



October 2025

Editor

Washington Post

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Re: East Wing Gone

The article about the demolition of part of the White House (“The East Wing Is Gone, and Trump Turns to Damage Control,” October 23, 2025)—in particular the dismantling of the East Wing to build a ballroom—rightly highlights historic-preservation objections. But the implications go far deeper than simply preserving old structures.

The White House grounds, significantly reshaped and unified in 1934 by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., are more than just a component of the presidency’s physical footprint. They are a national symbol: the People’s House. Prior to World War II, the grounds were far more publicly accessible, as people were generally free to stroll and picnic before dark. This incredibly significant landscape embodies democratic ideals of access to public space for all. As such, the demolition of the East Wing to build a new 90,000-square-foot addition represents not only a crisis for historic preservation but also a shift from democratic restraint to personal or institutional aggrandizement.

Olmsted’s vision for landscapes was rooted in democratic ideals: welcoming, egalitarian green spaces. Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and the ensuing successor firms followed the overarching philosophy of designing parks and places for all people. In 1934, Olmsted Jr. unified the White House grounds after many presidential alterations and carried forward that idea of cohesion, of preserving the historic trees and the spatial integrity of the site.

These trees and landscapes connect generations, a living testament to the ideal of stewardship over impermanent dominance. To remove or radically alter that without the people's mandate is to tamper with this democratic symbol.

When changes are made to a National Historic Landmark, they are typically subject to federal historic preservation review processes, including consideration under the National Historic Preservation Act. Changes should also uphold the public-good values embedded in the site. The grounds of the White House are the property of the public and of our democracy. We deserve careful consideration of the project's broader implications for history, environment, and democratic access. Otherwise, we risk eroding not only bricks, mortar, and green space, but the very ideals those grounds are meant to represent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Breitkopf', written in a cursive style.

Sue Breitkopf,
President
Olmsted Network

**This Letter to the Editor was not selected by The Washington Post.*