

The Committee of 100
on the Federal City



**Comments on the US Department of State Foreign Missions Center Plan and Its
Effects on Historic Properties Located on the Walter Reed Campus
Nancy MacWood, Chair, Committee of 100 on the Federal City
June 27, 2013**

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is a nonprofit organization established in 1923 and dedicated to safeguarding and advancing Washington's historic distinction, natural beauty and overall livability. We appreciate the opportunity to present our views concerning the potential effects on historic properties of the Department of State's Foreign Missions Center plan for the Walter Reed Campus.

Members of the Committee attended the public meeting held on June 18, which was held to begin the public consultation process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. We found some admirable qualities in the plan, especially the recognition that this historic area, which will be nominated by the Army as an historic district both on the National Register and DC Landmark List, must be treated very carefully and respectfully.

We were, therefore, greatly distressed also to learn that the **plan anticipates substantial demolition** of most of the historic buildings on the portion of the campus that is going to be used for the new Foreign Missions Center. This seems to counter one of statements made by a State Department representative who said, "We are committed to protecting historic resources." The devil is, as the old saying goes, in the details.

Following are some of our specific comments:

- (1) We **question the State Department's assumptions that Buildings 40 and 54 are too large** to be reused as chanceries. At a minimum, some financial or other incentives could be offered to countries that would find alternative designs and/or other uses for these buildings.
- (2) We also urge **retention and reuse of the residential houses**. Again, some financial or other incentives could be offered to any country (countries) that would do so.
- (3) We **strongly support the State Department's proposal for retention of the historic chapel**, on its current location, for community use. We do question, **who will manage this facility?** And we would note that it does not need to be "consecrated" to be also used as a chapel. Many religious institutions have services in non-consecrated venues, such as schools. Hence it could continue its historical use while allowing for more secular uses too.

- (4) We urge that the Programmatic Agreement for the campus include a stipulation that any major **alterations or new construction will be reviewed by the DC Historic Preservation Board** and that **any agreement with a foreign mission stipulate to this.**
- (5) We appreciate the State Department's recognition that the **Civil War history** is also included. As was noted by one member of the audience (Dr. Benjamin Franklin Cooling, an eminent Civil War historian), the whole Walter Reed complex is "sacred ground," part of the Battle of Fort Stevens and the State Department portion is the least corrupted. It's important to save as much as possible of the open spaces.
- (6) We further urge, as one of the mitigation measures, that the State Department to **provide interpretive materials and signage** to educate both the community and the people from other countries who will be working there on the history of the Walter Reed Campus, from the Civil War and beyond.
- (7) Also, as part of the mitigation measures, a **social history should be done** on the campus, including detailed photographs. These should be made available to the public. There is also **more modern history** to be recognized beyond the 1956 period of significance
- (8) We ask that all **documents be made publicly available** on the Walter Reed Foreign Mission Center web site, including the slide presentation that was given at the meeting on June 18. We further request that the **July 2 deadline be extended for another 30 days** in order to give the public and Advisory Neighborhood Commissions sufficient time to review and consider the plan.
- (9) In the future, a **schedule of meetings on the 106 and EIS processes should be provided well in advance.** It is extremely important that all interested parties be given an opportunity to participate in the development of the plans for this area.

Lastly, please **add the Committee of 100 on the Federal City as a consulting party** and keep us notified of any activities related to the State Department's plans for the Walter Reed Campus. Our representative for this purpose will be Loretta Neumann, a trustee and member of our Historic Preservation Subcommittee. Email: Lneu@rcn.com, phone: 202-882-9274.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our comments.

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