



OEHME, VAN SWEDEN & ASSOCIATES, INC.

June 1, 2015

Mr. Glenn DeMarr
National Park Service National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive SW
Washington, DC 20242

Re: The Imminent Demolition of Pershing Park

Dear Mr. DeMarr:

Oehme, van Sweden & Associates (OvS) would like to express our concern for the re-appropriation of Washington, DC's Pershing Park for the creation of a World War I commemorative installation. We were dismayed to discover the United States Congress has condemned this historic public space and reassigned it for another purpose.

Pershing Park was designed by the leading modernist Landscape Architect M. Paul Friedberg and functioned as an intimate sanctuary in the busy downtown Business District of Washington, DC. Pershing Park and Freedom Plaza, designed by the renowned architect Robert Venturi, were commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), established by President John F. Kennedy in an effort to rehabilitate Pennsylvania Avenue as America's Main Street. These two public spaces anchored the western flank of what is considered the most important thoroughfare in the United States.

OvS' Founding Principals, Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, were fortunate to be commissioned by PADC as the landscape architects of record for the project. Charged with bringing horticultural design to America's Avenue, Oehme and van Sweden humanized the street with color, texture and movement, transforming a hard-edged urban space into a lush, green oasis in the middle of the city. The Park was one of the first examples of the the firm's *New American Garden*, a signature style that challenged the plastic evergreen look of the Washington city scape in the 1980's and celebrated all four seasons with native, American plant material.

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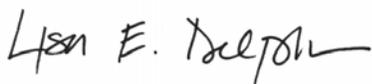
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Mr. Glenn DeMarr
The Imminent Demolition of Pershing Park
June 1, 2015
Page 2 of 2

As part of the public realm for over 30 years, Pershing Park is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This, in addition to the Park's significant design legacy, is proof of the intrinsic historical and cultural virtue of the space. We believe the United States should invest in the preservation of these virtues, and reject the idea of their destruction.

We respectfully request that the National Park Service reconsider the imminent demolition of Pershing Park.

Sincerely,



LISA E. DELPLACE, ASLA
CEO / Principal



ERIC D. GROFT, FASLA
VP / Principal



SHEILA A. BRADY, FASLA
VP / Principal

CC: Stephanie Toothman, Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science;
Thomas Luebke, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts;
David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia;
Liz Waytkus, Executive Director, Docomomo US;
Tom Jester, Docomomo DC;
Brett Wallace, President-Elect, Potomac ASLA;
Jennifer Nitzky, President, ASLA New York Chapter.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



www.committeeof100.net

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May 27, 2015

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Glenn DeMarr
National Park Service
National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, D.C.20242

SUBJECT: World War I Memorial Design

Dear Mr. DeMarr:

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (Committee of 100), founded in 1923, is the District of Columbia's oldest citizen planning organization. We are pleased to provide these initial comments on the design of the World War I Memorial which is to be located in Pershing Park at 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. These comments are preliminary, based on information on the National Park Service PEPC website, the World War One Centennial Commission website, and the discussion and information provided at the May 20 Scoping Meeting for the World War I Memorial Design.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City has long been concerned with protecting and enhancing, in our time, the various elements of the L'Enfant Plan (1791-92) and the planning and design work of the McMillan Commission (1901-02). Both of these plans have been important in shaping the "Monumental Core" of Washington, D.C. Pershing Park has an important location in the Monumental Core in the western portion of the Pennsylvania Avenue area, just east of the White House complex and President's Park South. The Committee of 100 has a strong interest in the continuing revitalization of Pennsylvania Avenue and adjacent areas between the Capitol and the White House.

The area called Pershing Park was designed and constructed by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in the late 1970s, with the Pershing Memorial

Glenn DeMarr
May 27, 2015
Page Two

in the southeast corner of the park. Most of the park has continued to serve an important “urban park” function, though affected by the problems which caused terminating the skating rink/outdoor plaza and the concession stand. Since the design process is just beginning, there is not now much to comment on except in general terms.

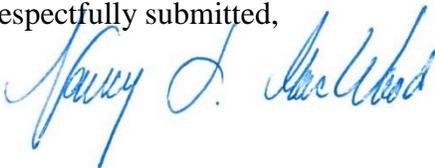
The Committee of 100 would like to receive additional information as it becomes available. We understand that the major review by consulting parties is not likely to begin until fall of 2015. Please let us know if there is any change in that schedule.

The Committee of 100 is concerned that the important “urban park” functions of Pershing Park not be overwhelmed by the design of the World War I Memorial. Our initial sense is that the World War I Memorial can occupy part of the overall park site, probably an enlargement of the present Pershing Memorial, which is already a partial World War I Memorial in itself. However, we believe that a major portion of the site should continue to serve as an urban park, with an area of transition between that area and the enlarged World War I Memorial.

The redesign of Pershing Park needs to consider relationships with Freedom Plaza to the east and with other adjacent open spaces and buildings. We note that some of the existing Pershing Park features are not easily understood and perhaps improvements can be made when the larger World War I Memorial context is provided.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City appreciates the opportunity to make these initial comments. We look forward to receiving additional information as the World War I Memorial design process moves forward.

Respectfully submitted,



Nancy MacWood
Chair

1608D Beekman Place, NW
Washington, DC 20009-4021
May 31, 2015

Mr. Glenn DeMarr
Attention: World War I Memorial
National Capital Region, National Park Service
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

Dear Mr. DeMarr:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed redesign of Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in Washington, D.C., as the site for a World War I Memorial. Although the WWI Memorial Competition Design Objective states that “Congress has authorized the World War I Centennial Commission to **enhance** the existing Pershing memorial by constructing ...“appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping”, the Design Goals in the Competition Manual indicate that extensive redesign is contemplated, thus potentially destroying this park.

Pershing Park was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), and originally designed by landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg and architect Jerome Lindsey in 1979; then the landscape architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden redesigned the plantings in 1981 at the request of PADC. Thus the park was designed by three nationally distinguished landscape architects – M. Paul Friedberg, James van Sweden, and Wolfgang Oehme – all of whom have since received numerous design awards for their work and professional achievements and thus have increased status. As such, Pershing Park has become is a nationally significant Modernist work of landscape architecture and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is already located within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site (2007).

When it was completed in the early 1980s, the park was an enjoyable and heavily-used urban park. In addition to containing a contemplative space as a setting for the General John J. Pershing Memorial, the central feature of the park’s multipurpose design was a large, sunken area containing an ornamental pool and waterfall in the summer and an ice-skating rink in the winter, with a paved terrace with movable chairs on one side and a stepped amphitheater on the other. A concession pavilion at the east end housed restrooms and skate rentals, and berms at the west end created a grassed terrace overlook with benches. The berms provided a sense of quiet containment to the sunken area which served as an urban oasis for picnickers and skaters in the midst of the park, which anchors the west end of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. An underground NPS maintenance facility beneath the terraced west end was accessed behind the waterfall.

Unfortunately, the park has deteriorated over recent years due to a lack of maintenance and funding. The uniquely-designed concession gazebo has been abandoned, the pool and waterfall are no longer in operation, and the once-luxuriant plantings have become

overgrown and not properly replaced or maintained, thus discouraging use by the public, although the basic well-designed framework of the park still remains. This is no excuse, however, for abandoning the original design, which is a significant work of landscape architecture by master landscape architects.

While I was working for the NPS National Capital Region as Senior Landscape Architect in the Professional and Design Services Offices in the 1970's-1980's, I reviewed the design and construction documents for all of the Pennsylvania Avenue parks, including Pershing Park, so I have a vested interest in them. Thus when I first heard of the park's selection as the memorial site, I naively thought that the existing park would be rehabilitated and adapted to serve this purpose, but, although the competition Design Objectives state that "competitors should thoughtfully consider the range of appropriate enhancement strategies and transformation options—preservation, alteration, relocation, demolition—for addressing these physical elements and integrating the existing Pershing Memorial elements and new commemorative features into the site", the Design Goals variously state that "The Memorial should be designed primarily as open space" and that, among other things, "indoor space, such as a ranger contact station, public restrooms, bookstore, or concession pavilion" and "water features are discouraged." This in itself would negate preservation and rehabilitation of the waterfall and pool and the berms that house maintenance facilities, as well as the gazebo. Likewise the estimated \$20-25 million construction cost implies destruction of the existing park design and features.

I do not question the selection of this site or its enhancement as a WW I Memorial, but I urge that careful consideration be given to limiting the scope of that enhancement so that it does not adversely affect the integrity of the existing design which should be nominated to National Register of Historic Places, and at least listed as a contributing site within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

An imaginative and sensitive designer should be able to develop a solution that would both commemorate WW I and preserve and enhance the significant components of the existing park's design. This creative "pairing" would also show that the success of WW I enabled the continuance of a democracy that celebrates public vitality and enjoyment of a vibrant public space that anchors the west end of the grand ceremonial Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House within the larger urban context of our Nation's Capital. I would hope that such a solution would not be rejected by the Competition Jury as being not "grand" enough!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely yours,

Darwina L. Neal, FASLA

cc: Stephanie Toothman, Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science; Thomas Luebke, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia



May 27th, 2015

Mr. Glenn DeMarr
National Park Service
National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Dr. SW
Washington, DC 20242

Dear Mr. DeMarr:

I write on behalf of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) to express our deep concern about the imminent destruction of Pershing Park, in Washington, D.C. As a nationally significant Modernist work of landscape architecture (and a rare pedigree of three master landscape architects, whose careers can be bracketed), the park is today eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and this fact alone should bring serious pause and reflection to the current plans to redevelop it.

As you are aware, Pershing Park was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), which was created by an act of Congress in 1972. To design the park, the PADC chose M. Paul Friedberg, one of the nation's leading landscape architects, who is now retired from practice. Friedberg's oeuvre includes Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2013; and indeed, several elements of Pershing Park—the sunken plaza/pool basin, the amphitheater-style seating, the lawn terraces—are recurring motifs in Friedberg's work, also evident at Peavey Plaza. The plantings for Pershing Park were executed in 1981 (the year the park opened) by Oehme van Sweden & Associates. Headed by Wolfgang Oehme (d. 2011) and James van Sweden (d. 2013), the firm's work is the subject of an upcoming national retrospective exhibition (debuting at the National Building Museum, in October 2015), and has been particularly impactful on the cityscape of Washington, D.C. One need only look to the nearby World War II Memorial or the German-American Friendship Garden, for familiar and beloved examples of Oehme van Sweden's revolutionary approach to planting design.

In 2012, The Cultural Landscape Foundation's *Landslide* program identified Pershing Park as part of the larger at-risk landscape of Pennsylvania Avenue, recognizing that since the PADC was terminated in 1996, many of the public improvements that it initiated had fallen into disrepair due to diminished maintenance. The pool basin at Pershing Park is but perhaps the most unfortunate and glaring example of this; but given the clear historical significance of the landscape, surely its state of disrepair should spur immediate action to preserve and rehabilitate the design, rather than destroy it.

In January 2001, work began on the National Register Nomination update that led to the creation of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, so designated in 2007. During my tenure as the Coordinator of the National Park Service's Historic Landscape Initiative, I met with the consultant for the nomination, and I recall a discussion about the nodal spaces created by the landscape architects along the Avenue. Because the designers were still practicing, it was reasoned that an assessment of their

work would be premature. Recognizing, however, that these designers are now retired, or no longer living, and that an additional eleven years have passed since the 2004 submission of the nomination, Pershing Park should be reevaluated, ideally for its own listing in the National Register and, at a minimum, as a contributing resource to the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Having conducted detailed oral histories with M. Paul Friedberg (2006 and 2008) and James van Sweden (2009) we would be pleased to assist NPS in any way possible to ensure that “enhancements” associated with the new memorial do not have an adverse effect on this significant work of landscape architecture, and one of the most important public spaces to come out of the work of the PADC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, *President + CEO*

The Cultural Landscape Foundation

cc: Stephanie Toothman, Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science; Thomas Luebke, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia; Liz Waytkus, Executive Director, Docomomo US; Tom Jester, Docomomo DC; Brett Wallace, President-Elect, Potomac ASLA; Jennifer Nitzky, President, ASLA New York Chapter

The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia

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November 11, 2015 – Veterans Day

Design Jury

The United States World War I Centennial Commission

1776 G Street NW., Suite 107

District of Columbia 20006

Dear Members of the Design Jury:

"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.'" – Memorial Design Competition from WWI Centennial Commission web site

Since 2011, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia (the District's oldest civic organization) nearly singlehandedly has called for the preservation of the District of Columbia War Memorial as the District's own memorial to World War I and, as an alternative to its 'nationalization,' recommended that the existing Pershing Memorial be adapted as a national memorial to honor those who served and died in 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 branches of the services to make the Pershing Memorial a comprehensive World War I memorial. Such rehabilitation and adaptive reuse would have a minimum impact on the existing park as designed by M. Paul Friedberg, FASLA, with plantings by Oehme van Sweden, whose work is now being celebrated in a major exhibit at the National Building Museum.

Now that the World War I Centennial Commission jury and members have narrowed the list of 360+ Stage I Submissions to five (5) Stage II finalists, we are increasingly concerned that all but one proposal would essentially obliterate Friedberg's design that was approved by the American Battle Monuments Commission, the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission and the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts and constructed nearly 35 years ago as an integral part of what is now the Pennsylvania Avenue Historic District.

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.

We urge the Design Jury's review of the five Stage II preliminary designs to consider those that would have the least impact on the existing park's design, while sensitively adding elements that would make it a national WWI Memorial, so the essential design concepts of the original work would be preserved. The fact that Pershing Park has not been adequately maintained over the years is no excuse for demolishing it. Rehabilitating it to incorporate additional design elements would make it truly a national WW I Memorial, while still retaining its original design. In fact, this approach would be most in keeping with the authorization quoted in our first paragraph above: "...to *enhance* the existing Pershing memorial by constructing on Pershing Park 'appropriate sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping...'".

If you would like to discuss this further or invite interested members of the AOI of DC to comment or participate, please let me know.

Sincerely,



William N. Brown, President

Cc: The United State Commission on Fine Arts
✓ The National Capital Planning Committee
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