



Office of the Director

Office of Planning Review of Commemorative Work Application

TO: Commemorative Works Committee
FROM: Chris Shaheen, Acting Associate Director, Office of Planning
DATE: August 5, 2022
SUBJECT: Commemorative Works Application for Armen Garo

Summary of Application and Recommendation

The Application is for the installation of a bust of Armen Garo, the first Armenian Ambassador to the United States, in front of the Armenian Chancery at 2225 R Street NW. The bust is located to the right of the building's main entrance and in District of Columbia public space. It is atop a marble plinth, appropriately scaled to its surrounding, at a site that is related to the subject, and is a subject consistent with policies and values of the District of Columbia.

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends that the Commemorative Works Committee (CWC) approve the application in concept with a request for further development of the application prior to final review:

- Changes to design of the area immediately surrounding the commemorative work to differentiate it from the circular driveway.

Background

The Friends of the Armenian Embassy Building and Education Fund is proposing a bust of Armen Garo, an Armenian nationalist, activist, and politician during the late 19th and early 20th century who served as the first ambassador to the United States from the First Republic of Armenia between 1918 to 1920. The bust is in public space controlled by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) adjacent to Armenia's Chancery at 2225 R Street NW. The location of the commemorative work is immediately adjacent to the building and next to a circular driveway that occupies an area of public space typically set aside for landscaped "public parking". The commemorative work has a total height of 7'6", including a bust that is approximately 24" and on top of a 66" pedestal and base.

2225 R Street is in the Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District and the commemorative work is in public space under the jurisdiction of DDOT. This requires the application to go through two

additional reviews in addition to those required as part of the commemorative work review process:

1. Public Space Committee; and,
2. Historic Preservation Office.

The commemorative work has been designed to fit into the existing conditions of the public space adjacent to the Chancery and is intended to enhance the grounds and arrival of visitors coming to the building. The bronze bust depicts Armen Garo at age 50 after he retired from public service. Other elements of the commemorative work represent various aspects of his personality - the vertical marble plinth symbolizes his dedication, integrity, and hard work required of a public servant, and a bronze hat attached to the plinth was a signature feature of his public persona as a gentleman, doctor, and diplomat. Adjacent to the plinth is a horizontal lower granite slab with a bronze plaque describing Armen Garo's service and legacy. Text on the plaque states:

“Armen Garo – April 23, 2020 marked the centennial of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America. On that day, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby informed Dr. Garegin Pastermadjian that the government of the United States, at the direction of President Woodrow Wilson, extended formal recognition to the Armenian Republic. Garegin Pastermadjian (February 9, 1872-March 23, 1923), better known as Armen Garo, had long been active, as a revolutionary, and then as a statesman and diplomat, in the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States advocating the Armenian cause. Born into a prominent family in historic Karin (Erzerum), he graduated from the noted Sanasarian Academy of his native city, before continuing his higher education in France and Switzerland. A lead figure in the Armenian National Liberation Movement, Dr. Pastermadjian was elected a member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Ottoman Empire after the sultan was deposed and prior to the genocide of Armenians by Ottoman Turkey in 1915. He was a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and, as such, was very much involved in the complex chain of events leading up to the proclamation of Armenian independence in 1918. Between 1918 and 1920, he served as the first ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States of America. He died in Geneva in March 1923.”

Engraved in a dark base are the names of the sculpture, architect, and person donating the commemorative work.

Armen Garo was an Armenian citizen who fought against the Ottoman Empire's repression of Armenians. As a young man he was active in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and helped plan the 1896 Ottoman Bank Takeover to galvanize support in Europe for Armenians suffering from persecution and forced assimilation under Ottoman rule. He also held elected office in the Ottoman parliament and fought for Armenian independence before establishing Armenia's first diplomatic mission to the United States at 2034-20th Street NW.

Assessment of the Application

Location and Relationship of the Subject Matter

The proposed site is appropriate considering the subject and use of the adjacent building:

- The Draft Commemorative Work Location Strategy considers using wide sidewalks and landscaped “public parking” as potential locations for commemorative works, although this specific location is not identified;
- There is a direct connection between subject and the site – the first Armenian Ambassador to the United States and the Armenian Chancery;
- The site is within 500 feet and visible from Sheridan Circle, the site of a statue of United States military officer and Union Army General Philip Henry Sheridan, but a direct line of site is partially obscured by vegetation and the scale of the Armen Garo commemorative work does not compete with the statue of General Sheridan;
- The scale and size of the statue and base complements the residential scale of the adjacent, historic three-story building façade; and,

However, while the commemorative work’s setting along a circular driveway and immediately adjacent to the Armenian Chancery’s entrance is highly visible location and entirely out of the pedestrian sidewalk, the surrounding around is primarily paved with nothing differentiating the commemorative work from the driveway.

Proposed Work’s Compatibility with District Policies and Values

The proposed commemorative work appears to be consistent with District policies and values:

- The commemorative work is located in a place relevant to the subject being memorialized, a policy specified in the Comprehensive Plan;
- The subject appears to be consistent with values defined in the final report of Mayor Bowser’s District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) Working Group that emphasized discouraging subjects that participated in slavery, systemic racism, mistreatment of, or actions that suppressed equality for, persons of color, women and LGBTQ communities and violation of the DC Human Rights Act;
- The subject is a native of Armenia and consistent with the District’s goals to encourage commemorative works that represent a diversity of culture, race, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability status; and,
- The size and scale of the commemorative work is appropriate for the R-3 zone– a zone that allows for row dwellings mingled with detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, and groups of three or more row dwellings - where the commemorative work is located.

Materials Used in the Commemorative Work

The materials proposed for the commemorative work are durable and appropriate for the subject. The bust, hat, and plaque are bronze and the plinth and base for the plaque are Italian Carrara marble. Bronze is a material that has historically been used for outdoor scriptures because of their durability. Carrara marble has also historically been used for sculptures and is recognized for his strength and ability to hold a high gloss finish and very fine detail.