

Board of Directors

Theodore Prudon
PRESIDENT
Robert Meckfessel
PRESIDENT-ELECT
Meredith Arms Bzdak
VICE-PRESIDENT
Todd Grover
VICE-PRESIDENT
Flora Chou
TREASURER
Katie Horak
SECRETARY

T. Gunny Harboe
Eric Keune
Anna Mod
Robert Nauman
Robert Pullum
Michelangelo Sabatino
Monica Schaffer
Barry Solar
Bradford J. White
Barbara Yanni

Liz Waytkus
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Docomomo US Chapters

Chicago/Midwest
Colorado
DC
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Michigan
Mid Tex Mod
Minnesota
New England
New Orleans/Louisiana
New York/Tri-State
Northern California
North Texas
Oregon
Philadelphia
Southern California
Western Washington

Friend Organizations

Houston Mod
Indiana Modern
Landmark Columbus
Modern STL
Palm Springs Modernism Week

March 30, 2021

Carly Bond
Historic Preservation Specialist
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Planning, Design & Construction
Architectural History and Historic Preservation
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 5001
Capital Gallery MRC 511
Washington, DC 20013

Dear Ms. Bond,

Docomomo US is pleased to provide a written response to the March 10, 2021 Section 106 Consulting Parties presentation for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Revitalization.

Docomomo US is generally supportive of the Smithsonian's revitalization plans that successfully address repairs and improve accessibility throughout the Sculpture Garden for the general public and its guests. Docomomo US supports and is pleased by the March 17, 2021 communication to consulting parties stating the Smithsonian intends to move forward with the Revised Reflecting Pool Alternative that maintains the dimensions of the historic 1974 reflecting pool. As has been stated by Docomomo US and other parties throughout this section 106 process, Gordon Bunshaft's reflecting pool is a key defining element of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. We are pleased by this change after two years of stating this element must be restored and retained as originally designed, and finally agreed to in response to the National Capital Planning Commission's action of December 3, 2020.

We remain however deeply concerned that the Revised Reflecting Pool Alternative continues to include the expanded terraced pool that will create a significant adverse effect on the central gallery. Docomomo US would like to point out that the terraced pool area for the programmatic desire of seating was not in the original design proposal, which showed chairs on flat ground. The NCPC recommended that the Smithsonian "provide a comprehensive rationale for the programming needs that require the expanded aprons around the Bunshaft reflecting pool and study other design alternatives." We continue to agree with this NCPC finding that the Smithsonian has not yet provided a comprehensive programming need nor shown other design alternatives.

The expanded terraced pool, impacting the most significant part of the garden, will only provide a minor convenience for 100 non-ADA compliant seats. In return, the expanded terraced pool will create a permanent false historical appearance, eliminate ADA access, create safety issues with small changes in elevation, and impose an element that is in discord with the historic design. We recommend the Smithsonian abandon the plans to expand and destroy historic fabric for an amenity available for a limited portion of the year that can be as equally as engaging and successful with chairs on a flat plane.

Docomomo US does not find the new acoustics arguments or the stacked stone wall precedents along the National Mall to be a compelling argument to change the shape or material of the inner partition wall. The material selection for this site must draw from the historic materials used, not impose a new material because an adjacent site or a specific trademark design element is the lexicon of a designer. We believe there is a deference that must be paid to the historic site and its materiality that is not present with the stacked stone walls. While acoustics is an important design consideration, we question why this aspect is only now being discussed after two years of consulting party meetings. We would like to understand the specific impact that is created with the vertical wall, and for what type of performances might this be an issue and if the same acoustics mitigation can be made with a slightly battered concrete wall.

Docomomo US appreciates having the opportunity to provide feedback through this Section 106 Process as well as the thoughtful and restorative plans that continue to be developed and shaped by this process for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Revitalization project. We believe the desired programmatic and revitalization goals, along with increased accessibility and better circulation, can be achieved without the adverse effects on the resource by restoring or replacing the original pool and the inner partition wall in kind.

Sincerely,



Todd Grover
Vice President Advocacy
Docomomo US



Liz Waytkus
Executive Director
Docomomo US

cc: Melissa Chiu, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Jaya Kaveeshwar, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Sharon Park, Smithsonian Institution; Greg Bettwy, Smithsonian Institution; Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Institution; Kevin Gover, Smithsonian Institution; Jaime Loichinger, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Andrew Lewis, D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Thomas Luebke, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; Marcel Acosta; National Capital Planning Commission; Lee Webb, National Capital Planning Commission; Steve Callcott, D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board; Christine Anagnos, Executive Director, Association of Art Museum Directors; Judith Pineiro, Executive Director, Association of Art Museum Curators; Nord Wennerstrom, Director of Communications, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Charles Birnbaum, President, The Cultural Landscape Foundation; Theo Prudon, President, Docomomo U.S.; Todd Grover, Advocacy Chair, Docomomo U.S., Kirby Vining, Committee of 100 on the Federal City; Rebecca Miller, D.C. Preservation League; Betsy Merritt, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Bill Brown, Association of Oldest Inhabitants; Alexandra MacKay, Esq., Stites & Harbison PLLC.