



April 16, 2026

Rodney Mims Cook, Jr.
US Commission of Fine Arts
401 F Street, NW, Suite 312
Washington, DC 20002

RE: CFA 16/APR/26-1 - Memorial Circle, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Columbia Island, Washington, DC. New monumental arch. Concept.

Chairman Cook and Members of the Commission:

My name is Zachary Burt and I am the Community Outreach and Grants Manager representing the DC Preservation League (DCPL). DCPL is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, dedicated to preserving and protecting the District's historic resources. Founded in 1971 as "Don't Tear It Down" to save the Old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue from demolition, DCPL has consistently worked to ensure that proposed new developments and the adaptive reuse of historic buildings do not compromise the character of this great city. I appear today to express serious concerns and strong opposition to the proposed arch.

The visual connection between Arlington National Cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial is not just a simple view; it symbolizes the sacrifices our nation has made in pursuit of its highest ideals.

The proposal for a 250-foot-tall triumphal arch threatens this solemn vista. Although the intent may be to honor those who served, the overwhelming scale of this project risks overshadowing the revered landmarks that Americans hold in the highest regard—ensuring that our national landscape remains a place of reflection rather than a showcase of architectural excess. Columbia Island's transformation from a muddy dredging site to the ceremonial "gateway" of the nation's capital is a classic story of D.C. urban planning—turning a functional necessity into a landscape of high-stakes symbolism.

Columbia Island did not exist naturally. It was a byproduct of the massive Potomac River dredging projects carried out by the Army Corps of Engineers to improve river navigation and sanitation. For nearly 15 years, between 1915 and 1930, the Corps deposited millions of cubic yards of river sediment on what was then the Virginia shoreline, resulting in a man-made island. The island's purpose shifted from "excess dirt" to "strategic landmark" with the construction of the Arlington Memorial Bridge (1926–1932). Planners needed a way to elegantly transition the bridge's grand Neoclassical axis into the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery.

Unlike the rest of the bridge corridor designed by McKim, Mead & White, Memorial Circle was designed by Gilmore D. Clarke, a powerhouse landscape architect of early American parkway design.

Completed in 1932, the Circle served as a symbolic "hinge." It connected the Lincoln Memorial to the Arlington House on the Virginia hills, physically and spiritually bridging the North and South after the Civil War.

Clarke installed neoclassical pylons topped with sculpted eagles, emphasizing the island's role as a formal entrance to Washington.

The visual integrity of the National Mall and Arlington Ridge is a shared heritage. Public testimony is the most effective tool we have to pause this development and demand a design that respects the existing historical context.

DCPL asks that the Commission of Fine Arts reject this proposal to preserve the view shed, honor our service members buried in Arlington National Cemetery, and maintain the design harmony achieved by Clarke's design.

Thank you.