

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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708 Jackson Place, N. W.,
Washington, D. C.

Tuesday, November 10, 1981

The Commission convened at 10:05 a.m., J. Carter
Brown, Chairman, presiding.

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

J. CARTER BROWN, Chairman
ED STONE
WALTER NETSCH
SONDRA MYERS
HAROLD BURSON
ALLEN NOVAK

STAFF PRESENT:

CHARLES ATHERTON, Secretary
DONALD MYER, Assistant Secretary
JEFFERY CARSON
RICHARD RYAN

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We move then to the Park Service.

MR. ATHERTON: That is correct. The design and development of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

As you will recall, when the Commission originally reviewed the design, there were three areas in that the Commission wanted to see further study. The lettering was one of those areas. The second was the problem generated by the potential hazard of falling off or walking off the wall if one was not aware of it. And the third was the access to handicapped people going down the sloping grass to the apex of the triangle. All three of these areas have been studied and the architects today would like to present their solutions for those particular problems.

MR. NETSCH: We understand it has been staked out for our final review.

MR. ATHERTON: It has.

It is true that the site has been staked out today?

CHAIRMAN BROWN: It has a change in dimension.

MR. COOPER: It has changed in dimension slightly.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Our final vote could be suspended until we have had a chance to see it.

MR. NETSCH: I believe you would understand that.

MR. COOPER: If we may, without the Klieg lights this

morning, we would like to review the conceptual design. We said we would come back with a complete package this time and we have done so. We appreciated your cooperation in letting us get the granite underway.

Maya Ying Lin would like to present the response in terms of her original concept to the Park Service and other requirements of safety.

MS. LIN: The first slide should be a basic idea of what the model is and what the design is at this point. Dealing with safety, we have talked to the Park Service, explored the different possibilities. There have been the ideas of a swale or a ha-ha or the use of ground covering. The swale was sort of like a ditch and made it look like it was falling over. The use of any ground covering made it effectively impossible to get up to the top of the wall. I was looking for a warning. What this curb does, it starts out a little behind the main wall at a height of zero and goes to, at its end, a distance of a foot. So what you have effectively got is a warning system. No one running can come up and go over the wall without stepping or tripping on this. There is an 11-foot walkway so someone could move easily.

What I like about it is it is visible from the side, from the side where there is the danger of falling off, but

from the other side -- so when you are on the other aspect, you only see the grass. That is what it looks like. The second feature was the handicapped accessibility, and what we designed was a one to 24 slope so that the actual slope is not even considered a ramp but because of the fact of the traffic patterns and the fact that a lot of people will be coming, walking along the wall, we felt it was necessary to put it. As the wall is granite, the path will be made of a black honed grate. There is a one-inch grass strip in there and yet it is close enough of a distance so that you could come up and touch the wall from the path. At the center, the wall^K is approximately eight feet wide and it tapers to a width of four feet, making it a very -- sort of, I felt, in concurrence with the wall.

The third problem was the drainage.

MR. NETSCH: I didn't understand that.

What tapers, the width?

MS. LIN: The width of the wall^K so it is eight feet down here and four feet wide at the end. The names begin five panels in. The first five panels are so small that names would not effectively be on it. So we started the walk at that time. So the walk is a part of the memorial. It does not try to connect with the Park Service path system. It is

solely to let people enter the memorial and go down the path and take in the traffic that could possibly kill the grass.

The third problem we explored was the drainage. This is just an overview of the memorial. But going back two slides, we have been exploring a stabilized turf so that you could walk anywhere in the memorial. It rests beneath the surface protecting the roots, and it also has a sheeting on it so water can drain through the grass and would prevent fogginess. Also we found out there is a drainage system through Constitution Avenue so it can gravity drain. There is no need for mechanical pumping devices or anything like that.

The last slides are to give you an idea of what the memorial looks like from the path system. I feel that it retains the basic design theme, the concept. I don't think the path or the curb really affects my original design.

MR. NETSCH: This curb gets to be one foot high and is made of what?

MS. LIN: Black concrete. In a sense, it echoes the wall behind it.

MR. NETSCH: The second thing is we are looking at a model. The grading is obviously not going to be contoured like that so the walk is a continuous surface that is acceptable

to a wheelchair.

MR. COOPER: One to 20 is the criterion and we are one to 24. One to 20 allows us not to have intermedial leveling and platforms so we are home free on that.

MR. NETSCH: I want that to be in the record as specifically responding to that need.

MR. COOPER: I would like to take it a little further.

Because the proposal removes the paved walkway surface from the pathway system in Constitution Gardens, we are making a connection with stabilized turf matting which prevents any kind of sogginess and wheelchair digging in during the fall seasons, to be able to get on the level to the path, to the paved surface and on the paved surface a wheelchair can move very readily on a one to 24 slope. So we think we have been responsive in dealing with a depressed monument.

Probably the stiffest problem we have had, the memorial as originally proposed in the competition did not have the adequate surface to get 57,000, et cetera, names on it. We were hoping to produce names at about three-quarters of an inch high. We have thought all the way along on this -- I would guess I would like to probably tell you our response and then^{out} go back and tell you in detail. the thing is there

We need a full scale markup. The contract, first, is much greater. But this gave us an opportunity to begin to view previewing distances. We set this up as the apex of the site so you have to obviously go through the gyrations of dropping this thing down. But you can see pretty much what you are going to see.

Next slide. Here you see the full scale markup. Here you see the end that we are proposing which is 246 feet away from that point to that point. Here you see the opposite end. There is a boring truck drilling on the site the day this was taken. So if you begin to drop this in, you can approximate what the model is telling you. Of course, the actual names would only be about 230 feet because the last 10 feet is just a small thing to fit in. They are into the ground. It is really nothing and then the pathway doesn't start until the names start. If you were standing at the top looking back towards the Lincoln Memorial, you can begin to see the same thing happening. You are going to see this on the site. We won't have the panels on site because of the iffiness of weather, but by seeing this you can draw your own conclusion. So this goes from there to there.

Looking the other direction, we have to move this out from behind the boring truck. In actuality, the thing is there

so that pathway leads towards the memorial. So we don't split the reflection of the memorial.

Now, this sample, getting down on the ground, this would be pretty much the way it would feel. In close, you begin to see the just awe inspiring magnitude of the 57,000 names. There has only been one other memorial, the one in France, that has more names inscribed on it.

MR. NETSCH: The one in back of Notre Dame?

MS. LIN: The Sun Memorial.

MR. COOPER: Which has 87,000 or whatever.

We have been working with John Benson, the engraver from Newport, in trying to unravel this. This is what we have come up with, the ragging out from the apex in both directions. A brief prologue and epilogue in order to establish a context done in the same size as the letters itself. The line to line spacing is .83 inches. The letter itself is .53 inches, a little over a half inch. We are dealing with a classic optimum font and we are doing a sandblasting technique. There are roughly -- we are doing a consistent five names to a line in order to be able to maintain a very good spacing. You can see a lot of rivering on this because we have taken the same little piece of paper and moved it. In actuality, that wouldn't happen. Names are quite legible.

MR. BURSON: Are you using all capitals. In between each one of the names we are putting a dot. In order to code the dead, missing, uncounted for, we have needed to put together -- because of the importance of the chronological listing, going outbound toward the right and turning to the center, the prologue, epilogue idea, we have a clearly dead veteran, a marking, for missing and unaccounted for a marking, and for missing but returned, in case this happens -- we don't propose to take the name off at all but rather change the indication to this classic new life symbol, and missing but later found. As you can see, this can be implanted over. So we think we have done something responsive to the sociological and psychological aspects.

MR. NETSCH: The wheel, you don't actually have any of those?

MR. COOPER: No. That is only if it happens. But you have to cover it because there are 1,700 families that are concerned.

MR. NETSCH: I think that is marvelous. That is very responsive.

MR. BURSON: Where would they go?

MR. COOPER: Right after the name. You can see it is just a simple mark. This will not be obtrusive. You will

have to really look to see it. But we think that is perfectly okay. We have resisted gridding. We have resisted pulling missing out of the sequence. This seems to us to be a pretty good way of going about it. I think you can see that of the optimum space, and actually we are going to improve it one more step -- sandblasting works very, very well. It is a flared gothic letter. We don't need to deal with the serif and yet it really has a classic shape to it. The normally inscribed engraving letter is going for three to five dollars a letter. We need to do something that is two dollars a name. Sandblasting is obviously the answer. We have needed to develop a process that eliminates the need for stenciling and we have done it. We are using a process quite similar to silk-screening where there is a mass negative and an impression is applied to this polished surface. That is light exposed, washing away the exposed area, leaving a residual rubber neoprene kind of film in place to the sandblasted areas. Then you can see the first run.

Have you all had a chance to look at this? Let's get the lights back on.

First of all, this panel illustrates tender loving care. While the granite got here from Sweden unbroken, between Cleveland and Washington, D. C., it got into seven pieces and

we hope you will forgive us even though it was packed the same way. I guess American traffic is rougher.

I have explained the pacing. In an attempt to hold the length of the memorial down, while we asked for this to be 42 inches, we have been able to cut out two inches in length. So the margin over here is two inches greater than what we are proposing.

As you can imagine, this -- every time you change this one micrometer, the implications are thousands. The sand-blasting is not quite perfect. This was the first run on this scale. The blasting will actually be done with an automated arm that will move across. We need at least four paces in order to get the flatness. This has to be done for sample purposes by hand. In actuality, it is roughly a 32nd of an inch deep. It will turn out more uniform.

There are a couple of places where the letters are worn away but they have lost their optimum style.

MR. NOVAK: How do you deal with that or will that not be a problem?

MR. COOPER: No, it will not be.

MR. NOVAK: How about errors?

MR. COOPER: No, because this is a photographic process. We will work directly off the Pentagon list, putting

this through linotype into, you know, a typographical form which will then be proofed by VVMF volunteers who will carefully proof the original, and from there there is no possibility of error. It will be done via computer for the linotype operation, but there is the one step where you have to make a human translation.

It is chronology of death. So we don't have alphabetization at all.

MR. NETSCH: How far is the walk from the wall?

CHAIRMAN BROWN: That is one of the more controversial aspects.

MR. COOPER. Maya's original design was based on the chronology going outward from the focus. Now, the issue of the locator has been discussed at length. I have shown you what we are doing with the missing. Let's talk about the locator. We have talked with the Park Service at length about this and the way we have come down is there will be a kind of rolodex device that will be in a weatherproof casing that will be placed at the tourmobile stand, which is on Constitution Avenue between the signers -- the 13 signers -- or whatever it is and the Vietnam Memorial, which would be the spot that the tourists will be approaching from, and this will also be printed literature that will be available that you can buy

that will give you the name, right panel number, line, so you will be able to find it.

MS. MYERS: Do you think the memorial is less meaningful if it is alphabetized?

MS. LIN: I think so. The idea of using an alphabet has seem to me a bit bureaucratic. It gives not so much importance to the individual as a person. In making this a Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the memorial is a sequence in time, 1961 through '75. It includes all special recognition to the dead. If you put them alphabetically, it sounds like a roster of dead names and you begin to lose the feeling. I imagine someone looking it up and finding the name. If that person meant something, it gave them some time and made it more special.

MR. BURSON: As we approach the year 2000, it seems archaic to have a rolodex when it seems --

MS. LIN: It is a matter of maintenance.

MR. NETSCH: I have a feeling there might be something better. That is a minor part. I think this is beautiful. This is the only memorial where individuals are recognized except for the four men on the Iwo Jima. On those 21 inches, you are going to find at certain times birthdays, anniversaries, you will find a flag or a Stage flag or a real flower or a

plastic flower. I think it will be marvelous. For that reason, the sense of time can be even more meaningful. I certainly hope that the detractors of this will soon understand the real personal power of this. The only one I know is the one in back of Notre Dame which is also very evocative, for the holocaust. I think this will be very, very successful. I like the rambling edge. It will also assist someone in find their place after they have used the preceding -- the system at the center wherever it is. They have (a) the year, and (b) the graphic visualization. I hope it can be done that way.

MR. COOPER: I think it can. The coding is very simple. It is right or left and so many lines down.

MR. NETSCH: Also using time, if there was a particular moment when friends also dies, they are easier to find without going back and forth in an alphabetical way. I think her decision was absolutely correct. The only thing I worry about is the sogginess problem. You say natural drainage. Sometimes Nature doesn't like to naturally perform.

MR. COOPER: You want me to talk about that? I will be happy to.

MR. NETSCH: She is a very good designer but I don't make her a mechanical engineer.

MR. COOPER: I am not either but let me talk to the issue. We are concerned about this, too, and obviously the topography is leading water into this area. Fundamentally, as the water comes in, we will have an anchor mat which is woven nylon stuff that looks like horsehair, something like that, that the grass is going to be growing through. When this is coupled with a sheet material, you begin to get sheet drainage which prevents the whole thing from going soggy to begin with. So, within 15 minutes after a rain, because you have got this area that is all tipped, you are going to begin to get the bulk off. Actually, we are meeting this afternoon with those people.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: You get the water which way, percolating through or --

MR. COOPER: I think of a football field. We will have an underground drainage system which will move into a sendback. We will take water off at every joint in the walkway, and the walk at the center will have a lift up panel.

MR. NETSCH: There is physically a drain, a pipe?

MR. COOPER: Yes. There is physically a fall from this pipe to the drain?

MR. NETSCH: It will go to something?

MR. COOPER: Yes.

MR. NETSCH: I didn't understand that.

MR. COOPER: It will naturally fall into the Washington drainage system through a big pipe.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: What happens in time of flood? Have you given this any thought? This is in a floodplain.

MR. ATHERTON: No. There is a berm on the north side of the reflecting pool. There are Park Service officials --

CHAIRMAN BROWN: On a 50-year basis, isn't there a threat that all Constitution Avenue will be under water?

MR. ATHERTON: In the Agnes flood, when it was a 100-year flood level, there was no water in that vicinity at all. It was all protected by the berm on 17th Street and north of the reflecting pool.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Glad we asked that question.

PARK SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE: Directly in this area there is a flood control device. It does require a sandbagging technique. We are prepared to do to meet the grade on the Washington Monument. That will protect all 17th Street. It does require the manual bagging across 17th.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: That drain will show then?

MR. COOPER: No, it will not.

MR. NETSCH: At each joint there wouldn't be a grate or will there?

MR. COOPER: The way we are planning to do this now, we have a half-inch joint or something, I guess it is three-eighths, between each of the panels, and we will drain straight through the hole, the walk panel joints.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: In the walk itself?

MR. NETSCH: There is a crack between and we hope that that will accept the water and not the mud.

MR. COOPER: Then, of course, there is an underground drainage system throughout this whole ditched area which is where the bulk of the water will come.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: I am just --

MR. COOPER: No big French drains.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: From an aesthetic point of view, I think people accept the presence of drains.

MR. NETSCH: Wait until you see the post office.

Our paving pattern with the drains, the sidewalk grills -- I think it is wise if they can do that, but I also know, being a baseball fan, White Sox, after all the drainage, after a downpour, ball players are slopping around in six inches of water and it goes squish, squish, squish.

MR. BURSON: Drainage is the least of your problems.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: You are going down the drain without it.

MR. NETSCH: I am just concerned about -- I think technologically you can solve it over time. The problem is having a nice summer deluge and then the sun comes out and then everybody wants to come over here. We all want this to work. The grass, suddenly there is a deluge -- having done the Air Force Academy Chapel and having so many people go through and having had a problem or two, I know -- how quick people are to respond.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Or couldn't the last two stones in your walkway be a grill material that would be the same color?

MR. COOPER: You wouldn't need to go from the granite. We could do it if we had to.

MR. NETSCH: I know you are as interested as we, but there will be even more pressure to use the walk after the water.

MR. COOPER: Because this is such an issue, can I say a few more things about this? We have really looked into this engineered turf thing and the systems that have been implanted by the agronomy section at Purdue University that are in the Purdue Stadium, in the Orange Bowl, some college campuses, designed to accomplish this thing that you are talking about, of draining the stuff very swiftly and

protecting roots. They are getting some remarkable results out of the engineered turf thing.

MR. BURSON: If you saw the Miami-Notre Dame game, you could not believe -- I think it rained about three inches during the course of the game, some phenomenal amount of rain, and they still played football and it didn't chew the field up, and also they didn't have -- even the hydroplaning that you get in the normal astroturf coating.

MR. COOPER: This is not astroturf.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: It is real grass?

MR. COOPER: Yes.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: It is just as much fun to be tackled on.

MR. COOPER: It is softer.

MR. NETSCH: I have one other question.

What is the saying that occurs? Is there something that reminds the stranger in the year 2000 that doesn't know what Vietnam means except a location on a map. It may not even be on a map. You know, countries disappear. Is there something that identifies this?

MS. LIN: Yes. In going with the panels as pages out of a book, there is the epilogue and the prologue. The prologue will be dealing with a general introduction, very

apolitical, simply stating that the people who are named here are those of the dead and of the missing and, in general, introduces you to the Vietnam veterans. I think Bob Doubek can cite it for you.

MR. DOUBEK: The prologue reads, "In honor of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order that they were taken from us."

And the epilogue reads as follows, "Our Nation remembers the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built through private donations from the American people. Dedicated November 11, 1982."

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Okay.

Do we have any comments from anyone?

MR. NETSCH: I believe that the questions this Commission has asked have been carefully responded to and I for one would like to give my formal approval.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Do we have a motion and a second?

MR. NETSCH: Motion.

MR. NOVAK: Second.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: All those in favor?

(Show of hands.)

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Approved.

MR. COOPER: We thank you.

MR. ATHERTON: We skipped two items on the first page, Appendix I and the Shipstead Appendix on page 2.

MR. STONE: Just as a matter of curiosity, we have no jurisdiction in downtown Washington?

MR. ATHERTON: Only in the sense that projects might be constructed within the RLA process. Then they would bring that project, like Metro Center and Gallery Place, to the Commission. But in the general business area, no.

MR. STONE: I noticed an enormous hole in the ground next to the National Geographic.

MR. ATHERTON: I haven't seen it but that is not our jurisdiction.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: It isn't. However, there is a coincidence, I am on the Board of the National Geographic and on the Building Committee and helped in the selection of the architects.

The handicapped ramp for Georgetown Library caught my eye. It has gone back for restudy?

MR. ATHERTON: The Board sent it back.

MR. NETSCH: We will see it eventually?