

**National Coalition to
Save Our Mall**
Preserving Our Monument to Democracy



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION for
OLMSTED
PARKS



The COMMITTEE of
IOO
on the FEDERAL CITY
founded 1923



National Parks Conservation Association
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations

December 19, 2008

Susan Spain
Project Executive
The National Mall Plan
National Mall & Memorial Parks
900 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, DC 20024-2000

Re: NPS Response to nonprofit consulting parties about National Mall Plan

Dear Ms. Spain:

We are increasingly concerned that the National Park Service is failing to take seriously the need to establish a means to create a multidisciplinary, visionary plan for the National Mall's future.

The National Mall lacks a cohesive design and use vision that takes into account, and enhances, the historic character of the landscape and the built environment. In the current NPS planning process, we have been frustrated with the NPS's response to our desire to discuss a comprehensive vision and guiding design principles for the Mall to determine the future of this nationally significant historic place.

The attached documents demonstrate to us that inadequate attention is being paid to the importance of a new plan for the Mall. The NPS communication dated October 6, 2008 responds to a joint letter as well as to individual comments from seven local and national non-profit organizations participating in Section 106 review regarding the scope of work of the National Mall plan. In the comments matrix, the NPS largely dismisses and/or muddies consulting parties' concerns and recommendations. (See the attached matrix and note particularly responses in #2, 16, 21, and 31.)

During this process, NPS has stated that it intends to produce a visionary long-range plan. But the comments matrix (p. 4) says that such a vision now exists—NCPC's 1997 Legacy Plan—and that the National Mall Plan “tiers off Legacy.” The Legacy Plan, however, cannot be considered a vision for the Mall since it excludes the Mall from future planning as it considers the Mall to be “complete.”

Without question, a long-term plan is greatly needed; however with multiple agencies responsible for parts of the Mall, the NPS alone cannot create and implement a compelling vision for the entire Mall that preserves the Mall's historic and symbolic integrity and promotes a

seamless visitor experience. Any future visionary plan must address the question of the Mall's meaning as a symbolic landscape, a concept that originated in the L'Enfant Plan and was revised and extended by the McMillan Commission over a century ago.

Our experience in this process leads us to conclude that, unless the service makes a dramatic turnaround in its approach to this issue, NPS should limit its scope of work to deal with practical and immediate priorities, as we requested in our May 29 letter (see the attached joint letter of recommendations). To move the public consultation process quickly forward, we ask that NPS immediately provide all consulting parties the summaries of visitor studies and any NPS guidelines pertaining to concessions, restrooms, food service, wayfinding and other data requested in our May letter. It would be useful for NPS to provide us with the last Mall management plan, which we believe dates to the mid 1960s, so that we could better understand the difference between the current plan and past plans including the choice of alternatives and a preferred alternative.

It is our hope to hear from you either that an immediate change in the agency's approach is planned, or that you will work with us to place the process to establish a visionary plan in the hands of Congressional managers. Congress has the oversight authority both to create and implement a comprehensive vision for the National Mall.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss your plan for change in the agency's direction or your agreement to reach out to Congress for assistance to fulfill the short term goals of a Mall management plan as well as share our ideas as to how a multidisciplinary visionary plan for the National Mall might be created to perform a function similar to that of the McMillan Commission of 1901-2.

Sincerely,



Judy Scott Feldman
National Coalition to Save Our Mall



Joy Oakes
National Parks Conservation Association



Catherine Nagel
National Association for Olmsted Parks



Rebecca Miller
DC Preservation League

John Fondersmith

John Fondersmith
Committee of 100 on the Federal City

2 Attachments

Cc: Mary Bomar, Director, National Park Service
The Hon. Daniel Akaka, Senate Energy & Natural Resources, National Parks Subcommittee
The Hon. Raul Grijalva, Chair, House Natural Resources, National Parks Subcommittee
The Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton
Peggy O'Dell, Director, National Capital Region
Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, Deputy Director, National Capital Region
Stephanie Toothman, Acting Superintendent, National Mall
All agency and nonprofit consulting parties in the Section 106 consultation