

March 20, 2009

Mall Plan Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting Notes

Classroom B, National Capital Region Headquarters Building, 1100 Ohio Drive, SW,
Washington DC 20242; 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Attendees: Alan Spears - NCPA, John Fondersmith – Committee of 100, Edwin Fountain – DC Preservation League, Richard Westbrook – Committee of 100 and Guild of Professional Tour Guides, Cynthia Field – Latrobe Chapter Society of Architectural Historians, Judy Scott Feldman and Kent Cooper – Coalition to Save Our Mall, Linda Doyle – Tourmobile, Kelly Fanizzo – ACHP, Nell Ziehl, Betsy Merritt and Lane Pearson – National Trust Historic Preservation, Pete McCall – Guild of Professional Tour Guides, Daniel Maillet – Guest Services Inc., Nancy Witherell – National Capital Planning Commission, David Maloney and Andrew Lewis – DC State Historic Preservation Office, John Katinas – Katinas Bruckwick Architects, Iris Gestram – National Association of Olmsted Parks

NPS: Jennifer Talken- Spaulding – Cultural Resource Mgr., Maureen Joseph – Historic LA, Perry Wheelock – Chief of Resource Mgt., Doug Jacobs – Deputy Assoc Regional Director – National Capital Region, Steve Lorenzetti – Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Stephanie Toothman – Acting Supt, Susan Spain – Project Exec – National Mall Plan

Introductions

Discussion Goals: Union Square, the Mall, and Washington Monument. The discussion got part way through the Mall.

Handouts:

- 2 page handout on NPS Management Policies relate to Cultural Resource management defining Preservation, Rehabilitation and Restoration of Cultural Landscapes, as well as approaches to new construction.
- Map showing McMillan Plan Mall Systems overlaid on National Mall and the White House & President's Park.
- 5 page Union Square Chronology and, contributing and non- contributing features
- 14 page Mall Chronology and, contributing and non- contributing features

- 3 page Washington Monument - Primary Character Defining Features and Assessment of Potential Effects. This handout contained materials from Section 106 discussions related to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The handout will not be posted online. NPS is currently preparing a Cultural Landscape Inventory that will be available when it is completed later this year.

Announcements:

New handouts (references from the CLI of chronology and contributing/non-contributing features) for the Mall, Union Square, and the Washington Monument; list of all structures in the project area on the List of Classified Structures; Summary of NPS Policy Guidance on Cultural Landscapes; reminder and encouragement that public comments on the wayfinding/pedestrian guides into PEPC by today's deadline (March 20, 2009).

There had been a discussion about layering site furnishings data with proposals from the preliminary preferred alternative of the National Mall Plan, and in particular wayfinding proposals. Jennifer stated this is not as easy as thought - GIS data is point on the ground, and in a landscape scale the points will overlay on top of each other. They will only be within 5' accuracy. We have: GIS information for post/chain and trash receptacles for the National Mall between Constitution Ave and Independence Ave and lights. We don't have benches, but can infer from a typical pattern. The value may be not an assessment in a point of reference, but rather in the overall context. Agreed by group - they request an overview of how those design elements are incorporated in the park. The NPS does follow the Sec. of Interior's Standards for Treatment and NPS policy. These guide decisions on all projects.

Consultation Notes:

What we are doing in the Section 106 process is not design related- the purpose is not to design the changes proposed in this preferred alternative. We are discussing what guidelines we want to provide and what significant historic elements we want to preserve. Once the plan is done, implementation will require additional design and then we'd continue the Section 106 process on the specific details at that time.

[Discussion about chronology - what's included, what isn't, implemented plans versus plans that were never implemented. Chronology really includes a chronology of physical changes in the landscape. Note that handouts from Cultural Landscape Inventories were provided as a quick check for what is considered historic.]

Questions came up about the L'Enfant, McMillan, and perhaps portion of SOM plans and their priority in this process. David (SHPO) thinks it's important not to "fossilize" past plans. It is important to capture the hierarchy of landscapes, streets, etc. It is also important to remember the evolution of these plans. Considering the context of the development of the plan, important not to necessarily look so much at what the McMillan plan shows, but how it was implemented.

Nancy - wants context and discussion provided to the designers when this NAMA Plan is implemented. NPS concurs.

UNION SQUARE

Union Square, NPS and AOC planning. AOC is a cooperating agency in the Mall Plan process and they have been working on a plan. It is not a public plan.

Susan - described portions of the draft AOC plan for their area of the plan. The area directly north of Union Square, managed by AOC and used for construction staging, is Youth Park. The AOC concepts would use the area to expand the Botanic Gardens with a focus on sustainability and use of native plant materials. Facilities are possible. While the short term plans for Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues retain permit parking, the long term goal of all plans is to return the grandeur of L'Enfant boulevards by removing parking at the visual terminus.

At some point in the discussion Susan was asked to review the preliminary preferred alternative concepts for Union Square.

Cynthia - important in the McMillan plan is what they say, not necessarily what they showed (text narrative in the plan is opposed to the illustration). All agreed. They said they wanted "organic" Union Square connection between the Capitol and the Mall. The avenues and green are what make up an "organic" connection. The most important aspect of Union Square is as a connector to the Mall.

Perry – a change of use is proposed – from a backdrop to an active space.

Cynthia – doesn't think water is appropriate.

John F – reminds David about National Square (proposed on Pennsylvania Avenue) was too big and too hot. This area needs to be carefully designed so that it doesn't become a

skateboard park. Over time, the avenues have taken on a different character – less monumental and more human scaled.

Kent – agree, WWII can be like an oven. It is important to address scale as well. Moving water can be positive. The program (National Mall Plan concepts) – it should be destination and hard surfaces are useful to protect the Mall. Don't need food service, but you do need toilets and seating. This should be a formal space, and food service is too informal. Lots of study needed to define the exact program – the degree of shade, aeration, etc. Need multiple test designs.

(Note: NPS always requires multiple design concepts to explore different solutions to meet the defined need. The goal of planning to define broadly what should occur and provide some sideboards and criteria. The goal of Section 106 consultations helps provide sideboards related to historic preservation.)

Nell – water features are important.

David – active water

Cynthia – splashing, sparkling water was intended on the Capitol side of Union Square. You can mix a pool and sparkling water.

Nell – the concept for the Capitol included water that was never developed. I have a few questions about contributing and non-contributing elements as well as the eligibility of the SOM plan.

Andrew – some of the SOM plan might be eligible

Cynthia – the McMillan Plan emphasized the east west axis.

Perry – the big features continue to respect the east west axis

Andrew – Olmsted had no break in the grass to reinforce the axis

David – you can have both – with continuous open space in the middle

Richard – food and restrooms are critical and hard to fit in. Water relates to and feeds circulation patterns. Youth park could be an area for support facilities.

Edwin – doesn't want to see utilitarian space

Richard – complement the Botanic Gardens

Perry – traditional use of Union Square include school group photos and that brings up a need for bus parking.

Pete McC – groups park on the east side of Union Square – it is also the Capitol drop off and the hill can be an obstacle.

Kent – the area needs a sense of containment, to begin to get a sense of edge – define the space with vegetation or whatever.

David – the Olmsted plan provided both continuity and enclosure at the east end of the National Mall – a bookend before the Capitol

Kent – Olmsted is too informal

Perry – strengthening circulation connections and past character can be part of new space

Judy – this is about dignity and symbolism (power) – it is not a lively space. Need to move people and accommodate current and projected uses.

Jennifer – do we want to be reactive or proactive?

Andrew – needs to be a connection and improve the Mall

Nancy – flexible and transformable is important – not only for civic uses (national celebrations, demonstrations, special events) but for residents.

Betsy - question about Union Square and Capitol Reflecting Pool eligibility?

Perry - pointed out that over time NPS assessments change. In the case of Union Square, the reflecting pool was listing in the LCS, but subsequent study – the Union Square Cultural Landscape Inventory, changed the assessment of it to non-contributing. To be eligible National Register policy is that it should be 50 years old or extraordinary.

Maureen – the reflecting pool destroyed the Olmsted landscape by the removal of historic tree/canopy which defined vistas and weakened the Union victory theme. The SOM plan added elements to a space already defined and altered the F.L. Olmsted Jr. plan for Union Square, whereas in Constitution Gardens it defined the character.

Susan – subsequent thematic changes since McMillan have strengthened the presidential memorial theme – the Grant Memorial is one of five presidential memorials on the National Mall (and Garfield is in the immediate vicinity). Union civil war victory themes are now concentrated along Pennsylvania Avenue with Meade (relocated from Union Square), the Grand Army of the Republic, Hancock and Sherman.

There was a general discussion about the size of the reflecting pool and why it is so large. There was also discussion that the McMillan plan was more fully articulated in the Olmsted Jr. plans – that he provided the link to thinking in his implementation.

Judy – what did the Olmsted Plan include?

Jennifer showed plans and photos

Perry – we focus on what gets implemented; we can learn from the 1930s plan, from guidelines and memos of agreement.

Andrew – what is being proposed at Union Square is most significant. Would there be other memorials (to bring back the Olmsted symmetry)?

John F – what can you do with vegetation on the tunnel? It might constrain future design. (NPS concurs and study related to this would be part of early design analysis)

Kelly – 106 goals could be to establish the sideboards (fenceposts) and principles to guide future design
NPS concurs.

Nell – the focus on place and character defining text

Maureen – does the Meade memorial work with use?

Nancy – let's capture the character and principles

Nell – is Union victory theme apparent? No

John F – Union victory was a strong purpose at the time, but not sure it is still valid.
What would you do for a second monument?

Betsy – themes (victory and presidential memorial) at odds with the lively destination proposed.

Kent – needs to be dignified

Judy – suggested relocating the Grant Memorial

Edwin – transformable but not to draw crowds

THE MALL

Perry - contributing elements are the Washington City bench and Olmsted light fixtures as well as vegetation (turf and trees), circulation patterns. (See handout from Mall CLI).

Kent – keep the greensward and theoretically Union Square will take pressure off the landscape – but you haven't solved the problem of urban trees. Kent mentioned Princeton experts. Smithsonian Institution needs some place to spill out to what is now a dead place. There is nothing to do. Needs to become a place people want to be in. Bands of trees and tunnels areas are the area to solve this. Need a resolution about the Folklife Festival and a protocol for larger events.

Cynthia – What is the Mall historically? A special landscape – a shrine of liberty – place where people go, a connecting landscape between the Capitol and The White House. Nature (greensward and trees) is what makes it a shrine.

Pete McC – this is the U.S. front yard

John F – the museums are integral

Nancy – welcoming (NPS goal) is comfort, connection, orientation, inspiration, education, the awesome scale and sense of national pride.

DISCUSSION TO BE CONTINUED ON MARCH 30, 2009

The meeting adjourned at 4:10pm.