The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Report relating to the proposed construction of the National Bicentennial Science Centre within the Parliamentary zone

March 1986

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(Thirty-fourth Parliament)

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CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

Introduction

1. Clause 4(a) of the resolution of appointment of the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House provides that:

> "... the Committee also consider and report on matters coming within the terms of section 5 of the Parliament Act 1974 as may be referred to it by the Minister responsible for administering the National Capital Development Commission Act 1957."

2. Section 5 of the Parliament Act 1974 gives Parliament control over the erection of buildings or other work within the Parliamentary zone which is defined in section 3 of the Act. Sub-section 5(1) of the Act provides as follows:

> "No building or other work is to be erected on land within the Parliamentary zone unless the Minister has caused a proposal for the erection of the building or work to be laid before each House of the Parliament and the proposal has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament."

3. On 12 February 1986 the Minister for Territories, as the Minister responsible for administering the National Capital Development Commission Act 1957, referred to the Committee a proposal to construct the National Bicentennial Science Centre on the corner of Parkes Place West and King Edward Terrace, which is within the Parliamentary zone.

4. The Committee has examined the history of the proposal, its siting and design and the implications of these aspects for the future development of the Parliamentary zone. This Report on the proposal is divided into 5 parts:

   (a) objectives;

   (b) background;

   (c) siting;

   (d) design and costing, and

   (e) conclusion

Objectives

5. The objectives of the National Science Centre may be described as follows:

   (a) to provide access to the centre's resources for the population outside the capital cities;

   (b) to exchange exhibits with appropriate scientific institutions in each State and Territory, and to conduct joint public-awareness programs;

   (c) to demonstrate Australia's contribution to science and technology;

   (d) to promote the dissemination of knowledge in science and technology to all members of the public, with the co-operation of the scientific community and industry;

   (e) to establish, administer and seek donations to a fund or funds to be used to promote the centre's stated objectives, and

   (f) to act as a focus for science activities among Australia's nearest neighbours.

6. The influence of the National Science Centre would be felt across Australia through its extension and information services, its liaison with the makers of radio and television programs and writers of press articles, and its contribution to the education of young people. The headquarters of the centre could serve a Canberra population of nearly a quarter of a million people and an estimated 2.9 million visitors to the city each year.

7. The centre would serve the scientific community by providing an interface with the public on social issues, and with industry by demonstrating its dependence on innovation. It would serve governments by creating greater community awareness for, and understanding of, the consequences of technological change and for the opportunities it creates for the future. But, above all, it would serve all Australians by whetting latent scientific appetites and feeding them with experiences which contribute to the development of better informed and more responsible citizens.

8. Primarily, the centre is seen as being dynamic and participatory in nature (involving all the senses), with an education function aimed at the full range of the population in all parts of Australia. It would provide an exposure to the future as much as an experience of the present.

9. By means of interactive displays rather than passive artifacts, the centre can serve as an instrument of science, technology and engineering, providing 'hands-on' experience aimed at imparting awareness, understanding and (indirectly) skill to participants.

Background

10. A draft national program of Bicentennial projects and events was submitted by the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) to the Commonwealth Government in July 1982 which in turn committed $166m (July 1982 prices) towards the cost of the program of celebrations.

11. The ABA established a number of committees to examine and report on a range of possibilities to celebrate Australia's Bicenentary in 1988. One committee was specifically tasked to consider and report to government on the possible construction of a new national science centre.

12. In August 1984 this advice was presented to government which agreed that a small planning committee be established to develop further this proposal for a national science centre. This committee was to report to the Minister for Science (formerly Science and Technology) who, in turn, was to bring before government in early 1985 fully costed proposals for the construction and operation of such a centre. To assist in providing this advice the government agreed that the headquarters of the proposed Centre should be located in Canberra, and that the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) should proceed with site analysis and design studies.

Siting

13. A number of alternative sites for the science centre were analysed and tested by the NCDC as part of a feasibility study completed in late 1984. That study found that, as a national institution, the Bicentennial Science Centre warranted a prestige site. The Parliamentary zone would afford appropriate siting opportunities, raising the project to the same status in the public consciousness as exemplified in the arts and letters through the National Library of Australia and the Australian National Gallery.

14. By attracting families and large numbers of school children the Science Centre would inject a sense of activity to the zone, whilst enhancing the visitors' perception of the National Area of Canberra.

15. The feasibility study concluded that the most logical site for the Centre would be adjacent to the proposed Archives and Exposition building, forming a precinct with the National Library of Australia. This site was preferred both because of the prominent position and because of the positive contribution it could make to the Parliamentary zone.

16. The Committee supports these reasons for siting the National Bicentennial Science Centre within the Parliamentary zone. It provides a unique opportunity to inject a sense of vitality and activity into the Parliamentary zone. It will enable the location of a significant visitor attraction in the zone, an attraction that will be for families and school children. The major opportunity is for the Bicentennial

Science Centre, working in urban concert with the Archives and National Library, to allow a popular and 'user friendly' facility in the Parliamentary zone, where it could become the 'family focus' of the Parliamentary zone.

Design and Costing

17. In designing the building, the Architect has attempted to reinforce the idea of the building as a dynamic, 'hands-on' experience in the way that visitors move through the building. From the foyer visitors will proceed up a ramp to the top of a large drum, around which are grouped the various exhibition galleries at different levels. Visitors proceed from gallery to gallery via a circular ramp inside the drum. This arrangement will be, at the same time, easy to understand and a stimulating journey.

18. En route from the top of the drum back to the exit, visitors will also be taken through the workshop area so that they can observe new experiments being made. The galleries themselves are rather like television studios in that natural light will be excluded to allow maximum dramatic effect to be obtained from the individual lighting of the various experiments. The building will, nevertheless, have a very open appearance because of the transparency of the foyer, from which the passing pedestrian or motorist will be able to see the ramp, the drum, the coffee shop, the bookshop and various experiments which will be located within it.

19. Another important determinant in the form of the building is the desirability of maintaining public access to the theatres independent of the galleries. This has been achieved by locating the theatres with the administration area in a quadrant shaped block on the opposite side of the foyer to the galleries.

20. The materials used on the exterior of the building match those intended to be used on the proposed National Archive and Exposition. Rich material such as Tarana Granite will be used at ground level and ceramic tiles and precast concrete on the upper walls.

21. The design for the National Bicentennial Science Centre is quite unlike all other buildings in the Parliamentary zone in that the foyer acts as a 'shop front' through which visitors can sense what happens in the building. This idea is enhanced by the Science Court on the north side of the building where visitors to the national capital will be able to engage in experiments, largely with water, even when the building is closed.

22. Experience overseas has shown that science centres are immensely successful because they draw all sections of the community. The combination of this use and the open nature of the building will do much to increase the vitality of the Parliamentary zone.

23. The estimated cost of the project is approximately $14m at December 1984 prices and funds will be provided by the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

24. The attached plans show the location and design of the work.

Conclusion

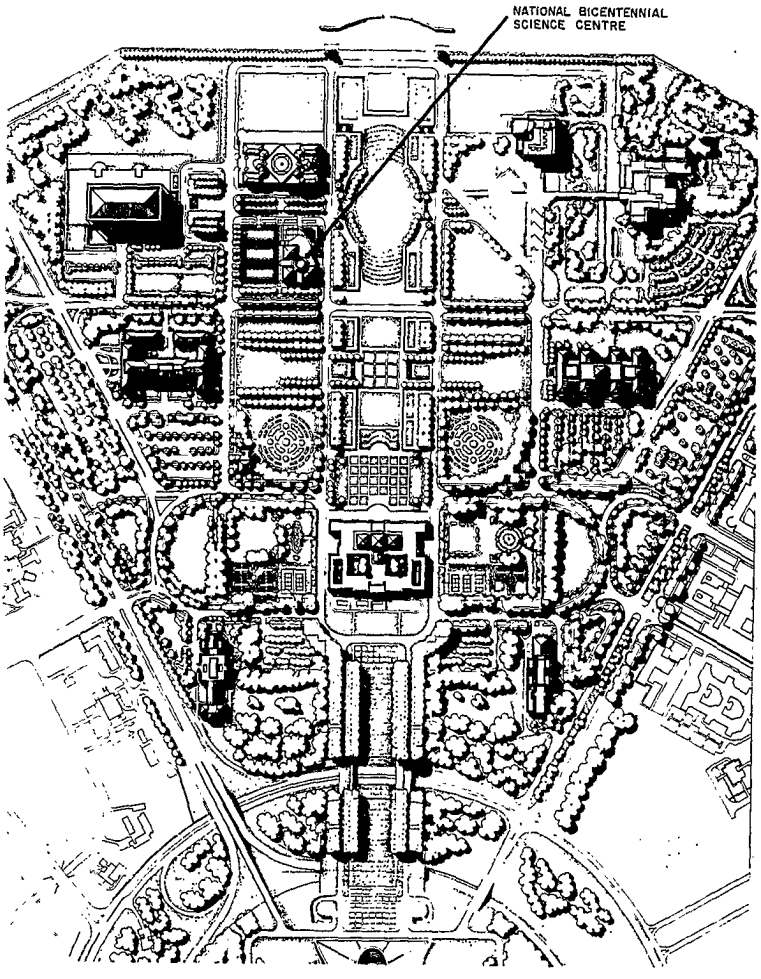
25. The Committee endorses the concept of the National Bicentennial Science Centre and recommends construction of the work referred to it.

(D. McCLELLAND)
President of the Senate

(J. CHILD)
Speaker of the House
of Representatives

Joint Chairmen

21 March 1986



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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL
SCIENCE CENTRE

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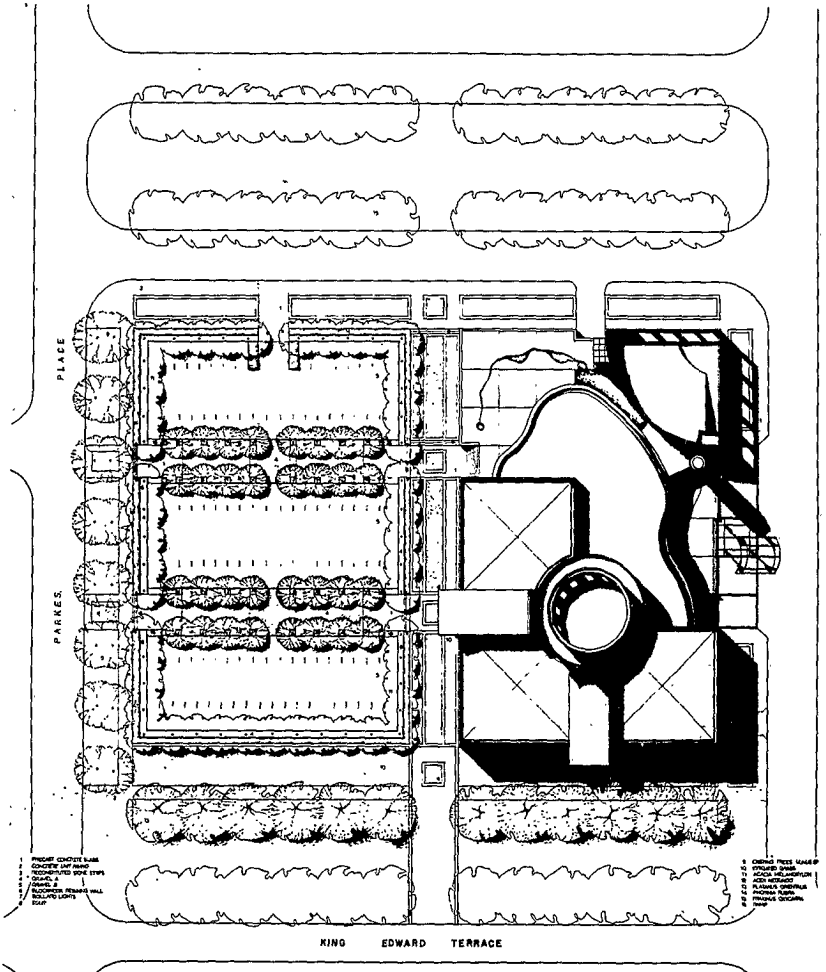

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

LANDSCAPE AND ROOF PLAN

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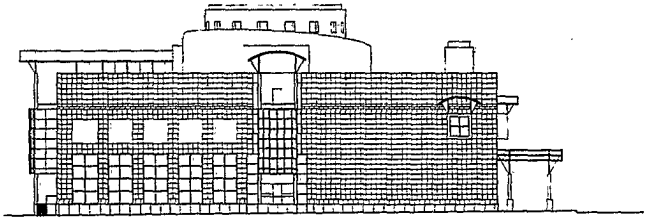

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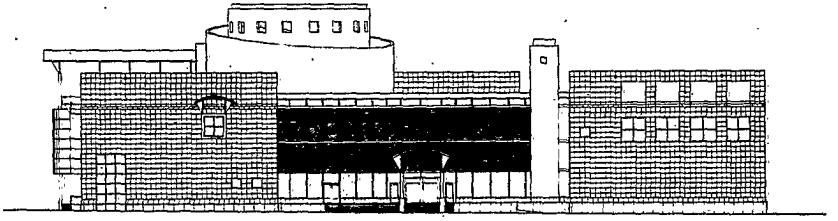

SOUTH EAST

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

ELEVATIONS

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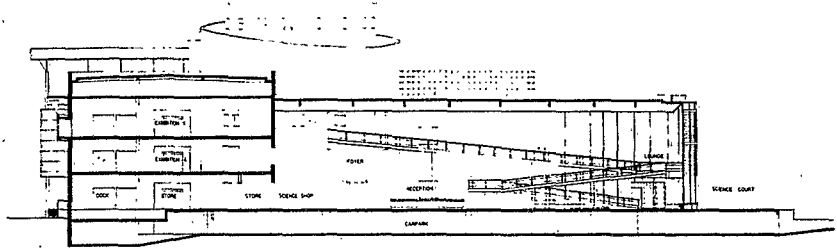

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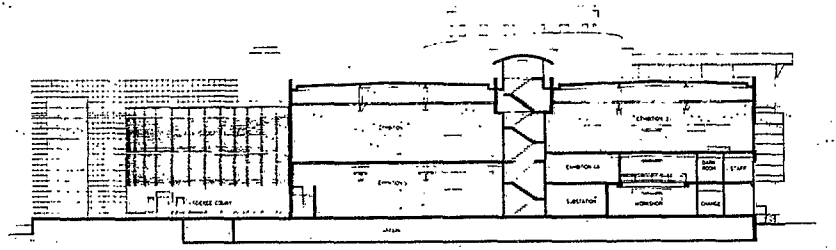

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

SECTIONS

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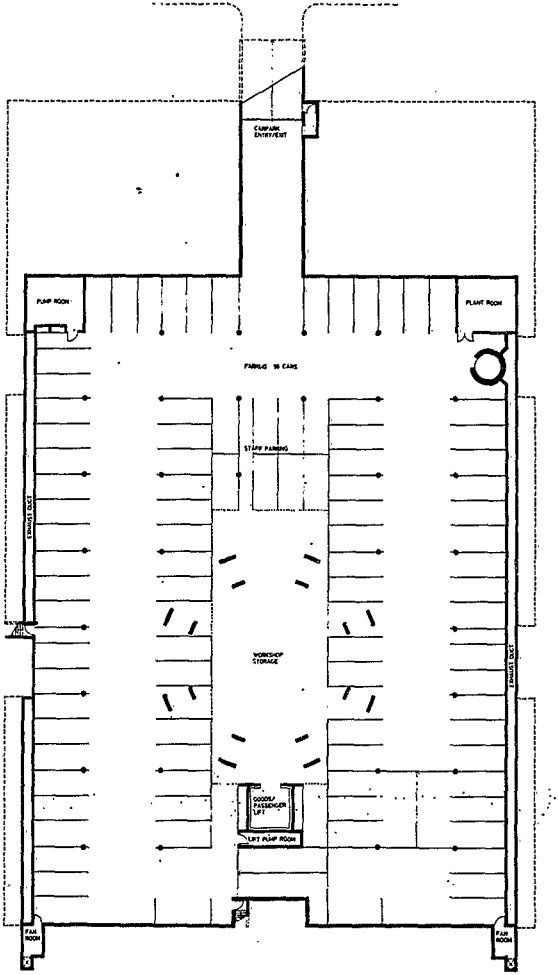

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

BASEMENT PLAN

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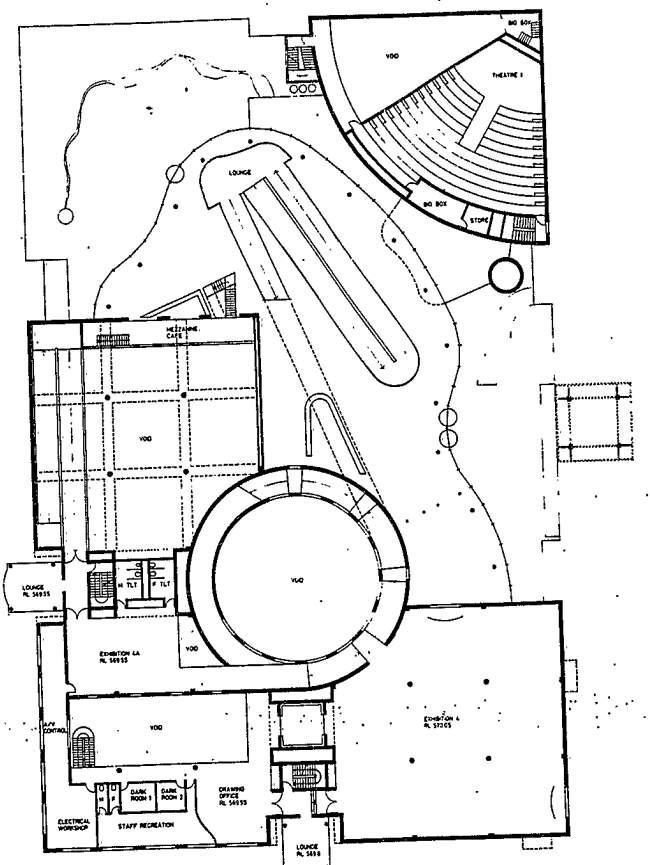

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

LEVEL 1 PLAN

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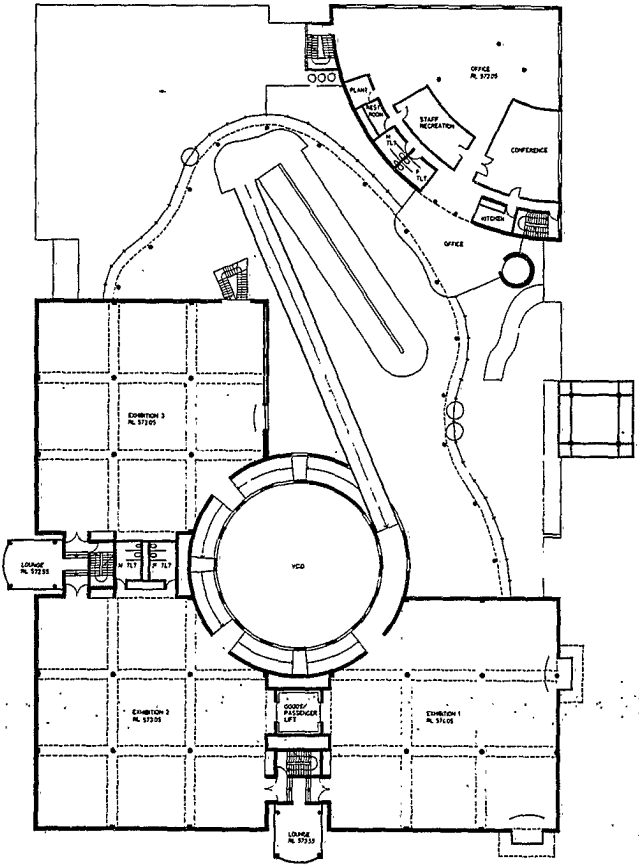

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

LEVEL 2 PLAN

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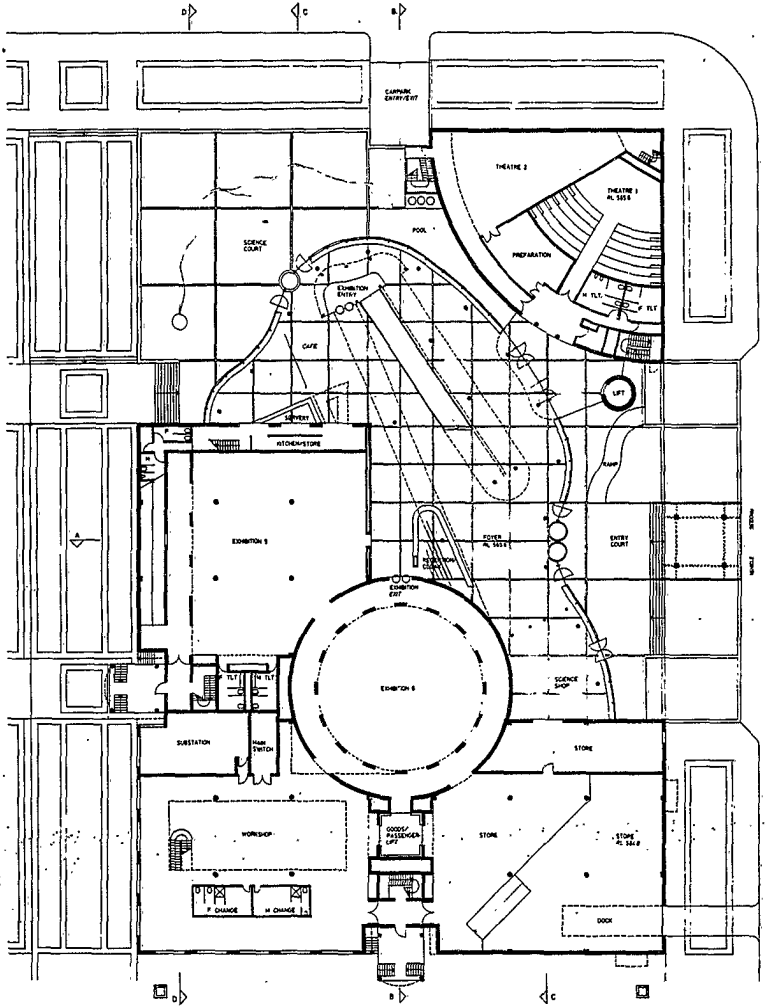

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

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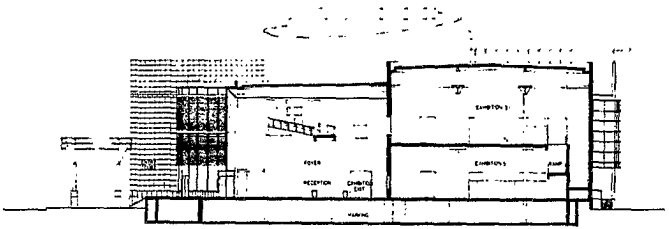

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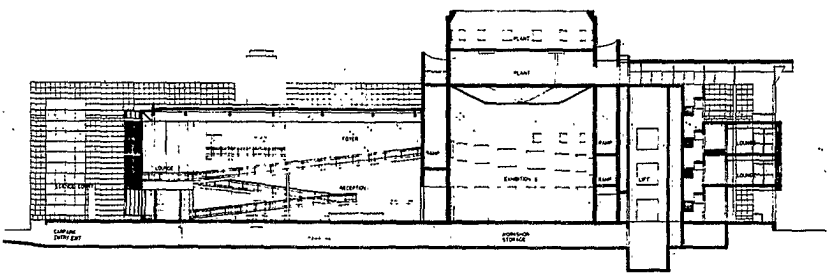

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NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

SECTIONS

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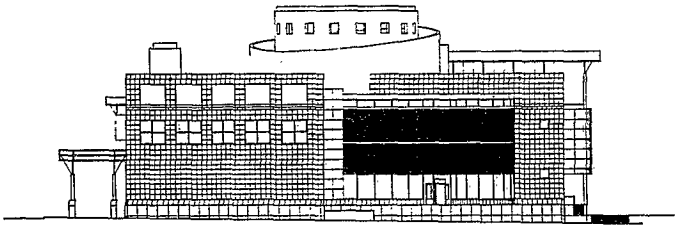

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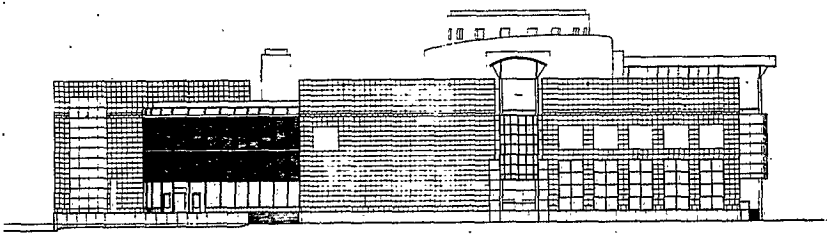

NORTH WEST

National Capital Development Commission

NATIONAL BICENTENNIAL SCIENCE CENTRE

ELEVATIONS

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