



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Advisory Board Proposes Unmanned Interpretive Center at K-25

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board has weighed in on the K-25 building historic preservation debate by recommending that DOE build an unmanned interpretive center at the site. The 20-member board also recommended that Manhattan Project exhibits at the American Museum of Science and Energy be expanded with a K-25 interpretive center making use of existing staff, space, infrastructure, and artifacts to explain its role more fully.

The recommendations, passed at the board's February 11 meeting, were a follow-up to recommendations made last year when there was still hope of reclaiming part of the K-25 building's entire north tower. Although DOE has not made a formal announcement, the agency has mentioned that the tower may be unsalvageable because of its deteriorated state and the cost and safety factors involved in converting it to some sort of interpretive center or museum.

K-25 was the first facility to use the gaseous diffusion process to enrich uranium that was used to manufacture the first atomic bombs. It also supplied enriched uranium for use in nuclear power reactors. It operated from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s. All operations at the K-25 site, which included a number of other gaseous diffusion facilities, were ceased in the 1980s.

Demolition of K-25 has already started at the end of one of the legs of the building. DOE-ORO must make a determination by March if it will indeed demolish the North Tower and how it will commemorate the building's historic significance. Steve McCracken, DOE's Oak Ridge Assistant Manager for Environmental Management, has said that he doesn't want to demolish the North Tower until some acceptable plan is in place with the historical preservation consulting parties to properly memorialize the building.

In 2005 an agreement was reached among DOE, the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Oak Ridge, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association to preserve the North Tower of K-25, which connects the two long 'legs' of the mile-long U-shaped building, for historical purposes.

Since that agreement was reached there have been many ideas proposed on how best to preserve the historical significance of the building using the North Tower as a museum or interpretive center. A recent idea proposed by the Partnership for K-25 Preservation is to build a staffed interpretive center near the south end of the building site.

At its February meeting the advisory board agreed with the concept of an interpretive center but recommended that it be an unmanned, self-guided center for tourists, which would save on staffing and maintenance costs. It would contain displays, photographs, artifacts, and representations explaining the history of the Manhattan Project and the role K-25 played in the effort to build the first atomic weapons. An even more thorough exhibit at the American Museum of Science and Energy would economically complement and provide synergy for the K-25 center and take advantage of existing museum amenities, as well as the flow of visitors.

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board is a federally appointed citizens' panel that provides independent advice and recommendations to DOE Oak Ridge on its Environmental Management Program. Complete text of the board's recommendation can be accessed through its website at www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab/recc.htm.

The board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 475 Oak Ridge Turnpike, Oak Ridge. The meetings are open to the public. For information, call (865) 241-4583 or 241-4584.

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