CONCEPT PROPOSAL · FOR DISCUSSION

The National Museum of **Artificial Intelligence**

A civic institution for how a nation lives with, questions, and shapes the most consequential technology of our age.

PROPOSED SITE
Forsyth & Carondelet · Clayton, MO

REGION
Greater St. Louis

DOCUMENT
Vision & Feasibility Concept

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An institution for the AI century — built in the American heartland.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping work, learning, art, medicine, and civic life faster than any society has been asked to absorb before. Yet the United States has no dedicated public institution where citizens can go to understand it — not merely the machinery, but what it *means* for ordinary lives. This proposal outlines the **National Museum of Artificial Intelligence** (NMAI): a landmark museum, research forum, and public square dedicated to the human experience of intelligent machines.

What it is

A flagship cultural institution of roughly **120,000 square feet** combining permanent and rotating galleries, a live-programming forum, an education and skills center, and civic gathering space. Its subject is not the circuitry of AI but its consequences: how intelligent systems change how we live, decide, create, and relate to one another.

Where

A prominent undeveloped parcel in the **Forsyth–Carondelet corridor of downtown Clayton, Missouri** — the county seat of St. Louis County — bracketed by Washington University to the west and Clayton's business district, hotels, and convention amenities to the south.

THE PROPOSAL AT A GLANCE

Institution type	**501(c)(3) museum**
Building	**~120,000 sq ft**
Site	**Clayton, MO**
Campaign target	**~$110M**
Incl. endowment	**~$35M**
Projected attendance	**450–600K / yr**
Anchor partner	**Washington Univ.**
Timeline to open	**~4 years**

> Why here? Because the story of AI is a national story — not a coastal one. Placing it in the heartland is itself the argument.

The case for St. Louis rests on three pillars developed in this document: a **genuine origin story** (the corridor sits within a mile of where one of AI's defining figures grew up); a **deliberate national statement** (a museum about how the whole country grapples with AI belongs where the country lives); and **uncommon civic readiness** — a research university, a deep philanthropic tradition, walkable amenities, and available land in one district.

What follows is a vision, a site study, an architectural direction, a gallery program, and a first view of governance and funding — intended to open a founding conversation.

THE CASE

A museum of consequences, not circuitry.

Every transformative technology eventually earns an institution that helps a society make sense of it. Photography, flight, the atom, and the space program each produced museums that did more than display hardware — they gave the public a place to reckon with change. Artificial intelligence has arrived faster and reaches deeper into daily life than any of them, and it has no such home.

The gap we fill

Excellent institutions preserve the *history* of computing. What does not exist is a public place devoted to the *lived experience* of AI: the parent wondering what it means for a child's classroom, the nurse whose diagnostics now include a model's second opinion, the worker whose trade is shifting, the voter navigating synthetic media, the artist collaborating with a machine.

Mission

To help the public understand, question, and shape artificial intelligence — advancing an informed, hopeful, and clear-eyed relationship between people and intelligent machines — so that no community is left on the far side of the AI divide.

What visitors leave with

- **Literacy.** A working intuition for what these systems do, and honestly do not do.
- **Perspective.** A long view — from Babbage and Turing to the present — that makes today legible.
- **Agency.** The sense that AI's trajectory is a set of human choices, and that they have a stake in them.
- **Judgment.** Room to sit with hard questions — bias, labor, creativity, truth, safety — without being told what to conclude.

> The museum's guiding stance: *wonder without hype, and scrutiny without fear.*

4

pillars of the visitor journey: Origins · Everyday · Frontier · Choices

3

audiences held in balance: families & students, professionals, and the curious public

1

national conversation that currently has no civic home

A balanced institution

Credibility depends on independence. NMAI is conceived as a nonpartisan, non-commercial institution that presents multiple viewpoints — the optimism of AI's builders and the concerns of its critics — and lets visitors weigh them. It neither markets the industry nor campaigns against it. That neutrality is the source of its authority and the reason serious partners across the field can support it.

LOCATION RATIONALE

Why St. Louis. Why Clayton.

The obvious home for a museum of AI would be Silicon Valley. That is precisely why it should be built somewhere else. A national institution about how the *country* lives with AI makes its first argument through its address.

> St. Louis was America's *Gateway to the West*. NMAI makes it the gateway to the AI frontier — and a promise that the heartland won't be left behind on the way there.

1 A true origin story

The narrative anchor is real, not manufactured. **Sam Altman** — among the most consequential figures of the modern AI era — grew up in Clayton, Missouri, the very district proposed here, and attended nearby John Burroughs School. The site sits within roughly a mile of that boyhood home. Few cities can claim a more direct human tie to AI's defining chapter, and great institutions are built on authentic stories of place. This connection is the cornerstone of the museum's founding narrative and lead-gift strategy — an invitation for the region's own to underwrite a national institution rooted in its soil.

2 A deliberate national statement

AI is not a coastal phenomenon; its consequences land hardest in the broad middle of the country — in classrooms, clinics, warehouses, farms, and main streets. A museum here insists that this technology belongs to *everyone*, and that the communities most likely to be left behind must instead have a front-row seat to understanding and shaping it. Building it at America's crossroads — rather than in the industry's company towns — is the whole point.

3 Uncommon civic readiness

Clayton offers, inside a single walkable district, what most cities cannot assemble: a world-class research university next door (Washington University), a deep and proven tradition of civic philanthropy, ample hotels and convention amenities steps away, direct highway and light-rail access, and prominent developable land. The institution can be born into a fully formed civic ecosystem rather than building one from scratch.

ST. LOUIS MUSEUM CULTURE

St. Louis is a rare American city where flagship cultural institutions — the Art Museum, History Museum, Science Center, and Zoo — are **free to the public** and civically beloved. NMAI would enter a metro that already understands museums as public goods and knows how to sustain them.

THE ANTI-COASTAL ADVANTAGE

Distance from the industry is a feature. It reinforces the museum's independence, widens its audience, lowers its cost base, and lets it convene builders and critics on genuinely neutral ground — a Midwestern table rather than a company town.

THE SITE

A gateway corner in downtown Clayton.

The proposed parcel sits on the green wedge where **Forsyth Boulevard and Carondelet Plaza converge** in the heart of downtown Clayton — prominent, undeveloped land on one of the most visible corners in the region. To the east, Forsyth runs to the front door of Washington University's Danforth campus; to the south sit Clayton's hotels and business core. The corner bridges the university and the city.

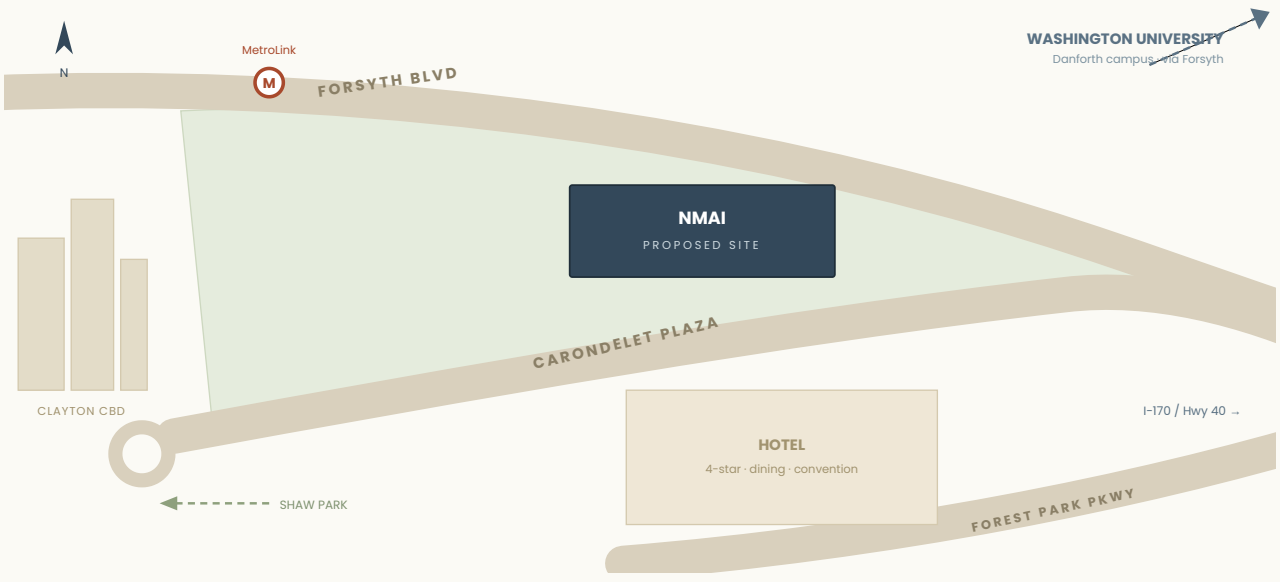

FIGURE 1 — SITE CONTEXT PLAN (SCHEMATIC, NOT TO SCALE) NMAI · CLAYTON, MO

Why this corner works

- **Adjacency to Washington University** — a live pipeline of scholarship, students, and credibility, steps across Forsyth.
- **Ample amenities on the doorstep** — the Ritz-Carlton next door, plus additional walkable hotels and convention halls, support out-of-town visitors, galas, and conferences.
- **Effortless access** — direct highway connections and the Clayton MetroLink light-rail station; ~15 minutes to Lambert International Airport.

A civic front porch

The design treats the corner as public space, not just a building footprint: a landscaped forecourt and open ground-floor arcade extend the museum into the street, giving Clayton a new civic room that is active whether or not one buys a ticket.

ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT

The Gateway and the Cortex.

The building's form carries the idea: a grounded *Gateway* of St. Louis limestone at the street, and a luminous, floating *Cortex* above — the human foundation and the intelligence it has built, held in one gesture.

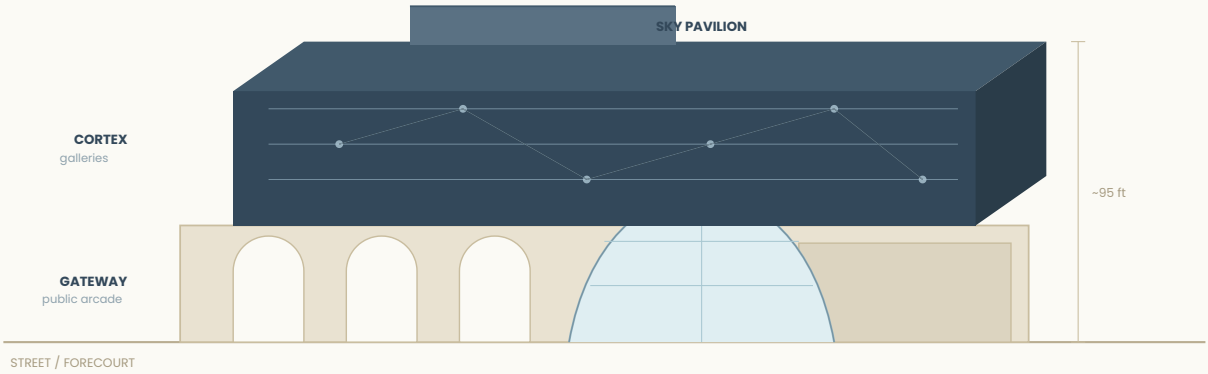

FIGURE 2 — WEST ELEVATION, STUDY (SCHEMATIC) MASSING CONCEPT

Design principles

- **Rooted & radical.** Regional limestone below; an inventive, light-filled machine-for-thinking above.
- **Porous at the street.** A public arcade and forecourt make the ground floor an open civic room.
- **Legible section.** Visitors ascend from human origins to the frontier — the building is the argument.

The Gateway window

A single catenary arch — the mathematical curve of the Gateway Arch — is cut through the plinth as the museum's great window and threshold, tying the institution unmistakably to St. Louis while framing the city skyline from within.

Massing shown is a concept study to communicate intent; final form to be developed with a design architect through competition.

THE VISITOR JOURNEY

The Ascent — from origins to horizon.

The museum is organized as a climb. Visitors enter at the human scale and rise, level by level, through the story of intelligence — ending in daylight, looking out over the city, with the future framed as a set of open questions rather than a foregone conclusion.

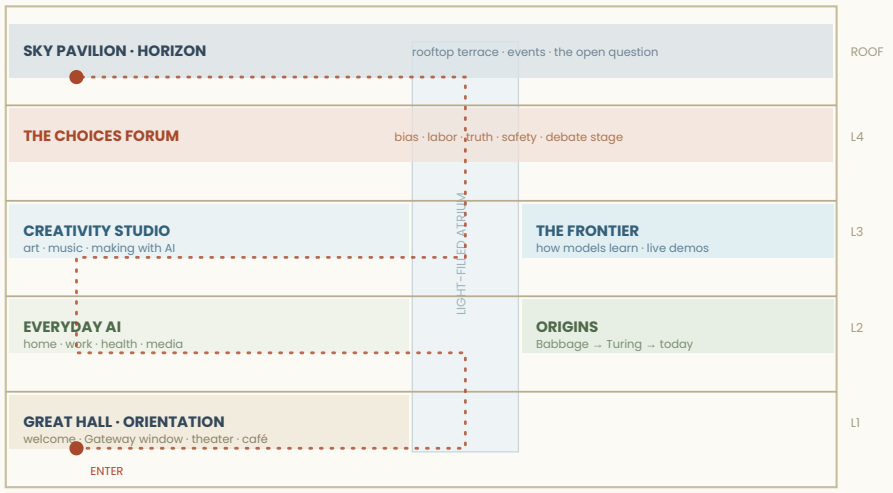

FIGURE 3 — LONGITUDINAL SECTION & VISITOR SEQUENCE "THE ASCENT"

A generous daylit atrium spines the section, so visitors always sense where they are in the story. Vertical circulation doubles as pause-and-reflect space; the dashed line traces the intended narrative path from **Enter** at street level to the **Sky Pavilion**, where the journey ends not with an answer but with a view — and a question.

EXPERIENCE & PROGRAM

What's inside.

Roughly 120,000 square feet are organized into permanent galleries, a rotating special-exhibition hall, a live-programming forum, and an education and skills center. The permanent sequence follows the four pillars of the visitor journey.

01 **Origins**

The long arc of thinking machines — from Babbage's engine and Ada Lovelace, through Turing, the first neural networks, and the deep-learning breakthroughs — told through rare artifacts and clear storytelling that make the present moment legible.

02 **Everyday AI**

The gallery most visitors come for: AI already woven into home, work, health, transport, and media. Hands-on stations let visitors see the models behind the tools they use daily — and where those tools fail.

03 **The Frontier**

How modern systems actually learn, shown through live, transparent demonstrations. A working lab where visitors watch a model train, probe how it "sees," and glimpse research as it happens — with university partners on site.

04 **The Creativity Studio**

A maker space for art, music, writing, and design made *with* AI — foregrounding human authorship and the new collaboration between people and machines. The museum's most participatory room.

05 **The Choices Forum**

The museum's conscience: bias, labor, privacy, truth, creativity, and safety, presented as genuine debates with multiple credible viewpoints and a live debate stage. Visitors weigh evidence and record their own positions.

06 **Special Exhibitions Hall**

A large, flexible gallery for rotating shows — keeping the institution current in a field that moves monthly, and giving repeat visitors a reason to return.

BEYOND THE GALLERIES

The Forum — a 350-seat hall for a national-caliber speaker and debate series convening AI's builders and critics.

Learning Center — school programs and adult AI-literacy and workforce courses, developed with regional educators.

Civic spaces — café, store, event hall, and the rooftop Sky Pavilion for the region's gatherings.

Program mix (approx.)

FUNCTION	SHARE
Permanent galleries	38%
Special exhibitions	12%
Forum & education	14%
Civic / event / retail	16%
Back-of-house & collections	20%

GOVERNANCE & FUNDING

How it stands up — and stays standing.

Structure

NMAI is proposed as an independent **501(c)(3) nonprofit** governed by a national board, with a firewall between funders and curatorial decisions to protect the institution's neutrality. An academic advisory council and a public-trust council (educators, ethicists, artists, workers) keep the program both rigorous and grounded.

Anchor partnership

A formal partnership with **Washington University in St. Louis** — adjacent across Forsyth — supplies scholarly credibility, curatorial and research collaboration, student engagement, and a live connection between the galleries and working AI research.

The founding-patron strategy

The corridor's authentic tie to a hometown figure of the AI era makes a **lead cornerstone gift** the natural spark for the campaign — an invitation for the region's own to plant a national institution in the ground they came from. Around that cornerstone, the museum assembles a coalition of St. Louis philanthropy, national technology and foundation partners, and public support.

CAMPAIGN PLAN (CONCEPT)

Illustrative total campaign: **~$110M** — building, exhibits, and site — including a **~$35M** endowment for operating independence. Sized to the Computer History Museum's ~$50M capital-and-endowment campaign (2002), adjusted for today.

Operating model

REVENUE SOURCE	APPROX.
Endowment draw	30%
Admissions	24%
Membership	12%
Events & venue rental	12%
Programs & education	10%
Retail, café, grants	12%
Target self-sustaining	**100%**

Precedent & benchmark

The model is proven. In 2002 the Computer History Museum acquired a landmark building and mounted a combined capital-and-endowment campaign of roughly **$50M**, and today holds **$70M+** in assets. NMAI's subject is broader — a national museum of AI's *societal* impact — but its target is deliberately sized to that same playbook, adjusted for inflation, keeping the institution lean and achievable rather than aspirational.

BENCHMARK	BUILDING	CAMPAIGN (YEAR)	MODEL
Computer History Museum (CA)	~119,000 sf	~$50M (2002)	Capital + endowment
NMAI (proposed)	~120,000 sf	~$110M (2025$)	Founding-patron led

IMPACT & PATH FORWARD

What it creates — and what happens next.

Regional & national impact

- **A national destination for St. Louis** — projected 450–600K annual visitors, drawing tourism, conferences, and press to the region.
- **A workforce engine** — AI-literacy and skills programs so Missourians and the wider heartland aren't left behind in an AI-shaped economy.
- **A talent magnet** — a reason for researchers, educators, and companies to look inward from the coasts.
- **A civic anchor for Clayton** — an active public corner that lifts the district year-round.
- **National standing** — the definitive public forum for how America reckons with AI.

450–600K

projected annual visitors at maturity

~4 yrs

from founding coalition to opening day

~$110M

indicative campaign, sized to peer museums

Phasing & roadmap

Year 1

Founding & feasibility

Assemble founding coalition and board; secure site control; feasibility and economic-impact study; anchor partnership with Washington University; lead cornerstone gift.

Year 1–2

Design & campaign

International design competition and schematic design; capital campaign in earnest; curatorial and content framework established.

Year 2–3

Approvals & construction

Entitlements with the City of Clayton; groundbreaking and construction; exhibit design and fabrication; early public programming to build audience.

Year 3–4

Opening

Collection and content completion; staffing and training; grand opening as a national event.

> The technology of our century deserves a place where the public can meet it — with wonder, with scrutiny, and on its own terms. That place can be built here.

This concept is intended to open a conversation among civic leaders, philanthropists, Washington University, and the City of Clayton. Figures and designs are illustrative, to be refined through feasibility study and professional design. The next step is a founding conversation.