



December 3, 2020

Thomas Gallas  
Chairman  
National Capital Planning Commission  
401 9th Street, NW  
Suite 500N  
Washington DC 20004

Dear Chairman Gallas,

On behalf of Docomomo US, I appreciate having the opportunity to speak to the National Capital Planning Commission about the preliminary site development plans for the Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden revitalization.

If you are not familiar with our organization, Docomomo US is non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of modern architecture, landscape and design. Through advocacy, education and documentation, we provide leadership and knowledge by demonstrating the importance of modern design principles including the social context, technical merits, aesthetics and settings of these important pieces of American history. Docomomo US is the American chapter of Docomomo International with committees in 71 countries across the globe. We are represented regionally with 18 chapters across the United States and today I speak on behalf of our national organization and our international colleagues.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is a masterwork of the Pritzker Prize winning architect Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore Owings & Merrill and completed in 1974 with alterations to the Sculpture Garden that have achieved their own significance by Lester Collins in 1981. Eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places and a contributing resource to the National Mall Historic District, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is a valuable resource. Repairs and alterations to historic character-defining features must be carefully considered using the principals of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties to avoid affecting the integrity of the site.

As an on-going participant in the Section 106 Consulting Parties review of the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization, Docomomo US is disappointed with the final design interventions proposed by the Smithsonian Institution. We are deeply concerned our feedback on the importance of avoiding negative impacts on historic character-defining features has been overlooked. The preliminary site development plans and the proposed alterations to the sculpture garden's inner partition wall and reflecting pool fail to address our concerns with the destruction of significant materials, spaces, and setting.

Based on nearly two years of project review and public participation in the Section 106 Process, we have not been presented with a sound and appropriate reason for the alteration of these elements.

There has been little explanation why the replacement of the inner partition wall needs to be built anew with stacked stones. The inner partition wall in concrete provides the same purpose as a stacked rock wall and we find no reason for its replacement.

We are also troubled with the proposed plans to radically alter and expand the reflecting pool. The reflecting pool's historic dimensions are directly related to the museum's balcony overlooking the garden. We believe that enlarging the pool will create a false historical appearance not in keeping with the original built design and the alteration will significantly damage this character-defining feature of the resource. The reflecting pool is quite literally central to the garden's design and is a piece of art within a greater work of art. We have not been presented with an appropriate reason for the expansion of the pool and based on its significance we find no reason for its alteration.

Additionally, the Smithsonian has proposed mitigation efforts, but these steps do not resolve the significant losses.

Finally, we have yet to see a review of the cumulative effects of all changes, current and proposed to the entire site: the museum building envelop replacement, the sculpture garden revitalization and the proposed expansion to the galleries and lobby area. Docomomo US believes the omission of a cumulative impact of all work will result in the resource no longer being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Liz Waytkus  
Executive Director  
Docomomo US