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CITYLAB

How Many World War I Memorials Does One Park Need?

Preservationists think D.C.'s first national World War I memorial should be restored before another is added.

KRISTON CAPPS | [@kristoncapps](#) | Aug 5, 2015 | [12 Comments](#)



Washington, D.C.'s Pershing Park (in better years). (Wikimedia)

Late last year, Congress authorized a new National World War I Memorial for Washington, D.C. Just last month, that memorial took its first step toward becoming a reality. But there's a hitch: The site that legislators picked out for the monument is already home to a World War I memorial. Predictably, the

plan has sparked a skirmish over the best way to remember the War to End All Wars.

Pershing Park opened in 1981 just a block from the White House. The park honors [U.S. Army General John Joseph "Black Jack" Pershing](#), who led U.S. forces to victory during the Great War. Pershing was a big deal. He's the only commander ever to achieve the title of "General of the Armies" during his lifetime. The only other leader who got that grade (posthumously) was George Washington.

Pershing Park is where the [U.S. World War I Centennial Commission](#) intends to erect its new monument—even though the park already stands as a memorial to one of the war's greatest heroes. Late in July, the Commission [debuted some 350 entries](#) it received in an open design competition for the National World War I Memorial. But the plan has rankled at least one landscape advocate, who says that Pershing Park, like its namesake, is also a big deal.

"There's a lot of opportunity at Pershing Park without destroying the key and signature elements of what's there today," says Charles Birnbaum, president of the [Cultural Landscape Foundation](#).

That's why the Cultural Landscape Foundation is announcing this morning a campaign to urge National Mall and National Park Service stakeholders to preserve Pershing Park. The group is asking leaders to add it to the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site—a move that would slow any radical changes to it, including a new memorial. (Parts of Pennsylvania Avenue were granted [National Register of Historic Places](#) status in 2007, but not the park, which was only 20 years old at the time when the nomination effort was begun.)



Pershing Park as pictured in 2010. (Tim Evanson/[Flickr](#))

Pershing Park merits another look. It was designed by M. Paul Friedberg, one of the greatest modern landscape architects. Friedberg received the [American Society of Landscape Architects Design Medal](#) in 2004 and the [ASLA Medal](#) in 2015, the two highest honors in the field. The D.C. park is also the product of the firm Oehme, van Sweden & Associates. In October, the National Building Museum will open a retrospective on Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, whose work ["revolutionized modern American landscape architecture."](#)

The park plaza design, Friedberg's signature element, descends into a sunken basin surrounded by granite terracing. The "softscape" by Oehme and van Sweden was an early example of the firm's [New American Garden](#) aesthetic, which favored native and seasonal plantings. (Where would New York's beloved High Line be today without those wild grasses?) A hollow, rectilinear fountain at Pershing Park houses a zamboni; the water feature doubled as an ice-skating rink during winter—back when it worked.

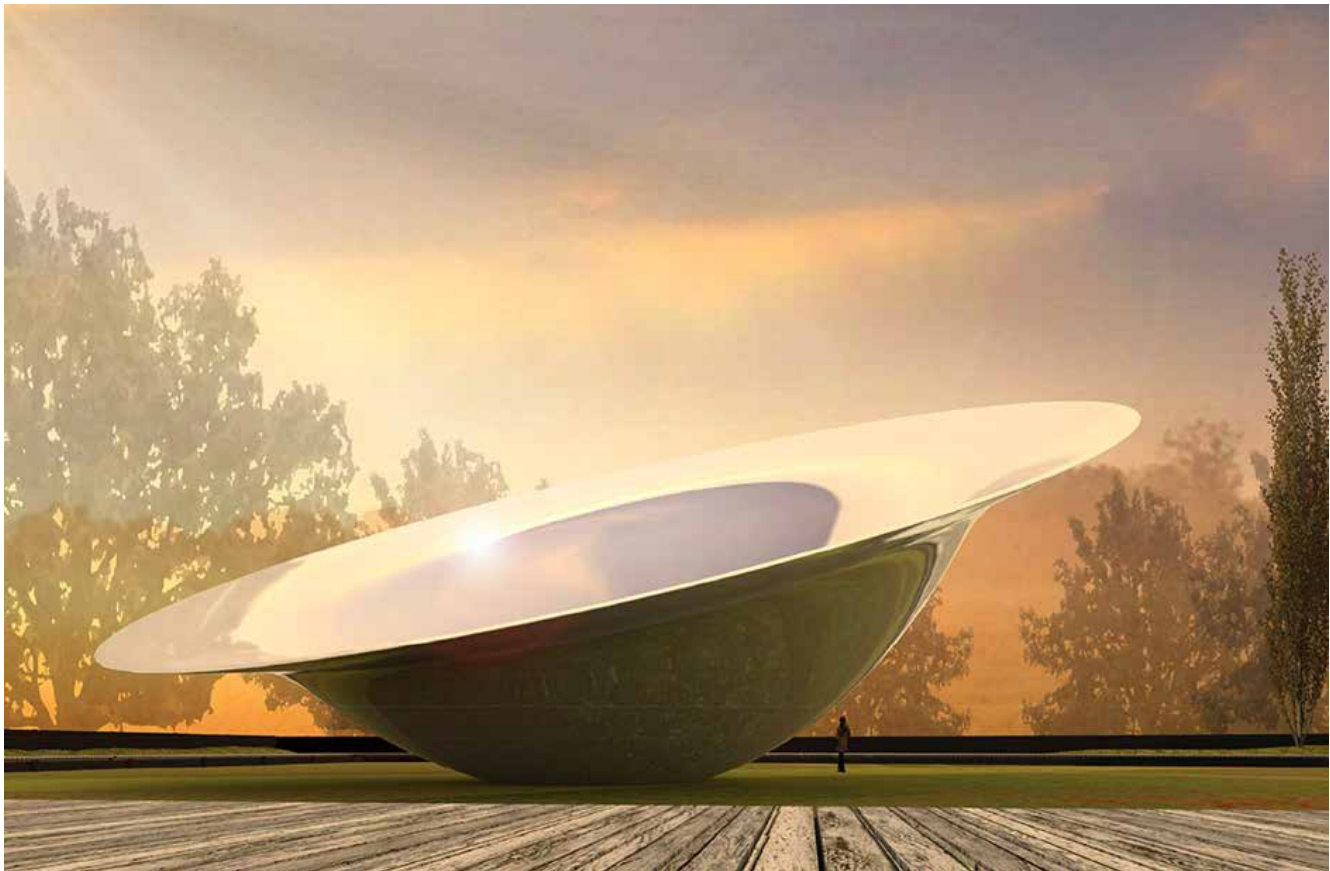


Pershing Park in 1991 (left) and today. (The Cultural Landscape Foundation)

Pershing Park occupies pride of place in the capital: It's a stone's throw from the White House, the U.S. Treasury Building, and the Willard Hotel (where Julia Ward How wrote "[The Battle Hymn of the Republic](#)"). But you wouldn't know it from visiting it today. The *Washington City Paper* called it a "[ghostly place](#)" in a 2012 article detailing all the failings of the federal contractor that has overseen it for decades. Now, the fountain is broken; delightful chairs and tables that once graced the park have been replaced by concrete benches; and the plantings and sunken water garden are long gone.

"When you have a landscape that has a water feature, and you stop maintaining the water feature, then you stop maintaining the plantings at the same level," Birnbaum says. "What we have here is bare-minimum maintenance. They empty the garbage. "

Perhaps that's why so many of the designs for the (new) National World War I Memorial call for completely demolishing and replacing Pershing Park. At a glance, a [huge majority of the more than 350 designs](#) treat Pershing Park as if it were a vacant lot. Many feature classical or figurative elements that would be out of step with the existing modernist landscape architecture.



Design entry #10, "[The Honor](#)," one of more than 350 competition submissions. A little on the nose, no? (WWI Centennial Commission)

Several of the best modernist landscape projects in America are endangered. Preservationists fought hard for Peavey Plaza, Friedberg's greatest work, in downtown Minneapolis. They succeeded in placing it on the [National Register of Historic Places](#), forcing the city to abandon plans to demolish it. Plans to restore it are [finally underway](#). And in Fort Worth, Texas, there's a [renewed effort to restore Heritage Park and Heritage Plaza](#), designed by Lawrence Halprin, a landscape luminary—thanks in part to [Laurie Olin](#), maybe the greatest practitioner working today.

"Just like Peavey [Plaza], people forget what [Pershing Park] looked like, and they are very quick to see it go away," Birnbaum says. "Any work of landscape architecture has the ability to adapt and evolve. I think there's a real difference between wholesale demolition and removal and thinking about how you adapt a place to serve multiple audiences."

For his part, Birnbaum doesn't rule out the possibility of adapting Pershing Park as a National World War I Memorial. (Although he does offer that a skating rink is probably incompatible with a monument to fallen soldiers.) The park as it

stands now—or as it once stood, anyway—might be better in keeping with the mission of a memorial than many of the competition entries. Consider the atmospheric [National September 11 Memorial](#), featuring fountains, landscaping, and a plaza, designed by Michael Arad and Peter Walker.

“Whatever you think about the World War II Memorial,” Birnbaum says, “when you go there on a hot day and see all of those people in that basin, it’s incredible.” (The [National World War II Memorial](#) is nobody’s favorite design.)



The cubic fountain, pictured in 2010, hides a zamboni. (Tim Evanson/[Flickr](#))

Restoring Pershing Park ought to be a no-brainer. It would certainly suit the adjacent hotels to reverse years of deferred maintenance and reclaim what was once a well-loved D.C. park. Today, it’s a sorry site, but not an unfamiliar one. The park falls under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (even though it belongs to the city), which “has long struggled with underfunding,” according to the [National Parks Conservation Association](#).

For now, the Cultural Landscape Foundation hopes to forestall any decision that will undermine the integrity of Pershing Park. “The competition language

discusses any proposed design interventions in terms that seem benign," says the group's statement, "but the proposed \$20-25 million budget points to wholesale changes."

Whatever shape they take, those changes aren't in the offing anytime soon. The National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, at a minimum, will need to sign off on any design selected by a jury. Presuming that Congress won't appropriate the funds for a National World War I Memorial, its backers will need to raise the money.

So any final decision will be a long ways off. All the better reason to restore Pershing Park as the nation's World War I memorial now. As [Roll Call](#) noted back in January, "Achieving approval to establish a National World War I Memorial in the District of Columbia took longer than the war itself."

About the Author



Kriston Capps is a staff writer at CityLab. He writes about housing, architecture, design, and other factors that shape cities. Previously, he was a senior editor at *Architect* magazine.

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THE CRISIS OF CONTEXT

A PARK IN D.C. BY M. PAUL FRIEDBERG IS UNDER THREAT, EVEN AS THE DESIGNER IS CELEBRATED, AND HIS PROFESSION STANDS BY.

BY CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM, FASLA

"We took the profession one step further. I brought landscape architecture into the city along with Halprin. There was a group of us that were not restricted to landscape's ties to nature—we saw nature as part of urban life. This was a response to the changes in urban America. What bothers me is it is not always seen—and is now being marketed as an elitist approach—this is the antithesis of what I set out to do."

—M. PAUL FRIEDBERG, FASLA (JULY 2015)

The American Society of Landscape Architects' highest honor, the ASLA Medal, is bestowed "upon a landscape architect whose lifetime achievements and contributions to the profession have had a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment." This year's award will go to M. Paul Friedberg, FASLA, a principled and opinioned maverick of the profession, during a capstone event of the ASLA Annual Meeting and EXPO on November 9. Like Lawrence Halprin (1916–2009), Friedberg is known as a leading advocate for reclaiming cities, design innovation in the civic realm, and an ever-expanding role for landscape architects. His flexible approach to urban design originated with revolutionary playground designs in the 1960s, and was fueled by his constant observation and analysis of what made public spaces successful. In a remarkable career that spans more than a half century, Friedberg has designed municipal and corporate

plazas, main-street malls, intimate vest-pocket parks, and expansive waterfronts, all while fostering and championing design innovation in play spaces and giving rise to a new type of urban public space, the hybrid "park/plaza."

During a recent weekend visit I had with Friedberg and his wife, the Israeli-born landscape architect Dorit Shahr, ASLA, at their country house on Long Island, Friedberg talked about his oeuvre in tones that were democratic and egalitarian. "My work is an extension of what Olmsted and his work stood for," he said. "It is in service of those who need places in an urban environment." He also reflected on several of his projects that, over the past decade or so, have been razed, significantly altered, or allowed to fall into such disrepair that momentum builds for their removal. Friedberg says that in these situations the landscapes become "fair game" for redesign or demolition.

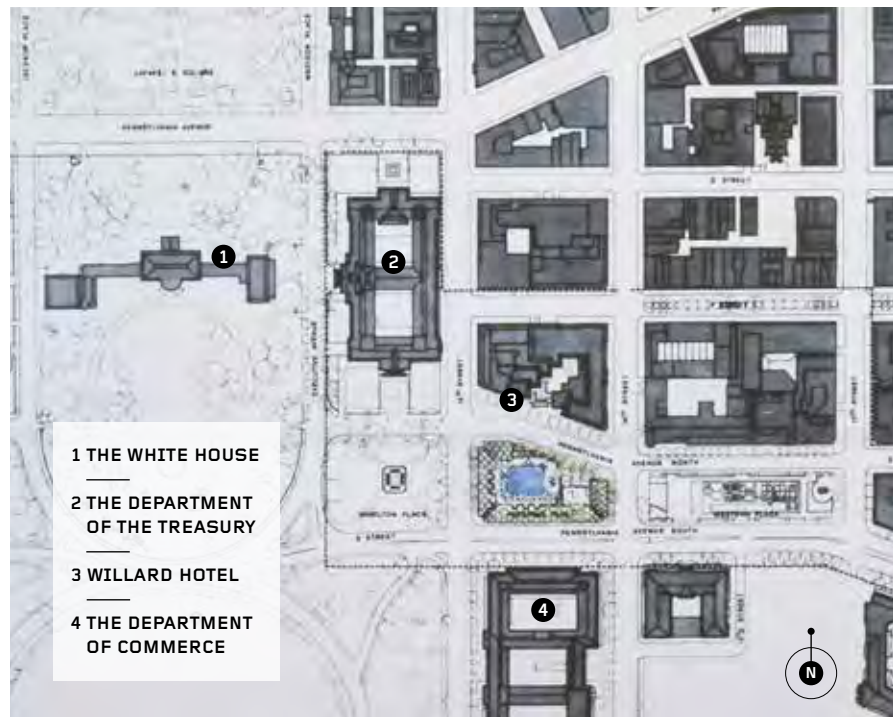


COURTESY M. PAUL FRIEDBERG & PARTNERS

ABOVE

The trapezoidal park is an urban refuge in a heavy traffic area of Washington, D.C., just east of the White House.

Recognizing that ASLA does not advocate for the preservation of individual built works of landscape architecture, what can we, as landscape architects, often working in isolation, do to honor the design legacy of a hugely influential practitioner? And if we don't take action, through our local ASLA chapters or other nonprofit groups, what might Friedberg's irreplaceable design legacy look like in 10 or 20 years? Will it be sufficient that we have Friedberg's writings or his former students and employees (Bernard Jacobs, FASLA; Signe Nielsen, FASLA; and Lee Weintraub, FASLA; among others) to carry his ideas forward while the built works are allowed to vanish over time? At a minimum, if we accept that not all of these works can or should be saved, shouldn't we try to ensure the survival of his most significant extant work? Rather than looking at just photographic and other documentation through a Historic American Landscapes Survey and other avenues (which are vitally important), shouldn't we have the opportunity to experience the places he designed within their larger urban



contexts, when they're animated with people, water, and light? Or, as Friedberg put it: "If you are going to honor the man who did the work—because the work is important to the man and the profession—why not protect it and say it has value?"

But that isn't always what happens. Consider Riis Park Plaza, which opened in 1965 to much fanfare and, in 1966, landed the then-34-year-old Friedberg in *LIFE* magazine, one of the most influential weekly print publications of the era. The new park on Manhattan's Lower East Side featured a series of modernist dynamic play structures—pyramids, mounds, and a tunnel—that appealed to children of various ages and in myriad ways, and it appeared in virtually every landscape survey during the next two decades. In 1999, Peter Walker, FASLA, asserted in *Land Forum* 08: *M. Paul Friedberg: Social Force*, "Modern urban landscape design began with the construction of Riis Park Plaza...[and]...like Mies' Barcelona Pavilion, it was unlike anything seen before in the modern city."

Unfortunately, by then Riis Park Plaza's fate had been determined, and the next year it was demolished. To make matters worse, this erasure was done in the near total absence of debate and public discussion. Even within the landscape

ABOVE
The park was part of a program to dignify the inaugural route along Pennsylvania Avenue.

LEFT
No longer in use, the sunken pool was intended to be an ice skating rink in the winter.

COURTESY M. PAUL FRIEDBERG & PARTNERS

ALAN RUSS, COURTESY THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION, TOP; COURTESY M. PAUL FRIEDBERG & PARTNERS, BOTTOM

architecture community, the park's declining condition and ultimate destruction remained below the radar. Riis Park died a quiet death, abandoned and forgotten.

Against this background, how do we move forward? Despite the prominence achieved by the profession during this decade, we still struggle with making visible the often invisible hand of the landscape architect. In Friedberg's case, he's not just any landscape architect. He's getting the ASLA Medal, having already received the ASLA Design Medal in 2004, the association's other "big kahuna" award, which makes him one of five practitioners to receive both awards in ASLA's 116-year history.

Today there are at least five Friedberg designs that face an uncertain future, including two seminal works—Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis (1974) and Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. (1981). An attempt to overhaul Peavey Plaza in 2012 was thwarted by a lawsuit filed by the Preservation



ABOVE
Granite steps and terracing are among the custom seating designed for the 1981 park.

BELOW
A later planting design by Oehme, van Sweden added water plants and year-round interest.



This raises the issue of the long-term management of Friedberg's designs, and to do so we must understand their context, which is both physical (the setting) and historical (the social and political aspects, along with the motivations and intentions of the designer, and his or her body of work). Friedberg is an urban person who loves cities and can cite distinct and memorable experiences from Manhattan to Mumbai that inform his worldview. As a keen observer of how we inhabit and move through our urban and civic realm, he is acutely aware of how to design for specific sites and situations, and to truly appreciate his works they must be experienced firsthand. The same could be said about the revolutionary 17th-century Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio (the name of the town in which he was born), another keen observer of contemporary urban life, and his work. To fully understand the importance of context—physical *and* historical—

of some of his most important commissions, there is no substitute for experiencing them in the spaces for which they were created.

In 1600, Caravaggio and the Bologna-born Annibale Carracci were awarded the plum commissions for the decoration of the three walls of the newly constructed Cerasi Chapel in Rome's Santa Maria del Popolo. To Caravaggio's annoyance, Carracci was commissioned to do the main altar, while Caravaggio did the two flanking paintings. To the right of Carracci's *Assumption of the Virgin* is Caravaggio's *Conversion of Saint Paul*, which is dominated by the saint's horse. The horse's rear end is pointed directly at Carracci's painting, a dual commentary on Carracci and his work.

Seeing those three paintings within the chapel's architectural space, a complex interplay of volume, form, and color animated by light, along with Caravaggio's critical twist of the knife, cannot be reproduced through documentation. It is that primary experience that is so informative and influential. The filmmaker Martin Scorsese said of the congested bar sequences in *Mean Streets*: "It's... [Caravaggio's] *The Calling of Saint Matthew* [painted for and located in the Contarelli Chapel of Rome's San Luigi dei Francesci], but in New York!"

Friedberg's work has also been influential to many disciplines (landscape architecture, planning, architecture, play, environmental art), though he believes that landscape as an art form is distinct. "What's the difference," he asks, "between someone going to an art museum that shows paintings as compared to going to a church? You are there for an hour or two and you feel good. The landscape does more—you have the right to go back, and it's as much of an art form as every other—it is yours, and you observe it. You have the idea to read [the landscape on] many levels." Successful parks for Friedberg are "adopted" by the public, but there are also times when they have to be adapted to accommodate new uses and needs. Successful adaptation starts by respecting the extant work while managing issues of change and

continuity, and that includes an understanding, among other things, of a designer's career canon.

So can this idea of adoption and adaptation be promoted by landscape architects? If so, what are the tools that landscape architects will need to assess a career canon to make educated decisions about which projects to save and how to go about it? What are the questions we should ask?

Once again, we return to context. Friedberg says that the original design intent at Pershing Park was to be flexible and to "serve many activities" and cites "the fountain, the pool, and the ice skating." He added, "Ice skating does something in the winter.... Why do people come to Rockefeller Center? It is [for the] ice skating rink. [It provides] a connection between the viewer and the spectator—they are being observed. I sit here on my porch and watch the boats go by. It's part of an ongoing daily experience. That is life interacting with itself. What intrigues me is that those are elements that you can't learn; you have to see it in action. Here people use it and it is a wonderful teaching tool, students see and learn their role, what their contributions can be." He continued, "The space should not be dictatorial—this is what bothers me about the [proposed World War I] memorial. They don't accommodate the uses and desires of the space." He goes on, "The fact that the National Park Service would allow a park two blocks from the White House to look the way Pershing does is a joke."

Now that Pershing Park appears to be headed toward the same fate as Riis Park Plaza, Friedberg is frustrated. "Why do we wait? Why didn't we scream when someone said [they] wanted to make this a competition?" And he says that lack of education is part of the problem. "Central Park is preserved because people are told. People make the decisions they do because they are the right choices."

Although Friedberg becomes quite animated in broader philosophical discussions about the role, importance, and design of parks, he deflects the



ALAN RUSS, COURTESY THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION

ABOVE
Pershing Park,
with President's
Park and the Ellipse
behind it.

conversation when it turns to the value of his own work. He is, however, most honored and touched when others advocate for preserving his work—something he has recently seen with his playground at P.S. 166 in New York City and the Fulton County Government Center in Atlanta. He says, "The fact that people would fight for my work is important—that they recognize its value. In Atlanta [at Fulton], Doug Allen, who tragically died of brain cancer in 2014, led the public effort to protect the site. Why did *he* do it and why does the profession sit back on their heels?

"The challenge is we don't have a commitment, and we need a mechanism [by which] we evaluate the work. We should be involved in the selection

of park commissioners, peer review, [and] evaluating designs, [because] we have developed a much more sophisticated level of design."

Given that ASLA's mission is "to advance landscape architecture through advocacy, communication, education, and fellowship," is it time, given the pending threats to Friedberg's works and others (not least the Olmsted-designed Washington Park in Chicago), to have a cross-disciplinary conversation about the profession's future and legacy? ●

CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM, FASLA, IS THE PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION.

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December 10, 2015

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President & CEO, The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Can Parks and Memorials Happily Co-Exist?

Posted: 06/16/2015 9:51 am EDT | Updated: 06/17/2015 9:59 am EDT

The [National Mall in Washington, DC](#) is saturated with monuments and museums and, while there is little support for adding more to the Mall, there is support for continuing the tradition of building monuments in the city. While it is a fraught process that requires approvals from numerous agencies and advisory panels, including the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, when well managed with clearly articulated goals, the results can be impressive. Consider the [Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial](#) located along the Tidal Basin -- that commission was won by [Lawrence Halprin](#) in 1974 (though it would be another 23 years before the memorial opened), and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial (also on the Tidal Basin), designed by the ROMA Design Group and chosen from more than 900 competitors. Perhaps the most notable example in the last 35 years is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya Lin and selected from more than 1,400 submissions. These Modernist insertions into Washington, DC's monumental core were skillfully handled and demonstrated great site sensitivity. The designs also established significant -- and symbolically rich -- visual and spatial relationships with adjacent memorials, thus creating a unique physical narrative of key points in the nation's history.



Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC. Photo ©

Allen Russ, courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Today the National Mall is at peak capacity and land nearby is being eyed for new monuments, including stretches that run parallel to the Mall, and along Pennsylvania Avenue. One instance of this is the Frank Gehry-designed Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial, slated for a four-acre parcel (that once housed a community garden) near the National Air & Space Museum, although for nearly a decade its design has been mired in controversy.

Parts of Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the US Capitol are also being considered. Recently a competition was announced for a [World War I Memorial](#) to be built on a 1.8-acre site across the street from the historic Willard Hotel (where the Battle Hymn of the Republic was composed and, legend has it, the term "lobbying" was invented). But there's one hitch - that is already the location of [Pershing Park](#), a landscape designed by [M. Paul Friedberg](#) that opened in 1981, a year before the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The park, which honors the World War I US General John Pershing, is part of a sequence of parks and open spaces designed under the aegis of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (created by an Act of Congress in 1972), which engaged some of the nation's most significant landscape architects and architects (Friedberg discusses his design in [this video oral history](#)).



Pershing Park, 2012, photograph courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Pershing Park, which is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, is one of Friedberg's most important extant works and was cited along with Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis, MN (which was listed on the National Register in January 2013) by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) when it recently announced that Friedberg would receive the ASLA Medal, "the Society's highest award for a landscape architect."



Pershing Park, 1991, photograph courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

The ASLA announcement noted, "Friedberg has designed public places that not only break the boundaries of traditional design, but also increase the quality of life for those who use these spaces." The park is also significant because of the plantings executed in 1981 by Oehme van Sweden & Associates, headed by Wolfgang Oehme (d. 2011) and James van Sweden (d. 2013), who are the focus of a forthcoming monographic exhibition at the National Building Museum.



Pershing Park, 1991, photograph courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

As the firm's three principals recently wrote: "Charged with bringing horticultural design to America's Avenue, [Wolfgang] Oehme and [James] 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. [Pershing] Park was one of the first examples of 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." Their work can be found throughout the nation's capital including the World War II Memorial, The German-American Friendship Garden, The Federal Reserve Board Garden and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. At Pershing, the profusion of plant materials, especially around the signature pool (once used for skating in the winter) also suggested the work of Roberto Burle Marx, the internationally influential Modernist landscape architect.

In December 1981, *Washington Post* architecture critic Benjamin Forgey wrote: "With its sequence of sloping green areas, cascading stairs and open terraces, Pershing Park is in fact a state-of-the-art demonstration of the lessons landscape architects have gradually been relearning about urban parks." Forgey went on to say, "It will become one of the more active and interesting outdoor spaces in the city because it is superbly designed to attract and to accommodate people in large numbers."



Pershing Park, 2012, photograph courtesy The

Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Pershing was one of five newly opened parks that Forgey reviewed. He concluded: "[W]e are being given five tremendous gifts in these parks along the avenue. The whole scheme, including not only the design but creative ideas about uses and activities as well, is a model of sophisticated, enlightened, realistic urban planning. The parks will do a lot to temper the massive mediocrity of much of the new architecture along the avenue, and they can only get better as the years go by."

Or not.

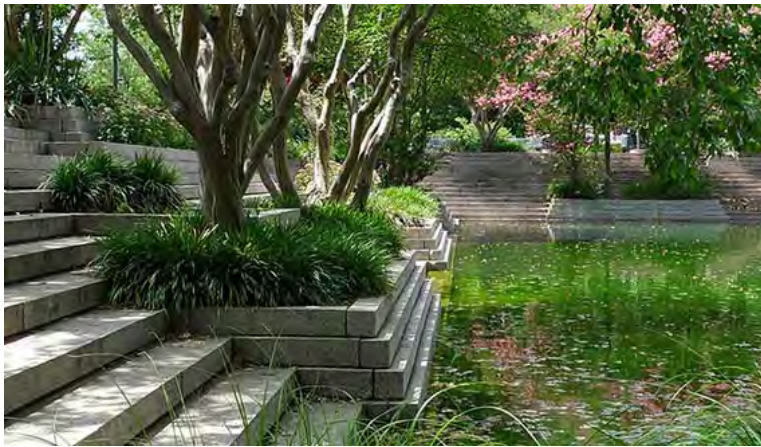
Pershing is beginning the slow, entirely preventable (and sadly predictable) decline that often results in the demolition of designed landscapes. In the World War I Memorial competition guidelines, a descriptive section labeled Memorial Site tells us: "In recent years, the park has experienced degradation due to failure of mechanical systems servicing the pool and skating rink, and vegetation growth adversely affecting the perceived security and welcome-ness of the park."



Pershing Park, 2014, photograph courtesy The

Cultural Landscape Foundation.

This deliberately inexact but suggestive language is the sort too often used as the prelude to a call for demolition. The park is "perceived" as unsafe and unwelcome; invariably someone deems it "broken," and, therefore, it must be razed and replaced. Rather than being attributable to design flaws though, the "degradation" is actually a result of deferred maintenance. That's the equivalent of denying medical attention and then blaming the patient for getting gravely ill.



Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Pershing Park, 2012, photograph courtesy The



Cultural Landscape Foundation.

Pershing Park, 2015, photograph courtesy The

Language from the competition's *Design Goals* charts a putatively ecumenical course: "To generate a visionary design concept for the World War I Memorial, competitors should thoughtfully consider the range of appropriate enhancement strategies and transformation options -- preservation, alteration, relocation, demolition -- for addressing the Park's physical elements and integrating the existing Pershing Memorial elements and new commemorative features into the site." However, the competition guidelines also state: "The Memorial should be designed to be constructed at a cost no greater than \$20-25 million, to be operationally sustainable and to minimize maintenance requirements over time." Knowledgeable landscape architects would tell you that this language and budget translate to the demolition of the existing landscape and the construction of a new work.



Pershing Park, 2012, photograph courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.



Pershing Park, 2015, photograph courtesy The Cultural Landscape Foundation.

As we approach the July 21, 2015 design application deadline, what responsibilities does the multitude of stakeholders -- members of the World War I Memorial Commission and its judges, landscape architects and related professionals who would compete for this commission, critics and the general public -- have to the design by Friedberg and Oehme van Sweden? By what criteria are the value and significance of this unique, National Register-eligible collaboration by three influential practitioners being assessed? And, is this process being steered towards a false choice: Either approve demolition of the original design or do not build a new World War I Memorial.

It would be encouraging to see entries from landscape architects and allied professionals that honor the legacies of Friedberg and Oehme van Sweden, and successfully nest the new memorial within a rehabilitated Pershing Park.

Follow Charles A. Birnbaum on Twitter: www.twitter.com/TCLFdotORG

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<http://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2015/08/24/why-one-group-opposes-sacrificing-d-c-s-pershing.html>

Why one group opposes sacrificing D.C.'s Pershing Park for World War I memorial

Aug 24, 2015, 11:16am EDT



[Bob Niedt](#)

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At least one D.C.-based group has risen up against design plans for a World War I memorial in a redesigned Pershing Park.

The Cultural Landscape Foundation says [the five finalist designs](#) vying to be chosen by the World War I Memorial Commission to create the tribute to veterans of the Great War all have at least one unifying theme: Demolishing Pennsylvania Avenue's Pershing Park as it is.

That isn't sitting well with the the Cultural Landscape Foundation, though it points out it is not opposed to a national World War I memorial.

"The five finalist World War I Memorial designs call for the demolition of one of the most important public spaces commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, and a work by three master landscape architects," said [Charles A. Birnbaum](#), president and CEO of the Cultural Landscape Foundation.

The foundation notes the current Pershing Park, which formally opened in 1981 two blocks from the White House, was designed by award-winning Modernist landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](#). [Wolfgang Oehme](#) and [James van Sweden](#) of Oehme, Van Sweden & Associates Inc. created the planting design. Their work is the subject of a new retrospective opening Oct. 17 at the National Building Museum Building. It's billed as the largest monographic landscape architecture exhibition in the

museum's history.

The World War I Memorial Commission plans to select a winning design by January 2016. The memorial is expected to land by 2018 — the centennial of World War I — in a redesigned Pershing Park.

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KAMJZ Proposes to Preserve Pershing Park with an Overhead Memorial

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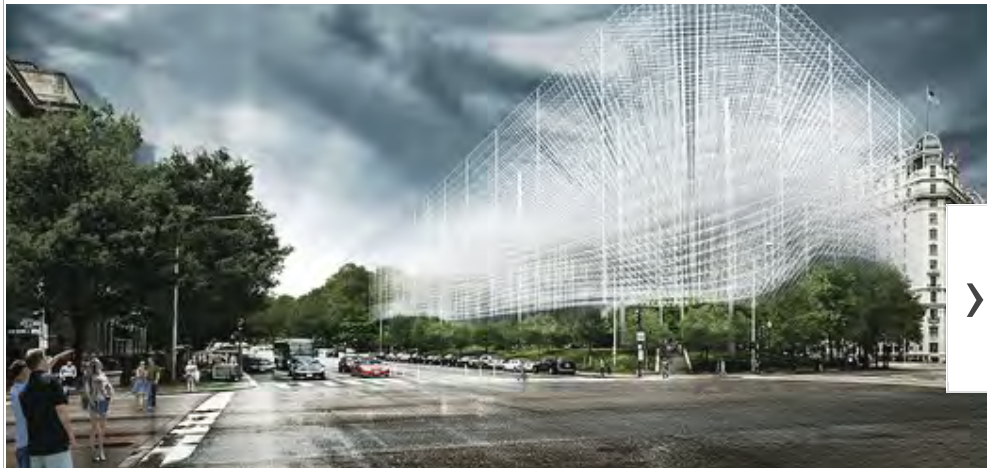
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Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects

Earlier this month, after viewing the [contenders](#) in the US World War I Centennial Commission's [competition](#) to redesign the National World War I Memorial in [Washington](#)

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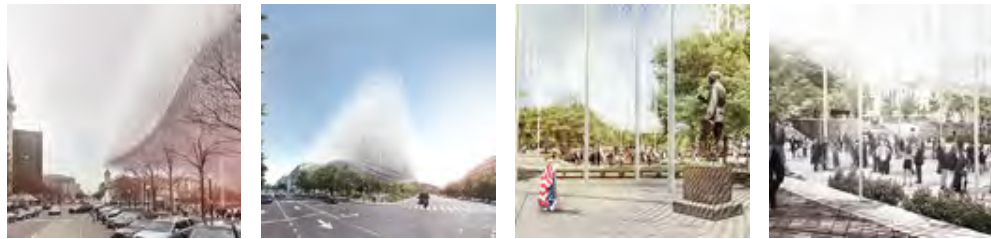
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DC, organizations like The Cultural Landscape Foundation began to [began to voice their opinion](#) regarding the reach of the competition. With the cultural importance of the site in mind, such organizations had hoped that the redesign would maintain the existing Pershing Park, but were disappointed to discover that the majority of the competition's [design proposals](#) seek to demolish the existing landscape.

Although left off of the competition's shortlist, [KAMJZ Architects'](#) proposal for the World War I memorial addresses these concerns by leaving [Pershing Park](#) almost completely intact. Leaving alone the park's seating areas, agora, and landscaping, the design proposal unifies the park by adding an outer ring of trees "along the borders of the site [to] provide an acoustic barrier from the noisy adjacent streets."



Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects

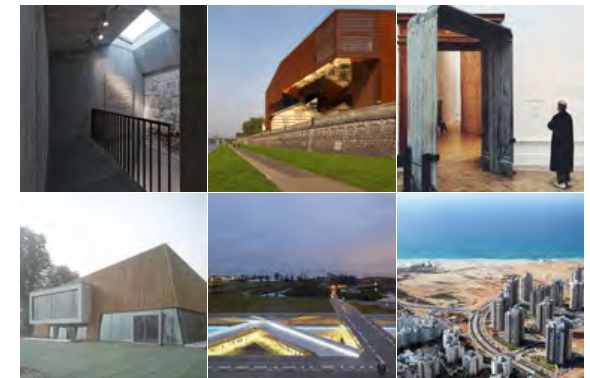


KAMJZ Proposes Sustainable Ruichang Flower Market for China
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City Cultural Center Competition Entry / KAMJZ Architects
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Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects

While the park remains mostly untouched, the centerpiece of KAMJZ's design is the hovering lattice of stacked roofs, which would span over the entirety of the park, creating a visually striking "covered green area in the middle of city center."



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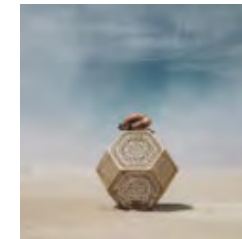


Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects

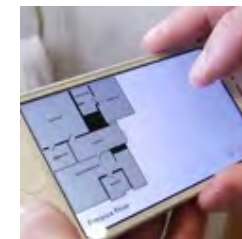
As stated by the architects, “the result is a subtle icon which does not try to compete with other important nearby-located American symbols, but at the same time is attached to the urban tissue by referencing the form of adjacent building heights. By resembling a dissolved surrounding building, it becomes a representation of the impact of WWI on American society.”


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Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects



Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects

Notwithstanding its status in the competition, the design proposal thus provides a compelling alternative view on the greater idea of the memorial. Learn more about the project, [here](#).

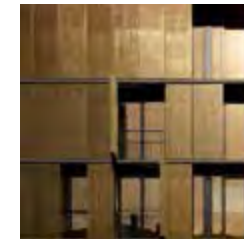
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ARCHDAILY SABRINA SANTOS



Charles Birnbaum on the Need to Save DC's Pershing Park

Last May, we published an open call for the redesign of the National World War I Memorial at Washington DC's Pershing Park, situated between the White House and the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue. Opened as a park plaza in 1981, the park's current state is in need of renewal.

[Read the article on archdaily.com >](#)



ARCHDAILY SABRINA SANTOS



World War I Memorial Competition Finalists Announced

In May, the US World War I Centennial Commission launched its design competition for the redesign of the National World War I Memorial, located in Washing DC.

[Read the article on archdaily.com >](#)

Architects: [KAMJZ Architects](#)

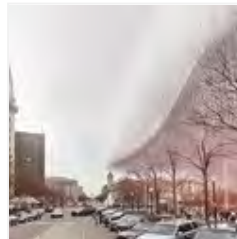
Location: Pershing Park, Washington, DC 20004, USA

Main Project Architect: Maciej Jakub Zawadzki

Partners in Charge: Maciej Jakub Zawadzki, Marek Kuryłowicz

Design Team: Łukasz Wenclewski, Michał Polak, Pablo Otero, Artur Zakrzewski, Lazar Djuric, Sofija Lalovic, Silvia Nigro

Photographs: Courtesy of KAMJZ Architects



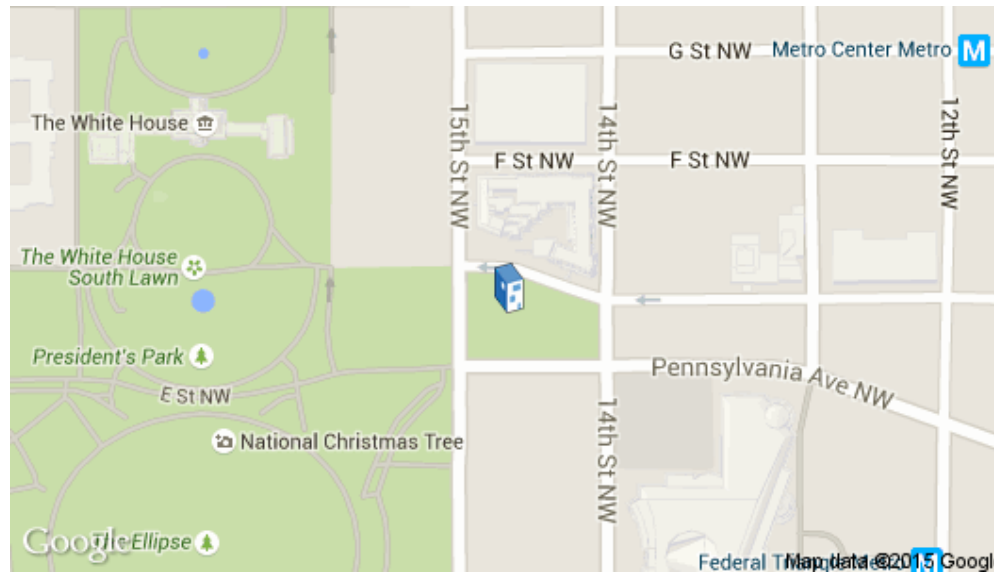
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Location to be used only as a reference. It could indicate city/country but not exact address.

Cite:

Sabrina Santos. "KAMJZ Proposes to Preserve Pershing Park with an Overhead Memorial" 24 Aug 2015.

ArchDaily. Accessed 20 Sep 2015. <<http://www.archdaily.com/772272/kamjz-proposes-to-preserve-pershing-park-by-building-an-overhead-memorial/>>

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Plans for WWI memorial in nation's capital stir ire



By [Carlos Bongioanni](#)

Stars and Stripes

Published: August 19, 2015

WASHINGTON — An effort to build a new World War I memorial is causing controversy even as the project moved forward Wednesday with the announcement of five design-competition finalists.

Finalists were thrilled at being chosen, and for the \$25,000 they each received.

Joseph Weishaar said he was “overwhelmed” at the news. “I never thought it would turn out like this,” said Weishaar, 25, an intern at a Chicago architectural firm. More than 300 designs were submitted.



Pershing Park as seen in June 2015.

COURTESY OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION

PHOTOS | Pershing Park from the 1980s compared to today

But organizers from the WWI Centennial Commission, which launched the design competition in May, are finding themselves battling those up in arms over the site of the new memorial.

“I was shocked there was even such a contest,” said landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, who designed Pershing Park, where the memorial is to be built. Friedberg, 83, told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday that he was never consulted about the new plans. “You don’t destroy something that has value to build something and give it some other value.”

Charles Birnbaum with the Cultural Landscape Foundation believes Pershing Park is a seminal work by Friedberg, whom he referred to as a “master” in the field of landscape architecture. The design competition plans threaten what Birnbaum sees as a nationally significant architectural site that his organization is petitioning to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

After reviewing the five design finalists announced Wednesday, Birnbaum said his group opposes the designs, all of which call for the demolition of Pershing Park in downtown D.C., “one of the most important public spaces.”

But to Edwin L. Fountain, vice chairman of the WWI Centennial Commission, the current site where the WWI memorial is to be built is a “35-year-old failed park” that should be replaced.

On the southeast corner of the park — at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, one block from the White House — a 12-foot bronze statue of WWI Army Gen. John Joseph “Black Jack” Pershing stands along with several granite panels with inscriptions. At the other end of the 1.8-acre enclosure toward the White House, amphitheater-style steps lead down to a concrete basin that in better days served as a shallow pool fed by an upper fountain.

For years after it opened in 1981, the pool was a well-kept water garden that drew many visitors. But in recent years, the park has not been maintained and has significantly deteriorated. The pool, which also served as an ice-skating rink during winter, has not been used for several years because of poor plumbing conditions.

Friedberg called it “obscene” and a “dereliction of duty” that city officials and the National Park Service have allowed the park to fall into such disrepair. But that doesn’t mean you do away with it, he said. “Would you destroy Central Park in New York City, just because it needed some repairs?” he asked. Friedberg said replacing his work with another was a “destruction of culture” akin to burning books. He said he’s prepared to fight to keep Pershing Park the way it is.

Fountain said it’s premature to say whether there will be a legal battle over Pershing Park. The five designs chosen to compete in the second stage of the competition will be extensively developed with several midcourse and compliance reviews before a final design is chosen in January. All pertinent agencies will be involved during the process to give guidance. If it’s determined that Pershing Park should be listed in the National Register as a historical site and cannot be substantially changed, Fountain said alterations would be made to the designs to accommodate that.

bongioanni.carlos@stripes.com



Read the article, join the discussion, and share with your friends online.
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Pershing Park from the 1980s compared to today

1980s



2012





JuxtaposeJS

Photo Credits: Before Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation After Allen Russ/Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation

2012



2015



JuxtaposeJS

Photo Credits: Before Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation After Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation

1980s



2015





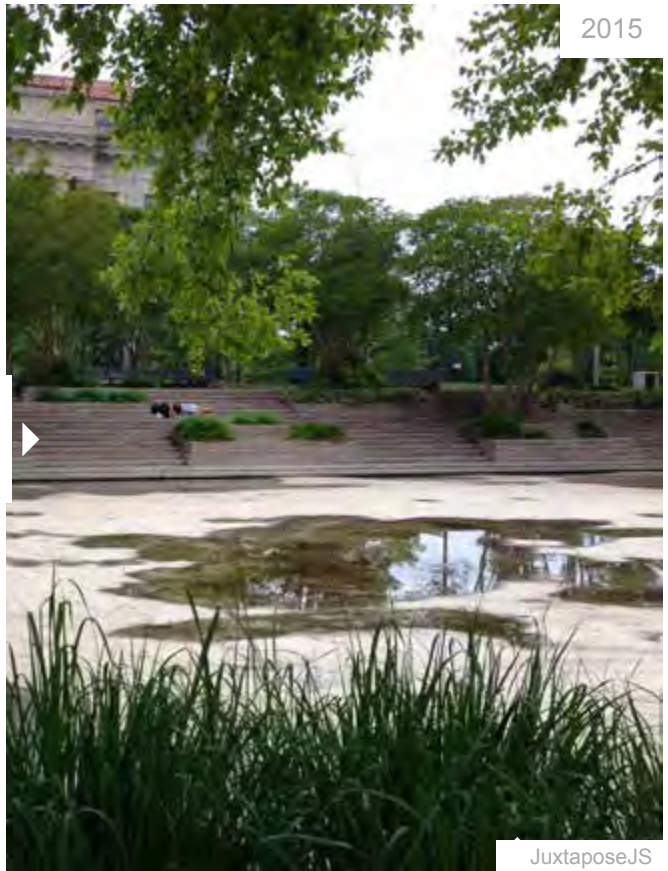
JuxtaposeJS

Photo Credits: Before Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation/Oehme, van Sweden After Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation

1980s



2015



JuxtaposeJS

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LANDSLIDE: At risk

Threat to Pershing Park Draws International Attention

[Pennsylvania Avenue \(/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue\)](#), [Pershing Park \(/landscapes/pershing-park\)](#), Washington DC

By TCLF Staff

Published August 18, 2015

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08.03.15 [Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue Is Threatened \(/landslides/pershing-park-threatened\)](#)



Pershing Park, photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

The fate of Pershing Park (<http://tclf.org/landslides/pershing-park-threatened>) in Washington, D.C., which could be demolished to make way for a national World War I memorial, has garnered national—and even international—attention, which may be one reason why the unveiling of the five finalist designs scheduled for August 14, 2015, was postponed to the 19th.

The Atlantic's CityLab (<http://www.citylab.com/design/2015/08/how-many-world-war-i-memorials-does-one-park-need/400487/>) first broke the news that Pershing, designed by Modernist landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg with plantings by Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, had become a TCLF Landslide site. The park has suffered from years of deferred maintenance and now its signature fountain (created as a water garden) is dry, the lithe moveable tables and chairs have been replaced with hulking concrete furnishings, and there are other deficiencies. The article, titled "How Many World War I Memorials Does One Park Need?," concludes: "Restoring Pershing Park ought to be a no-brainer. It would certainly suit the adjacent hotels to reverse years of deferred maintenance and reclaim what was once a well-loved D.C. park."

The creation of a new memorial, regardless of the impact on Pershing Park, will require approvals from the National Capital Planning Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the District of Columbia's Historic Preservation Office, among others. According to [Architectural Record](http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2015/08/150807-World-War-I-Memorial-Proposals-Please-Classicists-and-Anger-Preservationists.asp?WT.mc_id=rss_archrecord) (http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2015/08/150807-World-War-I-Memorial-Proposals-Please-Classicists-and-Anger-Preservationists.asp?WT.mc_id=rss_archrecord), there would appear to be a predisposition towards demolition. The article cites World War I Centennial Commission vice-chair Edwin Fountain, who "seemed perplexed when asked if the Friedberg-designed garden should be preserved." Fountain stated: "I'm aware that some people hold that view. I don't happen to share it. My view is that it's a 35-year-old failed park that has significant drawbacks. We'll go through all the necessary reviews. But Congress has authorized us to make alterations to the site, so that's our starting premise."

More recently, [Architect](http://www.architectmagazine.com/design/q-a-charles-birnbaum-president-and-ceo-of-the-cultural-landscape-foundation_o) (http://www.architectmagazine.com/design/q-a-charles-birnbaum-president-and-ceo-of-the-cultural-landscape-foundation_o) ran a Q&A with TCLF's Charles Birnbaum in which he discussed "the ongoing design competition ... and how [most of] the [more than 350] submissions threaten the integrity of the site."

The announcement of the five finalist designs was made August 19, and all call for the demolition of Pershing Park - TCLF issued the following [press release](http://tclf.org/news/pressroom/tclf-opposes-demolition-pershing-park) (<http://tclf.org/news/pressroom/tclf-opposes-demolition-pershing-park>).



Pershing Park, photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

Comments (1)

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,' has called attention to the Pershing Memorial as an existing, appropriate 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. We suggested that rather than attempting to build a new memorial on the Mall, in Constitution Gardens or elsewhere that modest funds should be sought to rehabilitate Pershing Park and 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. This was envisioned with a minimum impact on the existing park as designed by M. Paul Friedberg, FASLA, with plantings by Oehme van Sweden.

By aoiofdc
September 4, 2015

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.

Some elements of one design, however, could be nicely incorporated into the existing Pershing Memorial satisfying our vision of 'additional interpretive elements' added to make it a national WWI Memorial. Design 0077 "The Weight of Sacrifice" contains some of the elements that we believe could be included in a wall along the E Street boundary (north) of the memorial or the Pennsylvania Avenue (south) boundary. By including these bas relief elements proposed by Joseph Weishaar of Chicago, IL the existing water features, sculpture of General Pershing and the panels describing his campaigns could be preserved.

We appreciate the efforts of the Cultural Landscape Foundation to keep this debate alive and help minimize any impact on the existing Pershing Memorial that new interpretive elements may have upon its design.

William N. Brown, President
AOI of DC, Founded Dec. 7, 1865

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LANDSLIDE: At risk

Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue Is Threatened

[Pennsylvania Avenue \(/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue/\)](#), [Pershing Park \(/landscapes/pershing-park/\)](#), Washington DC

By TCLF staff

Published August 3, 2015

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08.03.15 [Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue Is Threatened \(/landslides/pershing-park-threatened/\)](#)



Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

Located along Washington, D.C.'s Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol, Pershing Park (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park>), which opened in 1981, is among the most significant extant works by Modernist landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg. The project is also notable for the planting plan designed by the firm Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, and is a unique effort between these influential practitioners. Degraded by accrued diminished maintenance, a World War I memorial has now been proposed for the site, and a vast majority of the more than 350 first-round submissions (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/stage-i-submissions-for-public-comment.html>) in the memorial design competition call for the

present design's complete demolition.

History

Pershing Park (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park>) is at the western end of a 1.2-mile long stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue between Capitol Hill and the White House, a significant element of Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the Federal City. The avenue is the nation's premiere ceremonial space, and a symbolic and physical link between the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government. After more than a century-and-a-half of degradation, President John F. Kennedy established a council to revitalize the avenue, and following the council's 1964 report, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), created by an Act of Congress in 1972, commissioned leading landscape architects, including M. Paul Friedberg, to design significant improvements along its expanse. Importantly, while this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue is designated as a National Historic Site, the "period of significance" (1791-1962), which the National Park Service defines (http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb39/nrb39_ii.HTM) as the finite "span of time during which significant events and activities occurred," does include some of the PADC-era commissions, which will be addressed below.



Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

New York-based Friedberg, the subject of a Pioneers Oral History (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/m-paul-friedberg>), is one of the nation's leading Modernist (<https://tclf.org/content/modernist>) landscape architects, whose extant oeuvre

includes [Peavey Plaza](https://tclf.org/landscapes/peavey-plaza) (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/peavey-plaza>) in Minneapolis, MN, which opened in 1975 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (2013), and the Winter Garden at Battery Park City's World Financial Center in New York City. Friedberg's career, which stretches more than a half century, is peppered with influential projects and he is a rare recipient of the two highest awards of the [American Society of Landscape Architects](http://asla.org) (<http://asla.org>) (ASLA), the association that represents the profession – the [Design Medal](http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/medals/friedberg.htm) (<http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/medals/friedberg.htm>) (2004) and the [ASLA Medal](http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535) (<http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535>) (2015) – only six practitioners have been so honored in ASLA's 116-year history.

The park Friedberg designed honors General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I, and the troops he commanded. Opened in 1981, the 1.8-acre multi-level plaza contains several elements—the sunken plaza/pool basin, the amphitheater-style seating, and the lawn terraces—also evident at Peavey Plaza. However, the planting plan, executed the same year, was by the Washington, D.C.-based Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, which created a lush water garden. [Wolfgang Oehme](https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme>) and [James van Sweden](https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden>) are recognized as the creators of a typology—the “New American Garden”—that has influenced practitioners nationwide, and can be found in Washington, D.C. at the [Federal Reserve Board](https://tclf.org/landscapes/federal-reserve-board-garden) (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/federal-reserve-board-garden>), the [World War II Memorial](https://tclf.org/landscapes/national-world-war-ii-memorial) (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/national-world-war-ii-memorial>), and the German-American Friendship Garden (Oehme, van Sweden will also be the subject of a monographic traveling photographic exhibition being organized by TCLF in collaboration with the [National Building Museum](http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html) (<http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html>) in Washington, D.C., where it will open in October 2015). Pershing Park was among the first uses of this planting design concept in a civic space, and the project is a unique effort between Friedberg and Oehme, van Sweden.

The PADC was terminated in 1996 and many of the public improvements that it initiated have fallen into disrepair in the intervening two decades due to diminished maintenance by the National Park Service, which has responsibility for the site (collectively, this section of Pennsylvania Avenue – and body of work commissioned by the PADC – was included in [TCLF's 2012 Landslide: Landscape and Patronage](http://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/landscape-patronage/pennsylvania-avenue.html) (<http://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/landscape-patronage/pennsylvania-avenue.html>) thematic compendium of nationally significant at-risk and threatened landscapes). The situation at Pershing is particularly noticeable. For several years, the signature expansive, but shallow, pool—essential to the “water garden” idea and also used as a skating rink in the winter—has been empty and at times garbage strewn. Paving materials and other hardscape elements are in need of repair, plant materials have been neglected, and even the original movable metal chairs and tables have been replaced with immovable concrete furnishings.



Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates



Pershing Park today. Photo © Allan Russ

In January 2001, work began on the National Register Nomination update that led to the creation of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, designated in 2007. As noted above, some of the PADC-era commissions were not included because only twenty years had elapsed since the park first opened, and their respective designers were still in practice. Since then, Friedberg has retired and both Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden (the latter also the subject of a [Pioneers Oral History](http://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/james-van-sweden) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/james-van-sweden>)) have passed away.

We believe the site is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and that the National Register Nomination should be revisited to consider the inclusion of Pershing Park and other PADC-era commissions – thus insuring that any proposed changes would not have an adverse effect on the park’s signature design elements and features.

Threat

As is the case with parks across the country, diminished maintenance has resulted in palpable structural problems and deficiencies at Pershing Park, and this is not the first of Friedberg’s works to so be afflicted (in recent years, [Peavey Plaza was threatened with demolition](http://tclf.org/landscapes/peavey-plaza) (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/peavey-plaza>), but that has been averted for now). Currently, there is a more substantial threat: the [U.S. World War I Centennial Commission](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php>), established in 2013, announced a design competition to redevelop the

park as a National World War I Memorial. The competition language discusses any proposed design interventions in terms that seem benign, “appropriate enhancement strategies” and “transformation options,” but the proposed \$20-25 million budget points to wholesale changes, which a recent [Huffington Post](http://tclf.org/blog/can-parks-and-memorials-happily-co-exist) (<http://tclf.org/blog/can-parks-and-memorials-happily-co-exist>) article noted is a budget consistent with “the demolition of the exiting landscape and the construction of a new work.” The Commission created an open design competition and by July 15, 2015 had received a first round of proposals. Significantly, nearly all of the [more than 350 options](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/first-round-submissions-for-public-comment.html) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/first-round-submissions-for-public-comment.html>) call for the complete demolition of this unique effort by Friedberg and Oehme, van Sweden. A jury currently sits in review of these entries and will choose those who will enter the second round of competition.

We believe this current focus on Pershing Park could be the impetus for the park’s renewal and the development of an ongoing management plan that includes a public/private conservancy (similar to the Battery Park Conservancy). Recent archival images demonstrate that Pershing was extremely popular with downtown workers along with visiting tourists and it could again become that oasis on Pennsylvania Avenue. Because of the significance of the site, both nationally and within Friedberg’s career, any alteration and/or demolition of Pershing Park would require consultation with and approval of several organizations including the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.



First

Lieutenant Paul Friedberg in Korea. Photo courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg

It is important to note that Pershing Park’s inclusion on Landslide is not a commentary by either TCLF or Mr.

Friedberg on the need for or appropriateness of a national World War I memorial, the people it would honor, or the sincere intent of the Commission and its supporters. In fact, Friedberg served in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Korea, as he discusses in TCLF's [Pioneers Oral History](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsXPotXD5q0&feature=youtu.be) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsXPotXD5q0&feature=youtu.be>).

How You Can Help

Contact [Karen Cucurullo](mailto:Karen_Cucurullo@nps.gov?subject=Proposed%20changes%20to%20Pershing%20Park%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.) (mailto:Karen_Cucurullo@nps.gov?subject=Proposed%20changes%20to%20Pershing%20Park%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.), Acting Superintendent, National

Mall and Memorial Parks at the National Park Service and urge for better maintenance of Pershing Park and the nation's most important processional space. In addition, the Park Service should explore an expansion of the period of significance for the avenue to include the PADC's contributions—especially the Modernist parks created by M. Paul Friedberg and other nationally significant landscape architects during its tenure, in all future planning and development initiatives:

National Mall and Memorial Parks
National Park Service
900 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Contact the [World War I Memorial Commissioners](https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html) (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>), including the [Chair, Colonel Robert J. Dalessandro](https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html) (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>), and [Vice Chair, Edwin L. Fountain](https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html) (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>), and urge that any proposed changes to Pershing Park not have an adverse effect on the park's signature design elements and features:

U.S. World War I Centennial Commission
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, #123
Washington, DC 20004

Contact [Executive Director Marcel Acosta](mailto:marcel.acosta@ncpc.gov) (<mailto:marcel.acosta@ncpc.gov>) at the [National Capital Planning Commission](http://www.ncpc.gov) (<http://www.ncpc.gov>):

National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW, North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004

Contact [Thomas Leubke](mailto:tluebke@cfa.gov) (<mailto:tluebke@cfa.gov>)

[subject=Proposed%20changes%20to%20Pershing%20Park%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.](http://www.cfa.gov)), Secretary of the [U.S. Commission of Fine Arts](http://www.cfa.gov) (<http://www.cfa.gov>):

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street, NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20001

Comments (2)

By artisanworks3
August 6, 2015

Please check out entry #0359. -The_tower_of_Peace is one of few entries submitted in the competition that utilizes the existing landscape design at Pershing Park. The 66 meter tall Peace tower seems to be the only entry that preserves and respects the integrity of Pershing Park. The tower will soar above the cityscape and only add to the beauty of the wonderful historical landmark site.

By kfarquhar
August 5, 2015

One of the WWI Memorial Design entries, 0265, does appear to be sympathetic to the M. Paul Friedberg park design and restores the landscaping as part of the concept. The memorial as proposed maintains the water elements, stepped seating and landscaping of the park. In addition the cavernous underground spaces originally required for the Zamboni and toilet spaces will be converted into cisterns for storm water control and water conservation. Thus the very maintenance driven elements of the original park that may have led to the down fall are transformed into sustainable features. The internal calm of Pershing park in the middle of the very busy part of the City is maintained.

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The Cultural Landscape Foundation Opposes Demolition of Pershing Park for a World War I Memorial

Media Contact: Nord Wennerstrom | T: 202.483.0553 | M: 202.225.7076 | E: nord@tclf.org (<mailto:nord@tclf.org?subject=Garden%20Dialogues>)

Project is a unique effort by landscape architects M. Paul Friedberg and Oehme, van Sweden

(Washington, DC – August 19, 2015) – The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) today opposed demolition of [Pershing Park](https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park) (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park>) for the creation of a World War I Memorial following the announcement by the [U.S. World War I Memorial Commission](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org>) of the [five finalist designs](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/stage-ii-finalists.html) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/stage-ii-finalists.html>) for a new memorial, all of which call for the demolition of Pershing Park. Pershing, which was designed by influential [Modernist](https://tclf.org/content/modernist) (<https://tclf.org/content/modernist>) landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](https://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg>), was recently added to TCLF's [Landslide](https://tclf.org/node/64729) (<https://tclf.org/node/64729>) list of nationally significant at-risk and threatened landscapes. The park, located on Pennsylvania Avenue and two blocks from the White House, was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) and opened in 1981. [Oehme, Van Sweden & Associates, Inc.](https://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates>) did the planting design, which was installed the same year.

"The five finalist World War I Memorial designs call for the demolition of one of the most important public spaces commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, and a work by three master landscape architects," said TCLF President & CEO Charles A. Bimbaum.

M. Paul Friedberg, a nationally significant landscape architect, is this year's recipient of the [American Society of Landscape Architect's](http://asla.org) (<http://asla.org>) (ASLA) top award, the [ASLA Medal](http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535) (<http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535>). Friedberg, who served in the [US Army](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsXPotXD5g0&index=6&list=PL11DE55C6FB6E1666) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsXPotXD5g0&index=6&list=PL11DE55C6FB6E1666>) in Korea, has already received the [ASLA Design Medal](http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/medals/friedberg.htm) (<http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/medals/friedberg.htm>), the other top award from the organization that represents the profession. He is one of only five practitioners to receive both awards in ASLA's 116-year history. [Wolfgang Oehme](https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme>) and [James van Sweden](https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden>), revolutionized the practice of landscape architecture with the creation of the "New American Garden" typology. Their work is the subject of a new retrospective at the [National Building Museum](http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html) (<http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html>) in Washington, DC opening October 17, 2015. This is the largest monographic landscape architecture exhibition in the museum's history.

TCLF's opposition is not a commentary on the need for or appropriateness of a national World War I memorial, the people it would honor, or the sincere intent of the Commission and its supporters.

NOTE: Downloadable [hi-res images are available at TCLF's online Pressroom](https://tclf.org/news/pressroom) (<https://tclf.org/news/pressroom>).

About The Cultural Landscape Foundation

[The Cultural Landscape Foundation \(TCLF\)](http://tclf.org/) (<http://tclf.org/>), established in 1998, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation that provides people with the tools to see, understand and value landscape architecture, its practitioners, and our cultural landscape legacy in the way many people have learned to do with buildings and their designers. Through its website, lectures, outreach and publishing, TCLF broadens the support and understanding for cultural landscapes nationwide to help safeguard our priceless heritage for future generations. TCLF makes a special effort to heighten the awareness of those who impact cultural landscapes, assist groups and organizations working to increase the appreciation and recognition of cultural landscapes, and develop educational tools for young people to better connect them to their cultural landscape environs.

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Washington, D.C.'s Pershing Park put on Landslide® List of Nationally Significant At-Risk and Threatened Landscapes

Media Contact: Nord Wennerstrom | T: 202.483.0553 | M: 202.225.7076 | E: nord@tclf.org (<mailto:nord@tclf.org?subject=Garden%20Dialogues>)

Project is a unique effort by landscape architects M. Paul Friedberg and Oehme, van Sweden

(Washington, DC – August 5, 2015) – The Cultural Landscape Foundation TCLF today added [Pershing Park](https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park) (<https://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park>), designed by influential [Modernist](https://tclf.org/content/modernist) (<https://tclf.org/content/modernist>) landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](https://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg>), on the organization's [Landslide](https://tclf.org/node/64729) (<https://tclf.org/node/64729>) list of nationally significant at-risk and threatened landscapes. The park, located on Pennsylvania Avenue and two blocks from the White House, was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) and opened in 1981. [Oehme, Van Sweden & Associates, Inc.](https://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates>) did the planting design, which was installed the same year. This site, which is likely eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, is under the supervision of the National Park Service and has suffered from accrued diminished maintenance. There is now a proposal for a national World War I Memorial (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org>) to be built there. Nearly all of the [more than 350 first round proposed memorial designs](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/first-round-submissions-for-public-comment.html) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/first-round-submissions-for-public-comment.html>) received by the U.S. World War I Memorial Commission (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org>) call for the demolition of the current park. As a recent [Huffington Post](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-a-birnbaum/can-parks-and-memorials-h_b_7593358.html) (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-a-birnbaum/can-parks-and-memorials-h_b_7593358.html) article noted, the memorial's proposed \$20-25 million budget is consistent with "the demolition of the exiting landscape and the construction of a new work." The [Landslide](https://tclf.org/node/64729) (<https://tclf.org/node/64729>) designation includes an overview of the site's history and design.

M. Paul Friedberg, a nationally significant landscape architect, is this year's recipient of the [American Society of Landscape Architect's](http://asla.org) (<http://asla.org>) (ASLA) top award, the [ASLA Medal](http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535) (<http://www.asla.org/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=46535>). Friedberg has already received the ASLA Design Medal (<http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/medals/friedberg.htm>), the other top award from the organization that represents the profession. He is only one of six practitioners to receive both awards in ASLA's 116-year history. [Wofgang Oehme](https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme>) and [James van Sweden](https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden>), revolutionized the practice of landscape architecture with the creation of the "New American Garden" typology. Their work is the subject of a new retrospective at the [National Building Museum](http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html) (<http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html>) in Washington, DC opening October 17, 2015. This is the largest monographic landscape architecture exhibition in the museum's history.

Pershing Park is the only project on which all of these influential professionals worked.

"Modernist landscapes, despite the wide popularity of Modernist design, remain at great risk for unsympathetic change and demolition and this current threat to Pershing Park attests to that fragility," said TCLF President & CEO Charles A. Birnbaum. "Pershing Park deserves to be properly maintained, considered for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, and recognized as a rare and important example of Modernist landscape architecture on the nation's premier ceremonial space."


Pershing Park's inclusion on Landslide is not a commentary by either TCLF or Mr. Friedberg on the need for or appropriateness of a national World War I memorial, the people it would honor, or the sincere intent of the Commission and its supporters. In fact, Friedberg served in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Korea, as he discusses in TCLF's [Pioneers Oral History](https://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/m-paul-friedberg) (<https://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/m-paul-friedberg>).

About The Cultural Landscape Foundation

The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) (<http://tclf.org/>), established in 1998, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation that provides people with the tools to see, understand and value landscape architecture, its practitioners, and our cultural landscape legacy in the way many people have learned to do with buildings and their designers. Through its website, lectures, outreach and publishing, TCLF broadens the support and understanding for cultural landscapes nationwide to help safeguard our priceless heritage for future generations. TCLF makes a special effort to heighten the awareness of those who impact cultural landscapes, assist groups and organizations working to increase the appreciation and recognition of cultural landscapes, and develop educational tools for young people to better connect them to their cultural landscape environs.

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Shaping the American Landscape: New Profiles from the Pioneers of American Landscape Design Project

The public's desire for greater understanding and interpretation of America's landscape heritage has increased dramatically since our first Pioneers of American Landscape Design volume was published. In response to growing interest, and the surge in scholarship that has followed, a second volume, will be published by the University of Virginia Press in August 2009.

Shaping the American Landscape explores the lives and work of 151 professionals who quite literally shaped both the land itself and our ideas of what the American landscape means. Although the contributors consider many important figures from the past, the book breaks new ground by including seminal designers who are in their twilight years, and in some cases still professionally active, to provide a fascinating look at the modern era of design in action. The roster of profiles extends far beyond landscape architects to encompass professionals in many other fields, including planning, journalism, gardening, and golf course and cemetery design.

The authors seek not only to bring their subjects' design legacies to light, but also to instill a sense of stewardship for historically meaningful examples of their art. Across North America, key works in landscape design—from M. Paul Friedberg's Riis Plaza Park in New York City to Dan Kiley's Nationsbank Plaza in Tampa—have already disappeared. Other iconic works, although still extant, face serious threats of demolition. Shaping the American Landscape identifies a host of public spaces deserving of recognition, and sheds light on the process by which they may be protected.

Organized in an accessible, encyclopedic format, Shaping the American Landscape is an indispensable reference work that may also be read simply for the pleasure of discovery. Many readers will want to go beyond the page and personally experience some of the landscapes described here. A generous selection of illustrations, together with a list of surviving landscape sites accessible to the public, brings both the subjects and their art to life.

About the Editors

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, Founder and President of the Cultural Landscape Foundation and former Coordinator of the National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative, and Stephanie Foell, Historian, served as project editors.*

*Shaping the American Landscape is in no way affiliated with or in any way connected to Robin Karson or the Library of American Landscape History.



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Charles Birnbaum on the Need to Save DC's Pershing Park

18 AUG 2015

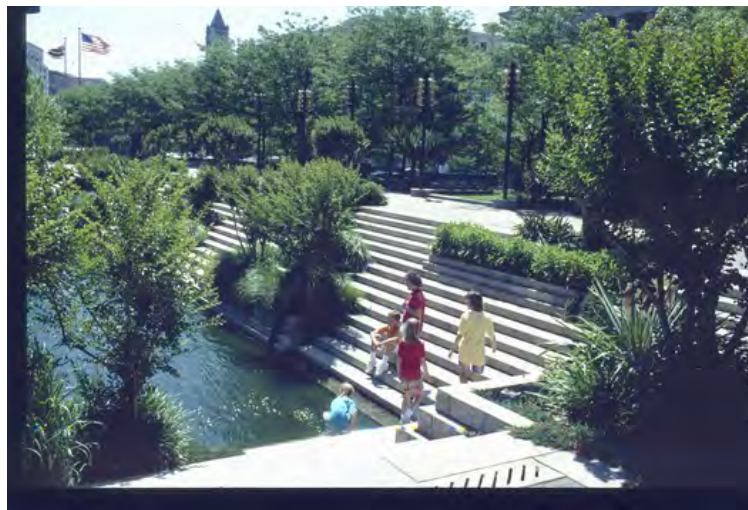
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Pershing Park in the 1980s. Image © Oehme, van Sweden & Associates
Landscape Foundation

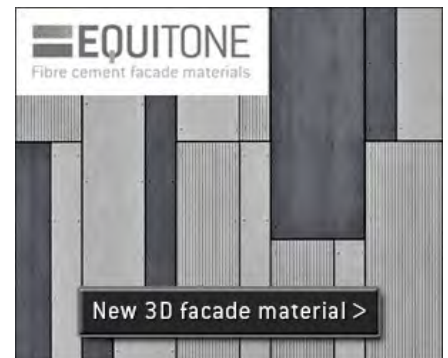
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Last May, we published an [open call for the redesign of Memorial](#) at Washington DC's Pershing Park, situated between the White House and the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue. Opened as a park plaza in 1981, the park's current state is in need of renewal.

The competition, hosted by the United States Federation for the Commemoration of the World Wars and sponsored by the World War I Centennial Commission, received over 350 entries. While these entries did generally follow the guidelines they were given, most of the designs incorporated the complete demolition of the park.

Now, because the park is one of the most significant works of Modernist landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, with planting plan designs by Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, landscape architecture organizations like The Cultural Landscape Foundation are speaking up against the possibility of demolition.

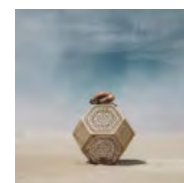


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Pershing Park in 2015. Image © The Cultural Landscape Foundation

In an article by [ARCHITECT Magazine](#), president and CEO of [The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#) [Charles Birnbaum](#) discusses "the significance of Pershing Park, and how the 350 contenders for the design competition do not reflect that."

Read the full interview, and learn more about the history and restoration of the park, [here](#).

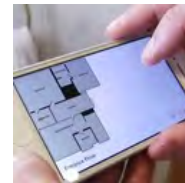


News via [ARCHITECT Magazine](#) and [The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#).

Correction notice: This article originally incorrectly stated that Pershing Park had its origins in 1791 with Charles L'Enfant's plan of the city of Washington, based upon a misinterpretation of information from the Cultural Landscape Foundation. This has now been corrected in favor of the more recent date signifying the completion of Pershing Park in its current form.

Cite:

Sabrina Santos. "Charles Birnbaum on the Need to Save DC's Pershing Park" 18 Aug 2015. [ArchDaily](#). Accessed 20 Sep 2015. <<http://www.archdaily.com/771985/architect-magazine-interview-saving-dcs-pershing-park/>>



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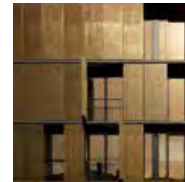
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Local

Top 5 WWI memorial designs for D.C. park lean toward the serene

By **Michael E. Ruane** August 19

The gigantic entrenching ax several stories high didn't make the list.

Nor did the towering bronze wreath of fallen leaves, representing the American war dead.

Nor did the huge metal sculpture that looked like a paper plane standing on its nose.

On Wednesday, when a federal commission unveiled [the five design finalists](#) for the creation of a national World War I Memorial in the District's Pershing Park, it chose less radical, if less eyepopping, concepts.

[\[Five design finalists for Washington's Pershing Park\]](#)

The winners range from a plan to decorate the park with haunting in-ground period photographs, to a design for a large traditional stone monument, to others that use inventive landscape and lighting ideas.

The World War I Centennial Commission said it looked at more than 300 submissions, and a stunning array of designs, from around the world.

"There was certainly a lot of imagination and creativity put into these," said Edwin L. Fountain, the panel's vice chairman.

But he said the new site needs to serve as a memorial and an urban park as well as harmonize with its surroundings. "Some of those designs, although creative, wouldn't necessarily harmonize with the D.C. urban scape," he said.

The pocket-size, 1.8-acre park at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue is a few blocks from the White House and near a major visitor crossroad in the city's monumental core.

The 35-year-old park — which honors American Gen. John J. Pershing — was named a national war memorial by the government in December 2014.

The park features a 12-foot-tall bronze statue of Pershing, who led American forces in France during the war. The

statue will probably be retained, though it might not be the centerpiece of the memorial, the commission has said.

The five design finalists are titled: “Plaza to the Forgotten War,” “World War One Memorial Concept,” “The Weight of Sacrifice,” “An American Family Portrait” and “Heroes’ Green.”

“These are design concepts,” Fountain said. “There’s a lot of work to do on all of them, which is par for the course. What I like is that they represent a very diverse array of stylistic approaches.”

[\[Pershing Park design competition begins.\]](#)

Among entries that didn’t make the list was “The Honor,” which featured a 37-foot-tall, 74-foot-wide World War I helmet resting upside down.

Another was titled “Reflection Crater” and displayed a large abstract shell crater with a polished steel mirror at the bottom.

Yet another, “Forest of the Fallen,” resembled the bristles of a huge brush suspended in air, bristles facing down.

[\[The Honor.\]](#)

The design competition began May 21, and the winning design will probably be announced in January, the commission said.

The project will cost an estimated \$20 million to \$25 million, Fountain has said, and will be privately funded. In December, the commission received a \$2.5 million gift from the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago to help pay for the competition.

The war memorial will commemorate the 4.7 million Americans who served during the 1914-1918 “Great War,” which claimed 116,000 American lives. Many places around the world are now marking the war’s centennial.

[\[Remembering how Christmas stopped the war.\]](#)

The current Pershing Park has seen better days. “Certainly, when it was designed and built, it was a perfectly nice park,” Fountain said. “It has failed of its original purpose.”

The commission, in its competition manual, said “the central feature of the park design — a large, sunken area containing an ornamental pool in the summer and an ice-skating rink in the winter — is no longer used or maintained for those purposes.

“As a result, the park landscape is dominated by a flat, concrete square . . . and by an abandoned concession gazebo,” the manual says.

But not everyone wants to see the park completely redone.

Washington’s Cultural Landscape Foundation, a nonprofit advocate for landscape architecture, notes that the park’s design is an important work by noted modernist landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg.

And the park’s planting arrangement was done by the influential Washington firm of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, the foundation said.


It’s a “pioneering work of modernism/post-modernism that doesn’t exist anywhere else in the U.S.,” said Charles A. Birnbaum, the foundation’s president.

“We do believe that . . . those features which are the most significant should be preserved and restored,” he said Wednesday. “And those aspects . . . of the design that are not functioning should be revisited.”

“We believe that a World War I memorial can be the key to revitalizing that park without destroying its design significance,” he said.

The park’s design competition followed the commission’s decision not to lobby for a national World War I memorial on the Mall, a location that local politicians and the National Park Service opposed.

The new site is separate from the elegant, columned D.C. War Memorial, which honors Washington’s World War I veterans, on the Mall.

 To see the 5 finalists' designs, go to wapo.st/DesignFinalists.

Mike is a general assignment reporter who also covers Washington institutions and historical topics.

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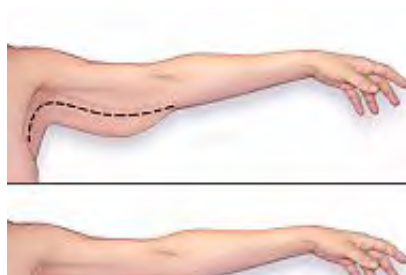
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Pershing Park Wins a Big Endorsement in WWI Memorial Debate

Posted by Kriston Capps on December 2, 2015 at 10:11 am

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A new national memorial honoring the soldiers who died in World War I may eventually be built in the District, but its planners will need to get approval from a lot of stakeholders first. One of the bodies overseeing the process has now weighed in—and the answer may not be what the memorial's backers had hoped to hear.

Earlier this month, the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission submitted its five finalist designs for a National World War I Memorial to the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts, a federal agency that advises the federal and District governments on architecture, landscape, and other aesthetic concerns in the nation's capital. Each of those five designs represents a new memorial that will be carved out of Pershing Park, now a dilapidated site on Pennsylvania Ave. NW between Freedom Plaza and the White House that was the site of a mass arrest scandal in 2002.

Pershing Park wasn't always as scuzzy as it looks today. It was designed by M. Paul Friedberg, a titan of modernist landscape architecture, along with Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, a landscape firm that is currently the subject of a major retrospective at the National Building Museum. The park, which opened in 1981, was built to honor U.S. Army General John Joseph “Black Jack” Pershing, making it a de facto World War I memorial. Perhaps more importantly for District residents, it used to be a beloved urban park: a sylvan retreat framed by New American Garden-style landscaping and a modernist step-wise plaza leading down to a pond.

Each of the five finalist designs for a new National World War I Memorial pays lip-service to the significance of Pershing Park while fundamentally paving over its defining features. In a letter dated November 30, the CFA praises the World War One Centennial Commission's mission but questions the contradictory message in its selection of finalists. CFA Secretary Thomas Luebke writes:

The [Commission of Fine Arts] members observed that the competition designs appear to proceed from the underlying assumption that the existing park design is a failure, whereas its problems are the direct result of inadequate maintenance. They commented that many features of the park—such as the berms and other topographical elements which help create a sheltered space at the center of the park and which are eliminated in most of these schemes—are the very characteristics of the design that make the existing park an appropriate setting for a contemplative memorial. Thus, they criticized the competition program for understating the value and importance of the existing park design, and they encouraged conceiving of the project as a new memorial within an existing park.

Is it back to the drawing board for the World War I Memorial? It's too early to say. The World War One Centennial Commission takes its portfolio to the National Capital Planning Commission on Thursday for review. As it stands, none of

the five finalist designs comes close to complying with the wishes of the CFA—which appears to call for restoring the historic, contemplative park that Pershing Park once was.

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A Park Full of Ideals

By CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM



IN MAY 1981 WHILE IN MY SENIOR YEAR studying landscape architecture, I visited Washington, D.C. Fortuitously, that trip coincided with the opening of M. Paul Friedberg's Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue. It had been commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) as part of a long-range plan to transform America's Main Street with the introduction of a sequence of unique and original public spaces by Carol Johnson, Dan Kiley, and others.

I had studied Friedberg's revolutionary design for the Jacob Riis Plaza, which blurred the lines between art and play (1966, demolished in 1999), and Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis (1975), which was the progenitor of a typology Friedberg called a "park/plaza." So I was curious to see what he had in store for the nation's capital. Would he again redefine the rules by blurring the lines between landscape typologies, or, as I would soon learn, interweave multiple styles?

Pershing Park was conceived at the same time as neighboring Freedom Plaza (by Robert Venturi and George Patton). Named in honor of General John J. Pershing, the park includes many of the signature design gestures found in Friedberg's earlier work, including a central sunken plaza (which also serves

as a pool), a waterfall constructed of rock-cut granite, amphitheater-style seating oriented around the plaza with lawn terraces, and a site-specific palette of furnishings, including moveable chairs similar to those used in Paley Park in New York City (since replaced with hulking concrete seating units). In addition, the design includes a statue of Pershing and a small structure that houses a café, restrooms, and a changing area for ice skating. After the park opened, the PADC commissioned Oehme, van Sweden and Associates to develop a planting plan for Pershing, which was completed in 1988. Inspired by visits with the Brazilian modernist landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, James van Sweden transformed the large, shallow pool in the center of Friedberg's design into a water garden.

What makes this different from Friedberg's earlier projects? Nested within this modernist park/plaza is more than a tinge of postmodernism, present in the design of the café, with its Victorian flourishes, and in the central waterfall, which references the Mayan ruins that Friedberg had visited in Mexico and Guatemala.

At Pershing, Friedberg's design did not completely reject modernist principles; instead it fractured modernist ideas to accommodate diverse viewpoints and histories. The result is a hinge point in Friedberg's career where modernist design principles happily co-mingle and meld with the tenets of postmodernism. With his design approach now informed and influenced by the burgeoning environmental and historic preservation movements, what we see at Pershing is that in appearance some postmodernist works of landscape architecture may not be radically different from modernist ones. Unfortunately, there are currently plans to demolish the park to make way for a National World War I Memorial.



CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM is the president and CEO of the Cultural Landscape Foundation in Washington, D. C. A Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the recipient of the Rome Prize and a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. Birnbaum is also a visiting professor at Columbia University and is a frequent contributor to the Huffington Post.

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LANDSLIDE: At risk

NPS Declares Pershing Park Eligible for National Register

[Pennsylvania Avenue \(/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue\)](#), [Pershing Park \(/landscapes/pershing-park\)](#), Washington DC

By TCLF Staff

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Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

On January 25, 2016, the World War I Memorial Commission will announce the winner of a design competition that would result in the demolition of Modernist Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Ave, two blocks from the White House. This is happening in advance of an official determination of whether the existing park is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (a decision is expected as early as March); a determination of eligibility would essentially prevent significant changes to Pershing Park. Nevertheless, the memorial's proponents have advanced five finalist designs that competition manager Roger Lewis says take a "tabula rasa" approach to the existing park, despite sharp criticism and strong reservations expressed by members of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, both of which must approve a new park. But in a new development, a January 4, 2016, [letter from the National Park Service \(NPS\)](#) (<https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/NPS%20Letter%20to%20WWI%20Centennial%20Commission.pdf>) to the competition jury appears to render the five finalist designs effectively invalid. The letter from Gay Vietzke, the superintendent of the National Mall and memorial parks, states: "Although the Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the World War I Memorial (Pershing Park) has not yet been completed, the National Park Service has identified the World War I Memorial (Pershing Park) as being eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places based on the finding of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI)." This should come as no surprise—NPS official Peter May, an adviser to the design competition, has said it was assumed more than a year ago that Pershing Park would be determined eligible.

The letter expresses NPS's desire that any new design would "enhance the existing park to accommodate a new memorial, while retaining the signature elements of the park." Because Pershing Park is eligible, "any adverse impacts [on the park] will require minimization and/or mitigation to be determined in consultation with the SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] and other Consulting Parties." That language effectively invalidates

all five of the finalist entries as currently conceived, because all five would entirely obliterate the current design of the park. The letter says, "The World War I Memorial (Pershing Park) exemplifies signature elements of Modernist landscape design that are characterized by simple designs, strong geometric lines, rectilinear forms, and largely open plans."



Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

While proponents of a new memorial have made ecumenical-sounding claims that "all options are on the table," from the restoration of Pershing Park to outright demolition, they have also expressed a strong bias against the existing park, which was designed by award-winning Modernist landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg/biography-m-paul-friedberg) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg/biography-m-paul-friedberg>) with a planting plan by [Oehme, van Sweden & Associates](http://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates>), the firm responsible for the influential style known as the "New American Garden" (<http://tclf.org/annual-spotlight/new-american-garden>). Not only did the competition's design guidelines encourage an entirely new design, commission officials, including Mr. Lewis and Edwin Fountain, the commission's vice chair, have consistently denigrated the Friedberg design in public presentations and media interviews. In a meeting on December 16, 2015, Mr. Fountain stated that, "it almost seemed an affront to preserve the bones of the Friedberg design" and declared that it was not the Memorial Commission's job to "restore the park." At one point he declared that if a preservation approach is required, "speaking personally...we'll have to decide if we move forward."

The World War I Memorial Commission seems to have created an unnecessary and unfortunate situation by aggressively pushing forward with tabula rasa designs, despite its NPS adviser having said it was assumed for at least a year that Pershing Park would be determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Mr. Fountain did, however, make another remark at that December 16 meeting that points to an opportunity to heal the rift. He said of the final decision to be made on January 25th, "Are we choosing a design, a design idea, or a designer? We're selecting a designer based on a design concept." What remains to be seen is whether the World War I Memorial Commission will select a designer who can work with Pershing Park, rather than raze it.



Pershing Park, July 2015. Photo © Brian Thomson

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Winter 2016

A Quest to Remember

116,000 Americans were killed in World War I. Why has it taken a century to build a national memorial in Washington, D.C.?

By Julie Scharper

Photograph by © AMERICAN PHOTOARCHIVE


Edwin L. Fountain believes a World War I memorial can—and must—be built. He wants people to understand the profound effects of the war, which inspired technological advances, led to greater rights for women and African-Americans, and sowed the seeds for other global conflicts.

Edwin L. Fountain was jogging on the National Mall a decade ago when—for the umpteenth time—he noticed a stained marble dome jutting from a shaggy grove of trees. He'd never given the half-hidden structure much thought, but that day, curiosity stopped him. He pushed through the brush to find out what the faded monument was. There, on the base of the dome, were the names of the 499 residents of the District of Columbia who had been killed in battle during World War I.

Nearby, ringing the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, striking memorials stood in silent testimony to the other great conflicts of the 20th century. There was the somber gleam of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The startling immediacy of the faces of the stone soldiers of the Korean War Veterans Memorial. The elegant arc of columns that encircles the national memorial to World War II. But this battered dome was the only monument commemorating World War I, a conflict in which more Americans lost their lives than the wars in Vietnam and Korea combined. Fountain, an attorney and student of military history, was troubled.

“It does a disservice to the veterans of World War I,” he said. “It diminishes their service and sacrifice and sends a message that we don’t value it as much as the others.”

The discovery spurred Fountain, now 51, to embark on a crusade to restore the District’s memorial and build a monument honoring veterans of what had once been known as “The Great War.” Fountain, who now serves as the vice chair of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, hopes to unveil the first national World War I memorial at a site just a few blocks away from the Mall—a neglected park dedicated to one of the war’s heroes, Gen. John J. “Black Jack” Pershing. The commission plans to announce a winning design in January; Fountain hopes to see the monument formally dedicated on November 11, 2018, the 100th anniversary of the armistice. But many hurdles remain. The commission must choose a design that meets the site’s unique challenges, and it must raise around \$25 million in private donations, a daunting prospect when the veterans of the war—and many of their children—are no longer living.

Edwin I. Fountain, the vice chair of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, hopes to unveil the capital's first national memorial commemorating The Great War by the 100th anniversary of the armistice in 2018.  © GASTON LACOMBE

“This is the first memorial built to a generation of veterans who are no longer with us,” Fountain said.

At the same time, Fountain and his commission hope to spark interest in a poorly understood and often forgotten conflict. While World War II was emblazoned in the national consciousness through newsreels, films, and novels, World War I is rarely discussed outside of history classrooms. Many Americans recall that the conflict was sparked by the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, but few can explain the complex political motives that drew most of Europe, Japan, and eventually, the United States to enter the conflict.

The war introduced the brutalities of trench warfare and chemical weapons, shattering Old World notions of the nobility of the battlefield. Some 17 million soldiers and civilians were killed, including 116,000 Americans, many of them farm boys who had never seen an automobile, let alone a tank, before the war began.

“World War I was harrowing, the psychological devastation of it alone,” said Erika Doss, an American Studies professor at University of Notre Dame. Returning veterans “threw themselves into the culture of the 1920s and tried to forget about it.”

Many soldiers refused to talk about the war at home, unsure of how to express the horrors they had witnessed. They also returned to another crisis, a flu pandemic that killed an estimated 675,000 Americans. And then, there is the ultimate tragedy of WWI, which had been called “The War to End All Wars”—it set the stage for a second and far more deadly global conflict 20 years later. While many towns built small memorials to the war—bronze statues of doughboys in round-brimmed helmets—there was little movement toward a national memorial in the decades immediately following WWI.

(1) The D.C. War Memorial commemorates the District of Columbia citizens who served in World War I. (2) Pershing Park on Pennsylvania Avenue, several blocks from the National Mall, will be the site of a new national World War I memorial.  © GASTON LACOMBE

Perhaps the lack of a national memorial has led to some of the national amnesia around the war. Even Fountain said that until a decade ago, his knowledge of WWI could have “fit on a single file card.” Both of his grandfathers served in the war, including one who had been scheduled to go to the front the day after the armistice. But it wasn’t until Fountain joined the DC Preservation League and began campaigning to restore the local WWI memorial that the war captured his imagination.

That memorial, which was dedicated in 1931, commemorates the 26,000 residents of the District who fought in the war and lists the names of the 499 who died. The marble dome was the only war memorial near the reflecting pool for half a century, until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was completed in 1982. As it was joined by tributes to the veterans of the Korean War and WWII, the WWI memorial fell into disrepair. The marble grew drab. Cracks appeared. Overgrown bushes cloaked the dome. It was “a forgotten memorial to a forgotten war,” Fountain said.

Spurred by his growing fascination with WWI, Fountain won the support of Frank Buckles, the last surviving American veteran of the conflict. Buckles, a Missouri native, had dropped out of school at 16 and fibbed about his age to

join the Army, then served as an ambulance driver at the Western Front. Until his death at the age of 110 in 2011, he joined Fountain in campaigning to restore the District's memorial and create a national monument to the war.

Fountain and his group managed to secure \$3.6 million in federal stimulus money to pay for repairs. After a year of work, the memorial reopened in 2011 with gleaming marble, tidy landscaping, and a replica of a long-vanished medallion. But Fountain's second quest—to convert the Doric-style structure into a national memorial to the war—was opposed by District lawmakers, including Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, who wanted it to remain solely a tribute to veterans from Washington.

Undaunted, Fountain and the Commission decided to turn their attention to Pershing Park, named for the commander of the U.S. forces in Europe. Late last year, Congress authorized the park to be a national WWI memorial, although it did not set aside funds for construction.

Detail from the existing memorial in Pershing Park.  © GASTON LACOMBE

Pershing Park sits on Pennsylvania Avenue across from the 200-year-old Willard Hotel, where Lincoln stayed in the weeks leading up to his inauguration and Julia Ward Howe penned “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” When the park opened in 1981, a waterfall trickled into a placid pool ringed with lush plants. But the water was long ago drained, leaving a lake of stained concrete. Pigeons roost in a long-shuttered concession stand.

As heat rose from the concrete on a blistering day last summer, Fountain pointed out the park’s shortcomings. Its sheltered location hides the park from passersby. Steep steps are treacherous and make for uncomfortable seats. The existing statue of Pershing is “static,” said Fountain, and panels of text are hard to parse for the casual visitor. He envisions reinventing the park to create an attraction on par with the war memorials on the mall.

“You have to do something to make this a destination,” he said. “You don’t want the only people who come here to come by accident.”

Nearly every monument on the National Mall can be seen as a war memorial, said Doss, the University of Notre Dame professor and author of *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*.


The Washington Monument commemorates the Revolutionary War. The Lincoln Memorial prompts reflection on the Civil War. Washington, D.C., is a “sort of sacred ground” for Americans, where the nation’s ideals are enshrined in stone, made permanent and legitimate, she said. Once the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was unveiled, veterans of other 20th-century conflicts and their descendants pushed for monuments to their wars.

“From childhood, we’re expected to go to Washington on field trips, to go to the Mall and the memorials,” said Doss. “Part of that is to tell stories and share ideas. And the biggest idea of all is that Americans are warriors.”

The Mall and the surrounding areas are “highly symbolic,” Doss said. But building on that prime real estate can be highly contentious.

A design competition for the memorial brought in some 350 proposals, and the commission announced five finalists in mid-August. One plan would transform the 1.8-acre park into a series of undulating grassy ridges and a grove of 116 gingko trees—one for every thousand Americans who died. Another would feature giant portraits of soldiers and their families jutting from the lawn. A third would include a field of 1,166 bronze markers shaded by red oaks and paper birch trees. Yet another would frame the statue of Pershing with panels of friezes depicting the doughboys. And a fifth hearkens back to the WWI era's aesthetics, with a classically inspired monument surrounded by an ellipse of trees.

But some are concerned about the finalists, all of which call for an overhaul of the park. The Cultural Landscape Foundation, a group headquartered in D.C., supports the revitalization of the original Pershing Park rather than a full redesign.

“Heroes’ Green” is one of the finalists in the design competition for the new World War I memorial.  © MARIA COUNTS AND COUNTS STUDIO

“We believe that it is in fact historically significant and is in fact eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places,” said Charles Birnbaum, the group’s president and CEO.

The park is one of the most important projects by noted landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, whose Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis was recently added to the National Register. The park’s original plantings, which complemented Friedberg’s design, were planned by the Washington-based firm of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, which pioneered the “New American Garden” look.

That none of the design competition finalists plan to preserve the park’s original features is disturbing, Birnbaum said. “When you’re talking about the demolition of a historically significant park designed by three masters, that’s problematic,” he said.

The winning design must also be approved by the National Park Service, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and the National Capital Planning Commission before construction can begin. The entire process will likely take much longer than the 19 months that Americans were engaged in the war.

Yet Fountain is confident that the memorial can—and must—be built. He wants people to understand the profound effects of the war, which fueled the cynicism of the “Lost Generation” of writers, such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, inspired technological advances, led to greater rights for women and African-Americans, and sowed the seeds for World War II and other conflicts that have raged around the world over the past 100 years.

Fountain, a broad-shouldered man with a military bearing, has seen his own life change as his interest in the war has deepened. He left a career in corporate law earlier this year to become general counsel for the American Battle Monuments Commission, the federal agency charged with protecting American war memorials and cemeteries around the world. He’s also become passionate about sharing the stories of WWI veterans after years of research.

“There’s no particular American mythology built up around the war,” he said, which he attributes, in part, to the humility of the era. Yet the actions of American WWI soldiers were no less heroic than those of veterans of subsequent wars.

Sgt. Paul Maynard, a shipping clerk from Massachusetts, enlisted after a patriotic rally in July 1917.  THE MAYNARD FAMILY

Take, for example, the story of Sgt. Paul Maynard, a shipping clerk from tiny Leverett, Mass. After a patriotic rally in July 1917, Maynard jumped on stage to enlist, according to family and historical records that his great-niece, Lisa Ann Maynard of Washington, D.C., has studied.

After a few months of training, Maynard and other soldiers from New England were shipped to France. He detailed his struggles there in a series of letters home.

In March of 1918, Maynard was temporarily blinded by a gas attack. He was still recuperating at a Paris YMCA camp when he turned 21 a couple of weeks later. “Well, my birthday went by very quietly,” he wrote to his family. “I wonder where my next one will be. I hope the war is over by then. If it is, I intend to be home.”

But Maynard would not live to see his 22nd birthday.

Hours before the November 11 armistice, Maynard—who had recently been promoted to sergeant—and his men were following orders to push forward near Ville-de-Chaumont in northeastern France, part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. As the squad came under heavy fire, Maynard ordered his men back to the trench, then jumped into a bomb crater to cover for them, his great-niece said. Soon after, word of the ceasefire spread and Maynard’s men hurried out to look for him. His body lay in the crater where he had made a desperate attempt to protect his men.

His great-niece, a 54-year-old paralegal with the Department of Justice, believes that Maynard—and the other 4.3 million Americans who fought in the war—deserve a national memorial. “All the people who fought in it, they need to be remembered,” she said. “WWI has just been lost to history.”

NPCA@WORK

The National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C., was established last December with the passage of the Defense Authorization Act. A remarkable public-lands provision in the bill, which represents a major victory for NPCA and its partners, creates or expands 16 parks and authorizes eight studies that could lead to additional park sites. It is the largest expansion of the National Park System since 1978. —RM

Julie Scharper is a freelance writer and journalism professor in Baltimore, Maryland.

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LANDSLIDE: At risk

NPS Declares Pershing Park Eligible for National Register

[Pennsylvania Avenue \(/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue\)](#), [Pershing Park \(/landscapes/pershing-park\)](#), Washington DC

By TCLF Staff

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Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

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Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

While proponents of a new memorial have made ecumenical-sounding claims that "all options are on the table," from the restoration of Pershing Park to outright demolition, they have also expressed a strong bias against the existing park, which was designed by award-winning Modernist landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg/biography-m-paul-friedberg) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg/biography-m-paul-friedberg>) with a planting plan by [Oehme, van Sweden & Associates](http://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates>), the firm responsible for the influential style known as the "New American Garden" (<http://tclf.org/annual-spotlight/new-american-garden>). Not only did the competition's design guidelines encourage an entirely new design, commission officials, including Mr. Lewis and Edwin Fountain, the commission's vice chair, have consistently denigrated the Friedberg design in public presentations and media interviews. In a meeting on December 16, 2015, Mr. Fountain stated that, "it almost seemed an affront to preserve the bones of the Friedberg design" and declared that it was not the Memorial Commission's job to "restore the park." At one point he declared that if a preservation approach is required, "speaking personally...we'll have to decide if we move forward."

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Pershing Park, July 2015. Photo © Brian Thomson

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LANDSLIDE: At risk

Threat to Pershing Park Increases

[Pennsylvania Avenue \(/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue\)](#), [Pershing Park \(/landscapes/pershing-park\)](#), Washington DC

By TCLF Staff
 Published January 26, 2016

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Pershing Park. Photo courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg

On January 26, 2016, the World War I Centennial Commission announced that [The Weight of Sacrifice](#) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/stage-ii-design-development/the-weight-of-sacrifice.html>), by Joe Weishaar & Sabin Howard, was selected from among [five finalists](#) (<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/stage-ii-design-development.html>) as the winning design for a newly proposed national war memorial in Washington, D.C. Should the design be executed, it would result in the demolition of [Pershing Park](#) (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park>), which was designed by landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](#) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg>) with a planting plan by landscape architects [Oehme, van Sweden](#) (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/oehme-van-sweden-associates>), and which the National Park Service (NPS) has [determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places](#) (<http://tclf.org/landslides/nps-declares-pershing-park-eligible-national-register>). The decision comes [despite reservations and concerns](#) (<http://tclf.org/landslides/plans-erase-pershing-park-encounter-roadblocks>) registered by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO), all of which must approve the project. More recently, Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post critic Philip Kennicott wrote (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/america-is-chock-full-of-world-war-i-memorials-so-why-build-another-one/2016/01/21/f1d09e66-be1a-11e5-83d4-42e3bceea902_story.html): “All five of the designs obliterate the Friedberg park, rather than building on it,” adding that, “None of the proposals, selected in July from 360 entries, rises to a standard the commission should champion.”

Despite the World War I Centennial Commission's unanimous approval of the design, several of its members seemed underwhelmed by the choice. During a conference call announcing the decision, Commissioner Thomas Moe, from Ohio, panned the winning design as “unremarkable.”

In a January 20, 2016, press announcement, Commission spokesperson Chris Isleib wrote of the design competition process: “The five design teams consulted with representatives from the Commission, the National

Park Service, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, and other stakeholders to develop and refine their design concepts. The designs must must (sic) meet a number of criteria related to design merit, site considerations, environmental impact, historical (sic) preservation, sustainability, and cost. The designers submitted their final concepts in December 2015."

"The World War I Centennial Commission did meet with stakeholders, and they also knew that Pershing Park would likely be eligible to the National Register, which would restrict the impact on the park, but they never really listened," said Charles A. Birnbaum, president and CEO of The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF). "Instead, they opted for conflict over collaboration," he added.

In a statement announcing the decision, the Commission reiterated its commitment to work with stakeholders. Hopefully the process will be more collaborative than it has been thus far.

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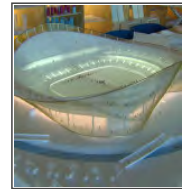
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[Plans for D.C.'s Pershing Park mired in debate over protection and progress](#)

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Thursday, March 17, 2016

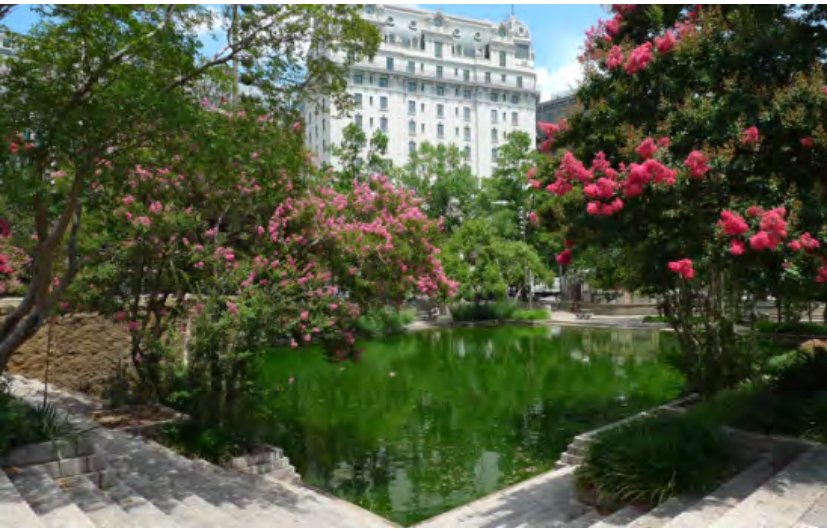
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(Courtesy TCLF)

Adored by some who consider it a neatly sculpted Modern landscape worthy of protection, and loathed by others who see it as an alienating 1980s byproduct that perpetually falls short in its public duties, Pershing Park conjures up some polarizing perspectives. Located in Northwest [D.C.](#) on Pennsylvania Avenue, the park's condition is shopworn, but its redevelopment continues to divide opinions.



An arial view of the park in its heyday. (Courtesy TCLF)

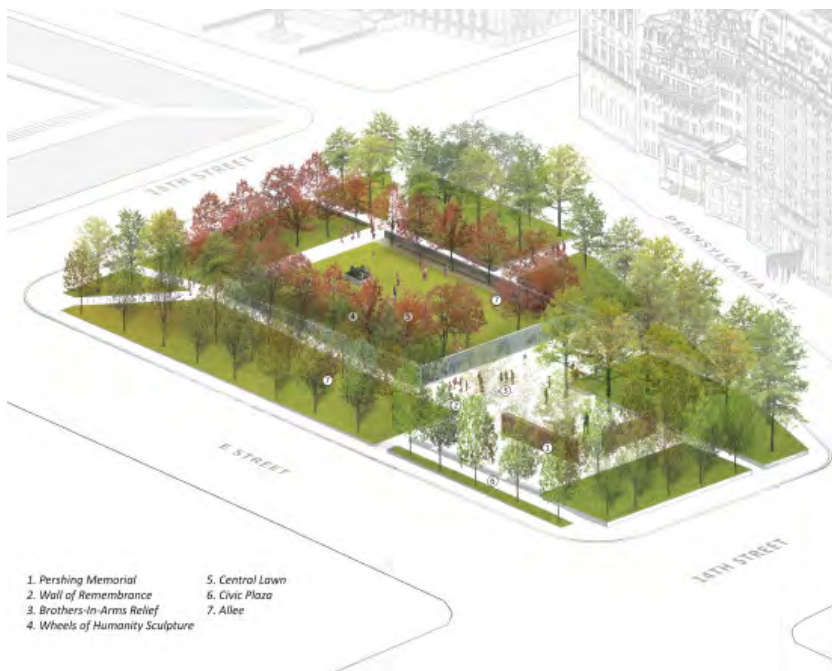
Home to the [WWI General John Pershing](#) memorial (a protected monument) Pershing Park was designed in 1981 by landscape architect [M. Paul Friedberg](#). At the time it was a tranquil environment, a welcome contrast to the hectic urban surrounding. Its layout is ordered, and clean lines run through the park, maintaining a harmonious and symmetrical relationship with the water and greenery—at least, that was what was meant to be. Once upon a time, the park promised to be a place to ice-skate in the winter and relax in the summer. The fountain and ice-skating framework however, have been defunct for years.



The park in its former glory. (Courtesy TCLF)

The water's serenity and sense of calm is easily disrupted when upkeep is ignored as litter fills the pool and steps become dirty. Paving slabs are riddled with cracks and are uneven, the slick lines now lost. It's no coincidence that that idyllic images shown on the [American Society of Landscape Architects](#)'s website (via The Cultural Landscape Foundation, TCLF) are clearly dated (though the date of the photographs is unknown).

Now, the [World War I Memorial Centennial Commission](#) is eager for change. A [competition which the commission ran in 2015](#) resulted in architect Joseph Weishaar, landscape architect Phoebe McCormick Lickwar and sculptor Sabin Howard winning with their proposal: [The Weight of Sacrifice](#).



The proposal. (Courtesy WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSION)

The design does away with the water. A problematic feature, seen as a catalyst to the park's downfall, it is replaced by a lawn that is partially surrounded by 10-foot-high walls that hug the perimeter, using bas-reliefs to inform visitors about WWI.



The proposal. (Courtesy WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSION)

The aim is to provide more space to relax, but it also sees a change in the park's role, becoming a place for historical education too. Costs are estimated at \$38 million by the commission who has currently raised \$6 million in their bid to bring about change.



The proposal (Courtesy WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSION)

Change however, may not come so easily. On the other side, those who fight for the parks protection are attempting to place the park on the [National Register of Historic Places](#). If successful, any changes, regardless of money raised, would be significantly curtailed.

It's not hard to see both sides of the argument. On one hand, to maintain the current style and layout of the park pays respect to the [WWI General John Pershing](#) memorial of which it was designed to do. On that note, any change would disrupt the relationship between the park and the memorial. Conversely, the space's decline surely implies that it is unsuccessful, so much so that none bother to maintain it. For this to be fixed, more need to be welcomed in and more space is needed to facilitate this.



The statue of General Pershing as of now (Courtesy TCLF)

[Joe Weishaar argues](#) that the dropped water feature is a “blind spot” and is hence ignored. [Sculptor Sabin Howard envisions](#) an “uplifting story of transformation, showing how noble the human race can be.”



The current stepped-down seating area. (Courtesy TCLF)

While the campaign for change gathers steam, the fight for protection does have some weight in the form of Charles Birnbaum, president and CEO of [The Cultural Landscape Foundation \(TCLF\)](#) and Darwina Neal, former president of ASLA among others. Here, [Birnbaum argues](#) for “making some changes, but keeping the signature and character-defining features intact.”



The fountain in full operation. (Courtesy TCLF)

From a withdrawn perspective, one cries out for collaboration between the two parties. Jared Green of [The Dirt](#) points out: “Whatever the outcome, one long-term question is: can this park be well-maintained moving forward? If not, we may be back to where we are now 30 years in the future.”

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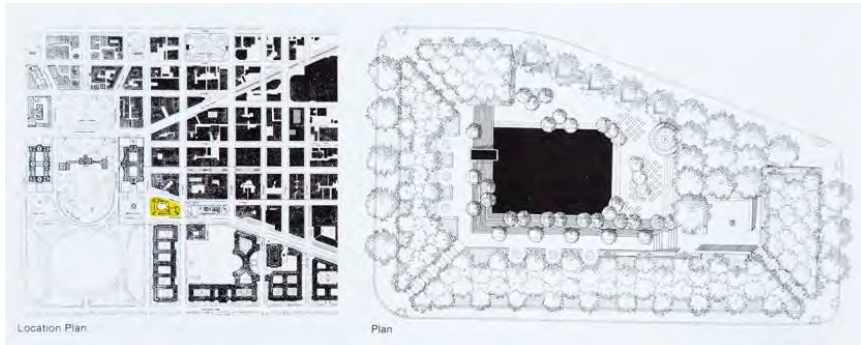


LANDSLIDE

Pershing Park Determined Eligible for Listing in the National Register of Historic Places

Sep 23, 2016

The Washington, D. C. State Historic Preservation Office, in a recently released and much anticipated 43-page document (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=58434&documentID=74339>) (called a "Determination of Eligibility"), has concluded that M. Paul Friedberg's Modernist Pershing Park in Washington, D.C., site of a proposed World War I Memorial, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The determination is significant because it provides essential context for the discussion of the park's future, and counterbalances the consistently negative remarks about the Friedberg design made by representatives of the WWI Memorial Commission in their justification for a new design.



Plan of Pershing Park - Image courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg & Partners

The document notes:

- "Pershing Park is significant at the national and state levels ... in the area of landscape architecture as a signature designed landscape by M. Paul Friedberg, one of modern American landscape architecture's most accomplished urban designers."
- "The park is an exceptional example of a landscape design of the modern period and of an approach to the design of public space as an integral part of the revitalization of an urban neighborhood in decline."
- "Pershing Park is also significant at the national and state levels ... as the first modernist commemorative park on one of the important elements of the nationally significant Washington city plan."
- Even though the park is less than 50 years of age, it is "an exceptional and highly intact example of M. Paul Friedberg's concept of the urban park plaza."
- "The park also retains a greater degree of integrity to its period of significance than Friedberg's Peavey Plaza, which has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places."

The document goes on to say: "Pershing Park is an exceptionally important example of this urban form of public space and of Friedberg's work."





Pershing Park, soon after it was completed - Image courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg & Partners

Nevertheless, it remains threatened.

At a September 21, 2016 meeting, members of the consulting design firm AECOM provided an overview of the latest iteration (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=58434&documentID=75336>) of architect Joseph Weishaar's winning proposal, *The Weight of Sacrifice*. The presentation was made before members of the National Capital Planning Commission, Commission of Fine Arts, National Park Service, General Services Administration, the D.C. Preservation League, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and other consulting parties (of which TCLF is one) in what's known as a "Section 106 review." This refers to "Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (<http://www.achp.gov/regs-rev04.pdf>) [which] requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties ... The goal of consultation is to identify historic properties potentially affected by the undertaking, assess its effects and seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate any adverse effects on historic properties."

This was the third time the consulting parties to the Section 106 review had met, but the first since Pershing Park was officially determined National Register eligible (though as previously reported (<http://tclf.org/landslides/nps-declares-pershing-park-eligible-national-register?destination=search-results>), the likelihood that the park would be found eligible had long been assumed).

AECOM's presentation did little to highlight the degree to which the park would be adversely affected (which was the purpose of the meeting), nor did it include required design alternatives illustrating concepts that could "avoid, minimize or mitigate any adverse effects." Instead, representatives said the one revised design that was presented "rehabilitates Pershing Park to serve as a national World War I Memorial" and "integrates new commemorative elements while maintaining character defining features of existing park," claims that were met with skepticism.



Pershing Park, Washington, D.C. - Image courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden

"The reality," said Tom Luebke, secretary of the Commission of Fine Arts, is that the revised design "takes everything out" (approval from the Commission of Fine Arts is required in order for the memorial to be built). Luebke added that if implemented, the proposed design would "bulldoze" Pershing Park.

Lost, for example, would be the waterfall and the 7500-square-foot pool, which would be replaced largely by lawn and a small water feature described as a "scrim." TCLF's Charles Birnbaum called the signature, Friedberg-designed fountain a "center of energy" and suggested that removing it would have the same impact as removing the fountain at Bethesda Terrace in New York's Central Park.





Pershing Park, Washington, D.C. - Photo by Eduard Krakhmalnikov, 2012

Through the course of the meeting, AECOM officials continued to suggest the impact of the new design on Pershing Park would be benign (they also claimed the pool and fountain had been inoperable since 2006, despite the photograph above, taken in 2012). On page 48 of their 50 page presentation (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=58434&documentID=75336>), in a section titled "Identification of Potential Effects," the impact on Pershing Park reads: "The World War I Memorial could affect physical park elements, but would maintain the conceptual elements and the overall spatial orientation of the modernist layout." The lack of specificity led D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer David Maloney and others to call for greater transparency in the design process. He implored AECOM and the WWI Memorial Commission to "please itemize all of the adverse affects" the proposed design would have on Pershing Park, and "be honest about what is and isn't being done." Maloney summed up by asking: "At what point do you obliterate a National Register eligible park and is that a fair trade off?"

In the coming months, the WWI Memorial Commission will meet with members of the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, and others from whom they will need approvals. We will continue to provide updates.

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

















































































































































































































































































































































































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Pershing Park and the World War I Memorial: Moving Beyond an Accumulation of Pieces

Feb 27, 2017

One of the most important parks on the most significant stretch of America's Main Street – Pennsylvania Avenue (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/pennsylvania-avenue?destination=search-results>) between the U.S. Capitol and the White House, known as the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site – remains under threat. The future of Pershing Park (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/pershing-park?destination=search-results>) is an example of how first tier works of landscape architecture too often are still treated like second-class amenities. Pershing, which is named in honor of the great American World War I General John Pershing and opened in 1981 two blocks from the White House, is a modernist park/plaza designed by landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/m-paul-friedberg?destination=search-results>), creator of this typology. It has a planting plan by the pioneers of the New American Garden (<http://tclf.org/new-american-garden-landscape-architecture-oehme-van-sweden?destination=search-results>) style, Wolfgang Oehme (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme>) and James van Sweden (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden>).

Through an act of Congress, the park has been renamed the national World War I Memorial, and a World War I Memorial Commission is seeking to build a new memorial on the site. A design competition was held that yielded hundreds of entries. In my June 16, 2015 article *Can Parks and Memorials Happily Co-Exist?* (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-a-birnbaum/can-parks-and-memorials-h_b_7593358.html) about the design competition that was then underway, I concluded: "It would be encouraging to see entries from landscape architects and allied professionals that honor the legacies of Friedberg and Oehme van Sweden, and successfully nest the new memorial within a rehabilitated Pershing Park."



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Pershing Park, Washington, DC - Photo courtesy Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

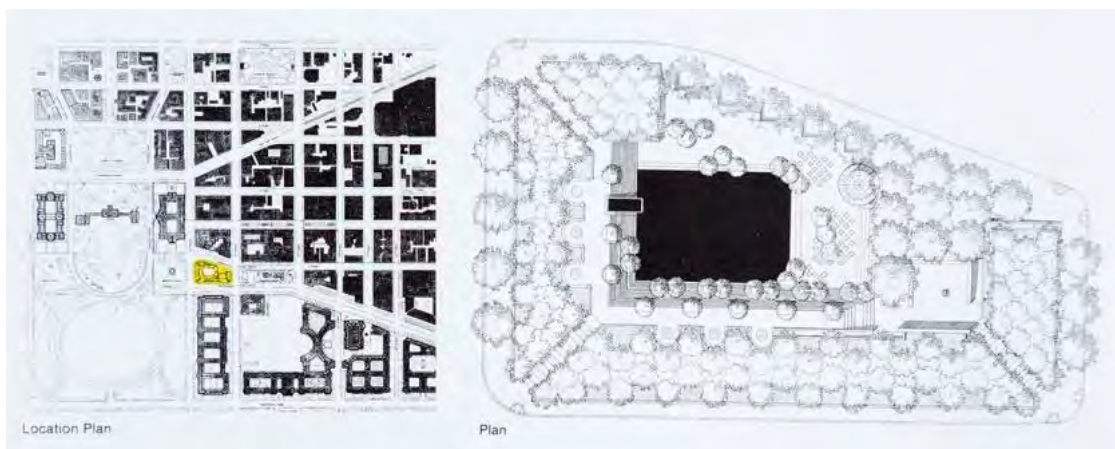
That did not happen, but the WWI Memorial Commission and its consultants would have you believe otherwise. A winning design was announced in January 2016 (<http://tclf.org/news/pressroom/world-war-i-centennial-commission-selection-weight-sacrifice-joe-weishaar-sabin-howar>), and there have been subsequent iterations. Unfortunately, the proposals would destroy major elements that define the park, most notably the waterfall/fountain and large rectangular pool of water that: provide an oasis amidst the multiple lanes of vehicular traffic that surround the park; has a cooling effect (from the mixing of air and water resulting during evaporation); and serves as a place of respite in the center of the city, offering opportunities for recollection, contemplation and remembrance.

Why should we care? The answer involves some context. Over the course of his long career, the award-winning Friedberg has designed hundreds of projects throughout the U.S. and internationally – of those, four are acknowledged as seminal works. The first is the plaza at Jacob Riis Houses in New York City, a work that landed Friedberg in *LIFE* magazine and was funded by Brooke Astor – without any debate it was demolished in 2000. The remaining three significant projects are Battery Park City (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/battery-park-city?destination=search-results>) in New York, Peavey Plaza (<http://tclf.org/landscapes/peavey-plaza?destination=search-results>) in Minneapolis, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2013, and Pershing Park, which was determined eligible for listing in the National Register in July 2016.



Process Magazine Covers, M. Paul Friedberg issue

Process Architecture, the internationally influential, Japan-based design journal, has the most comprehensive summary of Friedberg's body of work (*Process 82*, published May 1989, features Pershing Park on its front and back covers). It states that Pershing Park "was meant to be the activity center for the avenue." William "Holly" Whyte (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/william-whyte-jr?destination=search-results>), the celebrated urban theorist and critic, notes in his introductory essay: "Friedberg's designs are full of overtly useful features. Pershing Park in Washington is a virtual compendium of them . . . The carrying capacity of the park is very high – even in summer. Washington's dreadful Augusts might temper usage, to be sure, but the design does everything possible to make you think otherwise. What with the water, the plantings of the canopy of foliage overhead the place looks cool, even when it isn't." Whyte continues, "His water features, for example, are composed to draw people into it, to splash their hands in it, to dangle their feet."



Plan of Pershing Park - Image courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg & Partners

I recently reached out to Friedberg and shared with him the WWI Commission's most recent two proposals – the "Scrim and Green" concept, endorsed by the Commission, and the "Pool and Plaza" concept that was not been shared with Commission members. Both concepts call for the elimination of the waterfall and either eliminate or circumscribe the pool; and both introduce a 75-foot-long bronze bas relief sculpture.



"Scrim and Green" proposal for Pershing Park, Washington, DC



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"Pool and Plaza" proposal for Pershing Park, Washington, DC

After noting that he has never been consulted about the current efforts, he responded in writing on February 12. He began by stating: "I have tried to stay out of the assessment of the competition as my comments would be misinterpreted as self-serving." He noted: "The design represented does not build on what was positive and successful. It is an accumulation of pieces — with no apparent relationship to each other. It appears to be an accumulation of disparate elements to satisfy an authority. An example of this is in the use of water. It is present, however what [is proposed] appears to be obligatory, a static stand-alone element. There is no attempt to employ the range and character of water — sound, reflection, movement, focal point and symbolism." In Pershing Park, the water's edge "is where the topography came to rest as did the viewer."



Pershing Park, Washington, DC - Photo courtesy Oehme, van Sweden & Associates

As noted above, Pershing Park is also part of the broader Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, so radical alterations to Pershing could negatively impact the Historic Site, which encompasses a collection of modernist and post-modernist parks commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) and designed by Dan Kiley (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/dan-kiley?destination=search-results>), Hideo Sasaki (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/hideo-sasaki?destination=search-results>), Robert Venturi (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/venturi-rausch-scott-brown?destination=search-results>), Denise Scott Brown (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/denise-scott-brown?destination=search-results>), George Patton (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/george-e-patton?destination=search-results>), Carol Johnson (<http://tclf.org/pioneer/carol-r-johnson?destination=search-results>).

results), Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden. While this body of work was built less than fifty years ago, its significance in landscape architecture and community development has been confirmed by substantial scholarly evaluation. As a result the avenue is exceptionally important, with Pershing Park arguably the most significant extant design in the collection.



Pershing Park, Washington, DC - Photo by Eduard Krakhmalnikov, 2012

Two agencies must approve changes to Pershing: the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). CFA members were presented with the “Scrim and Green” and “Pool and Plaza” concepts on February 16. The CFA members praised the design consultants for the thoroughness of their analysis, but rather than vote on the proposals – which they all but indicated would be a rejection – they suggested the designers take a more surgical approach to inserting commemorative elements in the park. The CFA members specifically referenced the significance of the waterfall and pool Pershing’s design, and concerns about how a radical alteration could negatively impact the broader Historic Site.



A source of inspiration can be found elsewhere on Pennsylvania Avenue at another park with a fountain that was, until recently, also neglected and dry. Fortunately, the remedy was not radical alteration. Last year following the first phase of Mellon Park (<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/press/2016/fountain.html>)'s rehabilitation, *Washington Post* art and architecture critic Philip Kennicott reported in the March 17, 2016 article, *One of D.C.'s great fountains comes back to life, but it shouldn't have taken so long* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/one-of-the-capitals-greatest-fountains-is-alive-again-why-cant-we-fix-the-others/2016/03/17/4db52f36-ec64-11e5-b0fd-073d5930a7b7_story.html?utm_term=.a86481275d63), that National Gallery Director Earl A. "Rusty" Powell III stated, "We asked for it because the National Park Service didn't want it." Kennicott wrote, "The Park Service doesn't put it so bluntly, but representatives admit that they didn't have the funds for its upkeep, part of a larger budget problem so acute that it will affect the future look of the District." Should such budgetary challenges dictate the quality and richness of our shared civic heritage? Of Mellon Park, Mr. Powell observed at the opening ceremony, "People driving by just forgot that there was a fountain there."

Pershing Park has been neglected, and its waterfall and pool, now dry, have been forgotten. But the site's integrity and bone structure remain. During the CFA meeting, Commission member Toni Griffin noted that the design approach thus far had been one of trying to get the to accommodate a memorial and that perhaps more exploration should be embraced on how to put a memorial into a historically significant park (this was echoed in the CFA's subsequent official written remarks (<https://www.cfa.gov/records-research/project-search/cfa-16feb17-1>)). Griffin suggested the designers might also engage Friedberg in the process, which Friedberg has said he would welcome. Let's hope the designers take these recommendations to heart.

This article originally appeared on the *Huffington Post* (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/58b34bf5e4b02f3f81e44948>) on February 27, 2017.

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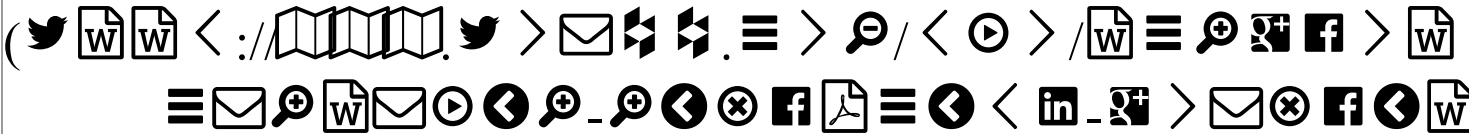
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LANDSLIDE

Targeting the Heart of D.C.'s Pershing Park

Jun 16, 2017

The proposed design for a World War I Memorial on the site of Pershing Park has changed considerably since the original winning concept – *The Weight of Sacrifice* – was first selected in January 2016. The initial proposal would have eradicated the M. Paul Friedberg-designed park, which is part of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic District and has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The WWI Centennial Commission has put forth a revised design that maintains the perimeter of the park; however, they have also proposed inserting a 65-foot-long wall with a bronze bas-relief sculpture into the area occupied by the central fountain and pool, the very heart of the park. And, despite admonition from members of the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), which has approval authority over the memorial, the proponents have been insistent on this consequential intervention in the park.



Pershing Park, Washington, D.C. - Photo courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden Associates

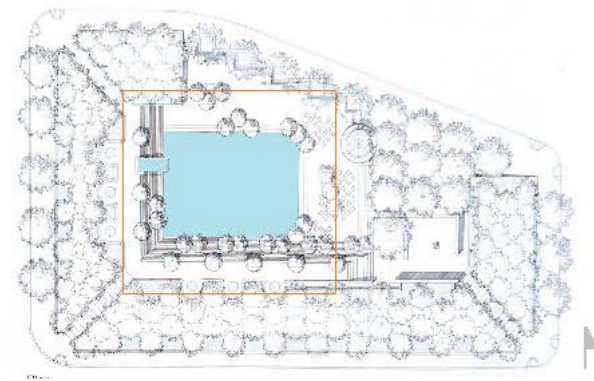
At the February 16, 2017 CFA meeting (<https://www.cfa.gov/records-research/record-cfa-actions/2017/02/cfa-meeting/minutes>), the memorial's proponents presented their "Pool and Plaza" concept, in which they illustrated their 75-foot-long, 10.5-foot-high wall in place of the current thirteen-foot-wide fountain. Commission members questioned the scale of the edifice and suggested a more surgical approach to inserting memorial elements into the existing park. Vice Chair Elizabeth Meyer, FASLA, according to detailed meeting minutes (<https://www.cfa.gov/records-research/record-cfa-actions/2017/02/cfa-meeting/minutes>):

Advised abandoning the idea of the wall and developing a new concept. She supported treating a memorial here as an insertion in the existing park; she emphasized that the fabric of Pershing Park is intact, and an insertion implies that pieces would be removed and altered in some precise, limited way. She said that the commemorative program has many other potential expressions than the large wall, which is holding back the creativity of the designers; she encouraged them to reimagine the stairs or the [now disused] kiosk as opportunities for commemorative features.

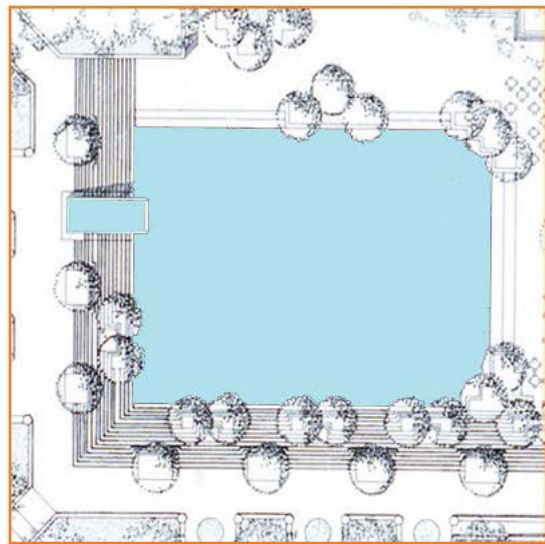
Following the February CFA meeting, the memorial's proponents again modified their design and three months later at the May 18 CFA meeting presented the latest version, the "Restored Pool Concept (<https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/05-04-2017%20WWI%20Commission%20proposal%20Restored%20Pool%20Concept.pdf>)," saying that their intent is "to create a memorial which (sic) shares a symbiotic relationship with the existing park." According to the proposal, "The existing fountain element is expanded equally north and south to become a larger 65' wide art object nestled in the western terrace stair." The memorial's proponents claim that they explored four alternatives to the wall, but concluded that none would "meet the commemorative goals of the WWI Commission."

Exhibit A

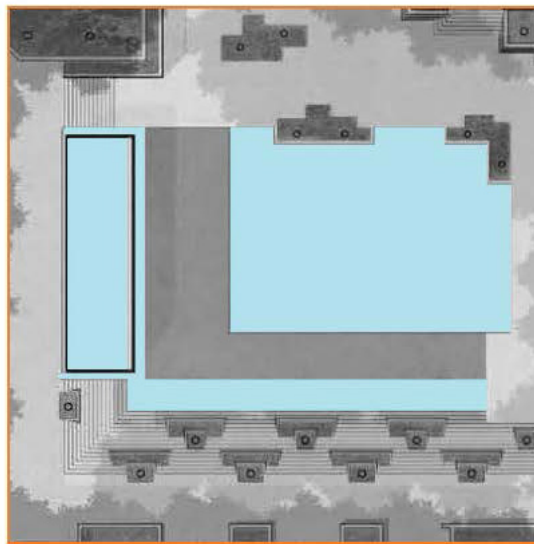
M. Paul Friedberg Design (1981)



Pool Basin



Existing



Proposed

Exhibit A showing differences between existing and proposed design for Pershing Park, Washington, D.C.

Along with the CFA, approval is also required from the National Capital Planning Commission (NCP). Another level of oversight is provided through the Section 106 review process (which refers to a specific part of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966). TCLF, along with several other organizations and individuals, is an official consulting party to the memorial's review process, the purpose of which is to "seek ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate any adverse effects on historic properties."

The Section 106 process uses specific language – preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, etc. – about specific forms of treatment. It should be noted that memorial proponents' use of the phrase "restored pool" is incorrect. This is not a restoration. The existing fountain would not be "expanded," it would be eradicated and replaced with a 65-foot-long bronze bas-relief with a very diminished fountain-like element; a portion of the pool would be replaced with a pathway, altering circulations patterns; and the treatment of the rest of the pool is ill-defined; it may be a pool,

a scrim, a wet plaza or some combination thereof. These issues are detailed in TCLF's June 20, 2017 letter (https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/06-20-2017%20PERSHING%20PARK%20SECTION%20106%20LETTER%20TO%20NPS.pdf) to Ms. Catherine Dewey, Chief of Resource Management, National Mall and Memorial Parks at the National Park Service, filed in advance of the June 28, 2017 Section 106 review of the proposed WWI Memorial.

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Pershing Park, soon after it was completed - Photo courtesy of M. Paul Friedberg and Partners

While the CFA did approve the design concept at their May 18, 2017 meeting, in a May 25, 2017 letter CFA Secretary Thomas E. Luebke, wrote the commissioners "found that the [May 18, 2017] presentation [of the "Restored Pool Concept"] lacked sufficient documentation about elements other than the sculpture, making it difficult to assess the overall experience, and they requested more detailed documentation for the next review." Mr. Luebke's letter states: "For the proposed bas-relief wall, they advised further study to determine whether its length is appropriate." This buttresses remarks (https://www.cfa.gov/records-research/record-cfa-actions/2017/02/cfa-meeting/minutes) made by CFA commissioners on February 16, 2017 (noted above) concerning the scope and scale of the proposed bas-relief.

Shortly after the CFA approved the design concept, the WWI Centennial Commission posted a Q&A with the organization's vice chair, Edwin Fountain, on its website (http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/communicate/press-media/wwi-centennial-news/2442-four-questions-for-edwin-fountain.html%3Futm_medium=email%26utm_source=govdelivery) in which Mr. Fountain states: "On Thursday [May 18, 2017] the CFA granted 'concept approval' for the proposed memorial, which means the CFA endorsed our proposal to establish a memorial at Pershing Park in the form of a monumental work of bronze bas-relief sculpture." The first part of that statement is correct, but the second part – "the CFA endorsed our proposal to establish a memorial at Pershing Park in the form of a monumental work of bronze bas-relief sculpture" – is not.

Process 82 (published in May 1989), the most comprehensive summary of Friedberg's body of work (which features Pershing Park's signature waterfall on its cover), notes that Pershing Park "was meant to be the activity center for the avenue." William "Holly" Whyte, the celebrated urban theorist and critic, notes in his introductory essay: "Friedberg's designs are full of overtly useful features. Pershing Park in Washington is a virtual compendium of them . . . The carrying capacity of the park is very high – even in summer. Washington's dreadful Augusts might temper usage, to be sure, but the design does everything possible to make you think otherwise. What with the water, the plantings of the canopy of foliage overhead the place looks cool, even when it isn't." Whyte continues, "His water features, for example, are composed to draw people into it, to splash their hands in it, to dangle their feet."



Pershing Park, Washington, D.C. - Image courtesy of Oehme, van Sweden

The proposed design threatens the central water feature in Friedberg's Pershing Park, which was designed to mitigate noise (from the surrounding vehicular traffic); have a cooling effect (from the mixing of air and water resulting during evaporation); and to serve as a place of respite in the center of the city, offering opportunities for recollection, contemplation and remembrance. Collectively, the visual and physical barrier created by the insertion of a 65-foot-long wall; the corresponding loss of more than 50 feet of open access between the upper and lower plaza levels; the severed relationship between the southern and western staircases; the introduction of new hardscape into the pool basin (changing the pool's shape and diminishing its surface area by more than 40%); and, the loss of the dynamic, animating qualities of water that are fundamental to the park's feeling and integrity, constitute substantial adverse effects on the Friedberg design, which has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=58434&documentID=74339>). Moreover, it destroys the integrity of the most important work of landscape architecture in the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site's expanded period of significance, as outlined in the Cultural Landscape Inventory (May 10, 2016). That period of significance spans 1976-1990, and encompasses a collection of modernist and postmodernist parks commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation.

As noted earlier, the WWI Centennial Commission has stated that their intent is "to create a memorial which (sic) shares a symbiotic relationship with the existing park." Several CFA Commissioners have expressed reservations about the design the WII Commission hopes will prevail - the 65-foot-long wall. In an exchange on Saturday, June 17, Pershing Park's original landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg was very succinct: "What they keep [of the existing park] in no way relates to what they're imposing on it."

How You Can Help

Contact the World War I Memorial Commissioners (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>) including the Chair, Colonel Robert J. Dalessandro (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>), and Vice Chair, Edwin L. Fountain (<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/contact.html>), and urge that any proposed changes to Pershing Park not have an adverse effect on the park's signature design elements and features:

U.S. World War I Centennial Commission
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, #123
Washington, DC 20004

Contact Executive Director Marcel Acosta (<https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=marcel.acosta@ncpc.gov>) at the National Capital Planning Commission (<http://www.ncpc.gov/>):

National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW, North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004

Contact Thomas Leubke (<https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=tluebke@cfa.gov&su=Proposed%20changes%20to%20Pershing%20Park%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.>), Secretary of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (<http://www.cfa.gov/>):

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U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street, NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20001

Contact Catherine Dewey (https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=catherine_dewey@nps.gov), Chief of Resource Management, National Mall and Memorial Parks at the National Park Service and urge for better maintenance of Pershing Park and the nation's most important processional space:

National Mall and Memorial Parks
National Park Service
900 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20024

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Jan 14, 2016

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DC DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Planned WWI Memorial would harm historic park, TCLF argues

The 65-foot-long wall and alterations to the existing pool are seen as too major for such a historic park

BY **MICHELLE GOLDCHAIN** | JUN 20, 2017, 11:57AM EDT



Rendering via the National Park Service

It shouldn't be any surprise that The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) is pushing against the National Park Service's planned WWI Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The organization has pushed against the approximately \$35 million memorial, called "The Weight of Sacrifice," since day one when Pershing Park was revealed as the site of the project. The TCLF is not alone on their views. In [March 2017](#), the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts also asked the WWI Commission for a "smaller intervention," more specifically a design that wouldn't "overwhelm the existing park design."

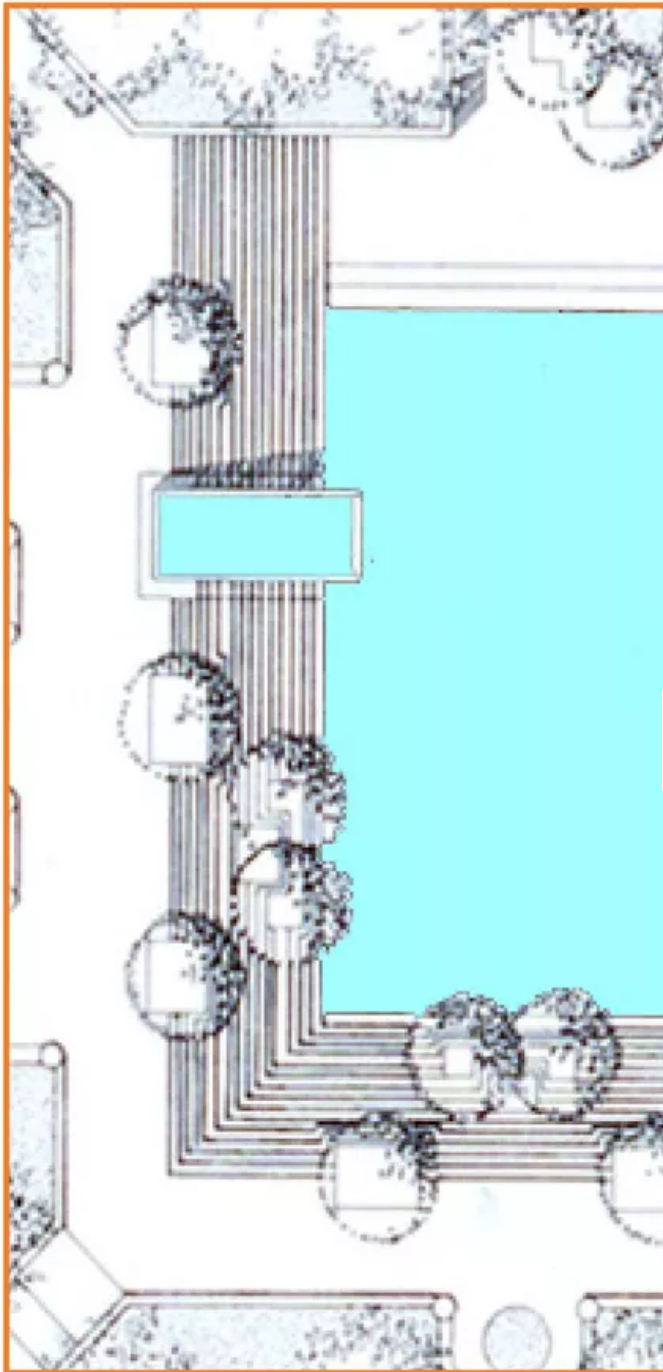
The reasoning behind the pushback from both organizations is the potential historicity of the 1.8-acre park, which was designed in May 1981 by award-winning landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, whose previous projects include New York's Battery Park City and Minneapolis' Peavey Plaza. It is also the only Friedberg project with a planting plan by D.C.-based landscape architects Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden.

Now, Curbed has learned that the TCLF President and CEO Charles Birnbaum has submitted a letter to National Park Service Chief of Resource Management Catherine Dewey, which further emphasizes the harmful impacts the memorial could inflict on a park that has potential to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In May 2017, it was revealed that the WWI Commission planned on using their "Restored Pool Concept," which proposes replacing the concession gazebo in the park with a ceremonial flag stand, restoring and enlarging the fountain, and inserting a walkway for access to the sculpture honoring General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing, who commanded U.S. forces during WWI, with inscriptions of text and maps describing his actions in the war. There would also be a 65-foot-long bronze, sunken wall, entitled, "The Wall of Remembrance," decorated with soldiers carved in bas-relief.

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Existing

Source: Images courtesy of the Cultural Landscape Foundation

While Birnbaum says that the design team should be “commended for its sympathetic treatment of the park’s perimeter,” the memorial is still expected to have “adverse effects” on the park’s spatial organization and water features. The pool’s surface area would be reduced by 40 percent, while the depth of the remaining pool areas are still ill-defined in the WWI Commission’s plans. In his letter, Birnbaum writes:

“In addition to the loss of some 40 percent of the pool surface, the removal of the existing fountain is more than a physical loss; it impacts the integrity of Friedberg’s design, especially the ‘feeling’ that it conveys. The fountain in Friedberg’s Pershing Park was not only aesthetically pleasing and commanding, it was designed to mitigate noise (From the surrounding vehicular traffic); have a cooling effect (from the mixing of air and water resulting during evaporation); and serve as a place of respite in the center of the city, offering opportunities for recollection, contemplation and remembrance, or, as Friedberg noted, ‘where the topography and the viewer came to rest.’”

Birnbaum further admonished the planned project for the loss of more than 50 feet of open access between the upper and lower plaza levels and the severed relationship between the southern and western amphitheater stairs and risers.

While the memorial’s plan is known as the “Restored Pool Concept,” Birnbaum wrote that this restoration is “completely false,” further adding, “This is not a restoration; rather it is a rehabilitation effort, but with the addition of a feature that is so incompatible in scale that its insertion destroys the integrity of the heart of the park.”

To read Birnbaum’s letter in full, check out the document below.

[06-20-2017 Pershing Park Section 106 Letter to National Park Service](#) by [Eater.com](#) on Scribd

June 20, 2017

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

Dear Ms. Dewey:

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide comments in advance of the June 28, 2017 Section 106 meeting concerning the most recent iteration of *The Weight of Sacrifice*, the World War I Memorial proposed for Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. We had a glimpse of this proposal – the so-called “[Restored Pool Concept](#)” – at the May 18, 2017 meeting of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and subsequently in more detail on the National Park Service’s website. The design team is to be commended for its sympathetic treatment of the park’s perimeter. In fact, when the as-built plan for the [National Register-eligible](#) M. Paul Friedberg-designed Pershing Park is overlaid with the most recent proposal, many of the character defining features along the perimeter are retained.

In the National Park Service’s “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes,” which have direct bearing on the Section 106 review of the proposed memorial, the “Guidelines” are organized along two primary areas: [1] Organizational Elements of the Landscape and [2] Character-Defining Features of the Landscape. As the author of that document, I can confirm that what the memorial’s proponents call the “Restored Pool Concept” would have adverse effects as noted in both of these primary areas. In fact, the

Can’t see the document? Go to Scribd [here](#).

- [Planned WWI Memorial in D.C. to use pool concept, restore park](#) [Curbed DC]
- [Commission of Fine Arts asks for proposed WWI memorial to not greatly alter Pershing Park](#) [Curbed DC]

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WWI Memorial news

Planned WWI Memorial would harm historic park, TCLF argues