

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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February 26, 2019

Robin Nixon, Acting Superintendent
National Mall and Memorial Parks
National Park Service
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, D.C. 20242

Founded 1923

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SUBJECT: Comments on the Environmental Assessment for the Latest Design for the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park

Dear Ms. Nixon:

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (Committee of 100), founded in 1923, is the District of Columbia's oldest citizen planning organization. The Committee of 100 has been especially interested in the design of the proposed World War I Memorial in Pershing Park, located at Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th Street, NW. This is an important location, just south of Downtown, at the north edge of the Monumental Core and just east of the White House area.

The Committee of 100 has been involved with this project since the initial public meeting on May 20, 2015. The Committee of 100 has submitted comments on the design of the WWI Memorial over the past three (almost four) years. A total of seven comment letters have been submitted through January 2019. Two of these comment letters were to NCPC, the last being dated January 18, 2019, and five were to the National Park Service. All the comments are on the Committee of 100 website, under "Pennsylvania Avenue" in the "Planning" Section. In addition, members of the Committee of 100 have participated in all of the Consulting Parties meetings.

Our comments today are based on the design presented to NCPC for review at its February 7, 2019 meeting (which had been delayed because of the partial government shutdown); information in the "World War I Memorial Environmental Assessment" (dated December 2018) and in the "Cultural Resources Technical Memorandum, Final Assessment of Effects, World War I Memorial" (dated December 2018).

The review and discussion of the design of the World War I Memorial by the Consulting Parties, and the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, has been a long and sometimes contentious process.

Some members of the Consulting Parties did not want any changes to the historic Pershing Park landscape and wanted to see the original elements of the design, especially the pool and fountain, retained in the World War I Memorial design. The Committee of 100 has advocated retaining as much of the original Pershing Park design as possible while still accommodating the World War I Memorial in a meaningful way. The design team for the World War I Memorial has presented a range of proposed designs over the last several years. Gradually, these designs have evolved to more respect the original design of Pershing Park, though still proposing significant changes.

We therefore offer the following observations and recommendations, building on previous comments with adjustments for the latest proposals.

Pool and Walkway Design

The Committee of 100 has advocated a simplified design in terms of the walkways and the pool, with the goal of better connecting the World War I Sculptural Wall to the surrounding park. However, the World War Centennial Memorial Commission, and its design team, has advocated designs in which the area for viewing the World War I Memorial Sculpture Wall is isolated from the surrounding urban park area. First there was the “L Shaped Walkway” and then the “U Shaped Walkway”. The latest design has two alternative arrangements of pool, scrim and walkways. The first is the “L Shaped Walkway” and the second is the “Island Walkway” in which visitors to the Memorial Wall enter the area for viewing the Memorial Wall by a walkway from the east. The large “Island” is therefore cut off from the south and north sides of the overall park.

Modification to the “L Shaped Walkway” Design

As indicated in our January 18, 2019 letter to NCPC, the Committee of 100 suggests shifting the southern walkway south so that it adjoins the sloping steps to the south. This would mean the pool would not be broken up by a walkway. This change would provide a direct walk from the Pershing Statue area to the World War I Memorial Wall and could also provide for a stair walkway to the upper level on the west side of the park.

Modification to the “Island” Design

For the “Island” design, the Committee of 100 suggests that some modifications would make it more useful and improve overall accessibility. A new walkway could be provided adjacent to the sloping steps on the south side of the park, with a walkway connection to the main “Island” area. On the north side of the island there could also be a walkway connection to the north side of the park. These changes would make the “Island” more accessible and useable, and facilitate park visitor’s access to the World War I Memorial sculpture wall.

Interpretation of the Sculpture Wall

The sculpture wall is a symbolic work of art but there is a question of how visitors can understand what it means, and how well it represents the progression and meaning of World War I, especially American involvement. The latest design for the memorial suggests an information area at the site of present kiosk.

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While we believe that is appropriate, we believe information also should be provided on walls or plaques, by information brochures, and by electronic means. It is important that visitors to the World War I Memorial be able to gain an understanding and perspective on World War I in addition to looking at the sculpture wall.

The Committee of 100 is also pleased to see the recent work that has been done, to make the engraved text and maps on the walls in the Pershing statue area more readable. This is an important place, in addition to the present kiosk area, to provide visitors with information about World War I, especially American involvement in that war.

The Importance of Pershing Park as an “Urban Park”

The Committee of 100 believes it is important to continue to stress the “urban park” role of this overall park. Probably half or more of future visitors will be there to enjoy the “urban park” features of the park.

Once a design is approved and constructed, the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park will be in place for many years and will be visited by millions of people, both American and foreign visitors. It is important to get the design right so that visitors to the memorial will not only see the physical memorial but will gain a better idea of what the World War I Memorial commemorates.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chair

cc: Marcel C. Acosta, Executive Director, National Capital Planning Commission
Thomas Luebke, Secretary -- U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
Andrew Trueblood, Interim Director, D.C. Office of Planning
David Maloney--State Historic Preservation Officer for the District of Columbia
Edwin Fountain – World War I Centennial Commission
Claire Sale -- AECOM