

The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia¹

Established Dec. 7, 1865 – Celebrating our 151st year!

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September 28, 2016

Gay Vietzke, Superintendent
National Mall and Memorial Parks
900 Ohio Drive, SW
District of Columbia 20024

Dear Superintendent Vietzke:

I attended last week's Section 106 meeting on plans for Pershing Park and its enhancement as a national World War I Memorial, as cited below.

*"Congress has authorized the World War I Centennial Commission to **enhance the existing Pershing memorial** by constructing on Pershing Park "appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping."'" – Memorial Design Competition from WWI Centennial Commission web site.*

The revised plan, based upon the design competition winning entry, "The Weight of Sacrifice," does not come close to adhering to that charge. The plan, as presented, all but destroys the M. Paul Friedberg-designed park and Oehme van Sweden's landscape design, rather than enhancing it by adding commemorative elements and landscaping.

We have pointed out during Congressional hearings, National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission hearings, in public talks and programs, and in the media that the American Battle Monuments Commission's memorial to General Pershing already serves as a 'national' memorial to World War I. Instead of attempting to build a new memorial, modest funds should be expended to *rehabilitate* Pershing Park and to *enhance* the Pershing Memorial by adding new interpretive signage and memorial elements, such as sculptural ones, to recognize other participating branches of the services and make the Pershing Memorial a comprehensive World War I memorial. Such rehabilitation and adaptive reuse would have a minimum impact on the existing park's design and retain its character-defining elements that make it eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as an individual site.

We believe that an adaptation of the "memorial wall" portion of the revised plan could be successfully incorporated into the existing park without destroying the water features (fountain and pool), terraced seating and landscape elements that are an integral part of the Friedberg design, but are absent in the revised design. As it now stands, the revised proposed plan for Pershing Park renders it virtually unrecognizable as the product of Friedberg's and Oehme van Sweden's designs and should be rejected.

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia -- the District's oldest civic organization -- was established on December 7, 1865, to preserve memories and matters of historic interest. By virtue of our long presence and participation in the city's prosperity and improvement, we continue to work and strive for the city's stability, security and advancement -- to aid in every way the prosperity and well-being of the District while preserving the heritage of its past.

¹Effective June 1, 1871, Congress revoked the charters of the cities of Washington, Georgetown and the County of Washington and established a consolidated government of the District of Columbia. For all intents and purposes, on that date Washington -- as far as a jurisdiction -- ceased to exist.

We urge the parties who will review this project to compel the WWI Commission to have their plan redesigned to incorporate only those modifications that would have the least impact on the existing park's design, by sensitively adding elements that would make it a national WWI Memorial, while preserving the essential character-defining elements of the original National Register-eligible design. The fact that Pershing Park has not been adequately maintained over the years is no excuse for demolishing it or severely modifying its water features. Rehabilitating Pershing Park to incorporate additional design elements could make it a truly national WW I Memorial, while still retaining the integrity of its original design. In fact, this approach would be most in keeping with the authorization quoted in our second paragraph above: "...to *enhance* the existing Pershing memorial by constructing on Pershing Park appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping...".

If you would like to discuss this further or invite interested members of the AOI of DC to comment or participate, please let me know.

Sincerely,



William N. Brown, President

Cc: The United States Commission on Fine Arts
The National Capital Planning Committee
National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
The DC Preservation League
The Cultural Landscape Foundation
NPS PEPC Comment Site

