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October 25, 2021

Carly Bond
Historic Preservation Specialist
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Planning, Design & Construction
Architectural History and Historic Preservation
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 5001
Capital Gallery MRC 511
Washington, DC 20013

Dear Ms. Bond,

Docomomo US is responding to the October 20, 2021, Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization request to Consulting Parties for comments on the final Memorandum of Agreement for the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization.

To begin, we want to express our disappointment and frustration with the final steps of this Consulting Party process that have been rushed with little regard for a constructive decision making between Smithsonian Institution (SI) and the Consulting Parties. To impose a burden of a five-day (over a weekend) turnaround for Consulting Parties to make their final comments on the extremely important step of finalizing the content of the Memorandum of Agreement is improper and unacceptable. While the SI provided a draft that showed the changes made, a simple review showed that other changes were made that were not identified. Toggling track changes from “All Markup” to “Simple Markup” showed additional commenting from the SI not seen when reviewing all changes. Compounding those issues, page 29 of the Final MOA includes the wrong text describing the proposed changes and mitigation of adverse effects to the Concrete Wall – Inner Partition. Reviewing such important details in five days is simply impossible and even more so with documents that include inaccurate material. We expected a premier institution such as the Smithsonian Institution would be on the forefront of developing a 106 Consulting Party Process for others to emulate, not one that is unnecessarily rushed, incomplete and with errors.

Before we can even begin to comment, let alone agree, on the mitigation measures for the proposed project at the Sculpture Garden we must repeat, again, the same issues from our previous letters that have yet to be addressed:

- Impact/appropriateness of the expanded Reflecting Pool
- Cumulative Assessment of the Impacts on Visual and Spatial Relationships of the project as a whole

We vigorously disagree that the expanded Reflecting Pool adverse effect has been minimized by the proposed measures. The SI has not provided any documentation or assessment on how these measures actually minimize the adverse effect, either as an element in isolation, or its impact on the entire Sculpture Garden as a whole. The impact of the size, color, configuration, and materials of the proposed pool in THE most prominent place of the sculpture garden have not been presented, nor how the minimization efforts offset the pool expansion are justified. Thus, the only outcome is that the expanded reflecting pool must be eliminated.

The Cumulative Assessment of the Impacts on Visual and Spatial Relationships that were initially requested in our November 6, 2020, comment letter are still missing. This is the most critical analysis to determine the final outcomes of the MOA which will include the proper mitigation measures to which everyone can agree.

There is much to celebrate about the restoration of the Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden but that is slowly being eroded by the failure to provide proper documentation and assessment of the impact of the reflecting pool, the cumulative adverse effect of the impact of all changes to the Sculpture Garden and by rushing such an important stage in this process. Docomomo US wants nothing more than to highlight and honor revitalization of this significant modern building and landscape. But we worry we will never get there without better communication, appropriate process expectations, and a thorough assessment of all the impacts to the resource.

Sincerely,



Todd Grover
Vice President Advocacy
Docomomo US



Liz Waytkus
Executive Director
Docomomo US

cc: Melissa Chiu, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Jaya Kaveeshwar, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Sharon Park, Smithsonian Institution; Greg Bettwy, Smithsonian Institution; Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Institution; Kevin Gover, Smithsonian Institution; Jaime Loichinger, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; Marcel Acosta; National Capital Planning Commission; Lee Webb, National Capital Planning Commission; Steve Callcott, D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board; Christine Anagnos, Executive Director, Association of Art Museum Directors; Judith Pineiro, Executive Director, Association of Art Museum Curators; Nord Wennerstrom, Director of Communications, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Charles Birnbaum, President, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Theo Prudon, President, Docomomo U.S.; Todd Grover, Advocacy Chair, Docomomo U.S., Kirby Vining, Committee of 100 on the Federal City; Rebecca Miller, D.C. Preservation League; Betsy Merritt, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Bill Brown, Association of Oldest Inhabitants; Alexandra MacKay, Esq., Stites & Harbison PLLC.