



Testimony of **Stephen A. Hansen**, Chairman
Committee of 100 on the Federal City
Before the National Capital Planning Commission
NCPC Action Item Number 7630
Smithsonian South Mall Campus Master Plan
January 4, 2018, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

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Good Afternoon. My name is Stephen A. Hansen. I am Chairman of the **Committee of 100 on the Federal City**. I appreciate your providing the Committee a brief opportunity to present our thoughts on the proposed Smithsonian South Mall Campus Master Plan. We support some aspects of it – none more so than the restoration of the sadly-neglected Smithsonian Castle. That being said, we find other elements problematic.

As my time is brief with you this morning, I wish to frame our concerns around three issues: 1) proposed destruction of The Quadrangle Historic District; 2) possible destruction of the Hirshhorn Museum plaza perimeter walls; and, 3) the Smithsonian’s refusal to make wise and better use of the 1881 Arts and Industries Building.

Issue 1: Central to every design alternative under your consideration is demolishing the **above-grade** architecture and landscapes of “The Quadrangle Historic District” - replacing it with a “banal” landscape design purportedly “in the spirit” of the original. Comprised of the Enid A. Haupt Garden, its three pavilions, and the James Renwick-designed Gates, the above grade Quadrangle Historic District is apparently viewed by the Smithsonian as not historically worth preserving. The Committee of 100 disagrees! In fact, so do many others - including:

- The District of Columbia, Historic Preservation Review Board which listed it as a District local historic landmark in April of this year.
- As did the National Park Service’s recent updating of the National Register of Historic Places listing for the National Mall.
- As did nationally-recognized American architectural history scholars from the University of Virginia, Boston University, and George Washington University.
- As have the national offices of the Garden Club of America and the Garden Conservancy.
- As have family members of Smithsonian Secretary Dillon Ripley and philanthropist Enid A. Haupt.
- And as have thousands of citizens nationwide who signed (and continue to sign) the online petition – “Save the Haupt Garden”.

The Quadrangle Historic District is a historically-significant, mid-20th century chapter in the Smithsonian’s 175-year presence on the National Mall. It is the physical manifestation of Dillon Ripley’s tenure – regarded by many as the Institution’s greatest Secretary. It is the gift to

the nation of noted American philanthropist and landscape enthusiast Enid A. Haupt whose generosity this Master Plan proposes to destroy – in certain violation of her stated stipulations for the endowment. The Quadrangle does not need to be destroyed. Leaking roofs below the Quad can be repaired - “from below”. We need look no further than remediation of leaking, underground station ceilings now underway in Washington’s Metro System. The technology exists! As to the Smithsonian’s goal of opening up vistas and making the south side of the Castle precinct a more welcoming entrance from Independence Avenue or being able to see the Washington Monument, that is acceptable **IF** achievable without major destruction of significant historic properties. However, this is not the case here. There is no tabula rasa - no “blank slate.”

We fear that the Smithsonian’s current leadership has become so enthralled with marking its own tenure with new capital projects, that it has lost its way in terms of preserving the built heritage of its own history. The appropriate design approach sorely needed for this entire undertaking must be one of subtle, balanced, and responsive contextual additions and changes to historically-significant landscape and architecture. And when affected adversely in construction, the historic architecture or landscapes should be restored or repaired. Not replaced.

Issue 2: The Hirshhorn Museum. Several design alternatives have considered (and may still consider) wholesale demolition of all, or most, of the plaza walls surrounding the Museum and fountain court. This is justified under the misguided “opening up” and “welcoming” rubric previously raised. Dedicated in 1974 and designed by prominent American architect, Gordon Bunshaft, the Hirshhorn Museum is widely regarded as a nationally-significant, 20th century architectural monument. The plaza, plaza fountain, surrounding walls, and the “drum” itself are “of one piece” – an inseparable, significant design whole. Proposing the demolition of so integral and large an element of Bunshaft’s design evidences an arrogant and cavalier disregard for one of America’s prominent 20th century architects and world-class museums. This option should have **never** been considered in **any** Master Plan design alternative and must be off the table.

Issue 3: The 1881 **Arts and Industries Building** is a troubling “elephant in the room” as the Smithsonian appears to squander this much admired historic building by not integrating it in the Master Plan - despite the significant public dollars recently spent on its exterior restoration. When challenged why the historic structure is not part of the plan, Smithsonian responses have been vague and evasive – usually redounding to some bromide of Congress’s recusing it for the site of The National Museum of the American Latino. More recently, the story is that it is slated for changing exhibition space for a yet-

launched Museum of Technology Innovation. The Committee of 100 encourages NCPC to press this point now in these deliberations and require the Arts and Industries Building be better integrated into the Master Plan – securing its use for future generations and reducing significantly overall South Mall costs and destruction of the Quadrangle Historic District.

Let me say in closing that History can be ironic. We all know this. Back in the 1980’s, the Committee of 100 opposed construction of the Quadrangle. Now we advocate its preservation. The point being - things change over time. What we considered not historic 30-some years ago is now significant. By the Smithsonian’s own reckoning, the South Mall Campus Project is many years in the future – decades even. Funding has neither been budgeted, requested, appropriated, nor raised. More than half the members of the Steering Committee that

envisioned the South Mall Plan are no longer involved. Things change! And despite the Institution's pressing NCPC to "wrap up" this phase of the Master Plan, we believe it is worthwhile to "get it right at the get go" and not make decisions we (or those following us) will regret. Simply put, this is too important, there are too many variables in play, and too many questions unanswered for NCPC to approve the Master Plan. We have the time. Let's do this right. Thank you.