

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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Marcel C. Acosta, AICP
Executive Director
National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, N.W., North Lobby, Suite 500
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SUBJECT: Comments on the Latest Design for the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park

Dear Mr. Acosta:

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 NW 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 submitted various comments on the design of the WWI Memorial over the past three years. The last Committee of 100 comment letter to NCPC was dated October 1, 2018 in preparation for the Commission's October 4, 2018 meeting. Now the World War I Centennial Commission has submitted a somewhat revised design for the World War I Memorial to NCPC for review at the Commission's meeting which was scheduled for January 10, 2019. Our comments below are based on that design.

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 lengthy and a somewhat contentious process.

On one hand, there are a number of members of the Consulting Parties who 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 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.

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. We therefore offer the following observations and recommendations. These comments build on previous C100 comments to the National Park Service (letter of March 15, 2018) and to the National Capital Planning Commission (letter of October 1, 2018) and have been adjusted and updated based on the latest design proposal which was to be reviewed by the National Capital Planning Commission at its January 10, 2019 meeting. However, NCPC has been closed due to the Partial Federal Government Shutdown. We assume that the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park will be reviewed at the next NCPC Meeting

Pool and Walkway Design

The Committee of 100 has advocated a simplified design in terms of the walkways and the pool and with 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 alternatives arrangements of pool, scrim and walkways. The first is the “U 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 “U Shaped Walkway” Design

As indicated in our October 1, 2018 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.

The north side of the “U Shaped Walkway” could also be shifted north. These changes would make the pool more meaningful and be closer to the original design of the pool in Pershing Park. We believe these changes would also simplify visitor access to the WWI Memorial Sculptural Wall. The Committee of 100 believes this modified design would be the best solution for the WWI Memorial in Pershing Park.

Modification to the “Island” Design

If the “Island” design is to be considered, 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.

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. The latest design suggests an information area at the site of present kiosk. We believe that is appropriate. Information could be provided on walls or plaques, by information brochures, and by electronic means. It is very important that visitors to the World War I Memorial be able to gain an understanding and perspective on World War I and not just look at a sculpture wall.

Pershing Statue Area

The Committee of 100 is pleased to see the recent work that has been done, and is being 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”

In deciding on the final design for the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park, it is important to continue to stress the “urban park” role of this overall park. Probably half of the visitors to the park will be there to enjoy the urban park features of Pershing Park. The Committee of 100 is pleased to see the strong support for the urban park use of Pershing Park in the “Executive Director’s Recommendation” prepared for the Commission Meeting which was scheduled for January 10, 2018.

Next Steps

Once a design is approved and constructed, the World War I Memorial in Pershing Park will be in place for many years will be visited by millions of people, both Americans 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 some better idea of what the World War I Memorial commemorates.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen A. Hansen, Chair

cc: Patricia Trap, Acting Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks, National Park Service
Thomas Luebke, Secretary -- U.S. Commission of Fine Arts
Andrew Trueblood, Acting 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