



June 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), I am writing regarding your recent appointments to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). ASLA applauds the racial and gender diversity of the members you appointed to the commission. ASLA strongly believes that diverse organizations can increase creativity, drive innovation, and achieve a broader range of decisions, services, and other critical outcomes.

However, ASLA is concerned about the diversity of professions of the current commissioners. After your recent appointments, five of the seven commissioners have an architecture background and—for only the second time in its century-plus history—the CFA does not have a single landscape architect serving.

The very first commission in 1910 included famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., FASLA, a founder of ASLA and son of Frederick Law Olmsted. Aside from an unfortunate lapse from 1994–2002, there has always been at least one landscape architect on the CFA, and from 2012-2019 there were three highly qualified and renowned landscape architects serving as commissioners, including Elizabeth K. Meyer, FASLA, who served as Vice Chairwoman from 2017 until January 2021.

Originally given advisory power over the design and location of monuments, statues, and fountains within the District of Columbia (DC), the CFA has had its responsibilities expanded through executive orders and legislation over the years. In addition to these original duties, the CFA also advises executive departments of the Federal Government on any matters of an aesthetic nature, especially those pertaining to landscape programs—including parks, memorials, and historic sites—that affect the appearance of the national capital city. In addition to its more DC-centric work, the CFA also has a role in overseeing American Battle Monuments and U.S. State Department properties abroad.

Based on its current responsibilities and duties, it is imperative that the CFA include one or more landscape architects to provide much-needed expertise and oversight for the many landscapes, historic sites, and other federal properties under the commission's purview. Landscape architects plan, design, and oversee community

master plans, campuses, memorials, parks, playgrounds, trails, roadways, recreational facilities, and civic spaces—including embassies and consulates worldwide. Landscape architects also work to preserve historically and culturally significant spaces, including historic sites and districts, and national battlefields and cemeteries. Without a landscape architect on the CFA, a large realm of important expertise is left untapped to the detriment of the commission and the advice it provides.

Based on the significant overlap between the current responsibilities of the CFA and the scope of work and expertise of landscape architects, I am respectfully urging you to appoint landscape architect(s) to the CFA as soon as possible. The lack of professional diversity on the currently constituted commission could lead to detrimental decisions and opinions that could last generations. The CFA is not merely an architectural board, and it must be as varied in its commissioners as it is in its responsibilities.

ASLA would be pleased to supply you with the names of highly qualified landscape architects who could bring their expertise to the CFA to better help it fulfill its mission. If you or your staff have any questions or would like to discuss this situation more please feel free to reach out to me or to contact ASLA Federal Government Affairs Manager Daniel Hart at dhart@asla.org or 202-216-2372.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Torey Carter-Conneen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Torey Carter-Conneen
Chief Executive Officer

About ASLA:

Founded in 1899, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) is the national professional association representing landscape architects. ASLA has nearly 15,000 members and 49 chapters, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Landscape architects analyze, plan, design, manage, and nurture the built and natural environments. The diversity and scale of work in landscape architecture is vast, and the mix of skills and expertise required make landscape architects uniquely qualified to create well-planned livable communities, leading the way in creating neighborhood master plans, managing stormwater, designing cutting-edge parks and other outdoor spaces, planning complex multimodal transportation corridors, and more.

CC: Director of the Office of Presidential Personnel, Amb. Catherine Russell