

The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia¹

Established Dec. 7, 1865 – Celebrating our 152nd year!

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February 16, 2017

Honorable Earl A. Powell, III Chairman
U.S. Commission on Fine Arts
C/o Thomas Luebke, Secretary
401 F. Street, NW Suite 312
District of Columbia 20001-2728

Ref: Pershing Park

Dear Chairman Powell and Members of the Commission:

I have reviewed last week's Section 106 meeting's plans for Pershing Park and its transformation into a national World War I Memorial and have heard from partner organizations about the two revised plans submitted for the park.

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia does not support either revision. The plan labeled "Scrim and Green" is, in our opinion, a non-starter. We believe there may be some potential in the "Pool and Plaza" design, but since it eliminates the waterfall/fountain feature and changes other significant elements of Friedberg's design, we cannot support it in its present form.

*"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 plans, both based upon the design competition winning entry "The Weight of Sacrifice," contain the Memorial Wall feature which we believe, in some form, conforms to the directive to "enhance the existing... memorial" but not at the expense of a focal animated water feature. The plans, as presented, all but destroy the M. Paul Friedberg-designed memorial and Oehme van Sweden's landscape design.

We believe 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 which are absent in the revised design. As it now stands, even these revised plans for Pershing Park render 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 reviewing this project to reject the two proposed designs and urge the development of a revised plan that would incorporate only those modifications that would have the least impact on the existing park's design, while sensitively adding elements that would make it a national WWI Memorial with the essential design elements of the original work preserved. 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 it to incorporate appropriate design elements could make it truly a national WW I Memorial, while still retaining its original design. In fact, this approach would be most in keeping with the authorization quoted in our first paragraph above: "...to *enhance* the existing Pershing memorial by constructing on Pershing Park "appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping..."

Sincerely,



William N. Brown, President

Cc: The National Capital Planning Committee
National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
The DC Preservation League
The Cultural Landscape Foundation

