

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

D. Hamilton

NCPC File No. 6179



AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL
WASHINGTON AVENUE (CANAL STREET) AND SECOND STREET, SW
WASHINGTON, DC

Submission by the National Park Service

March 25, 2004

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation, Inc., has submitted a design concept for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. The National Park Service has also initiated the Section 106 review for this proposal.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of design concept pursuant to the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 8905)

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the design concept for the American Veterans' Disabled for Life Memorial, Washington Avenue and Second Street, SW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 22.00(73.10)-41337.

Recommends that in the further development of the design, the applicant:

- Continue to study existing and anticipated transportation and vehicular movement around and through the memorial, and refine circulation patterns accordingly,
- Refine the design of the openings in the stone walls.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The total site area for the proposed memorial is 2.07 acres made up of three parcels. The primary memorial parcel is a triangular 1.16 acre site bounded by Washington Avenue, 2nd Street, and the historic alignment of C Street. The two other parcels provide supporting uses such as parking, drop-off, bus lay-by area, and pedestrian circulation and landscaping. The three parcels show an adjusted street configuration which returns C Street to its historic alignment. Currently, a diagonal segment of C Street bisects the site. This short segment was realigned from its historic location during the construction of the tunnel and ramp system for I-395 in the late 1960's. I-395 currently passes beneath the site.

In the immediate vicinity, the Bartholdi Park and Rayburn House Office Building are located across Washington Avenue northeast of the site; the Hubert H. Humphrey building and Food and Drug Administration building are located west and southwest of the site; the I-395 freeway tunnels are located south of the site; and the Capitol Grounds and Mall are located across Independence Avenue north of the site.

Background

The Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation (Foundation) was authorized by Public Law 106-348, enacted October 24, 2000, to erect a memorial to honor veterans who became disabled while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

At its October 10, 2001 meeting, the Commission approved the site location for the American Veterans' Disabled for Life Memorial at the Washington Avenue and Second Street SW. At this time, the Commission requested that the National Park Service (NPS) and the Foundation configure the siting and design of the proposed memorial to avoid encroaching into the C Street right-of-way, thus preserving the possibility of restoring C Street's historic alignment in the future.

Proposal

The proposed memorial is intended to be a commemoration of American veterans disabled for life. It would honor past, present, and future veterans, honoring their contribution to liberty and freedom. It is to express the nation's gratitude and serve as an eternal reminder of the human cost of conflict. The primary elements of the memorial include a central fire, a grove of trees fronted by a reflecting pool, framed by marble and glass walls:

- The fire element would emerge from the center of a black stone base, and be surrounded by a thin water mantle. The "flame" that rises from the water is intended to be a reminder of the hope that springs from endurance.
- The grove and reflecting pool would frame the view of the dome of the Capitol, and the pool would reflect that view.

- While the fire and grove together define the memorial, the stone and glass walls form its enclosure and delineate its paths. The walls give the memorial context within the city, screen distracting sights and sounds, and also enhance the focus towards the Capitol.
- The memorial's primary entrance is on the north and would draw pedestrian traffic from the Mall. The secondary entry is at the corner of 2nd and C Streets, where car and bus drop-off occurs. The third entry to the memorial would be at the corner of Washington Avenue and C Street. A small parking area south of the principle memorial site, across C Street, would be used for short term parking, primarily for disabled visitors.
- The solid stone walls would be inscribed with stories of bravery and sacrifice. These "Walls of Loss" would bear the collective gravity of the veterans' stories. The glass walls, "Walls of Light," would contrast with the stone walls and contain inscriptions of democracy and the principles that are intended to validate the losses indicated on the stone walls.
- The stone walls would be faced with white marble (honed finish) or white granite. Openings in the walls would frame views of the Capitol and other features on the National Mall.
- Glass walls would be laminated, with varying levels of transparency, translucency, and reflectivity.
- The internal walks and benches would be paved with grey granite in a pattern of thermal and honed finishes. The pattern of these walkways have not yet been developed.
- Works of art, which have yet to be selected, would be incorporated into the memorial to further enhance the overall design.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff recommends approval of the design concept for the Americans Disabled for Life Memorial:

- The site of the memorial is consistent with the NCPC Memorials and Museums Master Plan and has the potential to serve as a gateway connecting the Mall with future development along South Capitol Street.
- The proposed concept design is responsive to the previous request of the Commission in that the design calls for the re-establishment of the historic alignment of C Street.
- The proposal would invigorate and enhance an area that is currently devoid of character and very fragmented. Additionally, the proposed memorial would create a strong dynamic visual relationship with the nearby Bartholdi Park and Fountain.

- Approximately one-half of the site's acreage is used to facilitate pedestrian circulation in an area that has heavy vehicle movements.
- The elements within the principal memorial space are dignified and serve well to memorialize disabled American veterans as well as strengthen the desired visual linkage to the U.S. Capitol.

However, as the NPS and the Foundation further develop plans for the memorial, staff recommends that the applicant continue to study existing and anticipated transportation and vehicular movement around and through the memorial, and refine circulation patterns accordingly. The applicant should examine the configuration of the cross walks at the northern, southwestern, and southeastern entrances to the memorial site. Additionally, vehicle movements should also continued to be studied as a result of the recent closing of First Street for security reasons. Staff also has concerns regarding the openings in the stone walls, which resemble gun ports, and recommends that the design of these elements be refined to eliminate this unfortunate resemblance.

PROJECT CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed concept is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. One of the goals of the Preservation and Historic Features element is to "Preserve and enhance the urban spaces, circles, squares, and plazas generated by the L'Enfant Plan and McMillan Plan and the unique views and vistas of the National Capital."

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposed design concept does not include any security elements, and as such, is not inconsistent with the Urban Design and Security Plan.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the proposal at its March 18th, 2004 meeting and approved the concept. The Commission also recommended that the overall design be simplified and that additional study was needed regarding pedestrian circulation patterns around the site.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Park Service had developed an early programmatic environmental assessment for the memorial regarding site location issues in October 2001. The Park Service is currently developing a supplementing environmental assessment which addresses design and revised site access issues and their potential effects. The Commission staff will endeavor to achieve cooperating status in that NEPA document preparation effort. Doing so would provide the most expeditious mechanism to adopt the prepared EA and allow the Commission to quickly review the proposal and meet the independent responsibility of NEPA compliance for the Commission's future actions regarding any memorial approvals.

Staff recommends the Commission highlight to the National Park Service its expectation to be identified as a cooperating agency in the further development of any form of NEPA document prepared by the Park Service for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on March 10th 2004, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Historic Preservation Act

The NPS has initiated the Section 106 review required pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.