



Office of the Director

## Office of Planning Review of Commemorative Work Application

**TO:** Commemorative Works Committee  
**FROM:** Chris Shaheen, Program Manager, Office of Planning  
**DATE:** February 22, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Commemorative Works Application for the Lincoln: Emancipation Proclamation Freedom and Union Statue

### **Summary of Application and Recommendation**

The proposed statue of President Lincoln in front of the African American Civil War Museum is a commemorative work appropriate for its surrounding and furthers the plans, policies and values of the District of Columbia. Additional information is needed: 1) drawings of the statue showing the statue, base, and podium; and, 2) information on the purpose and use of the steps where the statue is located.

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends the Commemorative Works Committee (CWC) approve the application in concept so that the applicant can proceed with additional required reviews prior to final review by the CWC.

### **Background**

The African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation, a non-profit corporation with a mission to raise awareness of the United States Colored Troops who fought for the Union in the United States' Civil War, is proposing a statue of President Lincoln in public space controlled by the District Department of Transportation. The public space is adjacent to the African American Civil War Museum, which is part of the Archibald Grimke School at 1925 Vermont Avenue. The Museum is across the street from the African American Civil War Memorial. The proposed commemorative work is proposed to be placed on a podium integrated into stairs in front of the Grimke School building's north wing. The sidewalk and public space around the statue are designed as an extension of the African American Civil War Memorial. The statue of Lincoln is a total height of 5' and sits upon a podium that is 3'6" above the sidewalk. The statue is made from bronze and depicts President Lincoln seated as he signs the Emancipation Proclamation.

Due to its location in public space and in the Greater U Street Historic District, the statue is required to go through two reviews in addition to the Commemorative Work review process:

1. Public Space Committee; and,
2. Historic Preservation Office.

The applicant has submitted a public space application to the District Department of Transportation and is scheduled to be reviewed by the Public Space Committee (PSC) at their February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 meeting. The PSC review will provide further comment on the proposed location. The Historic Preservation Office has confirmed it has completed its review and approved the statue.

There is a strong connection between the commemorative work and the District of Columbia. It is located near the Civil War-era contraband Camp Barker that was home to runaway slaves eventually freed by President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. President Lincoln also routinely traveled past the location of the proposed commemorative work on his way to and from the White House to the summer cottage he used at the Soldiers Home.

### **Assessment of the Application**

#### *Location and Relationship to the Subject Matter*

The proposed site is appropriate considering the subject, use of the adjacent building, it's association to important aspects of slavery in the District of Columbia, and direct ties to President Lincoln:

- The Draft Commemorative Work Location Strategy identifies this as a potential "Shared Space" for a commemorative work site due to the location of a District-owned property along Vermont Avenue, which is identified in the strategy as a primary corridor;
- The statue, design of public space, and African American Civil War Museum are intended to be understood as an extension African American Civil War Memorial that is directly across Vermont Avenue from the proposed site; and,
- The commemorative work's setting is incorporated into a grand staircase leading to the original, main entrance to the Grimke School, close to the sidewalk where it is visually accessible, and entirely out of the pedestrian sidewalk; however, more information is needed on how the steps are used as part of the daily functioning on the building and the prominence of the proposed location.

There is a strong and direct connection between the proposed commemorative work and site specific to the District of Columbia. Slavery was legal in the District of Columbia during the Civil War until 1862 when Congress authorized the DC Compensated Emancipation Act authorizing President Lincoln to purchase the freedom of about 3,100 enslaved persons living in the District. At the time of the compensated emancipation, more than 3,500 mostly runaway slaves were living at contraband Camp Barker located in an area near the proposed commemorative work, between 11th and 13th Streets NW and from S Street south to Logan Circle. A few of the slaves living there were freed by the April 16, 1862 Act, but most were not because they did not have their owners' consent.

President Lincoln would also occasionally travel north along Vermont Avenue to reach the Soldiers Home from the White House, passing the location of the proposed statue. In late June 1862 while writing the Emancipation Proclamation, the President stopped and visited former slaves at the site of William Lloyd Garrison Elementary School, two blocks south of the commemorative work's proposed location. Several community institutions important to DC's African American history grew out of Camp Barker: Howard University Hospital (which evolved out of Camp Barker Freedman's Hospital), Metropolitan Baptist Church, Vermont Avenue Baptist Church, and the first African American residents in the area of what would become the center of African American culture in the District of Columbia along U Street.

#### *Proposed Work's Compatibility with District Policies and Values*

The proposed commemorative work is consistent with District policies and values:

- The commemorative work is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's policy to locate commemorative works outside of the Monumental Core;
- President Lincoln is a person consistent with values defined in the final report of Mayor Bowser's District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) Working Group that emphasized discouraging subjects that participated in slavery, systemic racism, mistreatment of, or actions that suppressed equality for, persons of color, women and LGBTQ communities and violation of the DC Human Rights Act;
- The design of public space and incorporation of the statue into the redevelopment of the Grimke School is consistent with recommendations in the Office of Planning's DUKE plan (2004) that specifically calls for distinct streetscape improvements in front of the school to visually connect it to the Memorial plaza across Vermont Avenue and to install public art in front of the school;
- The commemorative work's location furthers the goal of the ARTS-2 zone where it is located, which is intended to promote art-related uses, encourage pedestrian activity, and strengthen the design character and identity of the area; and,

#### *Materials Used in the Commemorative Work*

The materials proposed for the commemorative work are durable and appropriate for the subject. The statue and base are proposed to be bronze, a material that has historically been used for outdoor sculpture because of its durability. The material of the steps and podium where the statue is proposed to be placed is not specified in the application. More information on these materials is needed as part of the final review of this proposal.