



World War I Memorial Foundation

HONORARY CHAIRMAN: MR. FRANK BUCKLES
THE LAST SURVIVING AMERICAN VETERAN OF WORLD WAR I

September 29, 2009

National Capital Planning Commission
Office of the Secretariat
401 9th Street, NW
Suite 500-North
Washington, DC 20004

Re: October 1, 2009 meeting
Plan to Restore the District of Columbia War Memorial

Members of the Commission:

I am pleased to submit these comments on the “Restore the District of Columbia War Memorial” plan, PMIS #150359, to be considered at the Commission’s October 1, 2009 meeting, on behalf of the World War I Memorial Foundation.

The Foundation was formed as a non-profit organization in August 2008 to raise funds for the restoration of the DC War Memorial, and to advocate for re-dedication of that site as a “National and District of Columbia World War I Memorial” in conjunction with the approaching centennial of the war (2014-2018).

We are very gratified that the Park Service, by allocating \$7.3 million of funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to restoration of the Memorial, has fulfilled the first part of our mission. We further commend the Park Service for its sensitivity to the historic and cultural value of the memorial.

The other part of our mission, as noted, is to secure Congressional authorization to re-dedicate the site as a national war memorial. The DC War Memorial of course stood alone when it was dedicated in 1931; today it stands in a *de facto* “war memorial park” along with the Vietnam, Korea and World War II memorials. Yet alone among the four great conflicts this country fought in during the 20th century, there is no truly national memorial to those Americans who served during World War I.

Regardless of whether Congress acts on our initiative, we urge the Park Service, in implementing its restoration plan, to accord the DC War Memorial a prominence that is equivalent to the neighboring memorials. World War I was, ironically, called the “war to end all wars,” yet it led directly to World War II, and indirectly to the Korea and Vietnam wars, while its after-effects can still be seen in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and the former Yugoslavia. More American soldiers died during World War I than in Vietnam and Korea combined. The history of those wars, and of world history since, cannot be told without an understanding of World War I.

Yet World War I is largely a forgotten war, just as the DC War Memorial is largely a forgotten memorial. The Park Service, for all its much-appreciated efforts to maintain the memorial, has no signs directing visitors to the DC War Memorial, nor does it appear on many of the maps of the Mall.

The restoration of the memorial, including the pruning back of the overgrown foliage, will do much to bring new attention, as will the increased foot traffic to and from the Martin Luther King Memorial once it is constructed.

But more should be done. As part of the DC War Memorial's restoration, we urge the Park Service to treat the memorial as a "Primary Site" rather than a "Secondary Site" in its ongoing Wayfinding Project. The signage and wayfinding aids for the DC War Memorial should be commensurate with those of the three other adjacent memorials to the major wars of the 20th century -- it should not be on the same level as the far less significant Lock Keeper's House.

We understand that the Park Service accords heightened treatment to memorials authorized by Congress. In that regard, we point out that Congress did in fact authorize the DC War Memorial. Public Resolution No. 28 of the 68th Congress, passed on June 7, 1924, created the District of Columbia War Memorial Commission, "for the purpose of erecting in Potomac Park in the District of Columbia a memorial to those members of the armed forces of the United States from the District of Columbia who served in the Great War." The resolution specified the siting of the memorial at its current location on federal land in Potomac Park. In short, this is a Congressionally chartered memorial.

Presumably the restoration of the memorial will also include new interpretive signs and other elements. In addition to discussing the history of World War I, this presents an opportunity to observe that, unlike the other adjacent war memorials, the DC War Memorial is only a local memorial. Before 1980, war memorials were local; only after Vietnam did we as a nation begin erecting national war memorials. This presents a unique opportunity to educate visitors on the ways in which the nation has commemorated its veterans, and to encourage them to visit their own local memorials when they return home.

Finally, we endorse Scheme C, the preferred alternative. As we understand it, one choice to be made is between gravel and granite paving for the paths leading to the memorial. We anticipate that a significant number of wheelchair-bound veterans and others will visit the memorial, so a hard surface is preferable.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.



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