

National Mall Coalition

**Comments on the
White House East Wing Modernization and Ballroom Addition
before the US Commission of Fine Arts
by the National Mall Coalition
February 19, 2026**

Since our founding in 2000, the National Mall Coalition, a grassroots nonprofit organization of architects, historians, planners, and concerned citizens, has worked to protect the brilliant legacy of the historic 1791 L'Enfant and 1902 McMillan Plans for the National Mall and to ensure the vitality, beauty, and continued active role of the Mall in the capital and in American life. The first goal honors the visionary L'Enfant design that laid out the Mall as an embodiment in landscape and architecture of America's founding principles.¹ The second goes to the heart of American democracy – the role of the people in decision-making for the Stage for American Democracy. Public participation does – as long experience in Mall design matters prove – affect design.

In our opinion, the proposed White House Ballroom project violates both these objectives. Not only does the structure's almost-90,000-square-foot footprint and its height equal to that of the landmark White House structure challenge the physical and symbolic priority of the President's house as envisioned in L'Enfant's design. Its strong neoclassical features — the rows of massive Corinthian columns with elaborate capitals and long expanses of two-story arched windows – overpower the more delicate – and modest – Ionic neoclassicism of the historic White House. The Ballroom design seems to shout power, Roman Empire. The White House and its curvilinear south porch more simply Roman Republic. As was intended and as should be.

The destruction of the old East Wing without any concern for rules and laws governing public opinion speaks for itself: a total disregard of the public's rightful role in decision-making for our public buildings and lands, a sacred trust. The lawsuit brought by the National Trust for Historic Preservation calls on the courts to uphold the rules and laws protecting this sacred trust and the National Mall Coalition strongly supports that appeal to the laws of our country.

In conclusion, the Coalition asks this Commission to defer for now any approvals of the Ballroom project. *Please do not set a precedent that will be difficult, if not impossible, to overturn.* We ask you to await the decision of the courts and not support the further breach of public trust. We hope you will advise the design team to scale back the size and height as well as tone down the neoclassical architectural features that overwhelm the modest White House design.

Submitted on February 18, 2026, by:

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¹ In L'Enfant's visionary plan the US Capitol was located on the highest hill (Capitol Hill), the President's House a mile away on another rise, and a monument to George Washington was to stand, on axis with both the Capitol and President's House, at the west end of a Grand Avenue dedicated to "public walks". That design geometry and Constitutional symbolism is the basis of today's Mall with the public open space of the Mall at its heart.