

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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Ms. Nancy Witherell, Regional Historic Preservation Officer
Office of Planning & Design Quality
Public Buildings Service
U.S. General Services Administration
301 Seventh Street, SW, Room 4004
Washington, DC 20407

SUBJECT: Potomac Hill Campus Master Plan
“Observing the Past, Planning the Future”

Dear Ms. Witherell:

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City (The Committee of 100) and The Office of Strategic Services Society (The OSS Society) are pleased to be Consulting Parties for the Potomac Hill Campus Master Plan.

The Committee of 100 is a nonprofit organization that advocates responsible planning and land use in the District of Columbia. Its work is guided by the values inherited from the 1791 L’Enfant Plan, the work of the McMillian Commission at the beginning of the 20th century, and the Height of Buildings Act of 1910, all of which give our city its unique historic distinction and natural beauty, while responding to the special challenges of 21st century development. The OSS Society celebrates the historical accomplishments of the OSS during World War II, the first organized effort by the United States government to implement a centralized system of strategic intelligence, spearheaded by the legendary General “Wild Bill” Donovan. The Society works to educate the public on its historic legacy and its relevance in today’s world.

In The Committee of 100’s e-mail message to you dated July 15, we provided our position statement prior to the start of work on the Environmental Impact Study and the Section 106 review for this planning project. We understand from the PowerPoint slides dated July 29, 2014, that you provided Consulting Parties that one of your goals will be the development of a unified National Register nomination placing the entire campus in a single historic district, and that you will be using the previously drafted National Register nomination prepared by the DC

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Preservation League in this regard. Both The Committee of 100 and The OSS Society support a National Register nomination designating the site as an historic district.

Your presentation on the Potomac Hill site highlighted its unique place in the history of not only the City of Washington, but the entire nation: Potomac Hill is the highest point in the 1791 L'Enfant Plan for the then nascent capital city; was home to the Old Naval Observatory for nearly 50 years, a place visited one evening by President Abraham Lincoln during his time in office; was the site of the Naval Museum of Hygiene, Hospital and Medical School from 1894 until the mid-20th century; was the location of Navy Hill Hygienic Laboratory which became the National Institutes of Health in 1930; served as the headquarters of the Office of Strategic Services and General William Donovan's office during World War II, when he headed the OSS; became the location of the original Central Intelligence Agency following its formation after World War II, with the general's former office serving as the office of the first Directors of Central Intelligence. The site is also the birthplace of the American Intelligence Community.

Because of this rich history, The Committee of 100 and The OSS Society believe that more must be done to publicize this legacy than simply making it an historic district that could very well be walled off from the general public. Department of State officers who work here in the future should be made aware of this history and the general public should have access to the site and some of its buildings at planned times annually. Therefore, in addition to historic district status, we make the following recommendations for inclusion in your report on the site scheduled for Consulting Parties review early in early 2015:

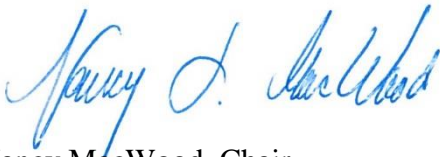
- Elimination to the extent possible of the paved-over spaces now used for parking and returning these areas to green space;
- Recreation of as much as possible of William Strickland's allee of trees and his 19th century landscape plan for the site without destroying any mature trees that now exist;
- Restoration of interior spaces in the Old Naval Observatory building (with or without a telescope) to the time when the structure was used as an observatory. The Department of State could still use these spaces for offices and conferences, but planning should include public viewings several times during future years;
- Restoration of the exterior of the Old Naval Observation building;
- Restoration of General William Donovan's office and conference room facilities. Again, State could use these spaces, but future planning should include public viewing periodically during any given year;
- Development of Heritage Trail signage for the site using Cultural Tourism DC's hardware design and its text and image formats to 1) identify on a sign at the sidewalk level immediately adjacent to the campus the overall importance of the new historic district, and 2) create and install at a number of locations (4-6) on the campus additional signs to inform State officers working there and visitors about its history;
- Develop and publish a Heritage Trail booklet to accompany the signage for distribution to those working on site and to the general public when periodic tours take place; and

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- Consider various other media that could provide virtual access to the site when it is not open to the general public.

The Committee of 100 and The OSS Society thank you for considering these comments and recommendations prior to the next meeting with Consulting Parties.

Very truly yours,



Nancy MacWood, Chair
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



Charles T. Pinck, President
The OSS Society