
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 17-02

National Mall Historic District (Amendment)

Meeting Date: December 15, 2016
Applicant: National Park Service
Affected ANC: N/A
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams, Andrew Lewis, David Maloney

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board amend the National Mall listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in accordance with the amended National Mall Historic District (Amendment) nomination that includes additional documentation and increased boundaries. The National Mall Historic District (Amendment) is currently pending listing in the National Register of Historic Places, having been forwarded to the Register by the National Park Service. Updating the D.C. Inventory to include the amended nomination for the National Mall is consistent with HPO's goal of updating its designations with more recent scholarship and to have parallel listings with the National Register of Historic Places.

Preservation Background

The National Mall Historic District Amendment is a revised nomination that provides additional historic, architectural, cultural and planning history of the National Mall, increases the boundaries of the designated district, and expands the Period of Significance. The National Mall was administratively listed in the National Register as a historic site upon passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The boundaries were limited to the formal greensward and the buildings framing it between the U.S. Capitol Grounds and 14th Street NW-SW. In 1981, a National Register nomination for the National Mall defining those boundaries was prepared and accepted by the Keeper of the National Register for the National Mall listing. However, this 1981 nomination for the National Mall provides minimal historical background history, does not identify contributing and non-contributing resources, and does not meet current-day National Register documentation standards.

Recognizing the limitations of the 1981 documentation, the National Park Service in 2011 commissioned a National Register Nomination amendment for the National Mall as part of Section 106 consultation to satisfy a stipulation in the Programmatic Agreement executed for the National Mall Plan. The amended nomination redefines the property as a historic district (rather than a site), and expands the boundaries from 14th Street west to the Potomac River behind the Lincoln Memorial, south to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, and north to the edge of the White House Grounds. The nomination also expanded the historic context of the Mall and considered the National Register eligibility of multiple resources that were not included in the 1981 documentation, including recently constructed memorials and monuments, cultural landscapes and archeological sites.

Boundaries

The revised nomination significantly expands the boundaries of the original documentation to encompass West Potomac Park (Reservation No. 332), the southern portion of President's Park (Reservation No. 1) known as President's Park South, the Washington Monument Grounds (Reservation No. 2), the portion of the Mall between 3rd and 14th Streets, NW-SW (Reservation Nos. 3-6; the Mall), Reservation No. 553, and Reservation No. 201. These boundaries reflect the development of the monumental core from its origins in the plan for the national capital designed by L'Enfant in 1791 through the 1901-02 plan developed by the McMillan Commission. These expanded boundaries encompass a significant concentration of resources united historically and aesthetically by plan and physical development. Because the grounds of the Capitol and White House are statutorily exempt from National Register listing, the nomination does not include either of these areas. It also excludes Union Square, which was part of the former nomination, but has been transferred to the jurisdiction of the Architect of the Capitol.

Resources Documented

The National Mall Historic District describes in detail 145 component resources within the district, identifying each one by their type (building, site, structure or object) and their contributing or noncontributing status.

Evaluation

The National Mall is significant at the national level under National Register Criterion A in the areas of entertainment and recreation, ethnic heritage (black), politics and government, education, and social history for the period 1791 to the present. The National Mall is significant for its relationship to the establishment of the permanent capital of the United States and continues to serve as the public space linking the executive and legislative branches of the federal government. It is also locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of entertainment and recreation over the same period.

The National Mall is nationally significant under National Register Criterion C in the areas of architecture, art, community planning and development, engineering, and landscape architecture for the period 1791 to 1965. The National Mall has buildings and landscape features that represent significant design trends in the nation's history; works that possess high artistic value; are the work of master architects; and that constitute an urban landscape unlike any in the country.

Finally, the National Mall is significant under Criterion D for the period 1791 to 1965 at the national and local levels. The district derives significance from a site in President's Park, and from sites primarily associated with the city's nineteenth-century infrastructure and urban development.

Three of the National Register's criteria considerations apply to the National Mall Historic District – Criteria Consideration B for moved properties, Criteria Consideration F for commemorative properties, and Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years. This nomination recognizes resources from the recent past that are of exceptional significance and resources that have been removed from their original locations but are significant primarily for their architectural value. This nomination also documents commemorative resources that are significant for their design, age, tradition, or

symbolic value and commemorative resources that are significant as symbols of broader cultural attitudes.

Periods of Significance

Under Criterion A, the Period of Significance for the National Mall begins in 1791 with L'Enfant's symbolic placement of the executive and legislative branches of government along axes that intersected at a proposed memorial to George Washington, and creating a public forum, and extends to the present, acknowledging the continued use of the National Mall as a public gathering space.

Under Criteria A and C, the Period of Significance ends in 1965, a period 51 years from the present following National Register Guidelines that recommend allowing for an appropriate interval of time to pass before aesthetic judgements are made on the enduring significance of built resources.