

U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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401 F STREET NW SUITE 312 WASHINGTON DC 20001-2728 202-504-2200 FAX 202-504-2195 WWW.CFA.GOV

24 February 2017

Dear Mr. Vogel:

In its meeting of 16 February, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a new concept design for the National World War I Memorial proposed for Pershing Park, a nationally significant landscape designed by M. Paul Friedberg and Associates, located on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets, NW. The Commission did not take an action and provided the following comments.

The Commission members expressed appreciation for the clarity of the presentation and the evolution of the design since their previous review of the project in October 2016; they acknowledged the difficulty of the design problem in balancing the new commemorative program with the complexity and character of the exemplary Friedberg design, but they expressed great optimism that a solution can be found. They emphasized again that the fundamental challenge is to insert a new commemorative program into the existing park, not to modify the park substantially to accommodate a wholly new memorial; they urged the design team to focus less upon the individual elements of the park and memorial program, and more upon the potential experience of a coherent landscape.

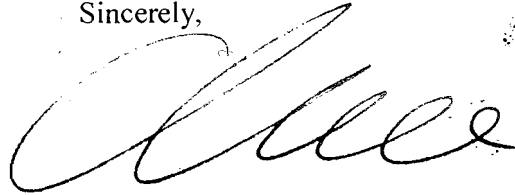
In their discussion, the Commission members commented on the complexity of the historic landscape, with its subtle sequence of spatial and sectional articulation, its intimate scale, and its contemplative character—all of which contribute to an experience of respite within an urban setting. They suggested that this quiet, contemplative character may be the common quality that can reconcile the dual goals of protecting the historic landscape and accommodating the new commemorative purpose. Given the intimate scale of the historic park, they urged the reconsideration of the commemorative elements proposed, both in typology and location, recommending that a smaller intervention may be more appropriate: perhaps a single sculpture in the round, or multiple elements distributed within or at the perimeter of the site. They found that the extended wall and bas relief—especially as proposed in the “Scrim and Green” alternative—would overwhelm the existing park design. They observed that the necessary programmatic interventions may be perceived as much larger in the context of Pershing Park than they would in a more open setting, and they commented that the weight and power of the memorial’s message of sacrifice can be conveyed appropriately with less massive elements.

In the development of the design, the Commission members noted the opportunity to bring a more intentional relationship among commemorative elements, such as the existing Pershing statue, a new feature at the kiosk site, and any other new memorial pieces within the park landscape. They opposed the transformation of the existing central pool—with its characteristic edge treatment of terraced plantings on two sides—into a vestigial scrim of intermittent water set into a field of stone paving; they also characterized the introduction of a grass lawn into the central space as inappropriate and alien to Friedberg’s original park-plaza hybrid concept. Finally, they strongly recommended the use of water—whether moving, still, noisy, reflective—as an element that would enhance and extend the visitors’ experience of the historic park and inform the symbolism of the modern memorial. They

suggested engaging in dialogue with the park's original designer, who may provide productive guidance for developing the design.

The Commission thanks the National World War I Memorial team for its diligence in working to develop a design that honors both the service of Americans in that war as well as the important legacy of this urban park as part of the Pennsylvania Avenue development plan. The Commission looks forward to further review of this work of high civic and commemorative prominence. As always, the staff is available to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Luebke', written in a cursive style.

Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Robert Vogel, Regional Director
National Park Service, National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

cc: Edwin L. Fountain, U.S. World War I Centennial Commission
Joseph Weishaar
Phoebe Lickwar, FORGE Landscape Architecture