

106

SUCCESS STORY

Demolition Reconsidered: Preservation at U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Washington, D.C.

“Just as Annex 3 once served a support role for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, it now houses the Ross Administrative Center of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The decision to retain rather than demolish the building provided valuable work space for the staff of the Museum as well as space for visitor services.”

— MICHAEL ZISK
*United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum Architect*



THE STORY

Located immediately south of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the federal Auditors Building Complex overlooks the nearby Washington Monument. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the imposing Romanesque-style Auditors Building was built in 1880, followed by several additions and annexes. The complex housed the Bureau of Engraving and Printing until 1914 when that agency moved into an adjacent new building. In subsequent years, the Auditors Building Complex was occupied by various federal agencies, but, by the 1970s, was underutilized.

THE PROJECT

Created by Congress in 1980, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council was charged with creating a national memorial museum to the Holocaust's millions of victims. In 1981, the federal government carved out a portion of the Auditors Building Complex—Annexes 1, 1A, and 2—to become the site of the proposed United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. As design development proceeded, the Holocaust Memorial Council explored reusing the historic buildings, but this proved challenging given the museum's ambitious program needs. Ultimately, in late 1984, the Holocaust Memorial Council proposed clearing the site for construction of a new building. In addition to resulting in demolition of Annexes 1, 1A, and 2, new construction had the potential to visually impact the adjacent Bureau of Engraving and Printing, a limestone Neo-Classical structure designated as a District of Columbia Historic Site, as well as the Auditors Building and Annex 3 of the Auditors Building Complex. Indeed, development of the design eventually raised serious concerns for the very future of Annex 3 and for the historic character of the adjacent National Mall.

Photos: Above, Annex 3, showing proximity to the Washington Monument and National Mall; Right, Annex 3, now known as the Ross Administrative Center of the Holocaust Memorial Museum



Photos: Left, Annexes 1, IA, and 2, and the Auditor's Building, with Washington Monument in the background (photo courtesy HABS); Right, (from left to right) Annex 3, the Auditor's Building, and the Holocaust Memorial Museum (photo courtesy Flickr/Mr.TinDC)

THE 106 PROCESS

The Holocaust Memorial Council, as the federal agency carrying out the project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects on those properties of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of historic properties when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

Consultation among the Holocaust Memorial Council, District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation led to agreement that the museum's program needs outweighed retention of Annexes 1, IA, and 2. The parties executed a Memorandum of Agreement providing for documentation of the three buildings prior to demolition and further consultation during design of the museum. However, Section 106 review had to be reopened in 1988 when the Holocaust Memorial Council proposed obtaining and demolishing Annex 3, an impact not previously considered in the Section 106 process.

Larger and more architecturally impressive than the other annexes, Annex 3 was a prominent anchor at the street corner facing the National Mall. The proposal to demolish the building to create a landscaped entry plaza in front of the new museum was controversial, in part because it would open up site lines from the new museum and proposed plaza to the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial. Critics argued this would result in the museum visually competing with these iconic monuments and fundamentally changing the historic character of the National Mall. After several months of debate and consultation, the Holocaust Memorial Council reversed its position, withdrew its demolition proposal, and instead agreed to reuse Annex 3.

Consulting Parties:
United States Holocaust Memorial Council
ACHP
District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer

THE SUCCESS

The Holocaust Memorial Museum opened to critical acclaim in 1993. The building's blend of brick and limestone façades harmonizes with its historic neighbors, including Annex 3. Although the final design was the culmination of several local and federal reviews, only the Section 106 review focused exclusively on the museum's impact on historic properties. The Section 106 process provided a forum for opposing interests to discuss the proposed demolition of Annex 3 and alternatives, ultimately leading to the building's retention and successful reuse. The handsome historic building is a vibrant and permanent part of the museum complex, housing museum administrative offices and visitor services, including a public cafeteria.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

401 F Street NW, Suite 308, Washington DC 20001

Phone: 202-517-0200 • Fax: 202-517-6381 • achp@achp.gov • www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage