

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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Founded 1923

May 9, 2017

Chair

Stephen A. Hansen

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Subject: Response to May 3, 2017, Section 106 Consultation Meeting on
Proposed Smithsonian South Mall Campus Master Plan

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Dear Ms. Spofford:

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City offers these comments on the new Alternative F unveiled at the May 3 public meeting as well as on continuing discussions and conceptual iterations of the proposed Smithsonian South Mall Campus Master Plan. While we find many aspects of the Plan laudable, we remain firmly opposed to demolition of the Haupt Garden and the Carlhian-designed pavilions in the Quadrangle Historic District, which was recently designated a DC landmark by unanimous vote of the Historic Preservation Review Board. The destruction of these contributing elements remains a prominent constant in many of the design alternatives currently under consideration and seemingly preferred by the Smithsonian Administration. We believe that a design challenge requiring a thoughtful and exemplary balance between old and new – to preserve the Quadrangle Historic District while meeting your desired new program - is not only possible but desirable. In this matter, you have an exciting design opportunity - a new phase of Smithsonian development on the National Mall all the while respecting and acknowledging your venerable past.

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The principal drivers of the South Mall project are generally laudable: restoration and upgrading the universally-loved Castle – returning it to its historic role as locus of the Institution, providing increased and updated visitor amenities and access, upgrading facilities, better administrative space, restoration/ expansion of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, etc. But none should be achieved at the cost of destroying a significant historic development chapter in the Smithsonian's past and replacing it with what is at best an embarrassingly

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incompatible landscape design concept. The entire Quadrangle Historic District is a historically-important chapter in the Smithsonian's history. It is a nuanced and sophisticated historic design and physical manifestation of the ongoing growth of the Smithsonian presence on the National Mall, the legacy of and a promise made to benefactor Enid A. Haupt and the final legacy of the Institution's most influential Secretary, Dillon Ripley.

As regards other issues now in play (including Alternative F), we do have numerous concerns and questions. None, however, rises to the importance of preserving the Quadrangle Historic District. Those additional matters to which we look for further discussion and clarification are:

1) preservation of the Hirshhorn Museum plaza walls; 2) proposed destruction of the Lester Collins-designed Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden; 3) inexplicable and continued ignoring of the Arts and Industries Building as viable space for meeting South Mall Master Plan program needs; 4) fuller understanding of requirements and design for the proposed new loading dock system; and, 5) status and proposed design for new "doorway" on the east exterior elevation of the Freer Gallery of Art.

The Committee of 100 appreciates your consideration of the points in this letter and looks forward to further discussions. Founded in 1923, the Committee of 100 is an independent, not-for-profit, citizen organization dedicated to safeguarding the fundamental values that give our nation's capital its distinction, beauty, and community character.

If we may be of further assistance to you in this matter, answer questions, or provide additional information or clarification, please contact me at the above address.

Sincerely yours,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chairman

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