

1608D Beekman Place, NW
Washington, DC 20009-4021
July 17, 2018

Thomas Leubke, Secretary
U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Leubke:

I have attended most of the Commission of Fine Arts, WWI Memorial Section 106 Consultation, and National Capital Planning Commission meetings at which the various WWI Memorial proposed designs were presented, have reviewed comments made by those review bodies, and have submitted my own review comments on the various designs.

Now I have just finished reviewing the proposed WWI Memorial presentation submitted for consideration at your July 19, 2018 Commission meeting. Unfortunately, it seems like “Groundhog Day”, because, despite comments made by not only this Commission and others, the alternative designs being proposed are essentially the same as those presented at your May 17, 2018 meeting, except that the proponent’s preferred alternative has changed from the Integrated Alternative to the Freestanding one. Thus I will not repeat prior detailed comments on the alternatives.

Granted, some relatively minor variations of walk shapes/locations, depths of pool, edges of pool and flagstaff locations have been presented in regard to the preferred Freestanding alternative, but both proposals would still be in conflict with the statement cited at the beginning of their last presentation that “***Congress has authorized the World War I Centennial Commission to enhance the existing Pershing memorial by constructing ...appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping***” – not to destroy its signature elements!

This destruction would be despite their statement in an even earlier presentation that “*The sunken pool is the dominant space within the park, and the focal point around which the park is organized in plan and section*”. That pool’s cascading fountain, as one of the three major focal points within the existing design, not only animates that space, but also the sound of that fountain’s cascading water helps to mitigate the sounds of adjacent traffic, and its spray adds a summer cooling effect to make the pool area even more of an appealing oasis within the heart of downtown DC. Instead of trying to preserve this significant pool space, the majority of changes in both options would still adversely affect and destroy that space!

Thus neither alternative successfully addresses the central dilemma expressed in this Commission’s letter after your last review “as how to honor the exemplary design of this romantic, serene landscape centered on a large cascading fountain and a simple pool, while inserting an equally compelling monumental artwork...within the park without

compromising its essential character.” Also, you had ...”**again urged more flexibility and collaboration on the part of the sculptor and landscape architect to integrate the two works of art, involving an earnest reconsideration of the wall, sculpture, and fountain beyond what has been presented.**” Which has not been done.

This is especially important because Pershing Park has been determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and is nationally and locally significant as *a signature designed landscape by M. Paul Friedberg, one of modern American landscape architecture's most accomplished urban designers and has* “**exceptional significance as a highly intact example of M. Paul Friedberg's concept of the urban park plaza.**”

Again, both designs should be rejected and the WWI Commission should be directed to develop new proposed designs that *would* preserve the integrity of this nationally significant historic landscape. In fact, one location that was peripherally considered on Sheet 10 - Consideration for Relocation: Additional Alternative Location Studies - would be a round sculpture, similar to those shown on Sheets 13 and 14, installed in the location of the existing kiosk. Such a “sculpture in the round” in the kiosk location could seamlessly be added to the existing park, where it would fulfill the goal of preserving not only the integrity of the three original focal points – the fountain, the Pershing Statue, and the kiosk, but also that of the original historic design.

Other advantages of this location would be its easy accessibility for Pennsylvania Avenue passersby both functionally and visually, as well its visibility from all vantage points within the park, preserving the integrity of the existing park as-designed, as an oasis for public use. The accompanying rehabilitation of the rest of the park would again make it a vibrant public space, anchoring the west end of the grand ceremonial Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House within the larger urban context of our Nation’s Capital. I would hope that this vitality could be brought back to life!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely yours,



Darwina L. Neal, FASLA, HM.IFLA, F.US/ICOMOS
Landscape Architect
(Former Chief, Cultural Resource Preservation Services, NCR, National Park Service)

cc: Peter May, Associate Regional Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service; Claire Sale, AECOM; David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia; Marcel Acosta, National Capital Planning Commission; Julia Koster, National Capital Planning Commission; Charles Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Rebecca Miller, DC Preservation League, Stephen Hanson, The Committee of 100; Bill Brown, AOI; Chris Wilson, Advisory Council for Historic Preservation