



**Cook County
Chicago**

**New Welcome Hall, Griffin Museum of Science and Industry
5700 S. DuSable Lake Shore Drive**

SHPO Log #001040110; Conservation Easement

July 8, 2026

**Dr. Chevy Humphrey
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry
5700 S. DuSable Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60637**

Thank you for your letter requesting our comments on the proposed Welcome Hall at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (GMSI), which we received on 5/19/26 (SHPO Log# 001040110). This office holds a [Conservation Easement](#) on the GMSI through August 30, 2061. Stipulation 4.c requires that this office provide the Chicago Park District (building owner) with a determination whether proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards).

Our staff have determined that no historic archaeological properties are known to exist within the project area. However, if any archaeological materials are encountered during construction, this office must be notified. This letter is not a clearance for purposes of the [Illinois Human Remains Protection Act](#) (20 ILCS 3440).

The GMSI (also known as the Palace of Fine Arts) is a contributing structure to the Jackson Park Historic Landscape District and Midway Plaisance, which was listed to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) on 12/15/72; the building was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1955. This office approved the proposed renovations to the GMSI's south portico on February 4th, 2025.

During discussions of the south portico project with GMSI, Robert A.M. Stern Architects (RAMSA), and Emily Ramsey of Ramsey Historic Consultants, you expressed the desire to change the current underground entry sequence to the GMSI and extend the GMSI's public, accessible spaces by creating a highly visible new Welcome Hall on the building's north (primary) elevation. Several preliminary designs were presented, along with examples of historic landmark projects that used glass as a connector to the historic buildings, as a new glass entry, as a ceiling, as an object.

The current public entry sequence lacks interaction or engagement with the GMSI's historic architecture. Rarely are guests able to walk through the historic north portico and experience the grandness and monumental scale of the Neo-Classical architecture, as visitors originally would have.

Visitors currently enter along East Museum Drive, approximately 200 feet from the north portico, through vestibules constructed in the 1990s to provide an accessible main entry and accommodate visitor parking. Guests enter the GMSI below ground, completely bypassing the north portico and historic 1930s main lobby with its stainless-steel panels, brass detailing, and stepped curved ceiling. Once underground, visitors travel on a series of escalators until they reach the main level. As most visitors have never experienced walking through the historic portico and entry lobby, they are unaware that these spaces are directly behind them. The effect of the current entry sequence is disorienting and requires visitors to travel about 400 feet before they enter the museum, which adds an additional 20 minutes to the average visitor's entry. Additionally, the current entry seems to cater to visitors traveling by car and parking below ground verses those who approach the Museum at street level from the surrounding city.

The proposed Welcome Hall seeks to redesign or replace the existing 1990s entry sequence in function, form, and image. A contemporary, curvilinear, glass structure would replace the rectilinear forms and massing of the existing limestone vestibules and recessed center steps along East Museum Drive. By lowering the grade of the north lawn by 5 feet 5 inches, visitors would enter the Welcome Hall at street level and enter the GMSI through either the historic portico or a new accessible connection to the lower level. The new, direct connection to the lower level would be achieved by removing the center section of stairs to the historic portico, similar to the approved design at the south portico.

The proposed Welcome Hall would span the location of the existing vestibules, while reusing the systems within, and adding new public restrooms, coat check, and mechanical rooms. The increased footprint of these spaces will not be visible from the street, as they are planned to be tucked within sloped, landscaped berms bordered by limestone retaining walls on either side of a curving glass curtainwall. On axis with the north portico, the Welcome Hall's glass curtain wall would be about 10 feet taller than the current limestone vestibules. A green roof would rise from the landscaped berms and surround the Welcome Hall's large, central skylight. The green roof would further slope up towards the historic GMSI, with the south curtain wall approximately 5 ½ feet taller than the north curtain wall and projecting south towards the historic north portico. While the Welcome Hall's north curtain wall is only as wide as the GMSI's central pavilion, its south curtain wall would extend to nearly three-fourths of the GMSI's north elevation, providing unobstructed views of the historic Neo-Classical façade.

A fully glazed connector (glass ceiling with glass east and west walls) would extend from the Welcome Hall to the historic north portico, creating an enclosed entrance that allows visitors to enter the GMSI's lower level or ascend to the historic north portico. A full glass curtain wall is proposed to be installed behind the portico's Ionic columns. To provide direct access to the lower level, the center section of the historic granite stairs is proposed for removal. The walls of the new entry portal will be limestone to match the historic exterior. The portal's roof would be flat, paved with granite to match the existing stairs, and would incorporate a glass railing along the perimeter to allow the roof to serve as a small terrace. The section of granite stairs that are removed will be reused at either side of the connector to extend the stairs an additional 5 feet 5 inches below the current grade of the north lawn.

The proposed connector will bisect the north lawn, and the Welcome Hall will limit street access to currently open Chicago Park District space directly in front of the GMSI. In the proposed plans these new spaces will remain free and open to the public. Additional landscape berms are proposed along the east, north and west sides of the GMSI's facades to ease the change between the existing and proposed grades. New paved and landscaped Science Gardens are proposed for the former north lawn spaces on both sides of the connectors.

Proposed interior changes are relatively minor. New punched doorways on the east and west (side) walls of the newly enclosed portico would provide access to the historic portico and proposed terrace. The two new punched doorways would be located where there are existing historic grills, with the historic grills reused as transom panels above each doorway. The historic, solid-panel brass doors at the north portico's three existing doorways would be fixed in an open position, and the historic brass doors, frames, and transoms within the doorways are proposed for careful removal and storage. No changes are proposed for the 1930s lobby. The existing underground entry sequence would be redesigned to expand current exhibit space, and the existing non-historic spaces below the north portico and main lobby would be reconfigured as part of the new at-grade entry portal, with systems added for access, ticketing, and security. The three existing escalators that connect the lower level to the main floor (south of the north portico) are proposed to be replaced with four new escalators, and the non-historic opening on the main floor would be enlarged to provide visitors on the lower level with better views of the historic rotunda.

Enclosing the monumental, historic north portico entrance with glass while creating an all-glass connection that would span a new at-grade entrance while also covering the historic approach (stairs) to the north portico, is no small feat, nor is it a small change. However, the project team has provided details to show how the proposed glazing will be supported, where and how connections to the historic building would be made to minimize new penetrations through the historic materials, and how the proposed changes will be reversible. The Neo-Classical temple design of the north portico and its historic decorative features would remain unchanged in the proposed plans, and the historic architecture would be given an opportunity to be experienced anew.

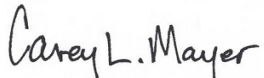
The existing, below-ground entry sequence and the building's original design as a temple on a hill give the perception that the GMSI is to be viewed from afar. Likely this is a notion that the GMSI's founder, Julius Rosenwald, may have sought to rectify, as his mission was to "transform overcrowded and polluted cities into inspiring and recuperative public spaces..." The proposed plans would return the GMSI's historic, exterior architecture to the public's experience. The new Welcome Hall project would extend the free and accessible public spaces, providing more opportunities for civic, community and neighborhood engagement. The GMSI would also gain additional exhibition space and broaden its educational scope with outdoor learning opportunities in the two new science gardens.

A highly visible new addition on a building's primary façade is rarely able to meet the Standards. The project team was very responsive to early feedback from the Historic Preservation Division of the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and from the SHPO. The proposed changes take

advantage of the site and existing non-historic conditions (such as the 1990s entry vestibules and grade of the north lawn). The proposed Welcome Hall would provide a large, unobstructed gathering space, and the glass curtain walls, and a large central skylight would provide clear views of the historic north portico and north facade. The glass curtain walls, and glass connector are specifically designed to minimize mullions and deliver continuous views of the historic building. The proposed additions are clearly differentiated from the historic; compatible in scale, massing, and materials; and designed to defer to the historic architecture. They maintain the symmetry of the historic north façade and portico, critical, character-defining features of the historic building. The project does not remove significant historic fabric and is reversible. While it does alter the GMSI's north (primary) elevation, its minimalist design visually defers to the highly ornamented, historic architecture. The proposed Welcome Hall project meets the Standards and will not adversely affect the historic building or the surrounding Jackson Park Historic Landscape District.

This office will continue to coordinate with DPD staff and Chicago Park District staff on this project. This coordination is not a substitute for their mandatory review and required submissions/processes, which you are still obligated to fulfill. To ensure that the proposed project continues to meet the Standards and avoids an adverse effect, please submit the next set of deliverables as they are developed to Anna Margaret Barris, AnnaMargaret.Barris@Illinois.gov, for review and comment. Failure to submit subsequent plans for review and comment may result in an adverse effect determination.

Sincerely,



Carey L. Mayer, AIA
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

c: Andrew Schneider, Chicago Park District
Dijana Cuvalo, AIA, Historic Preservation Division
Emily Ramsey, Ramsey Historic Consultants, Inc.