Joseph L. Fleischer Background and Credentials

Joseph L. Fleischer is the Managing Partner of Polshek Partnership, LLP and Partner in Charge of the Newseum Project. He received his first professional degree in 1965 from The City College of New York. Mr. Fleischer, who is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, received his initial professional registration in 1970 from the State of New York. He is currently licensed in 21 jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia.

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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 17122
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Joseph L. Fleischer Presentation to BZA on March 9, 2004

Design Goals

The goals of our design effort were to meet the programmatic needs of this very complex mixed-use project and to do so in a manner that is respectful of the urban context and neighboring buildings. This required us to interpret the needs and mission of the Newseum, while creating a meaningful, iconic form for this highly visible, unique site. In many ways, the requirements of the site provided the road map for the design.

- The site's location, at the intersection of Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, in an axial relationship to the Mellon Fountain and the National Gallery, gives the site a monumental character.

- The building design needed to maintain the qualitative excellence represented by the site's neighbors, particularly the Canadian Embassy, both wings of the National Gallery and the Federal Trade Commission building that begins the Federal Triangle.

- The design needed to address the diagonal geometry of Pennsylvania Avenue, transitioning itself to the orthogonal street grid of 6th and C Streets and the area north of the site. Simultaneously, it needed to mediate the Pennsylvania Avenue streetwall from the deeply set back Canadian Embassy to the property line streetwall of the commercial buildings to the west.

- Lastly, the design seeks to encourage visitors to the Mall to cross the divide of the Avenues and enter downtown. It does so by locating pedestrian-friendly program elements such as retail and food service, as well as the Newseum's famed front pages display, along Pennsylvania Avenue and C Street.

Design Constraints

- Shape of Site

  This 72,678 sf site is bordered by 6th Street N.W., C Street and the property line of the Canadian Embassy, all in an orthogonal relationship, and the dominant Pennsylvania Avenue on a diagonal geometry to the other bordering streets. The site elevates as one moves clockwise from the Pennsylvania Avenue intersection with the Embassy to the C Street intersection with the Embassy.

- Pennsylvania Avenue Plan

  This property is within the PADC area and is governed by the Pennsylvania Avenue Plan. The Plan was amended in 1993 to provide guidance for any building on this property to be compatible to the Embassy by establishing uses, height, setbacks, build-to lines, building restriction lines, roof structures, pedestrian features and off-street loading.

- Uses Within the Facility

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The Newseum Project is comprised of the following primary uses: i) a Museum Facility containing both permanent and changing exhibits, as well as administrative support areas, food service facilities and a Museum Store; ii) the Offices of the Freedom Forum, including a Conference Center; iii) Multi-Family Residential Facility at 2.0 FAR; iv) Retail Facilities; and v)Parking for the Offices, Residences and guests. There is also an off-street loading facility that services all of the other uses.

- As previously mentioned, the Project is surrounded by monumental buildings with the Canadian Embassy having the most direct impact on the design effort.

Description of Project Design

The Newseum Project itself is composed of three rectangular bars, like a three-dimensional newspaper, parallel to, and stepping away from the Pennsylvania Avenue streetwall. These bars vary in length, height and levels of transparency. The bar furthest from Pennsylvania Avenue is nestled within the volume of the Residential Building. The Residential volume orients to the District's orthogonal street grid. These bars are separated from each other by twelve-foot wide circulation zones, which together with a series of interconnected bridges move the visitor between exhibits and levels. It is actually the articulation of these twelve-foot wide circulation zones, so critical to the design concept, that are responsible for the so-called "courtyards" for which we are seeking a variance along C Street. Essentially they are façade articulation.

The first bar is the lowest, with a height related to the strong horizontals of the adjacent Canadian Embassy. It affects the transition between the Embassy streetwall to the east and the commercial building streetwall to the west. It is recessed at street level to facilitate or ease the transition. The main public entry to the building is through this bar.

The second or middle bar is the spiritual heart of the Newseum, and contains within it the Journalists' Memorial, the September 11, 2001 Gallery and the Berlin Wall Gallery. The Atrium Space is within this bar.

The third bar is the highest and most enclosed of the three bars. This bar contains many of the core elements of the exhibit, including the News History Gallery, the Interactive Newsroom, the demonstration Broadcast Studio and the Forum Theater. The third bar houses the Freedom Forum Offices on its top two floors. Nestled within the Residential volume, this third bar provides access from 6th Street for the Freedom Forum Offices.

The fourth or Residential volume is parallel to and oriented to C Street. It wraps around onto 6th Street. The lower levels of this Residential volume house a restaurant which is entered off of 6th Street, as are the residences themselves. The C Street side of this portion of the building also houses the Newseum's Group Entry, as well as the loading dock. In general, vehicles pull into the loading area and the doors come down to shield the activities from the street. Access to the Parking Garage is immediately east of the loading area.