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**Testimony on the
Restoration and Rehabilitation of the
District of Columbia World War Memorial,
before the
National Capital Planning Commission
October 1, 2009**

**John Fondersmith, AICP, Representing
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City**

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is pleased to provide comments on the proposed restoration and rehabilitation of the District of Columbia World War Memorial, located on the National Mall north of Independence Avenue and south of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. The memorial is located on the axis of 19th Street, NW, though the vista to the Memorial is not well developed at the present time. The National Park Service (NPS) has obtained American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds for this important restoration and rehabilitation project and is seeking approval of the concept design from the National Capital Planning Commission. The District of Columbia World War Memorial is relatively small, located somewhat “off the beaten path” in the Ash Woods area of the National Mall. It is one of the least known memorials on the National Mall, at least at the present time.

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City has long been concerned with protecting and enhancing, in our time, the various elements of the L’Enfant Plan (1791) and the planning work of the McMillan Commission (1901-1902). The District of Columbia War Memorial was completed and dedicated in 1931, and occupies a location on a portion of the National Mall that was developed only a few years earlier, generally in accordance with the McMillan Commission Plan. The District of Columbia War Memorial honors those residents of the District of Columbia who served in the military services and gave their life in the World War (now referred to as World War I). The Memorial was financed with funds raised from District of Columbia residents, organizations and businesses.

Over the next several years, the District of Columbia World War Memorial will become more noticed and visited. The proposed restoration and rehabilitation work to be undertaken by the National Park Service will make the Memorial and adjacent area more attractive and visible. It will be easier to

use the Memorial and adjacent area for concerts and related gatherings. In addition, over the next decade, our country will be observing the centennial of World War I. As the World War I Memorial on the National Mall, the Memorial will take on additional meaning for visitors, and as a site for special ceremonies. Finally, in the next few years the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial will be completed at the northwest corner of the Tidal Basin, to the south of the District of Columbia War Memorial. Completion of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial will greatly increase visitor traffic to that area of the Tidal Basin and at least some of those visitors will pass by the District of Columbia War Memorial in walking between the King Memorial at the Tidal Basin and the Lincoln Reflecting Pool area.

Previous Committee of 100 Comments relating to the District of Columbia War Memorial

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City has been one of the consulting parties with the National Park Service on the National Mall Plan for the past several years. The Committee has submitted written comments to the National Park Service on preliminary versions of the National Mall Plan and on various improvement projects on the National Mall. Some of these comments relate to the District of Columbia World War Memorial. These comments have supported the renovation and rehabilitation of the District of Columbia War Memorial and have suggested ways to better link the Memorial with adjacent areas of the National Mall and the adjacent city. Sections from these previous comments to the National Park Service are repeated below.

Comments on the National Mall Plan (Preliminary Preferred Alternative) (May 15, 2009)

Page 8

Nineteenth Street Vista to D.C. World War Memorial: The D.C. War Memorial is located on the axis of 19th Street, NW, the street that leads south from Dupont Circle to Constitution Avenue. The D.C. World War Memorial is scheduled to be restored in the near future. The Committee suggests that studies be made to see if a vista could be opened along the line of 19th Street to the Memorial, thus visually connecting this little known memorial to the area of the city north of the National Mall. It should be noted that the 1902 McMillan Commission Plan included a similar vista between 20th and 21st Streets, NW to connect with a northern extension of the Reflecting Pool (that extension was never built and the vista was not opened).

Pages 12-13

D.C. War Memorial: The Committee is very pleased to see that special attention is finally being given to the District of Columbia War Memorial which honors those District of Columbia residents who served in World War I. The recent announcement of stimulus funds for renovation of this memorial is especially welcome. This improvement project is especially timely since our country will soon be observing the centennial of the World War I period. Since there is no “national” World War I Memorial on the National Mall, this local D.C. memorial can symbolize that period. Interpretation could note that

hundreds of such memorials were built across the United States after World War I, some much more elaborate and some more simple. New interpretation should also include recognition that residents of the District of Columbia have served their country in all its conflicts since the establishment of the District in 1791, despite being denied the benefits of full citizenship. Use of the memorial (a bandstand design) and adjacent areas for performance use can add additional activity to this area.

Comments on Rehabilitation of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool Area (August 15, 2009)

Page 2

Visual and Physical Links to D.C. War Memorial: The National Park Service has also received stimulus funds for restoration of the D.C. War Memorial, located south of the Reflecting Pool. We assume that the planning process for that project will be moving forward soon. In previous comments on the National Mall Plan (see May 15, 2009 letter to Susan Spain, Project Executive, National Mall Plan) the Committee of 100 suggested that the National Park Service undertake feasibility studies of opening a vista along the line of 19th Street, NW, south of Constitution Avenue, to the D.C. War Memorial, in order to better link this memorial to the city. We suggest that this present work on the Lincoln Reflecting Pool area consider both visual (vistas) and physical linkages (walkways) to the D.C. War Memorial

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City supports the proposal by the National Park Service for restoration and rehabilitation of the District of Columbia War Memorial (both the structure and the adjacent walks and landscape) as generally indicated in the NPS *Scheme C: Proposed Rehabilitation-Preferred Alternative*. The Committee is pleased that funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is making this work possible at this time before the Memorial deteriorates further. We note again that this work comes at a time when our country will soon be observing the centennial of World War I. We are pleased that the restoration work will again allow the Memorial and adjacent areas to be used for concerts and public gatherings.

The Committee recommends that more attention be given to interpretation of the meaning of the District of Columbia War Memorial in the local and national context. In the short range, this will require additional interpretation panels at the site, updating of existing wording of interpretation messages and additional interpretation. Since there is no “national” World War I Memorial on the National Mall, the District of Columbia War Memorial can symbolize that period.

Interpretation should note that hundreds of such local memorials were built across the United States after World War I, some much more elaborate and some more simple. New interpretation should note that residents of the District of Columbia have served their country in all its conflicts since the District was established in 1791, despite not enjoying the benefits of full citizenship.

In the future, consideration should be given to providing these interpretation messages in a more permanent and significant way, but still simple form, as part of the Memorial area. This might be done through the addition of small stone walls with inscriptions, or some other appropriate but simple arrangement.

The Committee has previously suggested that both visual linkages (vistas) and activity linkages (walkways) to the District of Columbia War Memorial be considered as part of the current National Mall Plan and in the current planning for improvement of the Lincoln Reflecting Pool Area. We hope these concepts for improved visual and activity linkages are being considered by the National Park Service and we want to call these concepts to the attention of the National Capital Planning Commission for your consideration.

In conclusion, the Committee of 100 on the Federal City wants to indicate our support, and our pleasure, at seeing the rehabilitation and restoration of the District of Columbia War Memorial move forward at this time. We recommend that local and national interpretation of the Memorial be enhanced and that the visual and activity linkages to the Memorial be strengthened.