforts that the Museum makes to alleviate any lost parkland should have the same considerations.
2. **Trees:** Adding to the Museum should not mean subtracting cherished greenspace. As you are aware, the trees of Roosevelt Park are another major part of what makes it so special to our community, especially those that have helped define the park's character for decades. The Museum has long been a faithful steward of the Park and its trees, through your partnership with the Parks Department and Friends of Roosevelt Park to maintain and improve the Park. It should be a priority in the design to avoid cutting trees down, by incorporating them into the design or some other innovative approach.
3. **Congestion:** Additional school buses visiting the new center have the potential to overwhelm what is already a highly congested area. Utilizing the Museum's underground parking facility or off-site parking could be a way to address this concern, but whatever the Museum arrives at, simply leaving the buses to fend for themselves is not an acceptable option.

As the process continues, I look forward to working closely with you at the Museum and with neighboring residents to facilitate an open and productive dialogue. The Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation promises to be a world-class facility and will do much to further advance the wonders and opportunities of scientific inquiry. It is my great hope that the process by which it is built will serve a similarly important goal, fostering greater civic participation and an even stronger relationship between the American Museum of Natural History and our community.

Sincerely,

Helen Rosenthal