

NCPC File #7682

National World War I Memorial

Pershing Park
14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

National Park Service

Concept Review

Commission meeting date: November 3, 2016

NCPC review authority: Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 8905) & Public Law 113-291

Applicant request: Concept Review

Delegated / consent / open / executive session: Open Session

NCPC Review Officer: M. Flis

NCPC File number: 7682

Project summary:

The National Park Service (NPS), in collaboration with the World War I Centennial Commission (WWICC), has submitted concept plans for the National World War I Memorial, to be located at Pershing Park in northwest Washington, DC. The WWICC is project sponsor of the Memorial and was established by the World War I Centennial Commission Act, in accordance with Public Law 112-272. WWICC is responsible for planning, developing, and executing programs, projects, and activities to commemorate the centennial of World War I.

Title 30, Section 3091 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 (Pub. Law 113-291) designates Pershing Park in the District of Columbia, along with the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, as national World War I memorials. The Act further authorizes the WWICC to honor the service of members of the United States armed forces in World War I by enhancing Pershing Park with new sculptural and other commemorative elements, including landscaping. The project site is bounded by Pennsylvania Avenues North and South, and 14th and 15th Streets, NW. The Commerce Building is located to the south, the Sherman Memorial to the west, the Willard Hotel to the north, and Freedom Plaza to the east. The existing park was designed by M. Paul Friedberg, and includes a central, sunken plaza with water feature, raised berms and landscaping designed by Oehme Van Sweden. A gazebo, granite steps and seating can also be found on the site. A memorial to General Pershing, including a statue and walls, is located on the east side of the site. The fountain and water feature currently do not operate.

A open design competition resulted in five finalists, from which the winner – “The Weight of Sacrifice” - was selected in January 2016. Since that time, the sponsor has continued to develop the proposal. In addition, a Determination of Eligibility was completed for Pershing Park which found the site individually eligible for the National Register. The project design seeks to combine commemorative elements with an urban park, while considering the existing and contributing elements of Pershing Park.

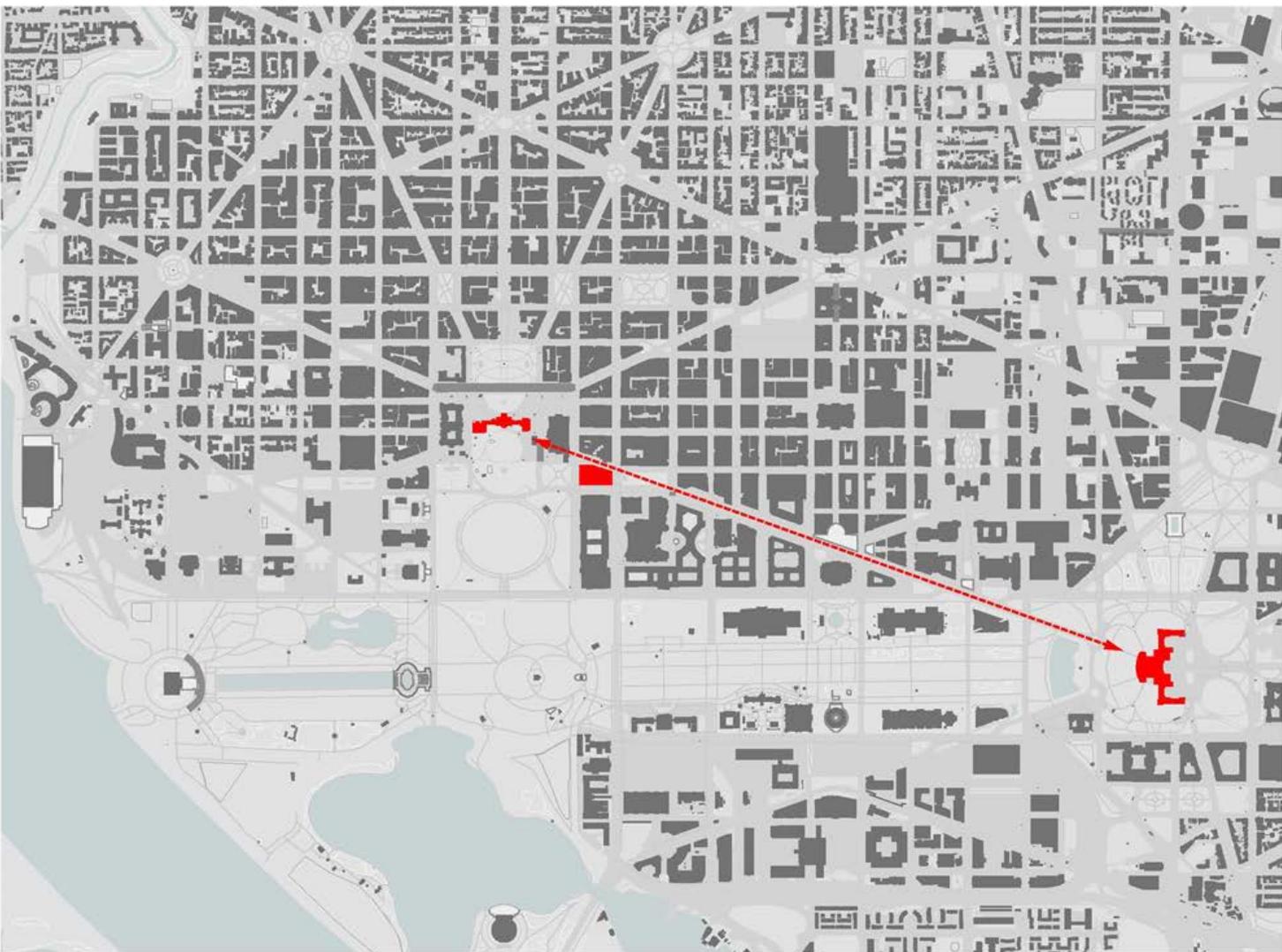
Site Context

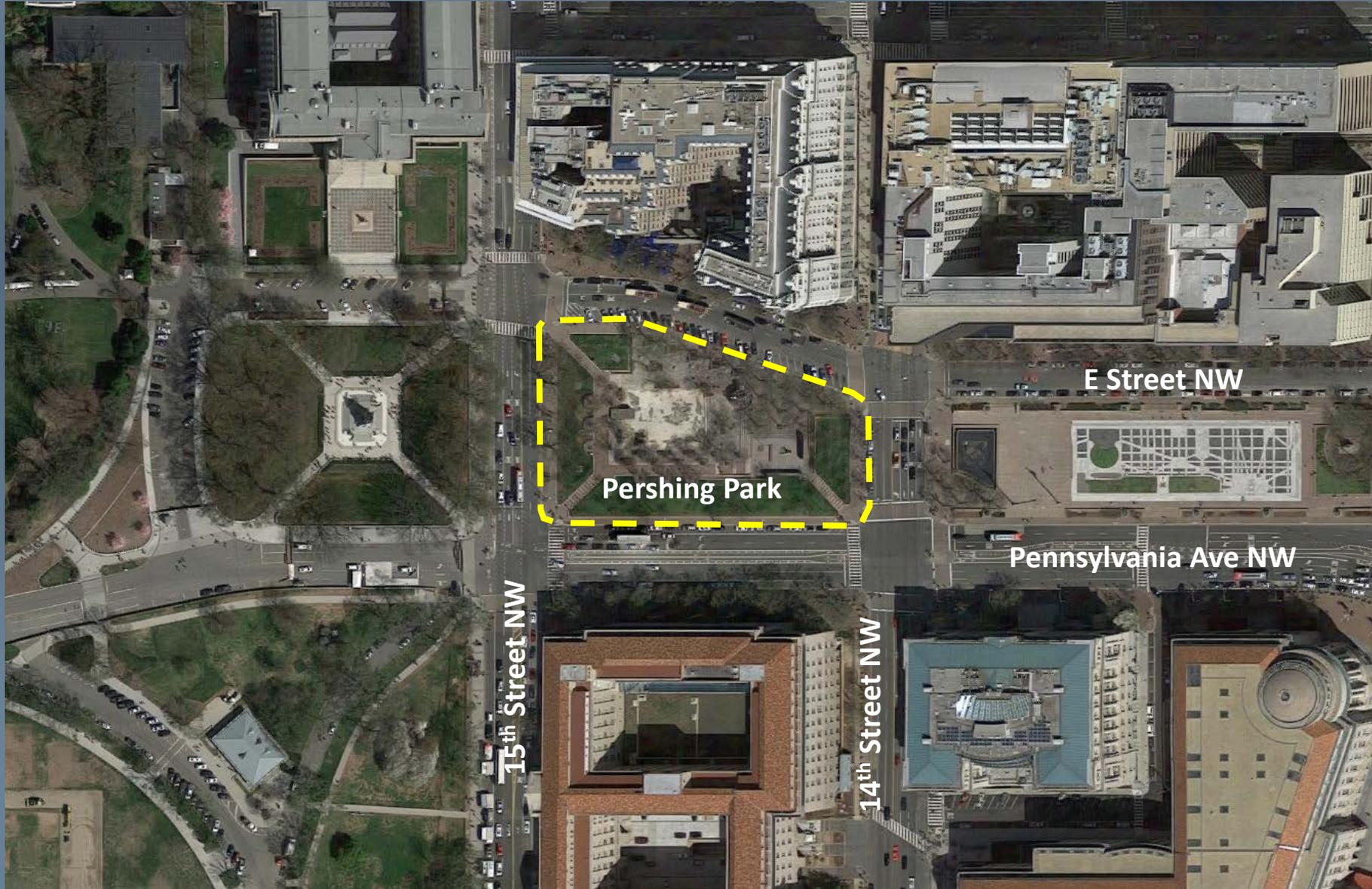
Pershing Park is the western most public space along Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol, and as such, it plays a significant role in the symbolic and physical connection between the executive and legislative branches of government originally conceived by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791.

At the junction between the monumental core to the south and west and the residential and commercial life of Washington D.C. to the north and east, Pershing Park needs to function as both a memorial and a park, contributing to the family of commemorative elements and spaces of Pennsylvania Avenue, while supporting a vibrant economy and culture.

Achieving continuity along the Avenue, maintaining vistas and consistent quality design has been an ongoing endeavor. In 1966, Congress recognized the need to coordinate the design of Pershing Park with efforts to rehabilitate Pennsylvania Avenue, amending the authorization of the Pershing Memorial. The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), released *The Pennsylvania Avenue Plan* in 1974, providing a framework that ultimately led to the design of a streetscape plan by Sasaki Associates and the redesign of Pershing Park.

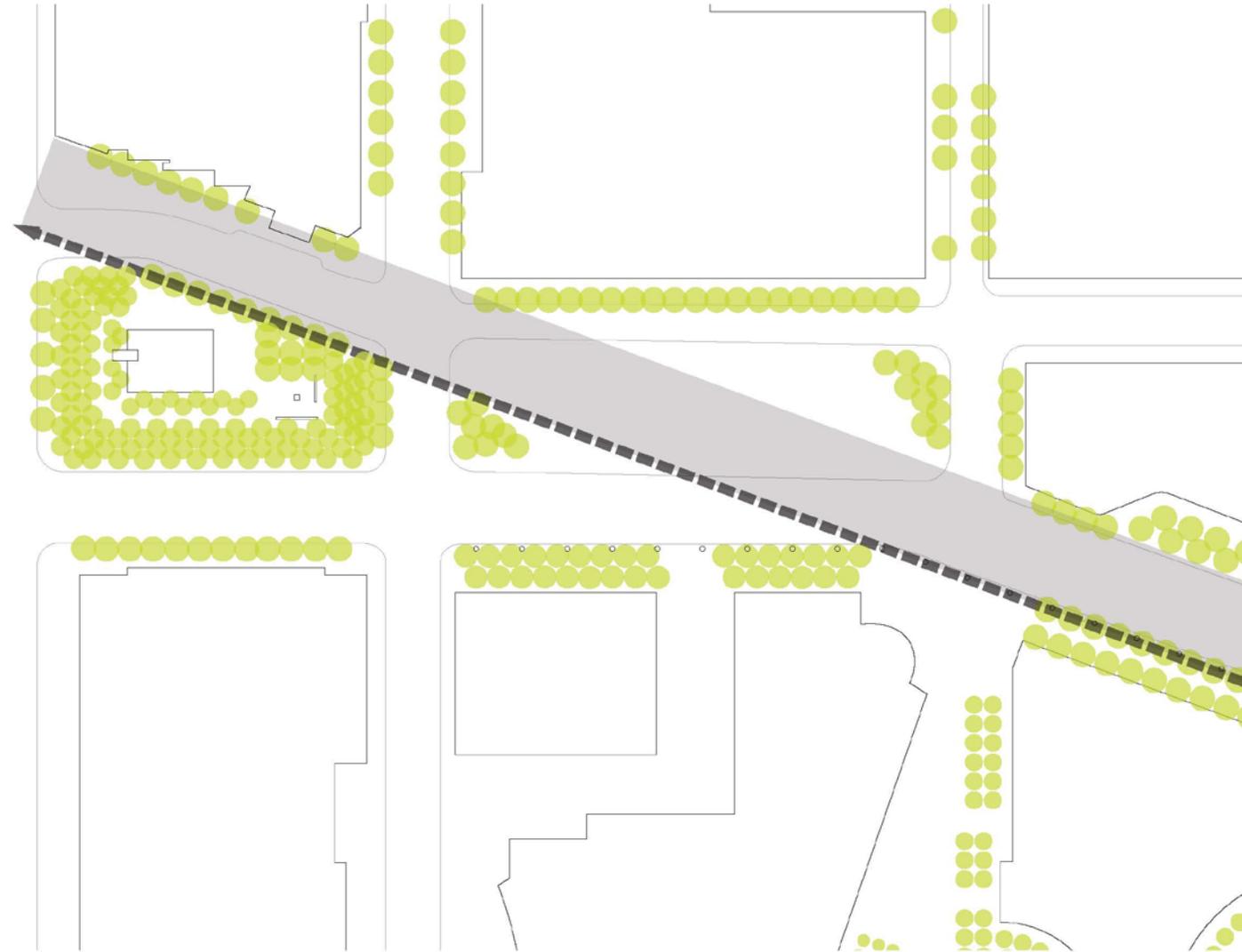
The design of the WWI Memorial honors the need for continuity along the Avenue and accentuates vistas of the Capitol through its streetscape strategy, while expanding the pedestrian and park experience along the northern edge. As an important public urban space within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, the Memorial supports ongoing efforts to revitalize the public realm.





Pennsylvania Avenue Viewshed

The existing Pershing Park street trees along Pennsylvania Avenue North are aligned with trees along the south side of the Avenue east of Freedom Plaza, thereby maintaining the Pennsylvania Avenue viewshed and Capitol vista. At their current location, the line of willow oak street trees are positioned 22' from the curb. The future design should seek to maintain the viewshed and address the need for continuity along the Avenue, while providing a safe and pleasant pedestrian experience.









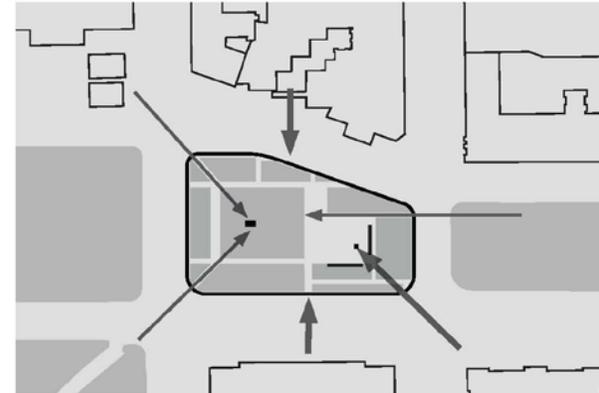




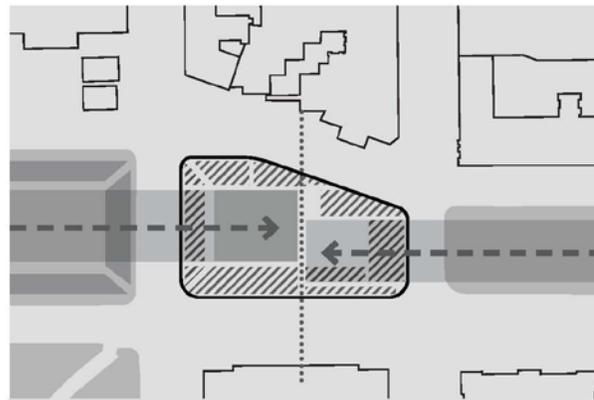




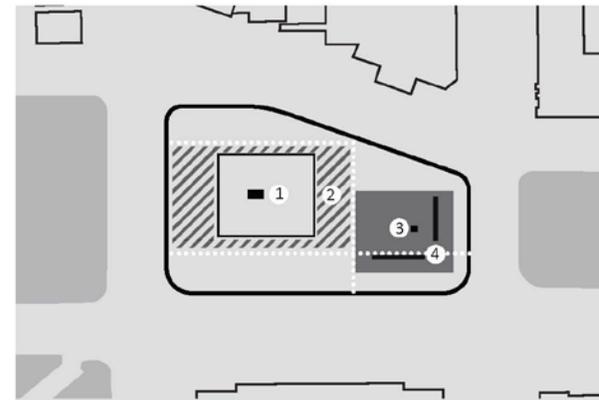
Pedestrian access to the site is primarily from the South-West in the direction of the mall, from the South-East via Freedom Plaza and the Freedom Triangle metro stop, and from the White House



Key views into the site are from the four corners, Pennsylvania Ave., and from the Willard Hotel



Connection to the surrounding park and plaza spaces



Procession of monuments: 1) Wheels of Humanity 2) Wall of Remembrance 3) Pershing Statue 4) Pershing Walls

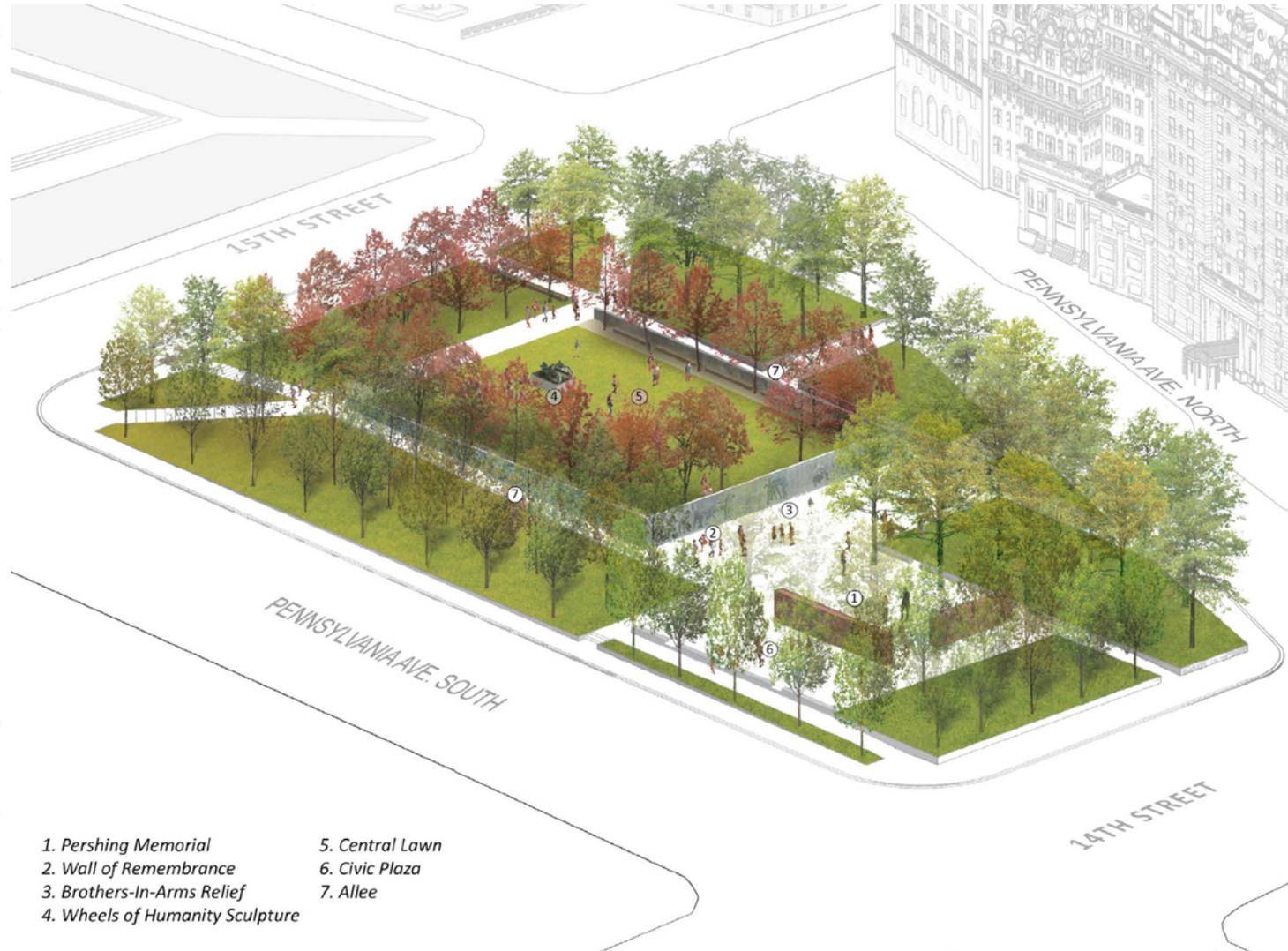
Competition Proposal: Context Analysis

The Weight of Sacrifice

The winning competition entry, *The Weight of Sacrifice*, proposed the allegorical idea that public space and public freedom are hard won through the great sacrifices of countless individuals in the pursuit of liberty. The raised figurative walls visually expressed a narrative of the sacrificial cost of war, while also supporting a literal manifestation of freedoms enjoyed in this country: the open park space above. The urban design intent was to create a new formal link along Pennsylvania Avenue which ties together the memorial to General Sherman on the West and Freedom Plaza on the East. This was achieved by lowering the visual barriers surrounding the existing Pershing Park and reinforcing dominant axes that come from the adjacent context.

The raised form in the center of the site honored the veterans of the First World War by combining figurative sculpture and personal narratives of servicemen and women in a single formal expression. The integration of a park around and atop the memorial alluded to the idea that public space and personal freedom are only available through the sacrifice of our soldiers. Above all, the memorial sculptures and park design stressed the glorification of humanity and enduring spirit over the glorification of war.

These themes were expressed through three sources: relief sculpture, quotations of soldiers, and a freestanding sculpture. The 81' long figurative relief sculpture, entitled "The Wall of Remembrance," was a solemn tribute to the resilience of human bonds against the inexorable tide of war. The bronze medium used throughout represented the timeless endeavor we face in the universal pursuit and right of freedom.



- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Pershing Memorial | 5. Central Lawn |
| 2. Wall of Remembrance | 6. Civic Plaza |
| 3. Brothers-In-Arms Relief | 7. Allee |
| 4. Wheels of Humanity Sculpture | |

Proposed Design

The WWI Memorial design proposal represents a sensitive approach that integrates new commemorative elements while maintaining character defining features of the existing park.

The design enhances Pershing Park to serve as a national World War I Memorial, making modifications to improve accessibility and safety, to create a stronger relationship with the urban context, particularly along Pennsylvania Avenue, and to ensure that the Memorial's features and materials will endure.

The central Memorial space, with defined zones of proximity to Memorial elements, is bounded by the Memorial Wall on the west and the Pershing walls on the east. A scrim of water defines a sacred zone nearest to the bas relief wall, symbolizing renewal and reflection, and cooling the Memorial space in the heat of summer. In winter, when the water is turned off, the area becomes a plaza. An area of lawn, bordered by two rows of red maple trees, connects the western memorial precinct to the eastern Pershing memorial and provides a flexible area for a variety of park uses and commemorative events.

The Pershing memorial to the east stands in dialogue with the Memorial Wall to the west. The central space's southern tree-lined pathway, links the two memorial elements, framing a view of the General Pershing statue. The existing walls and statue of General Pershing are retained in their current locations.



Proposed Design

The proposed Memorial design retains the spatial organization and sense of enclosed oasis of the existing park. The central sunken space is bounded on the north and south, as in the Friedberg design, by a stepped area made lush with planting. The berms on the east, west, and south sides of the park are retained to provide enclosure. The height of the berms has been lowered slightly, and changes in elevation across the park have been softened to make the park more accessible and visible to passersby.

A new terrace along Pennsylvania Avenue with planting and seating enhances the Memorial's connection to the urban context. From this vantage point, visitors can gain a view into the Memorial space while participating in the urban life of the street.

The existing willow oak tree planting has been retained along Pennsylvania Avenue North, maintaining vistas of the Capitol and providing continuity along the length of the Avenue.

In keeping with the National Parks Service Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site Management Plan, the proposed design:

- 1) supports congressional legislation to redesignate Pershing Park as a National World War I Memorial.
- 2) rehabilitates the park to reestablish it as an oasis in the city
- 3) improves visual access
- 4) strengthens the park's identity as a National World War I Memorial
- 5) develops stronger physical connections between commercial uses and across Pennsylvania Avenue North

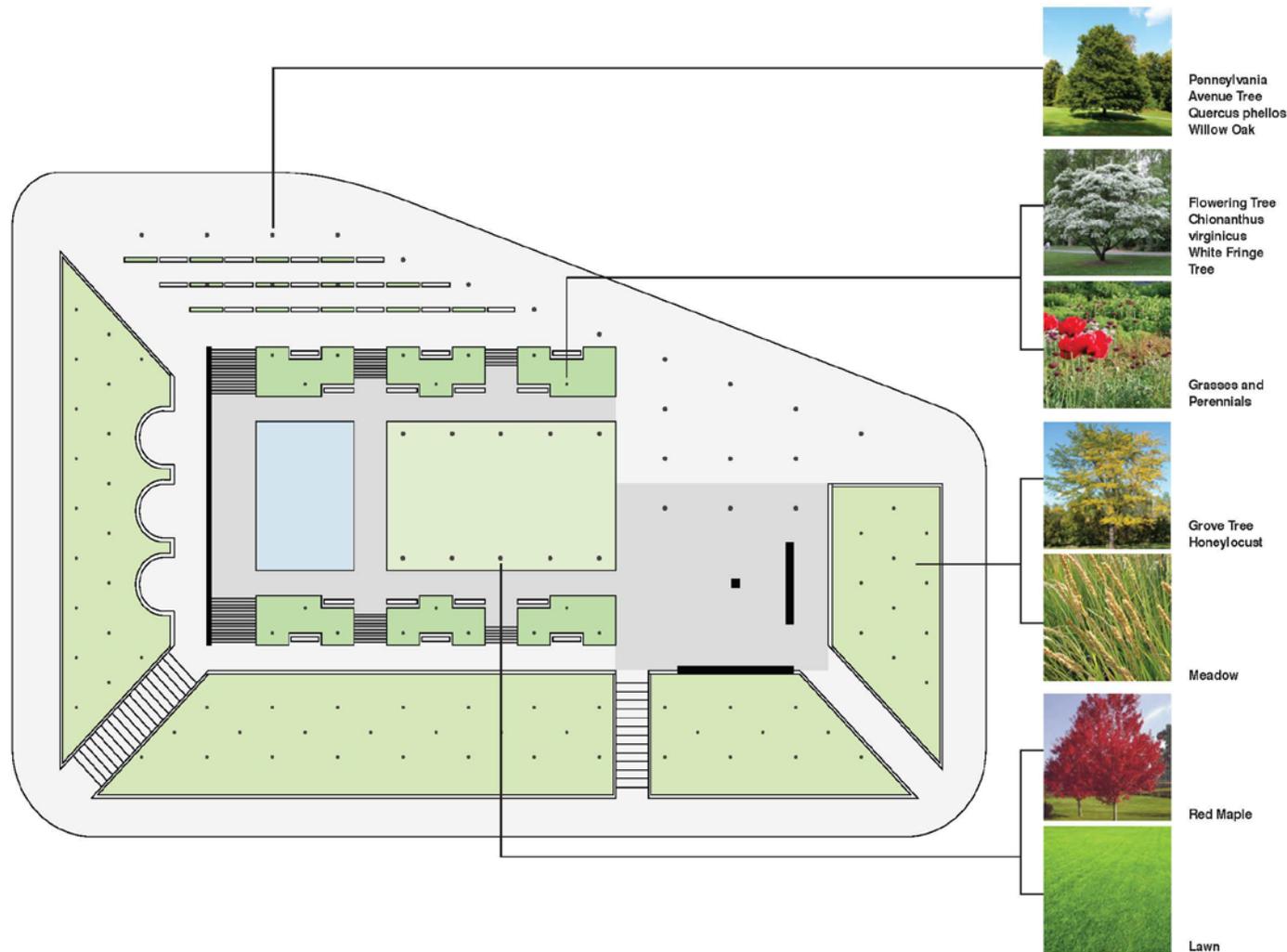


Planting Design

The planting strategy extends the legacy of Oehme Van Sweden's planting design, utilizing a palette of appropriate native and adapted trees, grasses, and perennials. Species are chosen for low maintenance and year round color, structure, and shape. Drawing upon Oehme van Sweden's New American Garden approach, the design relies upon a matrix of grasses and ecologically related forbs to create a rich and dynamic understory that reduces maintenance while increasing ecological value. The overall diversity of species has been increased, with the substitution of grasses and perennials for turf within the berms and with the addition of tree species that are indigenous and of high ecological value.

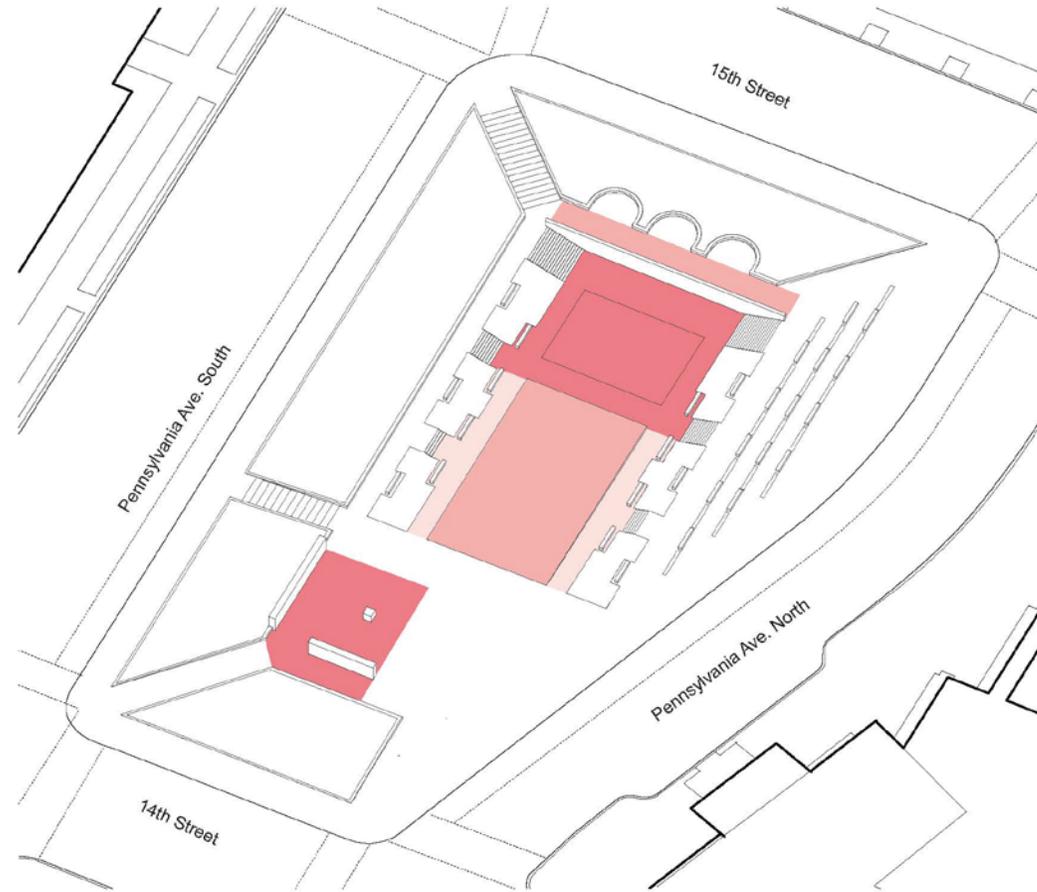
The Memorial trees bordering the lawn are red maples, chosen for their bright red fall foliage and suitability to urban Washington D.C. Trees along Pennsylvania Avenue are in keeping with the existing willow oaks, in order to integrate the Memorial into the broader context of the Avenue and provide continuity at its most western end. The trees planted in the berms are honeylocusts or a species of deciduous tree with similar transparency and form. And the trees planted amongst the north and south stairs will be smaller scale deciduous trees such as the flowering White Fringe Tree.

While the existing park layout of the honeylocust grove has been maintained, the total number of trees has been reduced to ensure a minimum of 1000 cubic feet of soil per tree. The design team will work with horticulturists and soils experts to design below grade conditions for maximum benefit to the health and longevity of the planting.



Memorial Precincts

The central Memorial space is designed with zones of proximity to Memorial elements, to create sacred spaces of commemoration while integrating more flexible space that accommodates the needs of an urban park. The area closest to the Memorial Wall, defined by the water plaza, and the area defined by the Pershing Walls are sacred spaces of reflection, commemoration, and education. The central lawn, flanked by the Memorial trees, provides a transition between Memorial elements, defining a flexible space that integrates appropriate commemorative or urban park needs. The planted stairs to the north and south similarly constitute zones of overlapping use, where people can view the Memorial elements and participate in commemorative events, or alternatively, find a place to meet friends for lunch or unwind at the end of the day.





Competition Proposal: E/W section looking north

Topographic Enhancement

From east to west, the site retains the overall spatial organization of the existing park, softening the topography to increase visibility and accessibility. The enhancement of the site topography also serves to maximize the free flow of space while creating a direct relationship between the Pershing Wall on the east and the Memorial Wall on the west.



EW Section Looking North

Memorial Wall

Placed at the western end of the central memorial space is the Memorial Wall, the primary new commemorative element of the Memorial. Framed by the planted north and south stair, and the trees that populate the edges of the site, the bas relief sculpture wall is a visual and tactile experience honoring the sacrifice of all World War I servicemen and women. The walkway on the south and the terrace area on the north provide views of the wall and visual connection across the site. Pedestrians walking along Pennsylvania Avenue South are able to see into the park and gain access mid-block.



N/S Section Looking West



Competition Proposal: Wall of Remembrance

Sculptural Artwork

The sculptural artwork for the Memorial Wall is meant to convey feelings of pride, honor, and loss. The sculpture, consisting of a 75 foot-long bronze relief, is conceived of as a visual and emotional narrative. The narrative consists of a series of scenes depicting the war experience of one soldier, who appears throughout as a recurring figure. On another level, the narrative shows the courage and heroism of American servicemen and women in World War I, which was as profound as that demonstrated in better-remembered wars, and conveys the scale of American sacrifice, which exceeded all our nation's wars other than the Civil War and World War II. The visual narrative is structured with a beginning, middle, and end - from the call to arms and departure, through the battle, culminating in the aftermath and return - with each section carrying different emotions and kinetic energy.





View looking east



View looking west



View looking west



View from northwest corner looking east



View from southeast corner

Features Retained / Enhanced

The Memorial design retains the spatial organization of the existing park, the central idea of an urban oasis, and specific elements.

The Pershing Memorial is retained in its current location.

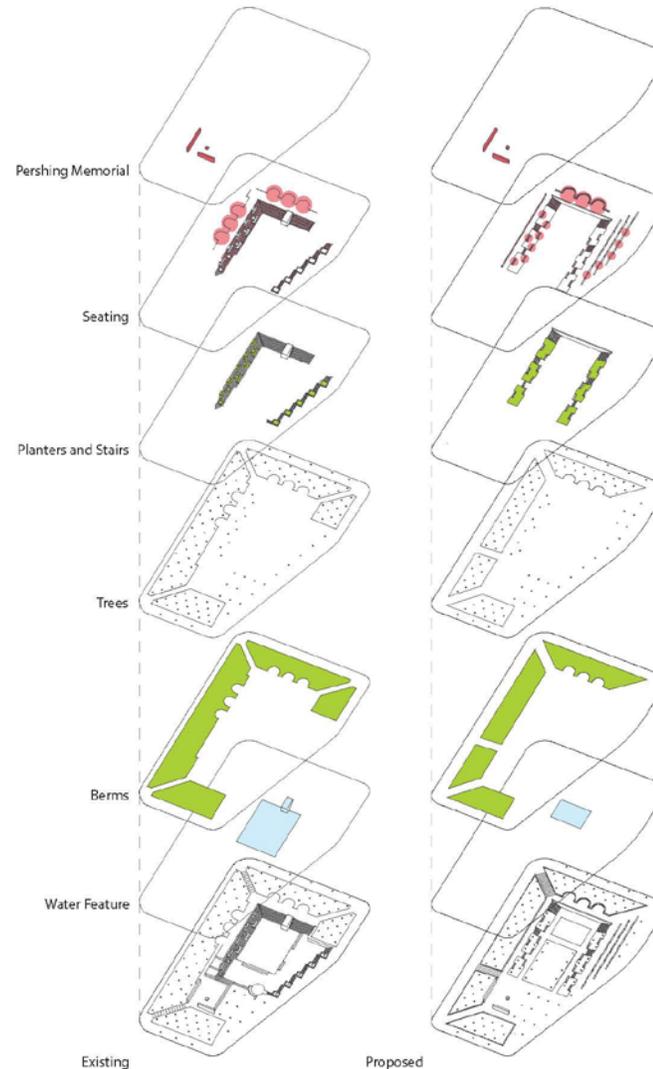
The semi-circular seating located on the west side of the central space is retained. Additional seating is provided in its existing location on the south stair and along Pennsylvania Avenue North.

The design retains the stair on the south side of the central space, expanding the size of the planters and reducing the number of steps. On the north side of the central space, the planters and stairs have been shifted to the south, to accommodate the expanded area for pedestrians along Pennsylvania Avenue North and to frame the Memorial Wall.

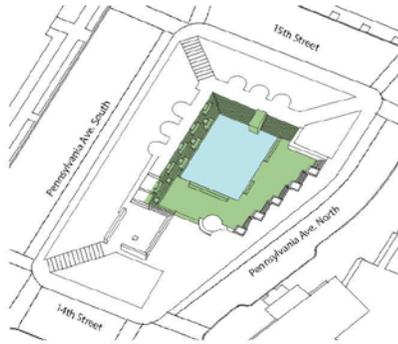
Trees have been retained across the site, reduced in numbers within the berms to ensure adequate soil volume for health and longevity.

The earthen berms are retained in existing location and orientation, with an additional access point into the Memorial through the southern berm and more generous corner entries for pedestrian flow. The sidewalk on Pennsylvania Avenue South has been widened to encourage pedestrian movement along the south side.

The water feature is rehabilitated as a sustainable element, reduced in size, and accommodating seasonal use.



Central Oasis



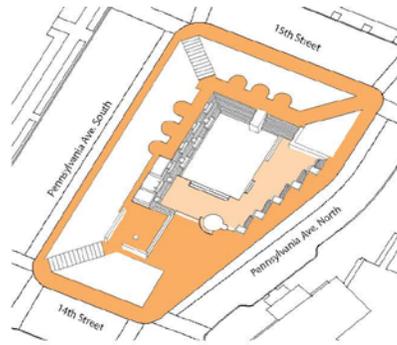
Pershing Park is organized around a large 7,575SF central water feature that served as an urban oasis, sheltered from the noise and traffic of the surrounding streets. Due to structural issues and failure of plumbing and electrical systems, the water feature has been drained since 2006-2007. As designed, the park no longer functions with the basin empty.

The concessions kiosk, underground restrooms, fountain, and ice rink are no longer in use because of failed HVAC and other systems. An alternative location for ice skating has since opened at the nearby NGA Outdoor Sculpture Garden, and another is planned for Constitution Gardens.

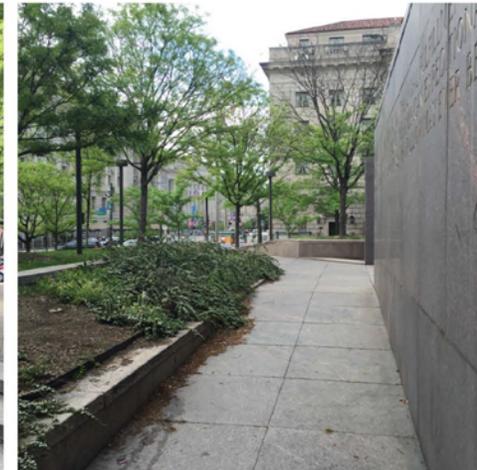
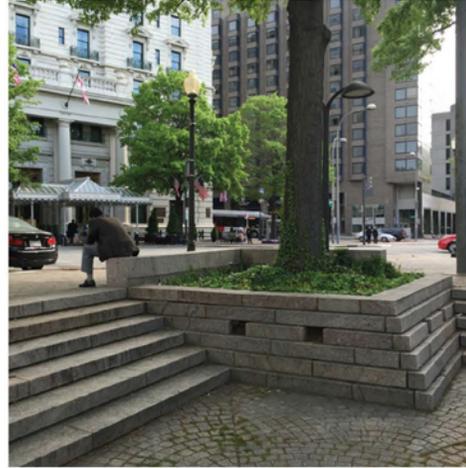
In considering the future design of the Memorial, there is an opportunity to retain the idea of the oasis and reintroduce the water feature in a sustainable form, maintaining a sense of enclosure with a softened topography, opening up the park to make it safer and more accessible.



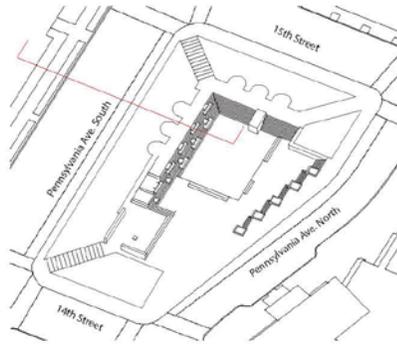
Accessibility



Accessibility is constrained in Pershing Park by stairs and stepped platforms. Where ramps are provided they require a circuitous route or passage along the margins. Accessible entry into the park can be gained only in two places, at the northwest corner and along Pennsylvania Avenue north of the Pershing statue.



Visibility



Earthen berms planted with honeylocust groves surround the park on the south, east, and west sides. These berms provide a sense of enclosure inside the park, sheltering people from the noise of city streets, but their excessive height makes the park invisible from the street and creates safety concerns. By lowering the berms, we can enhance visibility into the park while maintaining a sense of enclosure.

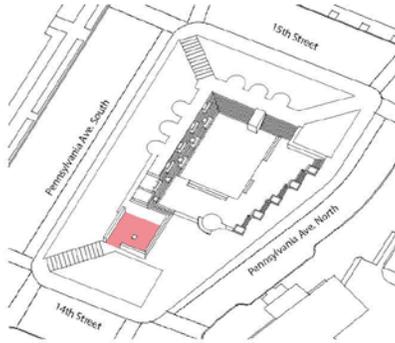


N/S Section: Limited Visibility into the Park



View from Pennsylvania Avenue South, looking northeast

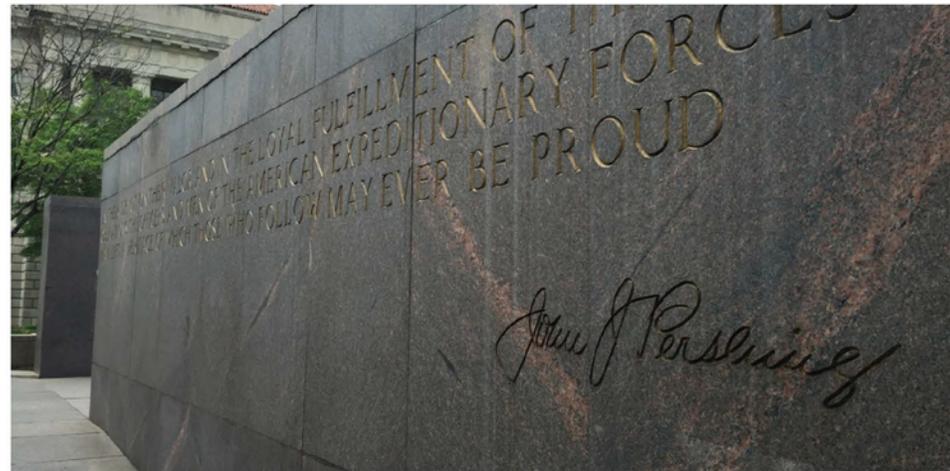
Pershing Memorial



In the southwest corner of the park, occupying an area of approximately 3,400SF, sits the Memorial to General John J. Pershing and officers and men in the American Expeditionary Forces. The Memorial was designed by architect Wallace K. Harrison.

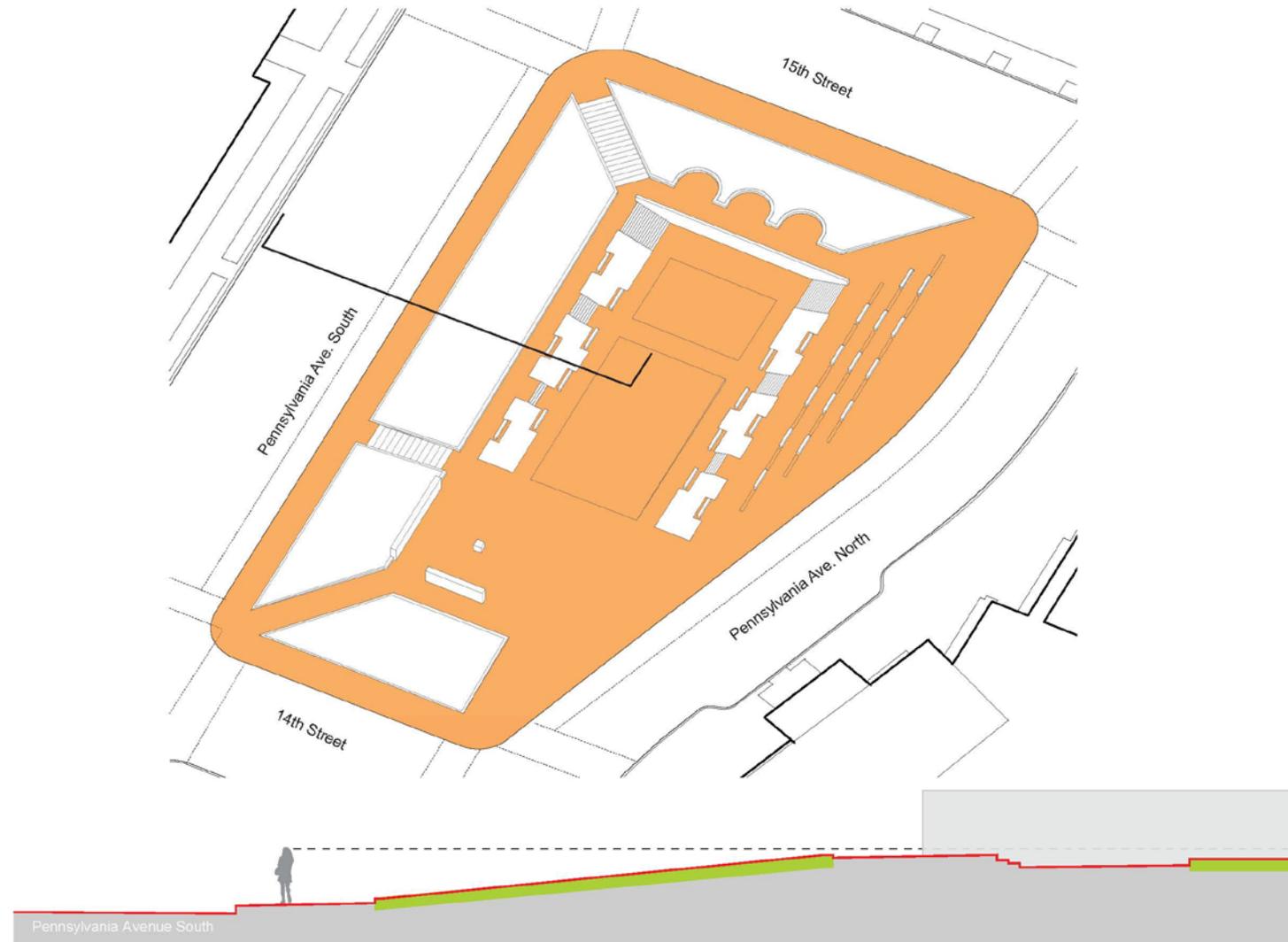
A statue of General Pershing is framed by two granite walls inscribed with text and maps describing his actions in World War I. The walls and statue form a memorial precinct, provide an important commemorative function, and are a contributing element within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.

The Pershing Memorial does not commemorate the greater sacrifice of all servicemen and women in the war, by the standards of the national war memorials subsequently built in Washington D.C. Furthermore, the memorial is not well integrated into the site, and the inscriptions on the walls lack legibility. The future design should seek to relate the Pershing Memorial to additional commemorative elements and to the park as a whole.



Accessibility and Visibility

The Memorial design increases accessibility and visibility across the site. The open, unified spaces are more inclusive and connected to the urban context. A moderate reduction in the heights of the berms supports views into the park on east, west, and south sides, making the park safer and more attractive to people as they approach. A direct physical and visual connection between the Pershing Memorial and the Memorial Wall is made through the perceptually flat topography of the central space and the alignment of the Pershing Statue with the southern walkway.



Topographic Enhancement

The topography of the WWI Memorial is in keeping with the overall relationships of the existing park. However, differences in elevation have been softened to increase visual and physical access and to better connect the site to the urban context.

Barriers to accessibility have been removed where possible, improving circulation and making the site more inclusive, maximizing the free flow of movement and experience.

Visibility is improved across the central Memorial space. The perceptually flat topography of the center reinforces the direct relationship created between the Memorial Wall and the Pershing Memorial.

The earthen berms surrounding the Memorial have been lowered slightly to increase visibility into the park on the south, west, and east sides.

