



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2878

IN REPLY REFER TO:

I.A.2. (RS-PA)

April 14, 2015

Thomas M. Becker
President, Chautauqua Institution
P.O. Box 28
One Ames Ave
Chautauqua, NY 14722

Dear Mr. Becker:

Thank you for the opportunity for our office to make a site visit to the Chautauqua National Historic Landmark (NHL) District on March 9-10, 2015. The primary purpose of the visit was to gain a better understanding of the District and the proposed Amphitheater project, which is intended to increase the structure's function and capacity, as well as improve safety and accessibility. Although the National Park Service (NPS) does not have any formal review authority regarding this project, we are pleased that you accepted our offer to provide technical advice.

Overall, we are impressed with the extensive work that the Chautauqua Institution has accomplished over the years to preserve the District while adapting to changing needs. We wish to commend you for developing a strategic vision that will improve Chautauqua's current programming and that acknowledges that you are the stewards of a National Historic Landmark.

Based on our tour of the District, which included an overview of rehabilitation and preservation work on several historic structures, the in-depth tour of the Amphitheater, the information provided by the heads of the performance and education programs, and the discussion about meeting the mission and goals of the Institution while preserving the Amphitheater for the future, we would like to offer the following observations and recommendations:

The NHL District is significant as a collection of structures and for its continuum of use. Similar to other historic districts that encompass a wide range of buildings and functions, there have been changes over time, including rehabilitations, restorations, demolitions, and new construction. Even with these changes, we believe the District has retained a high level of integrity. We are pleased that you have developed architectural design guidelines for the District, and we encourage you to consider developing a district-wide

master plan. This plan would be a comprehensive framework for planning, design, and asset management, for both the built (buildings, utilities, roads and walkways, signage, lighting, etc.) and natural environment (trees and other vegetation, water systems, soils) to help guide your efforts in the future. The plan should include an inventory and analysis of existing conditions, developing long range goals for preservation and future development, and identifying shorter term priorities that might trigger more specific planning and design (such as a tree management plan, stormwater management plan, etc).

Built in 1892, the Amphitheater is a prominent structure within the District, but is also one of many buildings that comprise the District. It has been substantially improved and altered over the years to accommodate programmatic changes and to meet structural requirements. The Institution has good documentation about the alterations to the structure over time, and we recommend that you compile this information into a single document in order to clearly show the evolution of the building.

The Institution has committed time and effort into conducting studies over the past five years to explore the functionality, accessibility, sustainability, safety, and historic preservation of the Amphitheater. We understand that during 2014, you had determined that retaining in place the existing roof structure, one of the major character-defining features of the building, may be technically and financially infeasible due to building codes, geotechnical analysis, structural span requirements, and safety concerns. These studies also confirmed that the Amphitheater is at the center of the Institution's activities. We recommend that the use and function of the Amphitheater remain in its current place at the heart of the district.

During the site visit it appeared that there could be significant structural issues with the Amphitheater. We recommend that you consult with a professional engineer with expertise in similar historic structures to perform a structural analysis. The engineer should also provide you with recommendations regarding the long-term stability of the structure, even if the proposed project was not implemented.

We recommend that you continue to identify the character-defining qualities of the Amphitheater and how these qualities could be preserved as part of the project. For example, the configuration and materials of the roof, relationship of audience to performance space, the design and placement of the benches, the circulation patterns such as aisles, the openness as an outdoor assembly space, etc. are some of the features that define the character of the structure. The proposed project may require a large amount of intervention and replacement of historic materials, and may include dismantling and rebuilding the roof; therefore you should explore options to retain features where possible, such as reinstalling historic elements as part of the new design.

The Massey Organ is a significant feature of the Amphitheater, and we are pleased that it will be repaired and restored as part of the project. This is a major commitment that will ensure that the organ remains as a key feature of the structure.

The enlarged back of the house structure is considered an addition to the Amphitheater. There may be some options to refine the current design so that it is more compatible with

the surrounding buildings. If you wish, we would be pleased to review and comment on the design.

The landscape and setting of the Amphitheater is part of its significance. Although the weather conditions during the site visit didn't permit us to completely see the existing landscape, we would be available to review and comment on any new landscape designs for the area surrounding the Amphitheater.

In summary, we recognize your strong commitment to preserving and maintaining the Chautauqua NHL District, and the extensive and high-quality programming that is critical to maintaining a successful and on-going community. Our office would be pleased to continue to collaborate with you on this important project.

Thank you again for arranging the site visit for Kathryn Schlegel, historical landscape architect, and me. If you have any questions about the observations outlined in this letter, or wish to discuss any aspect of this project, or other projects within the District, please contact me at bonnie_halda@nps.gov or 215-597-5028.

Sincerely,



Bonnie J. Halda
Chief, Preservation Assistance