

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD
Chair and President
National Coalition to Save Our Mall

Testimony on H.R. 6364 “Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act”
September 11, 2012



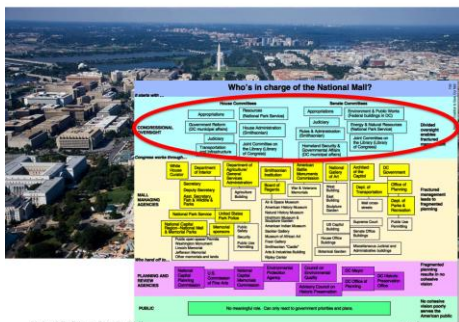
Photograph Courtesy of Carol Highsmith

Good afternoon, Chairman Bishop and committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Dr. Judy Scott Feldman, founding member and President of the National Coalition to Save Our Mall. The Coalition is an independent, all-volunteer nonprofit group formed in 2000 to provide an organized voice for the public in National Mall matters, and to advocate for long-range, visionary planning for this iconic landscape where Americans remember our history, honor the sacrifices of veterans, and recharge our sense of common purpose and aspirations.

World War I was an important chapter in our nation’s history and it is fitting as the centenary approaches for Congress to create a commission to study how to commemorate that era. Our concern with the proposed legislation is Section 10, which authorizes creation of a National World War I Memorial to be located in the “Reserve” area of the National Mall around Constitution Gardens. We believe it is a mistake to exempt the proposed memorial from the moratorium and from the public process Congress put in place, with the Commemorative Works Act, for selecting memorial sites in the Nation’s Capital.

In my comments today I would like focus on the role of memorials in telling America’s story on the National Mall, and on how memorials fit in the context of Washington’s historic plans that are the basis of Washington’s unique beauty and inspiring power.

Congress has declared the National Mall “a substantially completed work of civic art” and imposed a moratorium on new memorials, but the Mall can’t be complete any more than American history is complete. We will continue to see good and understandable proposals for new memorials and museums on the Mall – and the proposed WWI Memorial provides one example.

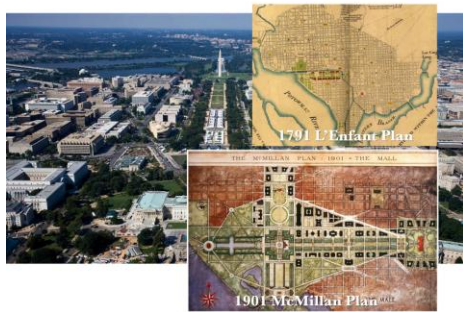


[Slide] We have to face facts. The bigger problem – for this memorial and the ongoing calls for additional museums and memorials – is that there is no overall, comprehensive vision to guide coherent, meaningful development of the Mall in the future. Not to discredit or dismiss the National Park Service “National Mall Plan,” but that is a management plan for

maintenance and upgrades of specific areas under Park Service jurisdiction, not a blueprint for future growth.

Furthermore, with Mall management fragmented among at least 8 agencies, and oversight in Congress divided among 14 or more committees, there is no mechanism to create such a visionary plan. Meanwhile, memorial and museum sponsors say it's impossible to raise funds without a site on the National Mall.

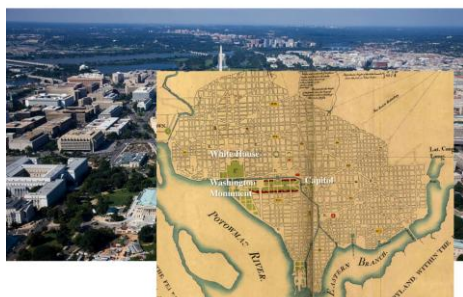
So a crucial question is: How can we continue to tell the unfolding American story on the Mall while protecting the historic, iconic landscape?



National Coalition to Save Our Mall

page 6

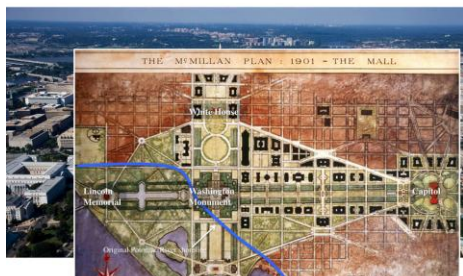
[Slide] The National Coalition to Save Our Mall firmly believes the Mall needs to be expanded to accommodate future museums and memorials. A new visionary Mall plan can re-imagine the historic L'Enfant and McMillan Plans to meet the needs of our growing democracy in the 21st century. We call the future Mall the 3rd Century Mall.



National Coalition to Save Our Mall

page 7

[Slide] The original 1791 L'Enfant Plan established the importance of public monuments in Washington's urban design. The symbols of American government – the Capitol, White House, and Washington Monument – were located in symbolic relationship to one another in the context of a grand public promenade – the Mall -- that celebrated the role of We the People in American democracy.



National Coalition to Save Our Mall

page 9

[Slide] The 1901 McMillan Plan, after a century of neglect, reinstated L'Enfant's vision and expanded it on new land west of the Washington Monument to include the Lincoln Memorial and complexes of government building between Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenue. The McMillan Plan is the basis of the Mall we know today.

[Slide] A new visionary plan could re-imagine the Mall's symbolic cross axis, and expand it once again to provide new

locations on federal land to tell more of the American story. But current federal plans reject the idea of Mall expansion. Moreover, federal plans do not recognize the L'Enfant and McMillan plans as the blueprint for planning the Nation's Capital, or even as the basis for defining the Mall's boundaries and interpreting its national significance. Indeed, there is no agreed-upon definition of the National Mall.

That is why the National Coalition to Save Our Mall believes the solution today, as in 1901, is to create an independent McMillan-type commission of visionary designers and thinkers to rise above the narrow interests and fragmented jurisdictions to create a truly comprehensive plan. At the turn of the 20th century, Congress created the independent commission. This time, perhaps a public/private group could be established and encouraged by Congress to create the needed long-range plan that embodies the aspirations of the nation, and of the American people.



National Coalition to Save Our Mall

page 10

[Slide] One important task for such a commission would be to evaluate the quality and scope of the history told on the Mall. What's missing? How can we tell more of the American story to better educate and inspire visitors, to build civic awareness and engagement, and to strengthen the role of the Mall in supporting America's unique democratic experiment?

The independent commission could review and propose revisions to the Commemorative Works Act, which, despite its stated purpose to "preserve the integrity of the comprehensive design of the L'Enfant and McMillan plans for the Nation's Capital," too often falls short, as for example with the Eisenhower Memorial, marked here with a green star, which was permitted to close Maryland Avenue instead of keeping open the avenue and vista to the Capitol as intended in the historic plans. Future decisions about locating museums and memorials might be given over to an independent panel of historians, designers, and educators.

To conclude, the National Coalition to Save Our Mall believes that looking comprehensively at the American story told on the Mall could provide benefits for the World War I memorial concept as well as other controversial or potentially controversial projects. For example, Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue at 14th Street has been proposed as a meaningful context for a national memorial to the Great War.



National Coalition to Save Our Mall

page 11

[Slide] That location, marked with the red star, is not commonly thought of as part of the Mall, but in fact Pennsylvania Avenue was a crucial element of the L'Enfant Plan and the northern boundary of the McMillan Plan Mall. Pennsylvania Avenue is the ceremonial avenue connecting the Capitol and White House

where, historically, troops paraded upon returning from war. The Pershing memorial site is, arguably, a more prominent location than the Constitution Gardens area proposed in the legislation under review. Adapting the Pershing Park site to become the National WWI Memorial would provide visitors to the capital one special place that accomplished three goals: to honor the national war effort, to celebrate one of the leaders of that effort, and to reinforce the symbolic meaning of Pennsylvania Avenue in the historic plan of Washington. So far as we know, there has not yet been a serious public discussion of this alternative and others that would build upon the brilliant legacy of the L'Enfant and McMillan plans.

In a similar vein, it has been proposed that locating a statue of Eisenhower at the National World War II Memorial (instead of at the Maryland Avenue site) would provide visitors to that site a deeper understanding of the role of leadership in that conflict and a context for understanding a citizen who served his country as both general and president.

The National Coalition to Save Our Mall invites members of this committee to visit our exhibition of the "3rd Century Mall" at the District Architecture Center (421 7th Street, NW), on view until this Saturday, September 15th. The exhibit shows ideas for re-imagining the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans for the Mall in our nation's third century. I would be happy to provide a private tour for members.

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD
Chair and President
National Coalition to Save Our Mall
www.savethemall.org
jfeldman@savethemall.org / 301-335-8490