



Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia¹

Established Dec. 7, 1865 – Celebrating our 159th year!



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September 3, 2024

Colonel Francis B. Pera, District Commander

United States Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District

2 Hopkins Plaza

Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Colonel Pera:

I am providing comments from the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia regarding the on-going renovations to the structures of the Georgetown Receiving Reservoir. Full disclosure: I am a Past-President of the organization (1999-2019) but am also a “neighbor” of the Georgetown Reservoir and walk past its vast property twice daily on my regular walks. I believe the issue regarding the unauthorized demolition of the two turrets was brought to light when I expressed my concerns to the D.C. Historic Preservation Office on August 5, 2024 when I observed to what I knew was not just restoration activity but demolition activity to a Historically Designated property.

I must admit that Jaimie Loichniger’s correspondence to you on August 26, 2024, helped to make clear what the issues are regarding the work at the reservoir, specifically to the “Castle Building.” The initial, undated Public Notice from the Corps (emailed to concerned parties on August 23, 2024) was somewhat vague in the description of the issue but the response on behalf of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation provided sufficient clarification not only of the matter at hand but also summarized the proposed efforts of the Corps to mitigate the situation.

As the District’s oldest historic organization, founded in 1865, the AOI of DC is -- among its several objectives -- critically concerned regarding the maintaining, preserving, and promoting the L'Enfant, McMillan, and Capital Framework Plans, preserving the Height of Buildings Act and overall

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preserving parks, Civil War Defenses, and historic structures. In this regard, AOI was deeply concerned when I brought to their attention the on-going activities regarding the restoration of the Georgetown Reservoir structures and what appeared to be severe demolition of portions of the designated structure.

If my facts are correct, the restoration of the 4+ structures at the Georgetown Receiving Reservoir has been going on for seven years, since 2017. The project appears to have had at least two general contractors: Hunter Allied of Maryland Inc. with Arcadis US, Inc. as Consulting Engineer and more recently Atlantic Restorations [sic.] of Beltsville, MD. The project suffered a prolonged hiatus perhaps because of the Covid pandemic or change of contractors but it appeared to be making progress at a snail's pace. I have described it to neighbors as "two-steps forward and one-step back" as there appears to be progress only to have that work undone. I have observed the veneer of the smaller West Shaft Gatehouse removed down to the bricks and a veneer reapplied only to have it again removed in recent months. I was told by an on-site supervisor a couple of years back, "...after they check the integrity of the bricks, they'll apply a new application of cement and score it so you couldn't be able to tell it from stone blocks...they're that good!" That building has once again been cocooned in a shroud with work being undertaken but I am unable to "report" what is taking place. Hopefully, the new veneer is being applied and scored. I have observed similar "progress" at the round Inlet Gatehouse on the property near Whitehaven Parkway. That building was stripped of its veneer, had its skylight structure replaced, wrapped in tarps, and has sat for months, if not years, with no apparent completion in sight.

Over the years I was personally delighted to see the improvements being made to the Georgetown Receiving Reservoir: new wrought iron-like fencing surrounding the entire property, improvements to silt abatement equipment, the fabrication of new wrought iron spiral stairs emblazoned with "M.C. MEIGS" to replace those in the "Meigs Vault," and the prospects of all the structures being restored to their original appearances. So, I am certain you can appreciate why – when on August 2, 2024 I observed the jack-hammering on one of the south turrets – I not only expressed my concern to the DC HPO but to the AOI of DC, and nearby community associations, too.

The AOI of DC would like to support and echo the remarks provided by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. And while the AOI is more than willing to participate in any future Section 106 activities should that be necessary to further the goal of conserving and restoring the historic structures of the Georgetown Receiving Reservoir in compliance with all applicable historic preservation rules and standards, we sincerely hope that future interactions will be unnecessary.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide these remarks both on behalf of the AOI of DC and as a neighbor of the Reservoir.

Sincerely,

William N. Brown, Past-President

Cc: David Maloney, CHPO; Robert Avery, Foxhall Community Citizens Association; Jessica Davis, Palisades Community Association; Rebecca Miller, D.C. Preservation League; et. al.

PS – I am attaching a small photo array of some of my favorite photos of the Georgetown Reservoir and wish to point out that the Castle Building is featured on one of the award-winning Foxhall Police & Fire Callboxes as a painting of the Castle Building by Peter Waddell.

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Figure 1 Castle Building prior to rehabilitation



Figure 2 U.S. & ACE Flags



Figure 3 City Tunnel West Shaft Gate House under rehab



Figure 4 Inlet Gate House under renovation



Figure 5 Historic Buildings & Public Parks medallion



Figure 6 New fence detail

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Figure 7 New stairs for the Meigs vault



Figure 8 New skylight/oculus for Inlet Gate House

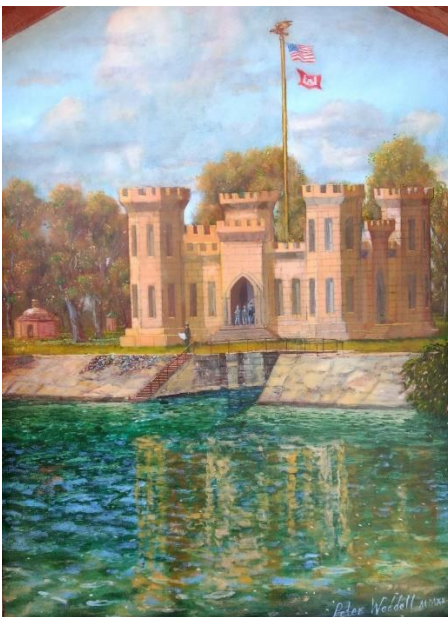


Figure 9 Peter Waddell's painting for FCCA Fire Callbox at MacArthur & Q St.



Figure 10 The "W.A." marker that for years lay abandoned along MacArthur Blvd.



Figure 11 The "W.A." marker & bronze plaque pictured with "advocate" Bill Brown



Figure 12 Bronze plaque accompanying the "W.A." marker across from the Conduit Road School House

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