

The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of The District of Columbia¹

Established Dec. 7, 1865 – Celebrating our 151st year!

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April 1, 2016

David J. Skorton, Secretary

Smithsonian Institution

P.O. Box 37012

Washington, DC 20013-7012

Dear Secretary Skorton:

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia is the city's oldest civic organization. Over its long history, the organization has fought to preserve, maintain and promote the L'Enfant Plan, the McMillian Plan and the NCPC's Framework Plan for the Nation's Capital. We have supported the preservation and restoration of the Smithsonian's Arts & Industries Building -- designed by Adolf Cluss -- successfully fended off efforts to 'nationalize' the District's War Memorial, championed efforts to prevent the permanent closure of streets (the DC Convention Center) and applauded initiatives that have re-opened previously closed thoroughfares (900 block of G Street, 10th and I Streets at the new City Center).

At our November 15, 2015 monthly luncheon we were enlightened by Carole Ottessen's program on the Smithsonian's various gardens and sculpture gardens. The response from the 73 members and guests in attendance was an expression of great appreciation and affection for the Smithsonian's landscapes and the peace, beauty and tranquility that they provide. We are deeply concerned that proposed plans for the south campus will destroy one of those most revered -- the Enid Haupt Gardens, whose design is in context with the historical Castle and their other surroundings. Although we are supportive of efforts to rehabilitate the Smithsonian Castle and, perhaps, redesign the entrances to the Sackler Gallery, the National Museum of Asian Art and the Ripley Center, we believe that these initiatives can be accomplished without the extreme changes that would removed the custom-designed and compatible Renwick Gates and destroy the Haupt Gardens.

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia -- the District's oldest civic organization -- was established on December 7, 1865, to preserve memories and matters of historic interest. By virtue of our long presence and participation in the city's prosperity and improvement, we continue to work and strive for the city's stability, security and advancement -- to aid in every way the prosperity and well-being of the District while preserving the heritage of its past.

¹Effective June 1, 1871, Congress revoked the charters of the cities of Washington, Georgetown and the County of Washington and established a consolidated government of the District of Columbia. For all intents and purposes, on that date Washington -- as far as a jurisdiction -- ceased to exist.

As the new Secretary of the Smithsonian, we sincerely hope that you will carefully evaluate the proposed plans and support an alternative that will incorporate the retention of both the Renwick Gates and Haupt Gardens, allowing only changes that will respect the history of these places and have the least impact on the entrance and gardens.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our organization's concerns with you. We believe, like so many others that you will certainly hear from, that although progress and improvements are necessary for the preservation and restoration of both the Smithsonian's Campus and the public's use and interest in them, these goals can be effectively accomplished in concert with respect for the beloved historic components that enhance the character of the buildings and spaces, such as the Renwick Gates and the Haupt Gardens.

Sincerely,



William N. Brown, President

Cc: Mr. Thomas Leubke, Secretary, CFA
Mr. Marcel Acosta, Executive Director, NCPC
Mr. David Maloney, DC SHPO
Mr. Robert Kogod, Regent
Congressman Ken Calvert
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton

