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By Email Only

The National Park Service
Planning, Environmental and Public Comments: www.parkplanning.nps.gov/NAMA

re: Kennedy Center/Potomac River Pedestrian Access Improvement

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please consider these to be my Comments on this proposed project, which you presented at the Public Scoping in February 2011.

As you know, in 1987, as one of my many *pro bono* projects for my hometown throughout my career, I proffered in the *Washington Post*, the idea of extending the promenade from Washington Harbour around to the Kennedy Center -- and then -- connecting the Center's terrace to the Potomac River via a grand stair. The NCPC not only approved the Concept Design, but made the proposal part of its Legacy Plan. So, I am extremely pleased that 24 years later, my idea of this significant amenity for the Center and the city is again being considered.

That being said, I write to oppose strongly each of the four options you presented, particularly your preferred option, for these reasons: it is a poor design and a failure in its scale, appropriateness, response to the river, cost, and safety.

Scale: The Kennedy Center is an enormous building, and your preferred option presents two narrow exit stairs -- the type of retro-fitted fire escape stairs often required by the Fire Marshall on older buildings. These stairs will forever look like superficial little add-ons, wholly out of character with the scale of the building.

Appropriateness: The Kennedy Center (despite some modern elements) was conceived by the architect Edward Durrell Stone as a classic dignified symmetrical temple-like structure -- even more significant now that the building has been dedicated as a memorial to President Kennedy. In the Washington tradition, important buildings and memorials (Jefferson, Lincoln) have as a prime feature a majestic set of grand stairs between two flanking cheek walls. Obviously, the NPS narrow little stairs turned parallel to the building, fail to respond to that tradition. (In approving my design 24 years ago, the NCPC appreciated that its cheek walls, which would house elevators, maintained that tradition).

Response to the River: By turning away from the river, these narrow little stairs do not provide places to sit and enjoy the view, see the sunset, or watch the river's boat traffic, and its many regattas. Note the contrast with the 1987 design -- an impressive staircase, which can be used as a grandstand for people who want to enjoy the increasing number of activities that are taking place on the river -- + -- a floating dock for water taxis and ferry boats bringing people to the Center. Here is how it would work: A theater patron could park in one of the 20,000 spaces in Rosslyn (mostly unused at night), take a ferry to Washington Harbour for an early dinner, then take the ferry to the Kennedy Center for a show, retracing his steps to go home -- all without fighting the traffic on the bridges and through Foggy Bottom and Georgetown.

Cost: With the help of Tadjer-Cohen-Edelson, Structural Engineers, the 1987 grand stair was conceived as a simple cantilever structure, counterweighted by the lower stair platform, thereby imposing no weight on the Center's cantilevered terrace. Whiting Turner, General Contractor, estimated its cost then at \$4 million. (I have no knowledge of its current cost, nor of the expensive individually supported, narrow exit stairs made of glass.)

Safety: The 1987 design anticipated necessary evacuation of the Center: people would be directed out of the theaters, then to the lobby which is on the water side of the building, then to the terrace, where a grand staircase would provide ample egress for thousands of people -- as contrasted with your preference of two small exit stairs.

My only interest here is this: to do whatever I can to prevent an avoidable mistake that would forever mar a National Memorial to a President.

Sincerely,

Arthur Cotton Moore