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Restore Mass Ave pushes back on National Park Service plan to cut down large cedar tree by Emmet statue

EMBARGOED until 5 pm November 19, 2015

RMA Contact: Robert Nevitt rnevitt562@gmail.com | More at restoremassave.org/historic-initiative/

WASHINGTON DC (November 17, 2015) The proposed removal of a large Deodar cedar tree along Massachusetts Avenue is unnecessary, Restore Mass Ave (RMA) wrote in a formal Comment in a National Park Service (NPS) proceeding last week. The agency has proposed cutting down this tree as part of its “rehabilitation plan” for Federal Reservation 302, the federal land at the middle of the triangle bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, 24th and S Streets Northwest.^{1/} The huge, drooping, gray-green cedar is the notable landscape feature of the park and this part of Massachusetts Avenue. ^{2/}

The healthy tree partly overhangs a noted statue of Irish patriot Robert Emmet. ^{3/} The NPS proposes removing the tree to make the statue more visible. Also the statue’s curators at the Smithsonian American Art Museum have expressed concern that sap from this tree harms the bronze statue.

Some neighbors objected strongly to the NPS plan to remove this tree. Restore Mass Ave undertook research to see if statue and tree could co-exist. Based on expert advice, RMA said **the Deodar cedar can likely remain without sap drip harming the statue.** RMA also proposed planting two new shade trees away from the statue area. The RMA Comment and supporting material may be found at <http://restoremassave.org> under Tree Care on the Our PDFs page.

“RMA is devoted to **saving the healthy legacy trees** already here,” said President Deborah Shapley. RMA wrote that NPS can make the statue more visible by trimming the cedar’s lower branches. The NPS can make the statue made even more prominent by repairing the lighting installation there. Lighting would also make the park safer and more inviting.



Above: Emmet Park on Mass Ave between 24 and S Street in 2008, after vandalism to Deodar cedar. (Photo: RMA)

“Our goal is a flowing landscape connection between Mass Ave and the forested hill of Kalorama.”

Statues and big conifer trees can coexist, as they do in cemeteries and many other venues, RMA notes in the filing.

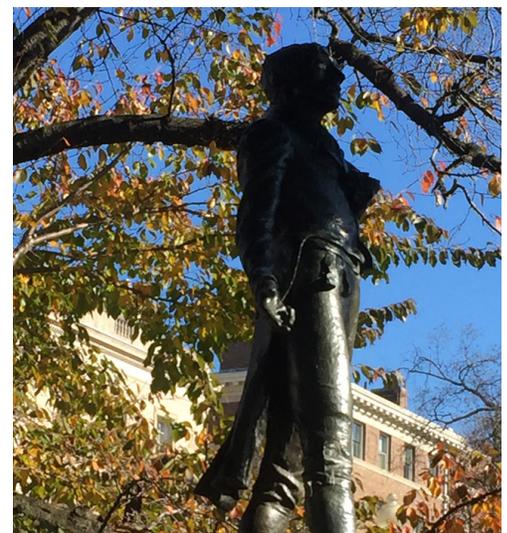
RMA’s mission is to expand Embassy Row’s tree canopy, so the Grand Avenue streetscape for the coming century resembles the original historic landscape of 100 years ago. At Emmet Park RMA proposed planting two shade trees on the upper slopes near 24th and S Streets, now a hot traffic corner. These tall, well-shaped trees would form a flowing landscape connection between Mass

Ave below and the hill of the former Kalorama estate, which has old-growth trees and significant architecture. 4/

The new trees could be planted in the strip of DC land along the curbs, so the NPS need not be involved directly. Possible sites for the two trees are shown in the RMA filing, and in the Emmet Park slideshow at <http://restoremassave.org/historic-initiative>.

RMA also wrote: a) Three Irish yews near the statue, which the NPS proposes, are not needed (too formal for this setting and block views of the statue from S Street. b) The park will be tidier if the trash can were restored. Finally c) the eight present trees in federal and city land in this triangle will be let alone.

A slideshow of images showing RMA work in the Emmet Park area is on the site’s Historic Initiative page. With Casey Trees, RMA planted **two trees** in DC land within the triangle: one is the **black gum** on the point by the bus stop planted in 2008; in 2011 it planted the **cherry** behind the bench, to make that spot more inviting. The **four DC street trees** on Mass Ave are mulched yearly by RMA Treekeepers and service workers. RMA arranged for the Chad Embassy (2401 Mass) to care for **three “Red Sunset” red maples** on S Street. In 2010, with Casey Trees, RMA planted **two “Valley Forge” elm trees** by the Embassy of Cameroon (2349 Mass). 5/



Above: Robert Emmet statue, by Jerome Connor, dedicated in 1917 and moved to the park in 1966.

A comment supporting RMA’s position 6/ was filed with NPS by Robert A, Enholm, Executive Director of The President Woodrow

Wilson House (2360 S Street), a National Trust property half a block from Emmet Park. President Wilson was present at the unveiling of the Emmet statue in 1917. The sculptor Jerome Connor presented Wilson with a 20-inch tall “maquette” of the work, which is displayed at the House today. “The park will be demonstrably improved by the attention NPS now proposed to give to it,” particularly if the Deodar cedar tree were saved, if the statue were lit and additional shade trees were planted, Enholm wrote.

In another supporting comment, Brian Conboy, a neighbor, noted that large-canopy trees are environmental “critical necessities” in urban areas. The NPS has a “very significant burden of proof” to show the benefits of removing the big Deodar cedar tree. “Hopefully a balance of interests can be worked out between NPS and the Smithsonian that will result in saving the tree.”

RMA seconds this sentiment.

Notes:

1/ NPS project homepage is at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=60430>.

NPS power point presentation to ANC October 19 is at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/documentsList.cfm?projectID=60430>

2/ *Cedrus deodarus* trees are native to the Himalaya mountains where forests of them grow to huge heights. “Deodar” comes from Sanskrit words meaning “wood of the gods.” They are a prominent landscape tree in our area, admired for their size, dramatic drooping branchlets and fragrant wood. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedrus_deodara.

3/ Robert Emmet was an Irish nationalist. He led a rebellion in Dublin in 1803, but the British captured, tried him for treason and executed him. Before sentencing, Emmet uttered a Speech from the Dock which echoed the American revolutionaries’ resistance to British tyranny. The speech secured Emmet’s posthumous fame, in Ireland and among Irish in America. The sculptor Jerome Connor created the statue in 1916. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Emmet_%28Connor%29

4/ *A Grand Avenue Revival; Massachusetts Avenue Landscape History & Design Guide*, Restore Mass Ave, 2014, pp. 8,9. Pdf is at <http://restoremassave.org/grand-avenue-revival-book/>

5/ RMA and Casey Trees’ planting of the gum tree and cherry aimed to be in the 12 strips of city land on the 24th and S Street sides. Baists boundary atlas of the park is in slideshow and attached to the RMA filing. While Catocin Construction worked at the Embassy of Cameroon at 2349 Mass, has carried water across 24th Street to

the young cherry, which has no source of water in the park. See RMA Tree Care Blog for January 2012. [http://
blog.restoremassave.org/search/label/Catocin%20Construction](http://blog.restoremassave.org/search/label/Catocin%20Construction).

6/ NPS reserves the right to make public Comments submitted to the agency.

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