



District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



March 17, 2008

Mr. Jonathan Mellon
Historic Preservation Review Board
801 North Capitol St NE, Suite 3000
Washington, DC 20002

RE: HPA #08-164, Brown AME Church, 130 14th St NE

Dear Mr. Mellon,

At our regularly scheduled and properly noticed meeting on March 13, 2008, our Commission voted 7-0 (with five commissioners required for a quorum) to oppose the above referenced application. Brown AME seeks to build a two story addition to the front of the church, enclosing what is now their front porch and creating a new vestibule. This existing porch already extends to the property line. They intend to build a new front porch and steps in front of that addition, beyond their property line into a public park, necessitating an additional walkway through that park to provide access to the new entrance. This triangle park is one of many small parks included in L'Enfant's original design.

The front porch, steps and walkway would encroach on several hundred square feet of a historic landmark adjacent to the church's property. This historic landmark is a public triangle park known as Reservation 236. The L'Enfant's Plan was designated as a historic landmark on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994. These small 'parklets' contained within the L'Enfant's Plan, such as Reservation 236, are included in the inventory of contributing features of that historic landmark.

In 1803 surveyor Nicholas King wrote the following argument against alteration of L'Enfant's Plan: "These spacious avenues and streets and open areas or public spaces, at the intersections of streets and avenues (so ornamental and conducive to the purity of the air) which yet remain **ought to be forever secured to the city**". Indeed, early defenders of these small parks argued that they should not be incorporated into adjacent lots or sold to private developers; that they "never should be liable to be appropriated to any private use or changed from their original purpose".¹

Brown AME contends that the purpose for the new porch is to maintain historic architectural integrity with the current front facade. However, a new porch that sits on Reservation 236 would be unnecessary without the addition of a new vestibule to the facade. The stated purpose for that new vestibule is to provide an elevator for the mobility-impaired. This is a laudable goal which could easily be accomplished by several alternative locations for the elevator within the existing structure not to mention the proposed addition on the southwest side of the church.

The seizure of any portion of Reservation 236 for private use will compromise the integrity of L'Enfant's Plan. If allowed in this instance, it opens the door for future requests. The cumulative effect of allowing even small pieces of reservations to be appropriated for private use is akin to death by a thousand cuts. We must insist that the plans for Brown AME be redrawn so that the building does not intrude on this historic landmark and that no portion of the park is appropriated for private use.

On behalf of the Commission,

Joseph Fengler
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

¹ Elizabeth Barthold, "The Predicament of the 'Parklets' - Understanding Washington's Smaller Parks," Washington History, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1993, pp. 28-25.