

Charles Birnbaum, President
The Cultural Landscape Foundation
1711 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20009

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Dear Charles,

It has been brought to my attention by representatives of District agencies that an additional sculptural element may be delivered and deposited into Canal Park. I thought I might take a moment as the commissioned designer of this beloved public space, undertaken as Equity Partner at Olin, to share with you the intentions of the overall park design realized and completed, as well as the collaboration undertaken with the artist David Hess and the work, *Waterline*.

Canal Park is one of the nation's most sustainable parks, with the capacity to capture 1.5 million gallons of stormwater every year from the adjacent neighborhood, bring it into the park for cleansing, and utilize that cleansed water for toilet flushing, irrigation, and unlike most parks, top off human-engaged fountains within the park's boundaries. No water leaves the site. In addition other significant measures for environmental sustainability are woven into the fabric of the park: electric car charging stations, 28 geothermal wells, reflective paving, among other elements. Opened in 2012, Canal Park is LEED Gold, 3-star SITES-certified (one of seven in the country).

But what is most sustainable about this park is its capacity to embrace the citizens of the Southeast District, offering them the opportunity to engage with each other in a space unified in their collective consciousness, and an ability to "see themselves" in the designed park. For the first time in HUD's history, every member of the community that was there prior to construction was there on opening day, and access to the park for social purposes has been a resounding success, crossing economic boundaries reaching deep into and embracing the surrounding neighborhood. Canal Park was written and was intended to be read as an equitable and engaging landscape – three disparate parcels "stitched" together to become one wonderful gesture celebrating the history of the site as a former canal, as well as the community it is intended to serve.

I had the pleasure of collaborating with sculptor David Hess to describe a piece of public art that would not be perceived as "plop" art – art randomly dropped into a composition. Rather, to describe a piece that would not only speak to the narrative I was writing, but also be resilient and engaging of the constituency who would occupy the site comprised of three one-acre parcels divided by two cross streets. And although Mr. Hess was originally only engaged to compose two elements, I had the pleasure of convincing him to create three pieces – one for each block – but read as one monumental piece unifying the three one-acre parcels. His composition, *Waterline*, was the result of that collaboration. The three-piece sculpture references the site's original purpose as a canal, its capacity to gather stormwater as a means to solve a regional issue at a neighborhood scale, as well as my desire to "stitch" three blocks together as one. *Waterline* makes as much reference to sutures as it does to piping.

In the composition of the park, I worked strategically to ensure that children and joyful adults would find explorative play within the park, rather than a structured playground. That all would be

welcomed and feel unified within the composition, and that illuminating pedagogy would prevail over all else. To that end, David Hess and I worked to ensure that the sculptural elements that would tie the narrative together would be climbable, and respectfully disrespected. Those that engage with the park know that climbing the sculptures to increase one's vista, or hanging a piñata for a child's birthday, or swinging with reckless abandon are all a part of the intended experience. It has been my great joy on summer movie nights to observe adults and children alike climb upon the spooling threads of coils on the northern block, purposefully positioned at the highest elevation of the park and sloping lawn, to get an even better view of the evening's entertainment. The art is intended to be engaging and engaged.

I have recently learned that an additional sculptural element, *Marabar*, may be sited on the northern block of Canal Park – a handsome, contemplative piece by artist Elyn Zimmerman, to date occupying a place at the National Geographic headquarters. There, the beautiful composition is acknowledged as something not to be climbed upon, but respected by observation only. I have significant concern for its intended inclusion in Canal Park, if that is the case.

David Hess and I worked extremely hard to describe a public art piece that was unifying of all three blocks, could be read as one composition made up of three chapters, and to describe a work that would invite direct engagement of the community it was intended to serve. Adding another sculpture randomly would be to disrespect both artists for their creativity, as well as the intended audiences. Mr. Hess' work was commissioned for site-specific purpose; I expect that Ms. Zimmerman's work was commissioned for site-specific purpose, as well. But more to the point, I don't believe the latter is intended to be a climbable piece, and to be sure, it has nothing to do with the narrative of Canal Park. With its possible placement in Canal Park, the new work will compromise both sculptures and the intentions of both artists and this landscape architect. I have hope this collision of opposites may be avoided. Having both pieces occupying the same space would be a lose/lose scenario, from my perspective.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you, Charles, and that you will keep me informed as to subsequent dialogues to find a better home for *Marabar*. It is a solemnly beautiful composition better served in a more deferential environment.

With kind regards,



David A. Rubin, FASLA, FAAR
Founding Principal, DAVID RUBIN Land Collective