May 21, 2001

BZA 16744

Ronald E. Wilson
National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street, NW, North Lobby, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20576

Dear Mr. Wilson:

I have only recently become aware of Jay John Hellman's exciting, innovative, and visionary ideas concerning the redevelopment of the area around the intersection of New Jersey and Massachusetts avenues, NW, (Site 98 in the Memorials and Museums Master Plan Draft) and in particular his interest in commemorating this historic location in the L'Enfant Plan as potential sites for monuments to John Adams and to a representative New Jersey patriot.

My work with the U.S. Capitol Historical Society has brought me to a unique appreciation for how redevelopment of this area can enhance the Capitol's role in the historic and commemorative sense of place. Congressman Fred Schwengel, the late founding president of the Society, warmly supported Jay Hellman's efforts to reinvent the city in the age of the computer by focusing on New Jersey Avenue as a laboratory in which to work out innovative new uses, including placing a National Firefighters Museum at 439 New Jersey Avenue in the historic firehouse visually linked with the Capitol.

Providing as it does an axial sight plane to the U.S. Capitol and Union Station, and its vicinity to both of those key monumental and functional national centers, this location deserves better than it has received over the years, just as John Adams deserves far greater attention and credit than he has received until recently. Scholars only within the last twenty years have begun to credit Adams for the central role he played in the American Revolution and founding of the new Republic.

A monument to John Adams of Massachusetts, arguably the most central Founding Father, belongs on Massachusetts Avenue at the Capitol. In 1996, our Society sponsored a conference at which Professor John Ferling spoke about Adams's presidency and his relationship with Congress. After the conference, Prof. Ferling toured the Massachusetts Avenue site and wrote a follow-up letter to Jay, in which he enthusiastically endorsed the site. David McCullough's recent biography provides evidence of the newfound appreciation for Adams, and the bill recently introduced in Congress by Congressman Tim Roemer and Senator Edward Kennedy for a memorial to Adams testifies to the ready response of the public to the idea of an

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Adams Memorial.

The site envisioned for the Adams Memorial incorporates land already owned by the U.S. government. Furthermore, it could be greatly enhanced by allowing the small park to triple in size by including the unnecessary segment of G Street, making the memorial site contiguous to the grand sidewalks of Massachusetts and New Jersey Avenues.

Moreover, re-landscaping the sight lines along New Jersey Avenue in the spirit of the L'Enfant and McMillan Commission plans would dramatically open up the vista to the Capitol. As Christian Zapatka, author of *The American Landscape*, observed in a paper he wrote about New Jersey Avenue: ". . . it is strangely underdeveloped, underutilized and lackluster in character. Rather than lined with the prominent buildings and elegant sidewalks offering vistas of the nearby Capitol Dome . . . trees that line part of the sidewalk obstruct any view of the Capitol that might otherwise help to remind a pedestrian of the location's prominence."

The potential site for a memorial to a New Jersey patriot is one block south of the Adams Memorial site at F Street on a National Park Service reservation at the north end of Square 627. Names that come to mind for such a memorial include Richard Stockton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Francis Hopkinson, a signer of the Declaration and composer of America's first opera, Jonathan Dayton, signer of the Constitution and Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 4th and 5th Congresses and a political ally of John Adams, and Frederick Frelinghuysen, a member of the Continental Congress and founder of an influential New Jersey family whose prominence in state and national politics continues to this day.

The addition of memorials to Massachusetts and New Jersey patriots, along with the proposed National Firefighters Museum and the existing National Postal Museum and the Japanese American War Memorial now being completed at New Jersey Avenue and Louisiana Avenue, combined with re-landscaping, restores this neglected area to its deserved prominence. I heartily endorse the most serious consideration of Mr. Hellman's proposal.

Sincerely,

Donald R. Kennon

Donald R. Kennon, Ph.D.
Chief Historian

cc: Matthew Evans, John Parsons, Charles Atherton, Pamela Scott, Herb Franklin, Sen. Edward Kennedy, Rep. Tim Roemer, Christian Zapatka, David Childs FAIA, Roger Lewis FAIA, Suzanne Ganschinietz, Jay John Hellman