

Letters of Support for the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial from Leaders of the Design Community

David M. Childs, FAIA

David Childs is a former Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission [1975 to 1981] and of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts [2003 to 2005]. He is a consulting design partner with the prominent architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. His major projects include master plans for The National Mall in Washington DC, the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, and the design of the new One World Trade Center in New York City. He has served on the boards of the Municipal Art Society, the Museum of Modern Art and the American Academy in Rome.

William E. Pedersen, FAIA

William Pedersen is the founding Design Partner of Kohn Pedersen Fox, an internationally-recognized architectural design firm headquartered in New York City. Locally, Bill designed the World Bank building in Washington, DC and the Gannett Headquarters [USA Today] in McLean, Virginia. Bill has received seven National Design Awards from the American Institute of Architects. Personal honors Bill has received include the Rome Prize in Architecture in 1965 and the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1985.

Laurie D. Olin, FASLA

Laurie Olin is a distinguished teacher, author, and one of the most renowned and respected landscape architects practicing today. His design for the Washington Monument Grounds turned a project originally funded to prevent terrorism into a handsome civic amenity. His re-design of Bryant Park in New York City was recognized by the 2010 Landmark Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects. He received the National Medal of Arts from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2012. Laurie's firm, the Olin Studio, received the 2008 National Design Award for Landscape Design from the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.

DAVID M. CHILDS, ARCHITECT

49 EAST 86TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK 10028

Preston Bryant, Chairman
National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW
Suite 500-North
Washington, DC 20004

26 August 2013

Dear Chairman Bryant,

I am writing with regard to the design by Frank Gehry for the Eisenhower Memorial now under consideration by the Commission. As a former chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission and of the Commission of Fine Arts, I applaud the Gehry proposal for being both a bold new addition to Washington's urban design and also one that reinforces the historic L'Enfant city plan.

The Gehry design has undergone significant revisions since it was first presented. These changes have modified many details of the initial scheme, but to date they have refined the concept, and have not weakened the powerful and inventive solution that this important site and program deserve. But to remove the east and west pairs of columns, as was recently suggested in a discussion at the Commission of Fine Arts, would destroy the grand urban space fundamental to the concept, and in its place leave a meaningless planar wall.

The site is an important one within the Monumental Core, but it is one that is surrounded by buildings and landscapes that vary in their relationships to the geometry of L'Enfant's grid. Gehry's plan respects all the traditional rights-of-way, view corridors and surrounding buildings in a complex but seemingly effortless solution that brings harmony to one that now suffers from a lack of coordination. To modify these proposed placements, alignments and dimensions would unbalance a brilliant solution.

I therefore urge you to support the proposal as it has now been submitted to you. The strength and timelessness of this design will be a proud addition to the list of Washington's most important civic undertakings.

Respectfully yours,

David M. Childs, FAIA

August 27, 2013

Mr. L. Preston Bryant, Chairman
c/o office of Secretariat
National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW
North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington D.C. 20004



Dear Mr. Bryant,

As a member of the jury which selected Mr. Gehry's design several years ago I have followed with great interest the evolution of it through the various steps in the approval process. This process is now at a critical juncture and I feel compelled to offer my support to the design.

Mr. Gehry is known throughout the world for the sculptural strength of his highly personal sensibility to architectural form. What struck me as extraordinary, when I first viewed his design for the Eisenhower Memorial, was the degree to which he eschewed this personal vocabulary in favor of a serene and highly contextual method of making a response to an almost unresolvable urban situation. I found it to be brilliant, particularly when viewed in comparison to his fellow competitors whose solutions looked far more "Gehry-like" than did his. He rejected the temptation to form a sculptural object of the Memorial in favor of making a contemplative room within the larger urban context.

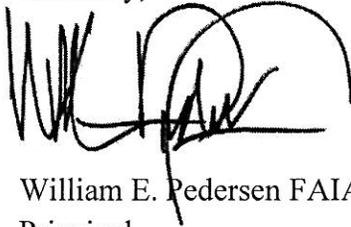
Two elements make the character of his design of the Memorial in sympathy with the character of Washington D.C.. The first of these, massive stone columns, connect the space to the classical language of the city. The second, the woven stainless steel scrim, creates a magical veil through which the surrounding buildings can be viewed but which, in conjunction with the columns, embraces and defines a room within a room. Together, these form the backdrop for the elements which convey to the world Eisenhower's legacies; as young man looking to the future, as a great leader in battle and as a great leader in peace.

Mr. L. Preston Bryant, Chairman
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Now, the critical presence of two pairs of these columns, on the east and on the west, is being called into question. To my mind, their elimination places in jeopardy the very intention of the design itself. This pair of columnar elements gives the enclosure which not only creates the inner room but also sponsors a larger connection to the surrounding context. They are two arms which form a spatial embrace. Their amputation would leave the inner elements of the Memorial, which convey the meaning of Eisenhower's life, stripped of their backdrop and adrift without reference.

KPF

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. E. Pedersen', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

William E. Pedersen FAIA
Principal



OLIN

Chairman Preston Bryant
National Capitol Planning Commission
C/o Office of the Secretariat
401 9th Street, NW
Suite 500-North
Washington DC 20004

20 August 2013

Dear Chairman Bryant,

I write to you and your fellow commissioners in support of the current scheme for the Eisenhower Memorial as designed by Frank Gehry and strongly urge you to resist attempts to alter or change this superb work of art and civic design. I believe it to be a remarkably significant and positive addition to our nation's capitol and the historic tradition of memorials and a worthy tribute to this great national leader in war and peace. Like many innovative works by great artists this project both builds upon tradition and invents new ways of seeing and experiencing ideas and messages of consequence that are not immediately appreciated or understood by some at the time, even discomforting them as seems to have been the case. It is, however, a great work of art and design by one of America's most significant architects and as such is a coherent work, all of which parts are significant.

Gehry's memorial design draws strength from a long tradition of monuments extending as far back as the Ara Pacis in Rome, a handsome roofless enclosure framed by carved narrative friezes erected in the first century CE to commemorate Peace after a devastating civil war. As members of the Fine Art Commission have pointed out the proposed Eisenhower Memorial also forms a roofless room of superb proportion and quality, framing key views of the L'Enfant plan and establishing an honorific space that unifies the disparate buildings and agencies on its edges that currently can only be characterized as disappointingly characterless and incapable of framing a civic space adequately. The two panels at the east and west are essential to the scheme, in part for the narrative imagery they contain, and in part for the manner in which they frame the space and form part of the twin gateways framing the historic diagonal view to the Capitol as well as for the manner in which they also address and engage the buildings behind them – the FAA and Cohen buildings – in effect bringing them into the composition as well as the Education building. In addition to accomplishing these goals and in the dimensions established for heights, setbacks, and widths, the current design specifically embodies successfully the 5th and 6th principles that NCPA articulated earlier for the memorial.



There is not a good track record for projects, especially memorials, which have been compromised, reworked, and watered down by various committees and numerous cooks. I recommend with full enthusiasm and without reservation that the Commission approve the current Frank Gehry proposal for the Eisenhower Memorial as it is. This elegant and imaginative work of art and design that is a tribute to one of our greatest leaders in both war and peace is certain to join other famous memorials in our nation's capitol as a pilgrimage sight, sought out by visitors from America and around the world.

Sincerely yours,

Laurie D. Olin
FASLA, AAAL, AAAS Hon AIA, Hon RIBA