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September 2, 2020

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 appreciates the opportunity to continue to comment and clarify the Smithsonian Institution's goals at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. With the pandemic and shifting demands within our own organization, we appreciate your patience as it has taken us a bit longer to review the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden revitalization materials.

Over the course of the last three months, our national advocacy committee has completed a review of the Sculpture Garden revitalization documents and updates. We have also become aware of a third phase: an interior rehabilitation and expansion of the Hirshhorn Museum. While we applaud the Smithsonian for being so detailed in your description of alterations, we would like to see an overall impact analysis on all three phases to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in addition to the National Mall Historic District. The piecemeal review of the project does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the combined potential effects of the project. If these phases continue to stand alone, how will the consulting parties appropriately comment on alterations or repairs to original fabric that impact one another? As an example, how does the expanded balcony dimensions due to the growth of the panels and expansion joints relate to the proposed expansion of the pool?

Additionally, we would like the analysis of impacts on individual character defining features and new elements separated out in order to fully understand what alterations will occur to historic fabric, versus what new elements will be introduced. We would also like to see further analysis of the combined alteration of character-defining features of the garden and further discussion on the effects of the Sculpture Garden as a holistic historic property, instead of as a collection of individual features as currently described.

### **Reflecting Pool**

In our review of the enlarged reflecting pool options, we are concerned with the proposal's focus on what was designed and not what was built. While the Smithsonian provided a sketch that at one time presented the idea of a larger pool, it is without context. We do know this was never built and establishes the current pool size as the foundation of design intention for the site. We believe that enlarging the pool will create a false historical appearance not in keeping with the original built design. The built pool dimensions are directly related to the museum's balcony overlooking the garden. It is not clear from the documentation why the current size of the pool does not meet "rigorous programming needs of a modern and contemporary art museum." Why does the pool need to be expanded in order for it to be engaging?

### **Wall Hierarchy, Rock Walls and Vistas**

The wall hierarchy and introduction of unprecedented stacked rock walls will radically change the character defining features of the garden. Precedent should be drawn from the Hirshhorn landscape elements (introduced by Collins) and not the larger materials palette of the National Mall Historic District. By placing stacked rock walls at each and every vista as one travels through the garden, it confuses the original design intent and negatively impacts the garden's integrity of design, feeling, materials, and workmanship, as well as association with the designers. Collins careful understanding of room hierarchy delicately placed plantings as a means of defining space while not taking away from the purpose and aesthetics of the exposed aggregate concrete walls that are featured in other significant museum sculpture gardens constructed between 1950 and 1990. There is no historical precedent relating to the Hirshhorn or other modern sculpture gardens and this historicized element is not in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.

### **Creation of More Rooms**

The garden historically designed by Gordon Bunshaft and later by Lester Collins, functioned as an open setting with a few rooms meant as places of quiet contemplation. One of our main take-a-ways from the thoroughly researched Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Significance and Integrity Report (Feb. 2020) is Collins' masterful ability to balance the overlapping sculpture views with vertical plantings rather than with new wall introductions. Walls to create more rooms for sculpture was considered for the 1981 alteration and ultimately deemed unnecessary. We find the introduction of the unprecedented stacked rock walls will overwhelm the garden and is a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the garden. These new rooms should be secondary to the original design and not compete with the layout, design form, and relationship of the historic garden.

### **Setting for the Display of Sculpture**

The Assessment of Effects on Historic Resources places "Setting for the Display of Sculpture" as a significant feature of the project. While we understand the garden will continue to be used as a setting for sculpture, we would like to see an analysis of the programmatic goals for the garden. Designing flexible space for the "presentation of time-based artwork, large-format sculpture and site-specific installations" is quite different from the historic use as a setting for sculpture. We believe more information is needed on the usage goals and programming before we can agree to no adverse effect.

**Interior Renovation and Expansion Project**

As we review documents made available by the Smithsonian to the public and the Section 106 consulting parties, we are at the Smithsonian's will in terms of the information that is shared with us regarding the project. It has only been through other means of information gathering and not the formal Section 106 process, that we have been made aware of a third phase of the overall project. While we understand the interior renovation was forthcoming, it is concerning that no notice to consulting parties has been made. As the request for proposals and response to questions have already been announced and completed, we can only assume the solicitation process has concluded and a project team has been selected. We would like to see more detailed information on this third phase including the idea behind the expansion of the first-floor lobby, expansion of the basement level, and an analysis on the overall effect of these proposals on the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in addition to the National Mall Historic District.


**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Docomomo US asks for more clarity of the process and insists the public and Section 106 consulting parties review the project as a whole, instead of in piecemeal phases. We ask for an Assessment of Effects of the garden as a holistic resource, instead of focusing on individual projects elements and character-defining features. We suggest an analysis of historic and proposed programmatic goals for the garden. As many of the design interventions seem focused on the "presentation of time-based artwork, large-format sculpture and site-specific installations" as opposed to the historic intent of the sculpture garden as a place for the quiet contemplation of art.

Sincerely,



Todd Grover  
Vice President Advocacy  
Docomomo US



Liz Waytkus  
Executive Director  
Docomomo US