INDEX TO MINUTES

INDEX TO MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
HELD IN NEW YORK CITY, MAY 23, 1935

The tenth meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts during the fiscal year 1935, was held in the office of Mr. John Russell Pope, 542 Fifth Avenue, New York City, on May 23, 1935. The following members were present:

Mr. Moore, Chairman,
Mr. Swartwout,
Mr. Clarke,
Mr. Lawrie,
Mr. Savage,
Mr. Coolidge,
also H. P. Caemmerer

Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a. m., daylight saving time.

1. BUILDING FOR THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD: The Secretary reported that Commander F. A. Hunnewell, Superintendent of Construction and Repair of the United States Coast Guard, called at the office of the Commission on May 22, and requested advice as to the location of a Coast Guard building. The Secretary reported that he informed Commander Hunnewell that he would bring the matter to the attention of the members of the Commission at the meeting today. In the talk with Commander Hunnewell the following locations were mentioned:

1. Extension of the Treasury Annex north to H Street.

2. The square between Third and Fourth Streets, N. W., adjacent to Pennsylvania Avenue.

3. A site along the Waterfront back of the Naval Hospital.

4. A site along Pennsylvania Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets.

5. Taking over the Municipal Building at 14th and Pennsylvania Avenue in the Triangle.

6. Near New York and Virginia Avenues, N. W.

Commander Hunnewell said that the Municipal Building would be first choice since they could occupy it at once. They have about 350 employees and in recent years have been moving about to half a dozen different places. They are now in a rented building on H Street near the Cosmos Club. He said they would like a building at the corner of Vermont Avenue and H Street near the Veterans Bureau if the Government should desire to take up that square.

The Commission considered the various locations above mentioned--the desirability of extending the Treasury Annex to H Street or a building along Pennsylvania Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets or the occupation of the Municipal Building in the Triangle were favorably considered.

Mr. Clarke felt that it would be unwise to use the squares north of Pennsylvania Avenue adjacent to John Marshall Place since they should be reserved for park areas as a foreground for the new Municipal Center buildings in that location. The Commission agreed with Mr. Clarke in this matter.

The Commission again emphasized the importance of developing Pennsylvania Avenue west of the White House. The Commission decided that Mr. Moore should have a conference with Commander Hunnewell on the subject.

2. LANDSCAPE PLANS SUBMITTED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE:

a. Under date of May 14, 1935, a plan was submitted to Mr. Clarke for the treatment of the Takoma Park Portal, with letter, as follows:

Mr. Gilmore D. Clarke,
Consulting Landscape Architect,
New York City Department of Parks,
The Arsenal - Central Park,
Fifth Avenue and 64th Street,
New York City.

Dear Mr. Clarke:

Submitted herewith are two blue prints of our Drawing No. NCP 1574, Sheet 2.

This is a planting plan for the Takoma Park Portal. You have previously approved Sheet 1 of this number, which is the grading plan for the same area. At the time when it was submitted, it was designated as the Piney Branch Road Underpass. This particular Portal is in northeast suburban Washington in a rather pleasant residential community.

As you may recall, the Underpass structure was built by the District of Columbia Highway Department and the grading adjacent thereto left considerable to be desired. This planting is designed to afford a screen from the railroad, provide street trees, cover the slopes and soften the rather gross details of the concrete bridge. You will note that the street trees have been omitted from Eastern Avenue. This was done because it was felt that the small units could serve as a larger open area if not cut by lines of street trees.

I would appreciate your reviewing this plan for approval or suggestions.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) Kirk,
Resident Landscape Architect

Mr. Clarke said he inspected the drawing and found it satisfactory and upon his recommendation the Commission approved it.

b. Under date of April 12, 1935, a landscape plan was submitted to Mr. Clarke for the treatment of the area adjacent to the Grant Memorial in Union Square with letter as follows:

Dear Mr. Clarke:

Submitted herewith are advance prints of drawings No. NCP 1590 and NCP 1585, Sheet 3 of 3.

Drawing No. NCP 1585 is to accompany the two drawings for the planting in Union Square previously approved by the Commission of Fine Arts. This drawing shows the planting proposed between Grant Memorial and the sidewalk on First Street, and sufficient additional planting to feather out at either end. The thought is that there will be provided a willowy mass of evergreen planting, somewhat of the nature of that on the east side of the Lincoln Memorial; of such size as to screen the traffic on First Street from observers west of the Grant Memorial.

Drawing NCP 1590 shows the proposed details of the granite paving to be placed around the Grant Memorial. We believe that the simplicity of this method of paving the area would yield to most satisfactory results.

May we have your approval and suggestions on these drawings?

Sincerely yours,
Malcolm Kirkpatrick,
Resident Landscape Architect.

Mr. Clarke said he liked the simplicity of the granite paving proposed to extend around the Grant Memorial; also the part of the planting plan for the area east of the Grant Monument, which is intended to screen out the motor traffic on First Street when the monument is viewed from the west. The plan provides for planting of boxwood.

The paving stones are quite large--some 3 by 6 feet. The Commission felt that the simplicity of the paving very nice, and upon the recommendation of Mr. Clarke the Commission approved the plan. (To save the PWA appropriation by June 10th, a paving composed of granite and brushed surface concrete recommended by Mr. Olmsted was approved by Mr. Moore. (Exhibit A)

c. Landscape plans were submitted to Mr. Clarke by letter for the area around the Bryan Memorial and areas each side of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Mr. Clarke made the following report on May 11, 1935:

Mr. Malcolm Kirkpatrick,
National Park Service,
U. S. Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Kirk:

I received your letter of May 4th, including blue prints of four drawings of certain planting plans for the area around the Bryan Memorial and also areas on each side of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

Drawing No. NCP 1566 in the vicinity of the Bryan statue is satisfactory with the exception that, in my opinion, it would be inadvisable to plant in the immediate vicinity of the statue as you have indicated. I don't think it would be wise to plant the hedges and the other evergreen material, Azalea, Pyracantha, etc., until the pavement around the Bryan Memorial has been laid. It would be perfectly appropriate to plant the trees, including, of course, the Cornus florida and Crataegus but the other material would look out of place until the architectural setting for the memorial has

been completed. Incidentally, it would add very materially to your maintenance problems and be rather meaningless in so far as appearance is concerned.

The other drawings numbered NCP 1568 in three sheets are satisfactory, and I shall recommend approval as I shall in the case of No. 1566 with the exception noted.

* * * *

Sincerely yours,
GILMORE D. CLARKE.

Upon the recommendation of Mr. Clarke the Commission approved these drawings with the understanding that the bushes back of the Bryan Memorial would be left out until the pavement around the memorial has been laid.

The Secretary stated that Mr. Malcolm Kirkpatrick, resident landscape architect of the National Park Service, had informed him that arrangements are being made now to put in the paving.

d. Under date of May 20, 1935, Mr. Kirkpatrick submitted a landscape plan, NCP 1595, for Fort Stevens Park. The plan was submitted to Mr. Clarke for study and advice.

e. Under date of May 20, 1935, Mr. Kirkpatrick submitted a landscape plan, NCP 1582-C, showing the general development proposed for the Palisades Playground. The plan was submitted to Mr. Clarke for study and advice.

3. PYLONS AND KIOSKS FOR THE TRIANGLE: Under date of April 6, 1935, the following letter was received from Mr. W. E. Reynolds, Acting Director of the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, asking advice of the Commission of Fine Arts as to pylons and kiosks for the Triangle:

Chairman,
The Commission of Fine Arts,
Washington, D. C.

Sir:

The Treasury Department has under contract the construction of ten pylons and two kiosks at certain locations in the Triangle Area in this city. Recently the National Capital Park and Planning Commission raised some objections to the construction of these features, and a copy of their letter of April 17, is attached.

You will recall that these items formed the subject of considerable study and were several times submitted to the Fine Arts Commission for consideration. In your letter of June 1, 1932, you indicated that the Commission concurred with the opinion of the Board of Architectural Consultants that these pylons and kiosks are a desirable part of the composition and stated that the "Commission is in sympathy with the fundamental idea" of incorporating these features in the Triangle Area, upon the basis of which a contract was entered into on August 24, 1934, and much work thereon has been done.

Before giving further consideration to the matter, this Division would be pleased to have an expression of opinion from your Commission regarding the situation as it now exists, particularly as making an effort toward the construction or abandonment of the pylons and kiosks.

Respectfully,
(Signed) W. E. Reynolds,
Acting Director of Procurement.

The attached copy of a letter from Mr. Delano above referred to, reads as follows:

April 17, 1935.

Admiral C. J. Peoples,
Director of Procurement,
Treasury Department,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Admiral Peoples:

During the meeting of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission on Friday April 12, the Commission inspected the dummy pylons which had been erected at our suggestion by the Procurement Division at the intersection of Constitution Avenue and 14th Street in Washington, D. C.

After due consideration of all aspects, the Commission voted to reaffirm its previous stand opposing the erection of the pylons and kiosks on the ground that they serve no useful purpose and are something of a menace to traffic, as stated in its letter of March 9. The Commission believes that these structures should not be erected, regardless of the fact that contracts may have been let.

The Commission wishes to thank you for your cooperation in having erected in cloth and wood the two sample pylons which have enabled them to visualize the effect of these proposed structures within the public streets.

Very truly yours,
(Signed) Frederic A. Delano,
Chairman.

The project was discussed with Mr. Louis Simon, Supervising Architect, who submitted a blue print showing where the 10 pylons and the 2 kiosks are to be located. Mr. Simon called attention to the models of pylons that have been erected at Constitution Avenue and 14th Street. These pylons are to be 27 feet high. The kiosks are to be 13 feet high. Mr. Simon said the limestone for the pylons and kiosks has been cut and arrangements would be made for the carving by a sculptor as soon as it is definitely decided that they shall be erected.

The Commission felt that the question was of an aesthetic nature. The pylons would serve no utilitarian purpose but would help to draw the buildings in the triangle together. They do not interfere with the traffic as they are adjacent to the curb and are as much as 72 feet back from the intersection of the street. The kiosks would be erected at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue.

Mr. Swartwout said in his opinion the pylons are needed in the Triangle to help carry out the composition. Mr. Moore said what the city needs now is dressing up and so far as the Triangle is concerned the pylons would help in this regard.

The Commission, therefore, recommended the erection of the pylons and kiosks in accordance with a previous decision of the Commission. (Exhibit B)

4. PLANTING FOR THE TRIANGLE: Mr. Simon was asked as to the planting that is being done in the Triangle and he said the planting is under contract amounting to $28,000. This includes the elm trees on Constitution Avenue.

Mr. Moore said the trees that have been planted are very small and that it will take years before they make any impression on the Triangle.

Mr. Clarke objected to the puny planting done around the Department of Commerce Building. It has a small staccato effect he said, looks trite, and it would be much better to have simply grass. What ought to be done is to get some big box bushes to flank the entrances of the building.

The Commission felt that the amount of the contract for planting, namely, $28,000, was very small since it included the purchase of elm trees along Constitution Avenue, and at the suggestion of Mr. Simon the Commission decided to allow him to carry out the remainder of the contract. Thereupon someone in Mr. Simon's office is to draw up a new landscape plan to bring the planting of the Triangle in proper order and this plan would be worked out with the advice of Mr. Clarke.

5. BULFINCH GATEHOUSES: The Commission called attention to the Bulfinch Gatehouses that are in the President's Park in a rather neglected state. The Commission felt that they should be repaired and brought up to the level of the street. The Commission regard them of historic interest and examples of Mr. Bulfinch's work in the National Capital. The matter is to be taken up with the Director of the National Park Service. (Exhibit C)

6. LANDSCAPE PLAN FOR THE TREATMENT NORTH OF THE ARCHIVES BUILDING: Mr. Pope requested ahd advice of the Commission as to the landscape treatment north of the Archives Building. The matter was brought to the attention of Mr. Clarke, who advised that no paved area be constructed as that would simply give an opportunity to park cars. It was decided to develop a triangular grassy plot with some shrubbery. The Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalk line is to be continued diagonally across the front of the Archives Building. Mr. Young

of Mr. Pope's office was present and agreed to make a plan accordingly and submit it to the Commission.

7. MURAL PAINTINGS FOR THE ARCHIVES BUILDING: The Commission visited the studio of Mr. Barry Faulkner at 319 East 72nd Street, to inspect his one-third size renderings of his paintings for the Archives building--the Declaration of Independence and the makers of the Constitution.

Mr. Faulkner said he had been giving the figures continued study and through research had secured photographs of portraits of the leaders to be portrayed--some 25 to 30 for each painting. The members of the Commission felt that Mr. Faulkner was improving the paintings constantly. There is still some question as to certain individuals who are to appear on the paintings. Mr. Swartwout suggested giving further study to the portico, which is to appear as part of the background for the figures. It was his opinion that four columns are too many and Mr. Faulkner said he would make a new study of this portion of the picture and try only two columns.

Mr. Faulkner said that he expected to submit some color schemes for these paintings in the near future.

The Commission adjourned at 3:00 p. m.

In the evening the members and former members together with a few guests assembled at the Century Club for a dinner to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Commission of Fine Arts, May 17, 1910. A description of the event will follow.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS
WASHINGTON

ADDRESS REPLY TO SUPERINTENDENT

June 8, 1935

The Director,
National Park Service,
Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Director:

The following quotation is from a memorandum received from Mr. Olmsted, dated June 6, relating to Union Square:

"I recommend that if practicable to do so without serious delay to the work, two changes be made in the construction details for Union Square prepared during my absence on account of illness.

"One should effect a saving in cost of $15,000 or more without essential sacrifice in the general appearance of the design as a whole. This would be done by using, inside the granite borders of the paved platform around the Grant Monument, panels of brushed surface concrete, using an aggregate of suitable color and texture. Quite apart from the saving in cost there is a purely esthetic argument for introducing panels of brushed surface concrete because of the fact that all the rest of the path system of Union Square is designed to be of such material, as are the paths of the Mall west of Third Street, and all the new paths of the Capitol Grounds.

"The artistic gain from the introduction of panels of such material within the granite border of the platform for the Grant Memorial, through its tendency to unify that platform with its surroundings, would be an offset to any local diminution in the monumental qualities associated with a pavement entirely of granite. I have submitted this recommendation to Mr. Moore of the Commission of Fine Arts and find that he strongly concurs in it in principle. Mr. Howard is now making a drawing embodying what I propose.

"The second suggested change, which I think of great importance artistically, especially if the first change is made, relates to the aggregate to be used in the surfacing of any concrete pavements in Union Square. I had expected that they would be the same as in the Mall paths west of Third Street, but the

EXHIBIT A

sample which has been selected for the latter and is now under contract, while excellent in itself and reasonable for its situation, is quite blackish in tone and would make far too strong a contrast in close juxtaposition with the existing and proposed stone work in Union Square, especially with the large expanse of white marble in the Grant Monument.

"I strongly recommend that the brushed concrete pavement in Union Square be made closely similar in color and texture to that of the warm gray granitic concrete paving parallel to and immediately north of Constitution Avenue on the north axis of the Capitol."

In view of the foregoing it is requested that approval be given the changes recommended by Mr. Olmsted.

Sincerely yours,

C. Marshall Finnan,
Superintendent.

CMF/BB
cc Mr. Kirkpatrick
Mr. Nagle

CONCURRED:
(Signed) Charles Moore,

Charles Moore,
Chairman, Fine Arts Commission.

John Nolen, Jr.
Director of Planning,
National Capital Park & Planning Commission.

APPROVED:

Arno B. Cammerer,
Director, National Park Service.

C O P Y

June 6, 1935.

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

The Commission of Fine Arts at their meeting on May 23, 1935, gave careful consideration to your letter of April 6, 1935, again requesting the advice of the Commission as to the erection of pylons and kiosks in the Triangle area south of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The designs for the pylons and kiosks were submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts by the Board of Architectural Consultants, through the Treasury Department several years ago. After several restudies the Commission approved the designs. It was the feeling of the Board of Consultants that these features contributed to the general effect of the Triangle Group, and in this opinion the Commission of Fine Arts concurred at the time, and they still adhere to that decision.

The Commission are quite aware that these pylons serve no utilitarian purpose. Their value is in unifying a particularly large group of buildings--distinctly a matter of taste. There may well be a further study of the design of the pylons and kiosks, due to the location of flagstaffs and certain other ornamental features not in the original design of the buildings.

The Commission do not regard the pylons as in any degree a traffic hazard. This point was called to the attention of Mr. Louis Simon, Supervising Architect, who attended the meeting of the Commission when this subject was considered.

It is possible to select a better location for the kiosks than the Tenth Street site, particularly in view of a contemplated use of the structures for police purposes, and a new design would probably result in an architectural effect more in harmony with the buildings.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) Charles Moore,

Chairman.

Mr. W. E. Reynolds, Acting Director,
Procurement Division,
Treasury Department,
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT B

C O P Y

June 6, 1935.

Dear Mr. Cammerer:

Will you accommodate the Commission of Fine Arts by having Mr. Nagle make a tentative estimate of costs of raising and repairing the Bulfinch gatehouses in the President's Park--structures of historic interest in the National Capital. The Commission deplore the fact that the gatehouses are in a sadly dilapidated condition, quite out of harmony with their surroundings. The houses should face Constitution Avenue.

Also the Bulfinch gateposts that are now located along Constitution Avenue should be put in condition and probably be relocated.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Charles Moore.

Hon. A. B. Cammerer, Director,
National Park Service,
Interior Department,
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT C