
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 17-03

Washington Monument Grounds Historic District

Reservation 2

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 designate the Washington Monument Grounds Historic District to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites based upon the recently approved National Park Service amendment to the National Register Listing of the Washington Monument and Grounds Historic District. The Washington Monument is currently listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites as a Historic Landmark. This landmark designation will remain intact within the boundaries of a new Washington Monument Grounds Historic District.¹

Preservation Background

In 1964, the Washington Monument was identified for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites by the Joint Committee of Landmarks, and in 1968 the property was administratively listed by the National Park Service in the National Register as a structure. A National Register nomination form was prepared in 1981 and approved by the National Register to include the monument and its grounds, but this 1981 listing did not affect the DC Inventory historic landmark listing.

Since that time, the monument has undergone renovation and restoration, and other buildings have been altered and repaired, as have the grounds themselves. In addition, significant historical studies of buildings, structures, landscape, and archaeological features have been undertaken. In 2004, the National Park Service completed historic structures reports for several of the buildings on the Grounds, and in 2015, NPS completed a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) on the Grounds, which identified Cultural Landscape Features that were not adequately documented in the 1981 nomination form.

The National Park Service has submitted this amendment to the National Register as additional documentation to the 1981 nomination form. This amendment, which forms a new DC historic district listing, incorporates additional information on the history, architecture and planning of

¹ The difference in listings between the National Register and DC Inventory accounts for slightly different names. The National Register has one listing, for the Washington Monument and Grounds Historic District, as amended in November 2016. The DC Inventory has one current listing—the Washington Monument, a historic landmark—and will have a second listing, for the Washington Monument Grounds Historic District. This avoids removal of the historic landmark designation for the Monument, and is consistent with other DC listings of landmarks within large grounds that are considered historic districts.

the Washington Monument and its Grounds based upon recent studies; identifies contributing and non-contributing resources associated with the monument; and expands on the discussion of the monument's significance, evaluation criteria, and periods and areas of significance.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the Washington Monument Grounds Historic District are the same as identified in the 1981 National Register nomination. The site, which comprises U.S. Reservation No. 2, is bounded by Constitution Avenue on the north, 14th Street, Raoul Wallenberg Place (15th Street), and Independence Avenue on the east, the Tidal Basin on the south, and 17th Street on the west.

Resources Documented

The Washington Monument Grounds Historic District includes a total of 40 historic resources, of which 22 are considered contributing and 18 are considered non-contributing. Of the 22 contributing resources, two are buildings, three are sites, eight are structures; and nine are objects.

Evaluation

The Washington Monument Grounds Historic District meets National Register Criterion A at the national level in the area of Politics and Government as part of the establishment of the new government; in the area of Social History as a gathering place for American citizens to exercise their First Amendment rights; and in the area of ethnic heritage (black), for the important role the monument and grounds played in the civil rights movement of the 1960s; and in the area of entertainment as the site of memorial visitation aimed at the physical and mental well-being of Americans. Further, the monument grounds also meet Criterion A at the local level of significance in the area of entertainment as the grounds are a site of on-going recreational activities for the city's residents.

The Washington Monument Grounds Historic District is nationally significant under National Register Criterion C in the Areas of Architecture, Engineering, Landscape Architecture, Community Planning and Development. The monument and its designed cultural landscape are central components of the capital's monumental core, acting as the crucial link between the President's house and the Capitol in the L'Enfant Plan, and as the crux of the kite-shaped McMillan Plan of 1901-02.

Period of Significance

The Washington Monument Grounds Historic District has two periods of significance. Under Criterion A, the Period of Significance extends from 1791 to the present, recognizing the continued use of the monument grounds as a public gathering place for significant national events. Under Criterion C, the Period of Significance extends from 1791 to 1943 with the end-date corresponding with the construction of the Jefferson Memorial and the completion of Independence Avenue extension, resulting in the current configuration of the monument grounds as they exist today.