

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia

Established Dec. 7, 1865

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August 19, 2011

Dr. Frank Mazzi
The World War I Memorial Project
2119 Foothill Boulevard
Calistoga, CA 94515

Dear Dr. Mazzi:

Thank you for providing the follow-up letter to our phone conversation of early last week.

As the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia evolved over the years since its founding in 1865, it has had among its goals the preservation and maintenance of the L'Enfant Plan, the McMillan (Senate Park) Plan and more recent initiatives of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) and non-governmental groups such as the National Coalition to Save Our Mall. The AOI believes, as has been promoted by many of the above-mentioned groups, that the National Mall, in essence, is a 'completed work.' This is well documented in the NCPC's Framework Plan, the National Park Service's National Mall Plan and other reports and findings.

The AOI did not comment on the placement of the World War II Memorial on the Mall nor has it endorsed or supported any of the more recently added or planned museums on the Mall. We have strongly encouraged the re-use of existing buildings for future museums such as the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building, portions of the Department of Agriculture, the Liberty Loan Building and now, more frequently in the news, proposals for the Federal Trade Commission to be the new annex of the National Gallery of Art.

The AOI took its position against the recent Rockefeller (S-253) and Poe (HR-938) legislation because both bills infringe on the District's War Memorial (to World War I) and we encouraged our Congressional Representative, Eleanor Holmes Norton, to take a position opposing the portions of the two bills which directly impacted the District by 're-naming' our memorial, which she has done (HR-346). [In testimony and comments before the NCMAC on June 23rd, several members of that Commission pointed out that memorials to the World War I fallen were very much 'local' initiatives... you may want to contact Nancy Young at the NCMAC (202-619-7097) and request a copy of the related testimony (pages 100 -148 are the relevant portions).]

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.

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When we became aware of the pending legislation, not only did we want to prevent the renaming/re-designation of our memorial but also wanted to point out that given the desire of many to maintain the National Mall as it now is, that there was another alternative to nationally recognize the men and women who served our nation during World War I; so, we adapted the recommendation of a fellow AOI member suggesting that Pershing Park (located just two blocks from the White House, two blocks off the National Mall, directly across from the White House Visitors' Center, at the western portion of Pennsylvania Avenue within sight of the U.S. Capitol) should be considered a national memorial to World War I to recognize all of those served, not just the AEF. If you obtain a copy of the NCMAC's proceedings you will see that even with a representative of the Battle Monuments Commission as a commission member, there appears to be some confusion -- yet tacit acknowledgment -- that the memorial to the American Expeditionary Forces of World War I and General Pershing was intended to be a National World War I Memorial. In fact, we have requested that Congresswoman Norton seek the services of the Congressional Research Service in order to help determine the legislative history and intent of Congress with regard to the Pershing Park Memorial.

Just as our organization has objected to the renaming or re-dedication of the District's War Memorial, we can appreciate a concern that those who sought to have the AEF and General Pershing memorialized at Pershing Park may have the same reservations; however, *if* Pershing Park, the AEF Memorial and memorial to General Pershing are a tribute to the United States' sacrifices during World War I, then what better tribute to them and their efforts than this existing, large, well-located park and without the controversy of adding another element to the National Mall? I have included a photo array of Pershing Park for your reference as I don't if you are already familiar with it but certainly recommend you include it on your itinerary for any future visits to the city.

I hope this helps to clarify the AOI's position on additional monuments, museums and features on the National Mall and why we are strongly supporting the concept of recognizing the AEF Memorial and Pershing Park as a National World War I Memorial to commemorate all of those Americans who served in the Great War. For the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion, Congress should be asked to officially rename and redefine the present American Expeditionary Forces Memorial (Pershing Park). It should be renamed the "National World War I Memorial" and be dedicated to all who served and died in World War I and be in conformity with the purposes of the National World War II Memorial. Appropriate signage and sculptural or commemorative elements should be added to the present memorial to accomplish this purpose.

Sincerely,

William N. Brown, President

Attachment

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