July 7, 2017

Ms. Nicole Floyd, AICP
Senior Planner
City of Olympia
601 4th Ave E.
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Ms. Floyd:

The National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP) is writing to express its deep concern about the proposed Views on 5th project now under review by the City of Olympia. For many years, citizens, agencies and numerous nation-wide organizations have advised the completion and protection of the Capitol Olympic Vista Park, to carry out the full intent of the original Olmsted Brothers’ historic design. To create a large multi-use development with the long vacant, non-conforming Capitol Center Building tower as the centerpiece would not only thwart this significant goal to complete such an iconic plan, but would irrevocably destroy the scenically unique Puget Sound vista which the Olmsted firm sought to highlight.

Established in 1980, the National Association for Olmsted Parks advances Olmsted principles and the legacy of irreplaceable parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people’s lives. It is the only national organization solely dedicated to preserving the Olmsted legacy by providing the advocacy, research and outreach needed to protect, restore and maintain these exemplary parks and landscapes, particularly in urban areas.

In the past, NAOP advocated for the park and related removal of the Capitol Center Building, also known as “the Mistake by the Lake,” in both writing and testimony before the City and State Legislature.

NAOP seeks fulfillment of the Olmsted Brothers’ powerful vision for the Washington State Capitol grounds and its extension across Capitol Lake and Olympia’s downtown isthmus to Budd Inlet on Puget Sound.
This one building’s intrusion degrades the panoramic vista from the Capitol view terrace and impedes the continuous flow of public open space along the view corridor intended by the Olmsted Brothers plan.

One hundred years ago, the Olmsted Brothers worked with architects Wilder and White to create a master plan for the Washington State Capitol Campus. A key aspect from the beginning was to integrate the Capitol grounds with the City of Olympia and the scenic power of the surrounding natural landscape. The ultimate Capitol Campus design includes strong organizing axes, sweeping lawns, framing forest, a reflecting lake, and panoramic views north to downtown Olympia, Puget Sound, and the Olympic Mountains. In 1912, and again in 1928, Olmsted Brothers’ plans featured north-south landscape vistas along with strong physical connections to the city.

The Washington State Capitol campus is a quintessential example of “borrowed scenery” that characterizes the Olmsted firm’s landscape design work in the Pacific Northwest. Legislators selected the site for its outstanding natural assets and iconic view potential. The Washington plan created by the Olmsted Brothers is widely considered their premier state capitol campus, echoing the principles set forth by the firm’s founder Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., when he designed the U.S. Capitol grounds, beginning in 1872.

The John C. Olmsted 1912 plan for the Washington State Capitol grounds specifically proposed an isthmus-spanning park linking Budd Inlet, a "Salt Water Pond" (now Capitol Lake) and the Capitol grounds. The isthmus was planned as a public civic area dating back to 1956 following the completion of Capitol Lake in 1951. Public acquisition of parcels of Isthmus property, demolition of existing buildings and incipient park construction will finally enable completion of Olmsted’s enduring vision for the citizens of Washington. Creation of Capitol Olympic Vista Park will secure seamless views and continuous public access between Puget Sound and the Capitol grounds. The proposed Views on 5th project represents a generational opportunity lost.

State lawmakers, citizens, and local residents have steadfastly advocated for, and invested in, the extension of the Capitol Campus to the isthmus. Consistent with historic intent that shaped the Olmsteds' preeminent state capitol plan, NAOP supports this objective without reservation.
We oppose the current Views on 5th proposal because it retains the derelict, ill-sited Capitol Center Building. If this project proceeds it will unilaterally prevent fulfillment of the compelling public vision that spans more than a century. We believe that development can and should go anywhere else than in this singular view corridor.

Sincerely,

Arleyn Levee, Hon. ASLA  
Co-Chair

Lucy Lawliss, FASLA  
Co-Chair

cc: Frank Kowsky, Eliza Davidson, Katie Comeau, Patrice Kish, Dan Marriott