

The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia¹

Established Dec. 7, 1865 – Celebrating our 152nd year!

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June 28, 2017

Ms. Catherine Dewey, Chief of Resource Management
National Mall and Memorial Parks, National Park Service
900 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Ms. Dewey:

I attended today's Section 106 meeting on the evolving plans for Pershing Park as a national World War I memorial.

We appreciate the continuing efforts of the design team to respond to the issues and concerns raised by consulting parties to incorporate modifications that have been requested. While we had believed that an adaptation of the "memorial wall" portion of the "Weight of Sacrifice" could be successfully incorporated into the existing park without destroying the water features (fountain and pool that are an integral part of the Friedberg design) many of these elements are all but absent in the revised design. As it now stands, the revised plan for Pershing Park renders it virtually unrecognizable as the product of Friedberg's and Oehme van Sweden's designs and the memorial wall element along the west border ("Restored Pool concept"), obliterating the existing water feature, should be rejected. We believe, instead, that the design variation previously identified as "Upper Wall Design" should be given serious consideration leaving the existing cascade fountain and pool intact but placing the sculpture along the west border of the park, behind but still a focal point to the existing fountain.

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia continues to stand by its original position regarding designating Pershing Park as a national memorial to World War I. We have pointed out during Congressional hearings, National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission hearings, in public talks and programs and in the media that the American Battle Monuments Commission's memorial to General Pershing already serves as a 'national' memorial to World War I:

"Instead of attempting to build a new memorial, modest funds should be sought to *rehabilitate* Pershing Park and to *enhance* the Pershing Memorial by adding new interpretive signage and memorial elements, such as sculptural ones, to *recognize other participating*

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia -- the District's oldest civic organization -- was established on December 7, 1865, to preserve memories and matters of historic interest. By virtue of our long presence and participation in the city's prosperity and improvement, we continue to work and strive for the city's stability, security and advancement -- to aid in every way the prosperity and well-being of the District while preserving the heritage of its past. ¹Effective June 1, 1871, Congress revoked the charters of the cities of Washington, Georgetown and the County of Washington and established a consolidated government of the District of Columbia. For all intents and purposes, on that date Washington -- as far as a jurisdiction -- ceased to exist.

branches of the services to make the Pershing Memorial a comprehensive World War I memorial. Such rehabilitation would have a *minimum impact on the existing park* as designed by M. Paul Friedberg, FASLA, with plantings by Oehme van Sweden.”

Support for the long-held position of the AOI is further evidenced by a quote provided by the World War I Centennial Commission in its call for a memorial design competition:

“Congress has authorized the World War I Centennial Commission to **enhance** the existing Pershing memorial by constructing on Pershing Park "appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping.”

I understand there will be future opportunities to comment on the “Memorial Wall’s” sculptural elements but I have to state that we are extremely disappointed at the lack of attention given to other branches of the military, the nurses who valiantly served, the Merchant Marine, the civilian labor force that supported the war effort on the home front, et al. Even the graphic on Page 5 of the NCPC submissions depicts nurses who are now absent.

The fact that Pershing Park has not been adequately maintained over the years is no excuse for demolishing it or severely modifying its water features. Rehabilitating it to incorporate appropriate design elements could make it a true national WW I Memorial, while still retaining its original design.

It is our sincere hope that restoration and modest new elements would occur in time for a rededication of the park by November 11, 2018. As it now appears, this deadline is unlikely to be met and that is very unfortunate.

Sincerely,



William N. Brown, President

Cc: U.S. Commission on Fine Arts
National Capital Planning Commission
National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission
District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
The DC Preservation League
The Cultural Landscape Foundation