

U. S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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23 February 2018

Dear Mr. Vogel:

In its meeting of 15 February, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a revised concept design for the National World War I Memorial proposed for Pershing Park, located on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets, NW. Expressing appreciation for the presentation of a maquette of the sculpture wall and of two alternatives for its placement within the park, the Commission provided the following comments for the development of the design.

The Commission members cited the inherent tension between conveying the enormity of World War I and maintaining the delicate character and experience of respite intrinsic to Pershing Park, a nationally significant work of landscape design. They said that the fundamental problem is how to insert a new work of art within an existing work of art; they strongly advised that both of these need to be integrated within a single, coherent design that balances many values—artistic, commemorative, historic, urbanistic—to create a compelling experience for all users of this park and to avoid designing the landscape merely to accommodate the new wall of sculpture. They therefore recommended close collaboration between the sculptor and the landscape architect, emphasizing that the success of the design will depend on an understanding of the sculpture and the wall as a unified element within the park, rather than as a long bronze artwork simply attached to a long stone wall.

In their discussion, the Commission members found that the length of the sculpture wall in both alternatives—currently proposed at roughly 65 feet—is unacceptable for its impact on the historic design of Pershing Park, and it must be reduced. They suggested that a length of roughly 50 feet for the commemorative wall would relate to the extent of existing barriers and planters on the east and west sides of the pool; they recommended using these datums to establish the appropriate position and length of the new wall within the historic landscape. While open to the development of either of the alternatives presented, they expressed particular enthusiasm for the opportunities of the freestanding wall in Option A to reduce its perceived heaviness, retain existing terraces, and foster social interaction. In addition, they encouraged the consideration of locating the freestanding sculpture wall elsewhere within the park, such as near the eastern or northern side of the pool.

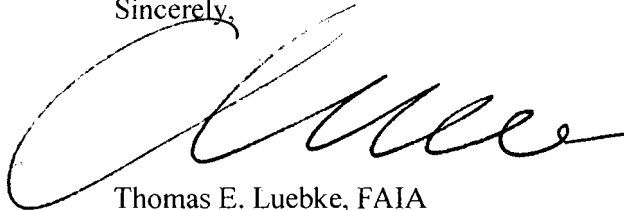
Regarding the sculpture wall, the Commission members expressed strong support for the narrative of the hero's journey as an abstraction of the American experience in World War I, and for the change in the sculpture from a bas relief to a more in-the-round composition. Given the increased depth of the sculpture, they observed that oblique views along it would be dramatic and recommended that these be accommodated. They also advised that this highly modeled sculptural ensemble—presented as sometimes exceeding three feet in depth, and appearing to hover over the pool—needs to be integrated with the design of the wall supporting it. They noted a redundancy of figures within the sculpture, and they advised eliminating some of these to reduce the length of the wall; they also recommended

verifying the historical accuracy of depicting racially integrated fighting units. Finally, they reiterated the opportunity offered by the kiosk site as a place to extend the memorial's narrative established in the sculpture wall instead of serving only as a location for the display of flags.

In addition to the reduction in the length of the sculpture wall, the Commission members made several recommendations for the development of the site design, particularly requesting more clarity in the relationship of the walkways to the stepped edges of the pool and to the sculpture wall. They encouraged refinement of the walkways generally—such as to be clearly above the water or more coplanar with it, anticipating any additional safety features such as railings or curbs, and avoiding the obtrusive, light-colored paving adapted from the Pershing Memorial area of the park. For the design of water elements, they emphasized the importance of the sound of cascading water for the experience of the park, and they recommended careful consideration of the appearance of the fountain walls and the pool during winter months. They cautioned against odd conditions in the pool, such as the notch proposed at the north side of the wall in both alternatives and the potentially narrow, dark strip of water against the western side of the wall in Option A.

The Commission thanks the National World War I Memorial project team for its diligence in refining the design of this important commemorative work within a nationally significant urban landscape. The Commission anticipates reviewing the results of the collaboration between the landscape architect and the sculptor, presented in a single site model at a scale large enough to convey the design relationships between the new sculptural wall and the elements of the existing park's microtopography, such as its ground planes, steps, and walls. For the next submission, please consult with the Commission staff which, as always, 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
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cc: Edwin L. Fountain, U.S. World War I Centennial Commission
David Rubin, Land Collective
Sabin Howard, Sabin Howard Sculpture
Joseph Weishaar