

A Feasibility Study for

# **Pittsburgh's National Immigrant Museum & Trail**

November 2009

Prepared by



One Hundred and Fifteen years ago, in the fall of 1894, the first Croatian Parish in America was established in Allegheny City, now Pittsburgh's North Side. Home to numerous Croatian immigrants, the parish was named for Saint Nicholas, the Traveler, in recognition that many of the parishioners, like St. Nicholas, had traveled great distances to finally settle here in the United States. St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church was dedicated on September 8, 1901 and was in continuous service until 2004.

St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church, design by architect Frederick Sauer, is located on East Ohio Street (Route 28) at the foot of Troy Hill. Originally built twenty feet to the south and eight feet lower, the church was moved to its current location in 1921 to accommodate the first widening of Route 28. The parish flourished for many years, but due to declining population beginning in the 1970's, the Diocese of Pittsburgh combined the parish with St. Nicholas Parish in Millvale in 2004.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) has had long standing plans to again widen Route 28, primarily to make it safer and more efficient for travel. PennDOT has purchased most if not all of the adjacent land and plans to demolish all of the adjacent buildings to make room for the planned realignment. Early plans for the realignment called for the demolition of the church.

A number of groups have been fighting to save the church from demolition. These efforts to save the church and convert it into a shrine

for St. Nicholas or a Croatian ethnic museum, resulted in a redesign of the Route 28 realignment to avoid demolition of the church. The church was designated a Historic structure by the City in 2001, the only church in the city with that designation.

Over the past several years, Astorino has produced several pro-bono studies for the conversion of the church into a shrine and for the creation of a trail that would connect the church to new parking and provide a link to the existing Riverfront Trail.

This feasibility study was commissioned by the Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation. It is the wish of this Foundation, among other interested parties, to establish a new museum on the site of the existing church. This museum will serve not only to preserve the historic architecture and hillside grotto, but to preserve the histories and tell the story of all immigrants to the Pittsburgh Region.

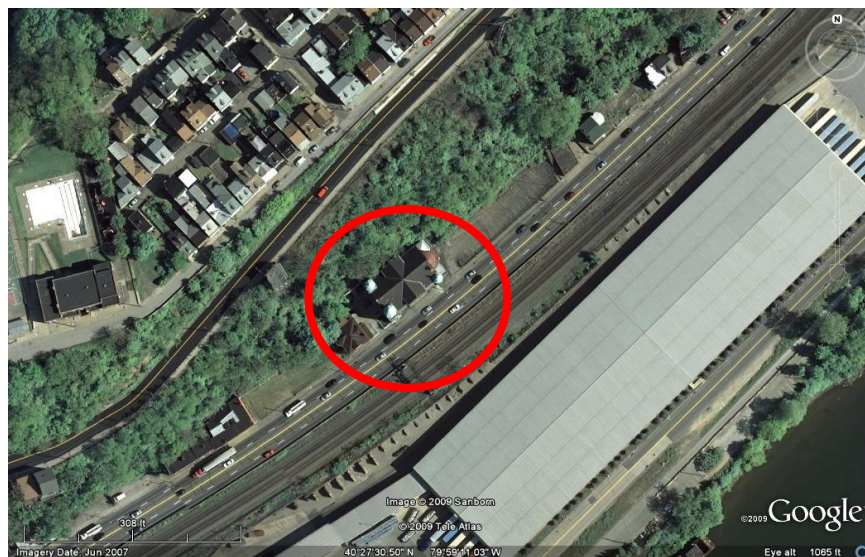
The scope of this feasibility study is:

1. To establish a reasonable program for the new museum,
2. To develop alternative diagrams showing how the church and site can be transformed into a working museum,
3. To determine a viable location for a trail that would connect the museum to parking and would link to the Riverfront Trail network,
4. To provide probable construction costs for the project, and
5. To create images to promote the project to obtain funds.

## Introduction

### The Site

The site of the proposed museum is the existing St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church located on the North Side of Pittsburgh on East Ohio Street (Route 28) at the foot of Troy Hill. Presently the grounds include two primary structures, the Church and the Rectory. There is a paved courtyard between the two structures with a series of stairs in a butterfly configuration that lead up the hillside to a grotto with an altar and shrine to the Blessed Mother. There is a parking lot to the rear of the church (to the east) with access from Route 28. The site at one time included a Convent and a School which were taken down years ago. The school was located where the parking lot is today. The Convent was located to the west of the Rectory. The site is very steeply sloped toward the north and large retaining walls hold back the hillside.



St. Nicholas Church and Rectory along Route 28

## Introduction

### The Site

To the north and to the west of the St. Nicholas Church site there are two neighborhoods – East Deutschtown and Troy Hill. The homes and the atmosphere of both neighborhoods reflect the traditional values of the immigrants who settled in those neighborhoods. Some of the most eclectic architecture and decoration in the city may be found in East Deutschtown. Troy Hill is accessed from Troy Hill Road which bounds the St. Nicholas Church site on the north. Troy Hill sits on a plateau above St. Nicholas and is dominated by brick and frame row houses, well preserved single family houses and a spectacular view of the city. Both neighborhoods are in support of this project and consider that it will be an asset to the area.



The surrounding communities of East Deutschtown (to the west) and Troy Hill (to the north)

## Introduction

### **The Site**

The site is located in close proximity to Interstate 279 which connects the site directly to downtown Pittsburgh as well as the rest of the region via Interstates 79 and 376. There are several bus routes in close proximity to the site, making it fairly accessible from all parts of the city and greater Western Pennsylvania region.

The site is currently very disconnected from pedestrian access with its only approach along the highly trafficked and dangerous Route 28. PennDot currently owns or will own all of the adjacent property along Route 28 stretching from the west at the empty lot across from the Penn Brewery on Troy Hill Road to the 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge to the east.

The site has a very prominent location along Route 28 which will give it tremendous visibility to a very large number of potential visitors.

The basic concept is to use the site occupied by the existing Church, Rectory, parking lot and Grotto, as the site for the new Museum. Extensive renovation and new construction will be required to create the new Museum.

Parking will be accommodated in a new lot created in the empty lot opposite the Penn Brewery with access from Troy Hill Road. The parking lot will be connected to the Museum by the new Trail.

The Trail will traverse the site parallel to Route 28 at the foot of the slope of Troy Hill. In all but one of the Options, the Trail divides west of the site with a spur serving as the main access to the Museum. It will then continue through the site at the level of the Grotto and eastward to the 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge. In one of the Options, the main entrance to the Museum is from the Trail. And, in another Option, a secondary entrance to the Museum is from the Trail.

The median size of all museums in the US is just less than 23,000 square feet. Each of the proposed schemes come in at very near 20,000 square feet and includes the following programmatic elements:

**Exhibit Space**

The museum exhibit space will account for the largest block of square footage in the facility and will be primarily composed of the existing church building, likely throughout both the lower and main levels of the church to potentially include the choir loft space as well. The church space itself with its historic paintings, artifacts and architectural elements are integral to the immigrant story.

**Multipurpose Room and Kitchen**

A large new multipurpose type space and adjacent kitchen will serve both the museum functions (lunches for field trips) and also for special events (weddings, parties, corporate events). It is intended that this space will host frequent functions for various ethnic groups throughout the region including events such as traditional dances, concerts, cook-offs and other ethnic celebrations. This space will be a Community Hall of sorts for any ethnic group to rent out and enjoy gatherings.



### **Admissions and Lobby**

In each scheme the lobby and admissions area will be a defined space separate from the main church building and museum exhibits. This area will provide a space to gather before beginning a tour, deposit coats, use the restrooms and also grab a bite to eat from the café or a souvenir from the shop.

### **Gift Shop and Café**

These will each be located adjacent to the museum lobby and will not require admission to visit. The café will ideally be located nearest to the trail extension to entice visitors along the trail in for a bite to eat and a drink and perhaps a trip through the museum.

### **Administration**

These spaces are required for the staff that will run the museum. Included are offices for the director and curators, a business office, reception area, conference room, kitchenette and restrooms.

### **Restoration / Workroom and Exhibit Storage**

Storage will be required for revolving exhibits and additional pieces of the collection as well as general storage. Space will be required for the restoration of artifacts and art as they are acquired by the museum for preparation to display.

**Community Research Room / Library**

The intention of this space is to serve as a library and resource center particularly dedicated to immigration and genealogy. Some resources might include digital copies of the Ellis Island register, old property records of Allegheny City and Pittsburgh among other genealogical databases.

**Mechanical and Maintenance**

A significant amount of room will need to be set aside for new mechanical systems that will be required to maintain the specific temperature and humidity required to display and store precious artifacts and artwork. Space for maintenance staff, equipment and reception of deliveries to the museum will also be required.

Introduction  
**The Program**

<b>Space</b>	<b>Square Feet</b>
Exhibit/Display Space	8000
Restrooms	400
Multipurpose Room	4000
Kitchen	1200
Admissions / Lobby	500
Gift Shop / Café	500
Administration	
Reception	100
Director Office	120
Curator Office	100
Co-curator Office	80
Business Office	200
Conference Room	200
Office Restroom	50
Maintenance Office	100
Exhibit Storage	1200
Restoration / Workroom	250
Community Research / Library	500
Facility Storage	750
Mechanical Room	1500
Receiving	250
<b>Total Area</b>	<b>20,000</b>

Proposal  
**The Options**

There are several options under consideration for the new Museum. Each option shares some of the same core considerations. The existing church building will become the major exhibit space in each of the options, using both the lower level and the main floor of the church. The church was built with no connection between the floors. A small elevator was added in the 1970's, but it is inadequate and does not meet current standards. A grand stair is proposed in each option that connects the main floor of the church to the lower level.

The church building has fallen into disrepair and will require major renovation. Significant renovations will be required for the stained glass windows as some are missing panels and/or beginning to sag away from their frames. In general the church building will need a major clean-up, repairs to the roof, new windows on the lower level, and repairs to the exterior walls and roof. Elevators for handicapped pedestrian access and service for moving exhibits will be added to the building. A new HVAC system will be required to provide the required temperature and humidity control per museum standards.

Each option will require significant new construction to house the operations of the museum. The new construction will more than double the size of the existing church. The new spaces will include the entrance lobby, café, shop, storage and mechanical spaces among other museum necessities. The options vary as to where the new construction is located and how the Museum is entered.

Proposal  
**The Options**

The options vary in the treatment of the existing Rectory, which, due to inconsistent floor heights in relation to the main church make it very difficult to tie in to the new Museum. There are options that propose to keep the Rectory and options in which the Rectory is demolished to make way for new construction.

In this Option, the existing Rectory, the existing Plaza, the existing stairs to the Grotto, and existing stairs to the Church building are retained.

The Main Entrance to the Museum complex is from a new plaza that will be constructed to the west of the Rectory at its main floor level. Entry will be thru the Rectory where the Gift Shop and Ticketing Office will be located. A new ramp will connect the main floor of the Rectory to the main floor of the Church building. To obtain the proper slope to the ramp, the ramp will be constructed in a U shape, the low point at the Rectory then towards Route 28 and continuing to slope up to the main level of the Church. The basement of the Rectory and the lower level of the Church are at approximately the same elevation, so a very gentle ramp beneath the upper level ramp will connect the two lower levels.

The upper levels of the Rectory will be used for Administrative Offices. A bridge connection to the Trail will be constructed at the third floor level of the Rectory. An elevator will be installed to connect all levels.

The Church will be used for Exhibits. The entrance to the Exhibits will be thru the front doors of the Church on the Main Level. The Main Level will be connected to the Lower Level by a grand stair located on the north side of the building beneath the large stained glass window. The loft will become the Research / Library space.

## Proposal

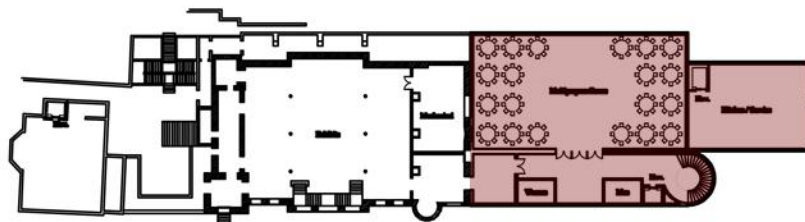
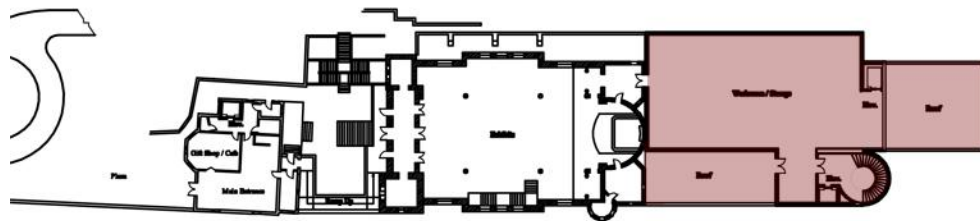
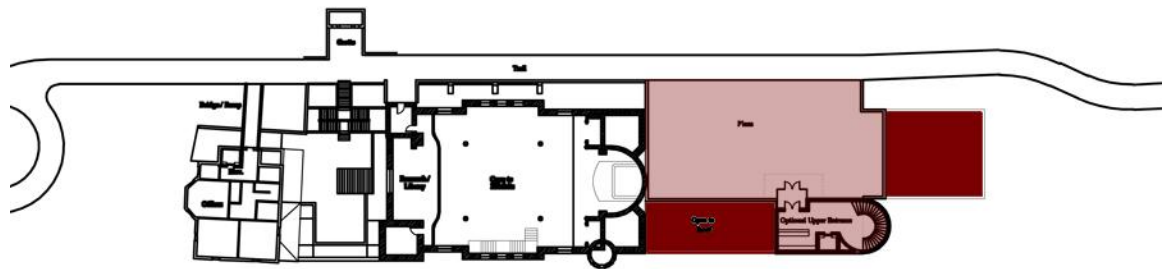
### **Option 1**

The new construction to the east of the Church will consist of two levels. On the lower level will be the large Multipurpose Room, Kitchen, and Service space. The upper level at the main level of the Church will be the Workroom and Storage area for the Museum. An optional third floor could be constructed to add a second entrance to the Museum at the level of the Grotto and Trail.

This option preserves to the greatest degree the original look and feel of the structures and Grotto around the small intimate plaza. The plaza is diminished somewhat by the necessary addition of the ramp.

Proposal

**Option 1**



Red denotes new construction



Proposal  
**Option 2**

In this Option, the existing Rectory, the existing Plaza, the existing stairs to the Grotto, and existing stairs to the Church building are retained.

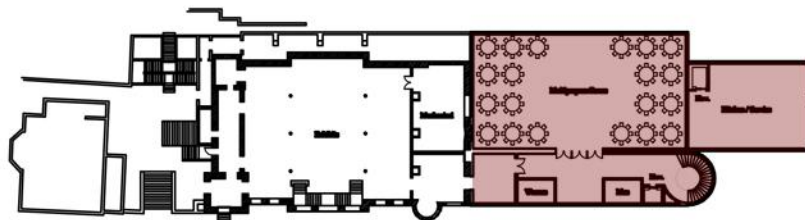
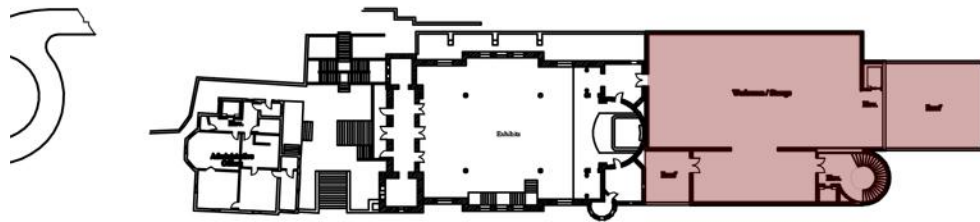
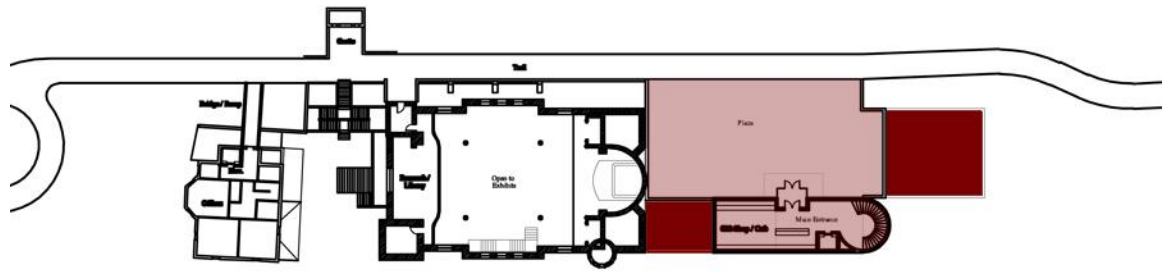
A three story addition will be constructed to the east of the Church in the existing parking lot. Entrance to the Museum will be at the Upper level of the new construction. The Upper level will be at the level of the Trail...the Main Entrance will be from the Trail. The Lower level of the new construction will contain the Multipurpose Room, the Kitchen, and Service spaces. The middle level will be used as the Museum Workroom and Storage areas. Elevators will be installed to provide accessible access to all areas of the building. Receiving will be located in the new construction as well with a new entrance to the existing parking lot as proposed by PennDOT.

The Church will be used for Exhibits. The entrance to the Exhibits will be at the Lower Level. The Lower Level will be connected to the Main Level by a grand stair located on the south side of the building beneath the large stained glass window. The loft will become the Research / Library space. The Rectory will be used for Administrative Offices. A bridge connection to the Trail will be constructed at the third floor level of the Rectory. An elevator will be installed to connect all levels.

This option retains the structures and the Grotto around the small intimate plaza, but makes the Museum entrance significantly more distant from the parking lot than the other options presented.

Proposal

Option 2



Red denotes new construction

Proposal  
**Option 3**

In this option, the Rectory is demolished to make way for new construction. However, the existing stairs to the Grotto and the existing stair to the Main Level of the Church are retained.

A two story addition will be constructed to the west of the Church where the Rectory is currently located. A new Plaza will be created a few feet higher in elevation than the existing Plaza. Beneath the Plaza will be the large Multipurpose Room located approximately six feet lower than the Lower Level of the Church. There will be a one-story entrance pavilion at Plaza level. The entrance pavilion will contain the Ticketing Office, Gift Shop, and stair and elevator to the Lower Level. The Lower Level will also provide access to the Church by way of a stair or a lift.

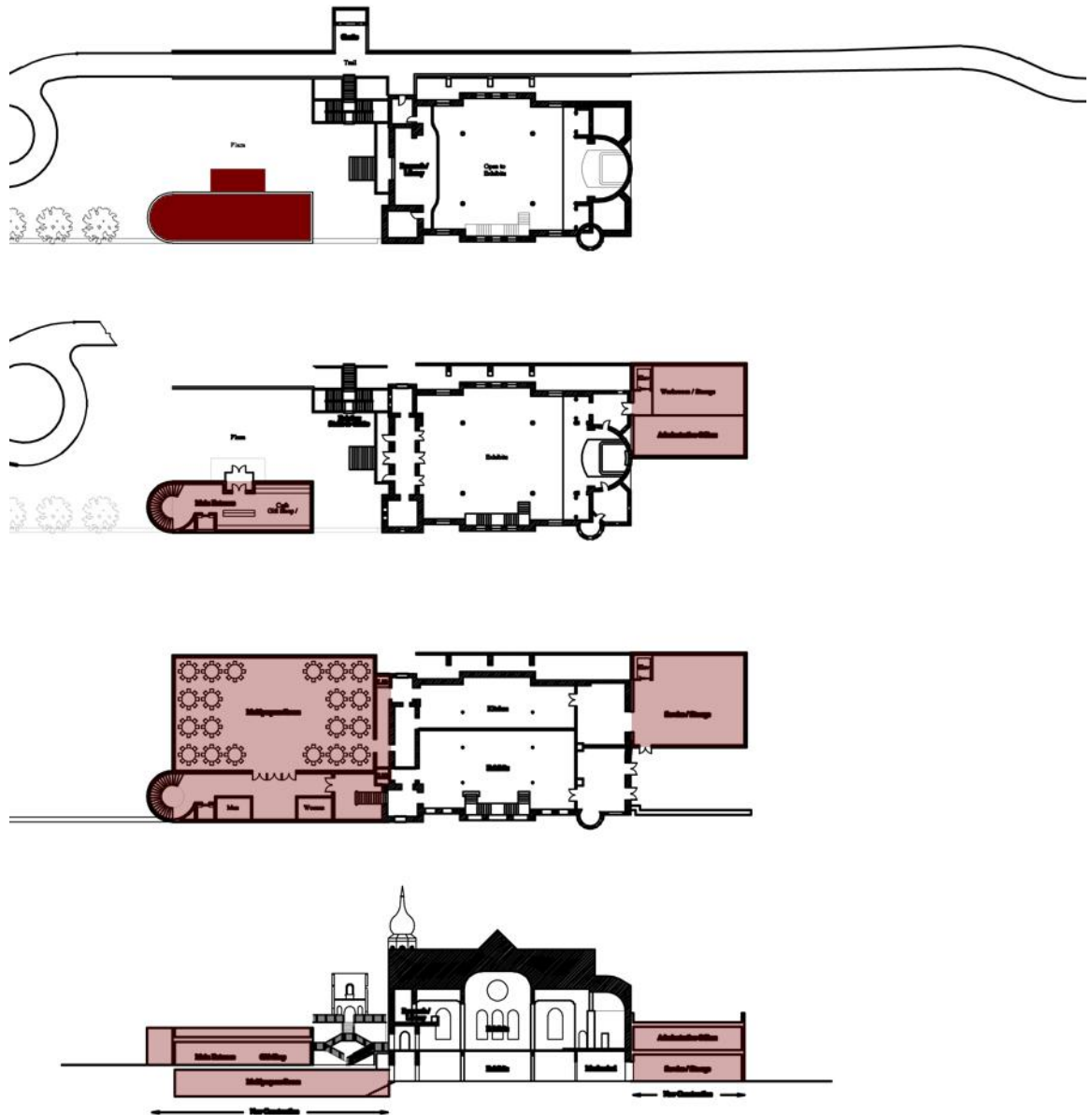
The Church will be used for Exhibits. The entrance to the Exhibits will be at the Lower Level. The Lower Level will be connected to the Main Level by a grand stair located on the south side of the building beneath the large stained glass window. The loft will become the Research / Library space. An elevator will be installed to connect all levels.

A two story addition will also be constructed to the east of the Church in the existing parking lot. The Lower level of this addition will contain the Service and Storage spaces. The Main Level will be used as the Museum Workroom and Storage areas and Administrative Offices. Elevators will be installed to provide accessible access to all areas of the building.

Receiving will be located in the new construction as well with a new entrance to the existing parking lot as proposed by PennDOT.

While this option results in the demolition of the Rectory and raises the plaza slightly, it retains much of the look and feel of the original plaza entrances to the Church and the Grotto. Placing the new entrance pavilion to the south edge of the site creates an expanded plaza shielded from highway noise and suitable for outdoor events and activities related to the Museum.

Proposal  
Option 3



Red denotes new construction

In this Option, the Rectory, the existing Plaza, the lower portion of the existing Grotto stair, and the existing stair to the Church are demolished. New construction is proposed on both the west side of the existing church where the existing Rectory is located and to the east side in the existing parking lot along Route 28.

The new construction to the west is a two story structure with a large plaza at the Main Level of the church building. The plaza will act as a gathering space at the Main Entrance to the Museum. Below the plaza will be a large single story structure at the lower level of the church building. This space will contain the Multipurpose Room and provide a connection to the church building. At Plaza Level on the south side, a one story entrance pavilion will be constructed. The main entrance is approached along axis with the main entrance to the existing church building. Visitors will enter the plaza with the new entrance to the Museum located on the right. The Ticketing Office, Gift Shop, and the elevator and stair are all located in this new building. The stairs from the plaza to the Grotto will be reconstructed to replicate the butterfly design of the original.

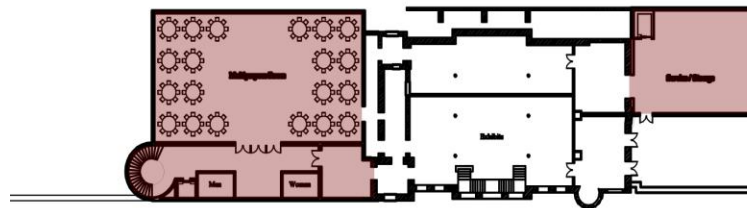
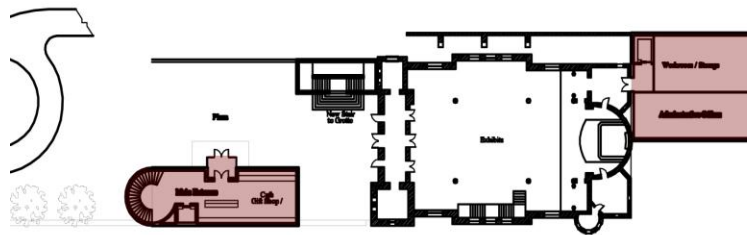
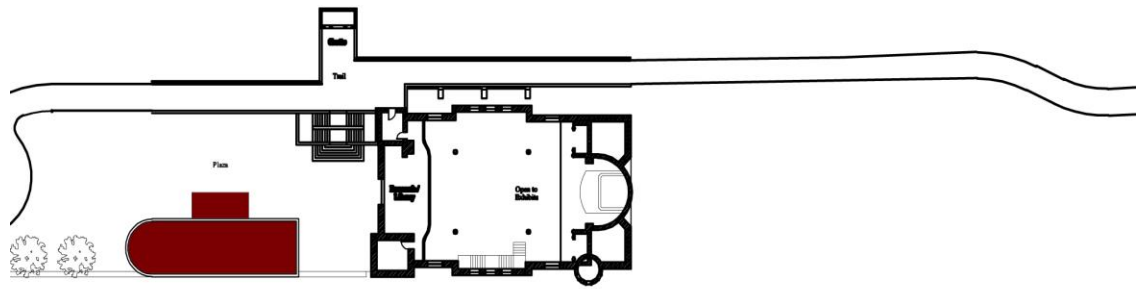
Visitors will enter through the entrance pavilion descend to the lower level where the multi-purpose room is located. Entrance to the exhibits is at this level.

The Church will be used for Exhibits. The entrance to the Exhibits will be at the Lower Level. The Lower Level will be connected to the Main Level by a grand stair located on the south side of the building beneath the large stained glass window. The loft will become the Research / Library space. An elevator will be installed to connect all levels.

New construction to the east consists of a two story structure containing Administration, storage, restoration and mechanical space. Receiving will be located in this new building with access from Route 28 with a new access point as proposed by PennDOT.

Similar to Option 3, with the primary difference being the elevation of the plaza and the new construction beneath it, this option shares the advantages of Option 3 in creating an expanded but shielded plaza suitable for outdoor events and programs.

Proposal  
Option 4



Red denotes new construction



In this Option, the Rectory, the existing Plaza, the lower portion of the existing Grotto stair, and the existing stair to the Church are demolished. New construction is proposed on both the west side of the existing church where the existing Rectory is located and to the east side in the existing parking lot along Route 28.

The new construction to the west is a three story structure with a large plaza at the Main Level of the church building. The plaza will act as a gathering space at the Main Entrance to the Museum. Below the plaza will be a large single story structure at the lower level of the church building. This space will contain the Multipurpose Room and provide a connection to the church building. There are two additional partial floors above against the hillside on the north, one at plaza level and one above at the Grotto / Trail level. There is an entrance proposed from both the plaza level and the Trail level. The main entrance is approached along axis with the main entrance to the existing church building. Visitors will enter the plaza with the new entrance to the Museum located on the left. The Ticketing Office, Gift Shop, and the elevator and stair are all located in this new building. There is a secondary entrance located at the upper level serving the Trail which ramps up between the new building and existing church and the hillside Grotto. The stairs from the plaza to the Grotto will be reconstructed to replicate the butterfly design of the original.

Visitors will enter through one of the new entrances and descend to the lowest level where the multi-purpose room is located. Entrance to the exhibits is at this level.

The Church will be used for Exhibits. The entrance to the Exhibits will be at the Lower Level. The Lower Level will be connected to the Main Level by a grand stair located on the south side of the building beneath the large stained glass window. The loft will become the Research / Library space. An elevator will be installed to connect all levels.

New construction to the east consists of a two story structure containing Administration, storage, restoration and mechanical space. Receiving will be located in this new building with access from Route 28 with a new access point as proposed by PennDOT.

This option reveals the grand west-facing façade of the Church, presently obscured by the Rectory. The façade would be highly visible to trail users and to the high volume of eastbound Rt 28 traffic. The expanded plaza would be suitable for outdoor programs or events, but would not be shielded from highway noise.

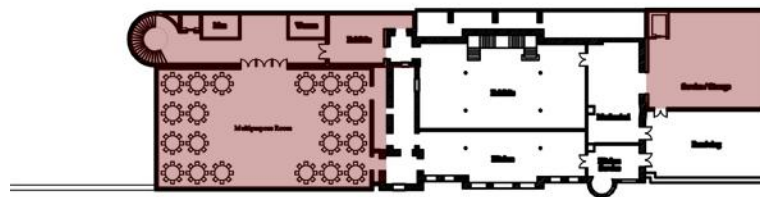
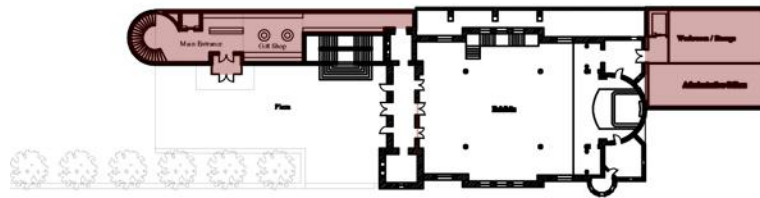
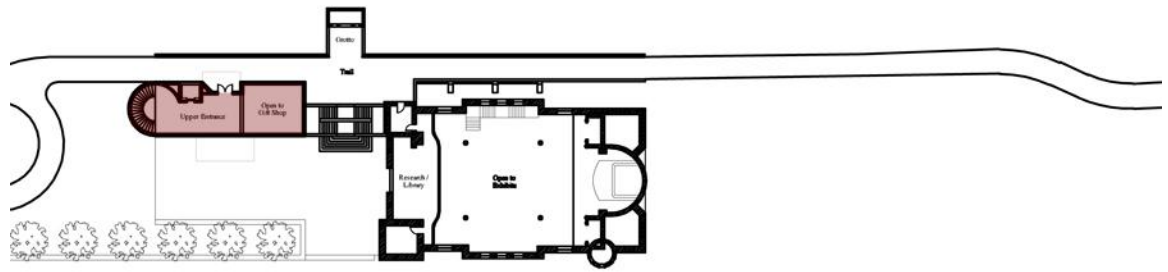
An adaptation to this option (similar to Option 3) would be to build the new construction below the Plaza at a lower elevation than shown on the drawings. This adaptation would have the advantage of preserving

Proposal

**Option 5**

more of the existing Grotto stairs, and would preserve the stairs from the Plaza up to the main level of the Church. The lower level of the new construction and the lower level of the existing Church would be at different elevation, therefore requiring a stair and lift.

Proposal  
Option 5



Red denotes new construction

Proposal  
**The Trail**

To connect the new parking lot to the Museum, a new trail is proposed. The Trail will extend from the new parking lot, to the existing church site, and continue along Route 28 a total of approximately one mile to the 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge. This new parking area is also adjacent to the pedestrian bridge leading over to the Sarah Heinz House, from which it is a short jog or pedal down to the Three Rivers Heritage Trail (TRHT). Ideally, the lot for the new Museum would serve as a Trail Head for the (THRT) that runs along the Allegheny River. The Trail from the parking lot to the Museum will also serve as a prelude to the Museum and could include features such as ethnic gardens and historic artifacts. The Trail, as it passes the Museum, will be at the level of the Grotto at the organ loft level of the existing Church or upper level of the Museum.

Trail users will be able to visit the hillside Grotto and view the existing Church from several vantage points without having to enter the Museum. Vistas from the site include Downtown as well as the Heinz Factory and the Strip District, major areas of commerce and employment for many of the early immigrants to the area. All of the proposed schemes for the new Museum include outdoor courtyard space and a café to serve both Museum patrons and users of the Trail.

The following map details the proposed parking lot and extension of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail (TRHT) system along Route 28. The map is rotated so that North is to the right. Starting at the top of the page (West) the path of the pedestrian footbridge connecting the Sarah Heinz House to Troy Hill Road is shown. It is here that we propose to create a new Trail Head allowing for a connection to the path along the Allegheny River (via the footbridge) as well as to the Museum site and beyond along the northern side of Route 28.

The Trail to the museum is in excess of one quarter mile. It is suggested that a transportation system be established consisting of golf cart type vehicles to transport handicapped and elderly visitors to the Museum. An additional lane for the transport vehicles will be created along this portion of the Trail to keep the bikes and transport vehicles separated. A loop turn-around is proposed as the Trail approaches the Museum.

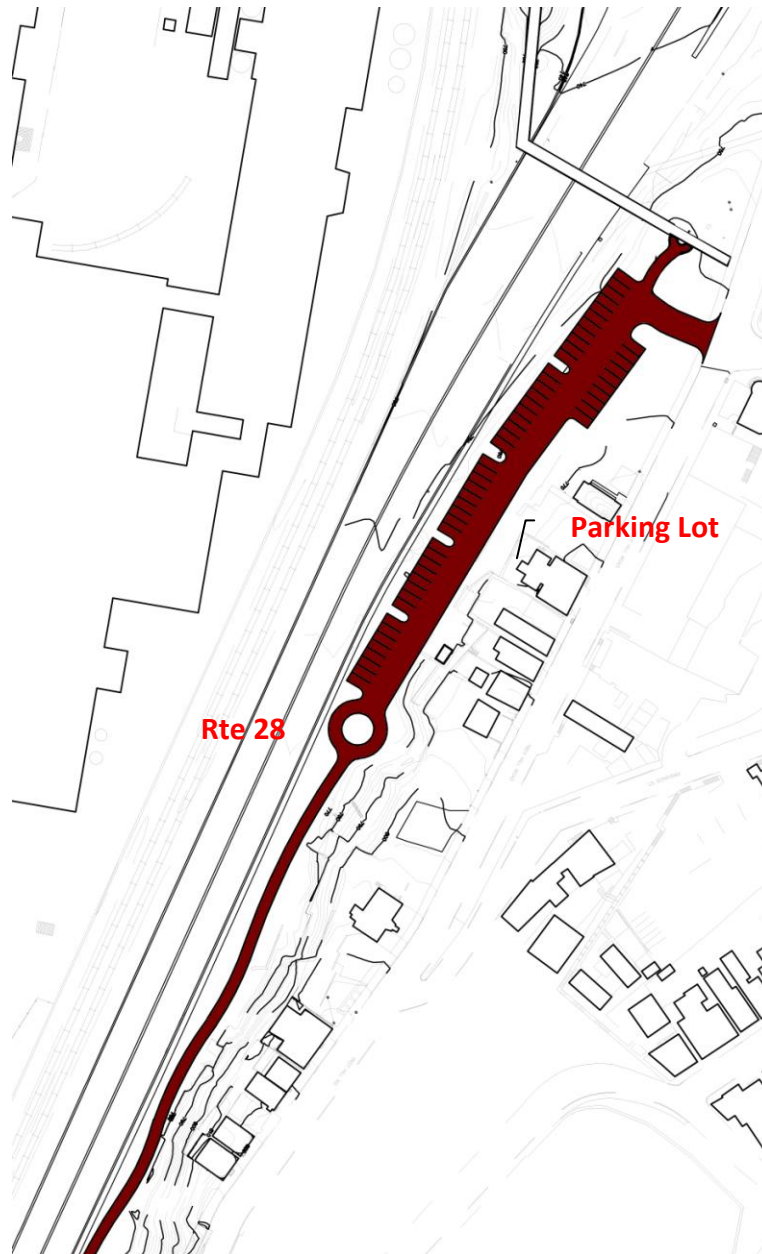
A parking area for bikes is planned near the Grotto allowing riders a chance to park and enjoy the site or visit the museum. From this vantage there is a view of the front of the church as well as across the river to downtown. From here the trail would proceed between the hillside and the church eventually grading back down close to the road level before reaching the intersection with the 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge. PennDot will be constructing a new bridge, crossing the realigned Route 28 that will allow riders safe passage to River Road and a connection to the TRHT.

This new Trail presents several significant advantages beyond servicing the proposed Museum. It creates a loop trail in combination with the existing TRHT, and it provides a direct neighborhood connection to the TRHT network.

Proposal  
The Trail

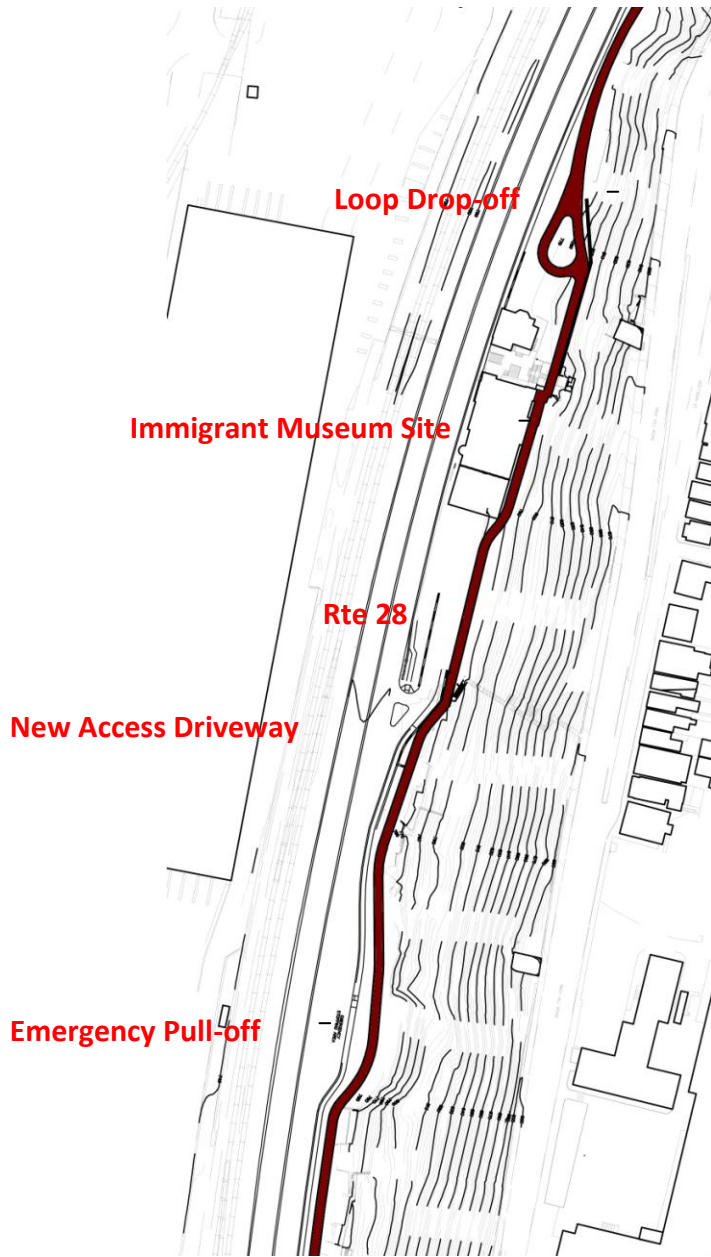






Trail Section 1

Proposal  
The Trail



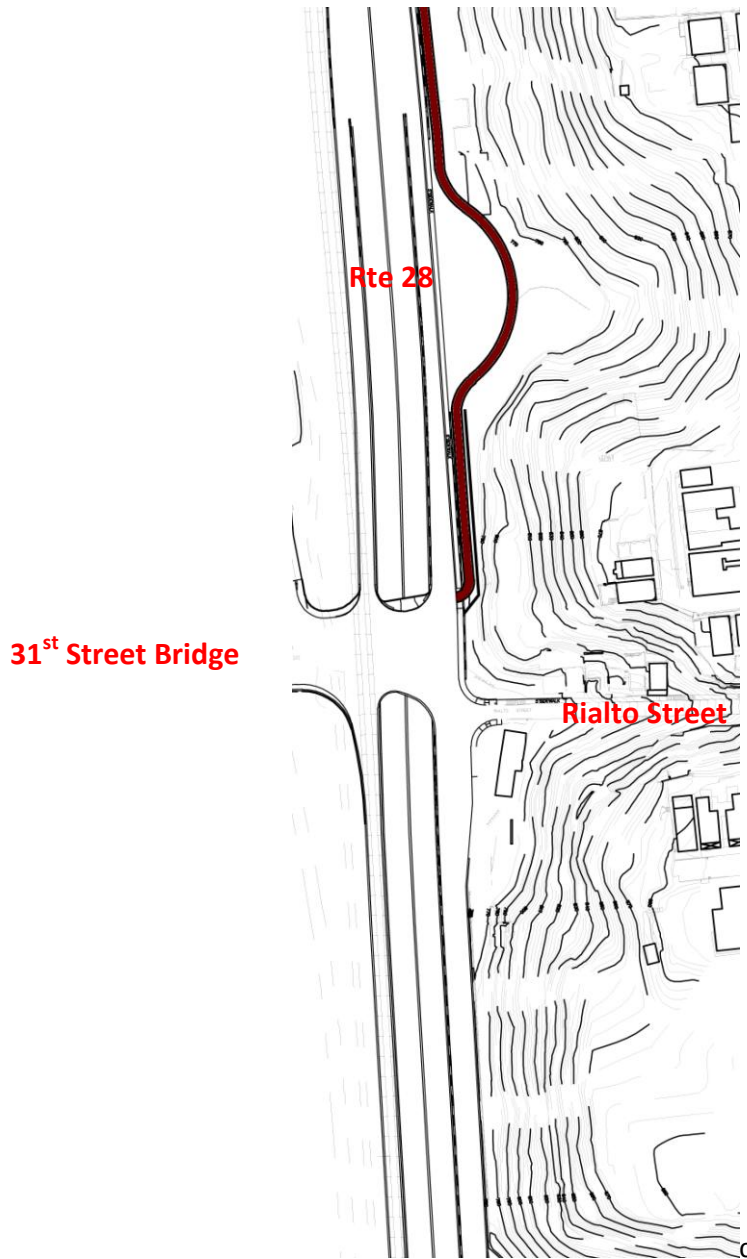
Trail Section 2

Proposal  
The Trail



Trail Section 3

Proposal  
The Trail



Trail Section 4

Proposal  
**Budget**

We believe that the estimated construction cost of each of the five proposed schemes will be essentially the same. A breakdown of our estimate follows. The estimate is itemized by room type with a cost per square foot identified based on the complexity of the space and the mechanical and electrical requirements. There is a separate line item of \$500,000 for restoration of the existing church building. This would include repairs to the existing brickwork, windows, and roofing. There is also a separate line item for parking and sitework. This does not include any dollars for the trail or for any new retaining walls that would be required to complete the trail.

We estimate the cost of the construction to be approximately \$350 per square foot, or about \$7,000,000.

Soft costs for the following are not included in this estimate:

- architectural and engineering fees
- construction management fees
- exhibits or exhibit design
- furniture and furnishings

Proposal  
Budget

Space	Square Feet	Cost per SF	Cost (USD)
Exhibit/Display Space	8000	300	2,400,000
Restrooms	400	250	100,000
Multipurpose Room	4000	300	1,200,000
Kitchen	1200	400	480,000
Admissions / Lobby	500	250	125,000
Gift Shop / Café	500	250	125,000
Administration			
Reception	100	200	20,000
Director Office	120	200	24,000
Curator Office	100	200	20,000
Co-curator Office	80	200	16,000
Business Office	200	200	40,000
Conference Room	200	200	40,000
Office Restroom	50	250	12,500
Maintenance Office	100	200	20,000
Exhibit Storage	1200	200	240,000
Restoration / Workroom	250	300	75,000
Community Research / Library	500	250	125,000
Facility Storage	750	150	112,500
Mechanical Room	1500	150	225,000
Receiving	250	200	50,000
Total Area	20,000		\$5,460,000
Restoration Cost of Church			\$500,000
Sitework and Parking			\$1,000,000
<b>Total Construction Cost</b>			<b>\$6,960,000</b>

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Rectory from Route 28 Sidewalk



Front of Church from 28 Sidewalk



Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Rear of Church and Parking Lot



Rectory



Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Entry Stairs



Above Courtyard to Route 28

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Hillside Grotto Altar



Hillside Grotto

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Rectory



Left (Hill) Side of Church

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Front Façade of Church



Left Bell Tower



Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Church Floor from Choir Loft



Choir Loft

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Existing Light Fixture



Column Detail

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Congregation to Altar

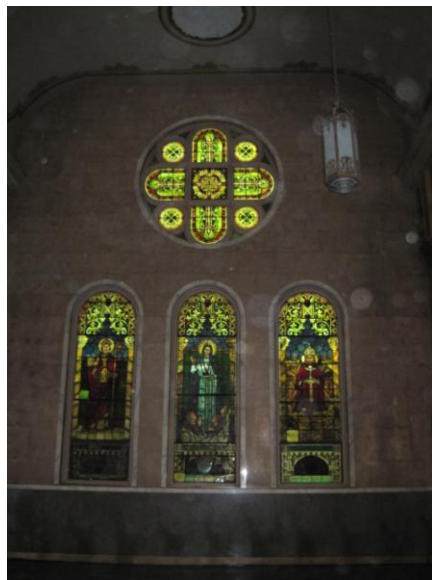


Congregation to Choir Loft

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Altar Close



Stained Glass Windows



Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Loft to Side Chapel Below



Ceiling at Crossing

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Stair to Loft



Basement Common Room

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Existing Bar



Existing Bowling Lanes

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Various Stone Ornamentation



Rectory Reception Wall

Appendix  
Existing Photographs



Rectory Kitchen



Rectory Dining