



PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S COTTAGE
AT THE SOLDIERS' HOME

November 7, 2014

L. Preston Bryant, Jr., Chairman
National Capital Planning Commission
401 Ninth Street NW
North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004

Re: ZC 13-14 McMillan Reservoir Sand Filtration Site
Correction for the Record and Request for Reconsideration

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the National Capital Planning Commission:

The purpose of this letter is to correct for the record a factually inaccurate statement that was made by NCPC staff at the hearing on November 6, 2014, regarding the proposed PUD and map amendment for the McMillan Sand Filtration site. Specifically, the presentation by your staff included erroneous statements to the effect that the views of the Capitol Dome from President Lincoln's Cottage, which is managed for public visitation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation pursuant to a cooperative agreement with the Armed Forces Retirement Home, are either not significant or non-existent.

These statements (and an accompanying diagram) were not included in the staff report that was released to the public before the hearing and have not been provided to us since the hearing, despite a written request. The staff did not consult with the National Trust before making these assertions and made no arrangements with us to come to President Lincoln's Cottage to inspect these views in person.

The assertions by NCPC staff regarding the views from President Lincoln's Cottage are inaccurate. These staff assertions are contradicted by the letter from the Armed Forces Retirement Home dated August 21, 2014, and they are contradicted by the observations of our staff and our visitors on a daily basis. From the landscape, the Visitor Center, and President Lincoln's Cottage our visitors not only see the views of downtown Washington, and in particular the Capitol Dome, but these views are central to our interpretation of President Lincoln's Cottage and the surrounding landscape. The 2000 designation of President Lincoln's Cottage as the first and only National Monument in the District of Columbia further underscores the significant federal interest in this site, which would be negatively impacted by the proposed development.

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There are two key places with existing views of the Capitol Dome that are currently available to the visiting public. Those two locations are in front of the Visitor Education Center and the western part of the South Lawn of the Cottage. The diagrams prepared by NCPC staff, shown only briefly at the November 6 hearing, were not from either of these two locations and therefore wrongly suggested there are no views worth preserving. The proposed development would obstruct these views.

In addition to these two clear and (currently) unobstructed views of the Capitol Dome that are available to our visitors at President Lincoln's Cottage, there is another historically important—albeit seasonal—view of the Capitol Dome that is at risk. This is the view of the Dome from the second floor of the Cottage. The view that the NCPC staff provided appeared to be projected from the second floor above the veranda. While that room does have a view of the Capitol Dome, it is not the only view. For example, more than 40 feet northeast is the “Emancipation Room,” so named because when the Cottage itself was threatened over 100 years ago, citizens of Washington, DC protested the proposed demolition or relocation on the grounds that Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation in that very room. Again, the staff diagrams erroneously suggested that any view from the second floor is already blocked by structures year-round.

The National Trust's responsibility to protect President Lincoln's Cottage extends beyond the house itself and includes the surrounding landscape and viewshed, which are essential to understanding Lincoln's time there, as well as the perspectives he gained by virtue of being there. We offer programs including tours and events to the public 362 days per year, inside and outside, day and night. The nighttime views of the illuminated Capitol Dome currently available to our visitors are especially impressive and impactful. These views provide context and a point of reference for visitors local, national, and international, all of whom instantly recognize the Capitol Dome. Destruction of that connection to Lincoln's view—the symbol of democracy he worked to maintain—would be a significant loss.

Much has been made of the view from the historic Scott Statue, a view not available to the general public as it is beyond the boundaries of visitation, which are demarcated by walkways and roadways on the grounds. President Lincoln's Cottage visitors are not permitted to venture past the boundaries of visitation and the Scott Statue is well over 1,000 feet beyond that boundary, making those views inaccessible to the public.

President Lincoln's Cottage was an environment that allowed Abraham Lincoln to create the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. Living here brought Lincoln closer to the war and its human cost, providing him with new perspectives on the cause and purpose of the conflict. We specifically point out to our visitors that the Statue of Freedom, which they can see on top of the Capitol Dome, was constructed by an enslaved Washingtonian, Phillip Reid, beginning in 1860. Fortunately, this skilled craftsman was

emancipated from slavery during the Civil War and finished the statue in 1863 as a free man. The ability of the visitors to make that connection -- standing outside the Cottage, the cradle of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, while contemplating the symbol of our democracy capped by Reid's Statue of Freedom -- is priceless.

Today, that world of civil war and slavery, reunion and emancipation is difficult to recapture walking the streets of Washington, DC. Nowhere else in DC is such a view available for the general public. It serves as a beautiful reminder of what we can nobly and justly accomplish for ourselves and the future.

The assertions made by the NCPD staff that these views do not exist are flatly erroneous, and the proposed development would in fact obstruct these significant views. We ask that the NCPD revisit its improvident approval of the map amendment in light of this information.

We appreciate the opportunity to correct these errors for the record.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erin Carlson Mast', written in a cursive style.

Erin Carlson Mast
Executive Director

cc: Armed Forces Retirement Home
DC Zoning Commission