



Calvert Vaux Preservation Alliance

PO Box 213
Staatsburg, NY 12580
www.calvertvaux.org

August 19, 2015

To: Town Board
Town of Poughkeepsie
Town Hall
One Overocker Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned about maintaining the historic integrity of the grounds and remaining original structures of Poughkeepsie's Hudson River Hospital site, designated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 1989. The grounds and buildings contain significant design elements by important nineteenth century designers Calvert Vaux, Frederick Law Olmsted and Frederick Clarke Withers. While we do not consider ourselves to be "anti-development," we do advocate for historic preservation and the concept of adaptive reuse. We hold that adaptive reuse dictates that the past can be incorporated into modern day usage and passed on to future generations in order to preserve our uniquely American heritage.

In his book, *The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America after 1850*, noted Architectural Historian and a cosigner of this letter Francis R. Kowsky has written of the Hudson River Hospital that "Withers' elevations were the first significant example in the United States of the application of High Victorian Gothic design to hospital construction." Professor Kowsky's words were quoted extensively in the National Park Service's landmark designation form. In addition, we know that Olmsted, Vaux & Co, who designed Manhattan's Central Park, Brooklyn's Prospect and Fort Greene Parks, among many other important designs, furnished plans for the hospital's grounds in 1866. This is corroborated by design documents held at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site (where the project is job number 12065) and correspondence contained in the Olmsted Papers at the Library of Congress from the period when Olmsted served on the committee authorized to choose a location for the hospital site.

We are glad to have learned that the entire Vaux and Olmsted "Great Lawn" will be preserved according to the developer's plans but remain concerned about the roads and landscapes as laid out in the original design. We also remain concerned about preserving the entire remains of Withers' designs for the administration building and its surviving wings. We refer the developers to the adaptive reuse of the similar National Historic Landmark structures at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center (designed by H. H. Richardson in 1870 with landscape plans by Olmsted and Vaux), currently undergoing restoration and construction as the Richardson Olmsted Complex in Buffalo.

In addition, we hope that the developers will avail themselves of federal and New York State tax credits for the preservation and adaptive reuse of the remaining elements of this historic site. These tax credits reward the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic sites in accordance with U.S. Department of the Interior standards.

Given that the site of the proposed Hudson Heritage development is located in the heart of the Hudson River National Historic Landmark District, designated in 1990, the opportunity to contribute to the thriving tourism economy of the mid-Hudson Valley should also be an important consideration. Our suggestion would be to incorporate the remaining elements of the Withers' designed main administration building and its wings into a historic heritage hotel, preserving its signature wide corridors in the process, to reflect the unique characteristics of the late nineteenth century mid-Hudson Valley for the enjoyment of tourists and visitors to the region.

Overall, we are pleased that the developers are undertaking this long awaited adaptive reuse project and will incorporate the significant landmark designated elements of the Hudson River Hospital site into their design. We strongly urge that these historic elements, specifically the "Great Lawn," remaining landscape and road design as well as the main administration building along with its surviving wings, be preserved to the fullest extent possible in their adaptive reuse.

Respectfully Submitted,

Calvert Vaux Preservation Alliance
Staatsburg, NY

Preservation League of New York State
Albany, NY

Springside Landscape Restoration
Poughkeepsie, NY

Hudson River Heritage
Rhinebeck, NY

J. Winthrop Aldrich - Retired New York State Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Albany, NY

Francis R. Kowsky - SUNY Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Buffalo, NY

Harvey K. Flad - Professor Emeritus of Geography
Vassar College
Poughkeepsie, NY