



HISTORIC ALBANY FOUNDATION

August 20, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Sheehan
Mayor
City Hall
Eagle Street
Albany, New York 12207

Dear Mayor Sheehan,

I am writing today on behalf of Historic Albany Foundation and our wish to have Capital Lights in the Park discontinued in Washington Park.

HAF's mission is to advocate for the City's built environment, which includes the city's historic carefully planned and designed urban parks. Celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, Washington Park is an important part of the City of Albany's historic fabric and an important cultural asset. Having been created in the 1870s in the style of Frederic Law Olmsted, the Washington Park Historic District was created around it, celebrating the houses that face the park and the park itself with all of the structures and monuments within it. The historic district nomination itself, done in 1972, notes that "[t]oday the park is acclaimed as a 'foremost example of the Nineteenth Century municipal garden still intact'" and notes it is "perhaps more important than ever before to the city and its inhabitants." Those statements are still true today and the Park is truly more important than ever with the COVID crisis bringing to light the need for the public to have access to outdoor areas where they can get fresh air and exercise safely.

Traditionally urban parks stemmed from the public health and city beautiful movements, bringing fresh air and greenery into the cities full of industrial and coal pollution, as well as a creating place of refuge and respite from daily city life. Washington Park has also long been an escape for mental, physical and spiritual health within walking distance of hundreds if not thousands of homes. The Washington Park Neighborhood as it is today is a direct result of the creation of the Park. Existing buildings received face lifts, new buildings were constructed in the latest fashion to take advantage of the health benefits and beautifully manicured gardens and lawns.

While Historic Albany appreciates the good works done by the Police Athletic League, and recognizes that Capital Holiday Lights in the Park is one of their largest fundraisers, we have to object to this event being located in Washington Park as the event causes continual and

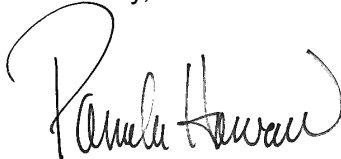
increasingly irreparable harm to this important historic resource. The usage of Washington Park for the car centered Capital Holiday Lights in the Park negates every intent the park was created for and physically damages the Park itself in many ways, in addition to the many quality of life issues the event creates for the surrounding historic neighborhoods.

First and foremost, Lights in the Park makes the Park unusable as it was intended by the public and as it is still used by the public the rest of the year. Non vehicular park-goers are not allowed in the City's largest public park and urban greenspace. The dense traffic significantly increases the exhaust in and around the Park, having a negative effect on landscape, its plantings and trees, and the surrounding historic homes. There are significant concerns over the displays near and on the trees themselves, causing damage to mature trees that create the peaceful and beautiful character of the Park. The wiring system is in no way sensitive to the landscape and creates hazards to public usage of the park. There has also been damage to berms that control water runoff in the park, creating additional damage with heavy storms.

Historic property owners within the City's local historic districts must get approval from the Historic Resources Commission to make any alteration to their building that is visible from the public right of way. This review is intended to protect the City's historic resources so that they may be in good condition and enjoyed by many generations to come, maintaining the very setting for our vibrant city. Washington Park at the very heart of the Washington Park Historic District and yet, Lights in the Park has no oversight from any regulatory board or entity that has the background to make educated decisions about the appropriateness of the actions taken or harm that may be caused through its installations. Our tax paying property owners should not be under more careful restrictions, while the Police Athletic League can do whatever it wants to a public owned historic resource that was intended for the benefit of the whole city.

Washington Park, its beauty, historic significance and place in our community, is worth maintaining and should not need saving. By allowing Capital Holiday Lights in the Park to continue, we risk the life of this park and it's place in our community. Historic Albany respectfully asks that you cease allowing this harmful event to take place in Washington Park to the detriment of our historic park, historic neighborhoods, and historic city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Howard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

Pamela Howard