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Public Testimony of Carol Quillen
President and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
Before the National Capital Planning Commission
Regarding the Proposed Monumental Arch at Memorial Circle

Thursday, June 4, 2026

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the National Capital Planning Commission.

My name is Carol Quillen, and I serve as President and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Thank you for this opportunity to be with you today to share comments about the proposed arch project on behalf of the National Trust.

This Commission works on behalf of the American people. You play a critical role—questioning, reviewing, and helping to refine proposed projects that define our nation's capital city and ideally embody both our founding ideals and our ongoing commitment to build a more perfect union. The value you bring was on full display during this Commission's review of the National World War I Memorial. Over a series of meetings, this Commission helped refine the original submission, modifying it to respect the iconic water basin that defined the site and improving pedestrian access. The result was a substantively improved design that highlighted the best of the site's existing features, while also creating a more fitting memorial to our nation's heroic service members.

Since our nation's founding, we Americans have understood the symbolic power of Washington, D.C. Our capital is a planned city. In their design, context, and relationship to each other, our most meaningful buildings and monuments communicate our system of government and the principles on which it is based. Achieving this in a democratic republic has required meticulous planning and deep respect for what has gone before. Each generation has left its mark, and they have done so in carefully calibrated, measured steps that honor our history and our aspirations. It's our responsibility to remember this two-century long tradition of design discipline, and to strive to be worthy of and then pass on this inheritance.

From this perspective, the proposed Arch project poses significant risks. It flouts centuries of planning. It would diminish some of the nation's most sacred landmarks. And its hasty design, lack of consultation, and rush to construction undermine the ideal of government by and for the people. We therefore respectfully offer specific comments on the proposed location, height, scale, and design of the arch project.

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First, the proposed location. The center of Memorial Circle is not an appropriate place to construct a monument equivalent in height to a 20-story building. The colossal bulk of the proposed arch would block the hallowed vista from the Lincoln Memorial, across Arlington Memorial Bridge, to Arlington National Cemetery and Arlington House. One of the American people's most sacred landscapes, this visual link communicates the magnitude of the Civil War, the obligation its unimaginable cost imposes on all Americans, and the aspiration of a post-Civil War reconciliation in a new birth of freedom.

Although there have been earlier proposals to place structures at this location, including the idea for two memorial columns, these proposed columns would have *framed* the views of Arlington House and the Lincoln Memorial, not interrupted them. And, after reflection, none of these earlier proposals were built.

Second, with its height and scale, the proposed arch would overwhelm neighboring landmarks. It is double the size of the Lincoln Memorial. It is also, as NCPC staff note, inconsistent with the Height of Buildings Act that protects and honors the plan of the city.

Third, constructing a mammoth arch at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery would brazenly disrespect the cemetery's solemn character. As the hallowed resting place of 400,000 veterans and their families, Arlington Cemetery is a powerful reminder of American military sacrifice, selfless service, and national unity. The arch would communicate a jarring indifference to the sacrifice of our veterans and mar the outward view for military families and visitors.

Finally, as indicated in your staff report, the applicant has not yet initiated review of this project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The law clearly mandates that this review process be completed *"prior to"* approval. Submitting these plans for collaborative review and expert commentary as the National Historic Preservation Act requires would signal respect for the rule of law, improve the project, and help protect the President's legacy.

Our concerns are serious. We respectfully urge you to withhold your approval for this project until the legally required Section 106 process has been completed and so that it has the benefit of the careful scrutiny that our capital city and the American people deserve. The National Trust for Historic Preservation remains eager and ready to support you through that process with our decades of experience collaborating with NCPC on these matters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.