

World War I Memorial Section 106 Consulting Parties Meeting

February 9, 2017

11:00 a.m.

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Conference Room

Agencies: Glenn DeMarr, Maureen Joseph (National Park Service-National Capital Region); Catherine Dewey, Mike Commisso (National Park Service-National Mall and Memorial Parks); Diane Sullivan, Matt Flis, Lee Webb (National Capital Planning Commission); Thomas Luebke, Sarah Batcheler, Daniel Fox (U.S. Commission of Fine Arts); Chris Wilson (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation); Nora Theodore via phone (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region III); Andrew Lewis, Michael Robb (District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office); Mark Wick via phone (District of Columbia Department of Public Works)

Attendees: John Fondersmith (Committee of 100 on the Federal City); Rebecca Miller (DC Preservation League); Darwina Neal (Association of Oldest Inhabitants of DC); Jo-Ann Neuhaus (Penn Quarter Neighborhood Association); Charles Birnbaum, Nord Wennerstrom (The Cultural Landscape Foundation)

Project Team: Edwin Fountain, Libby O'Connell, Dale Archer (WWI Centennial Commission); Joe Weishaar (U Studio); Phoebe Lickwar (Forge Landscape Architecture); Monica Pascatore (GWWO); Alan Harwood, Claire Sale, Rachel Lloyd (AECOM)

Introduction

Everybody introduced themselves.

Presentation

Alan Harwood (AECOM) provided a review of the undertaking and information about the site context. He noted that the central design concern is the balance between the park and a memorial, and the balance between the preservation of the park and its enhancement as a memorial.

Phoebe Lickwar (Forge Landscape Architecture) provided an overview of the project history, site location and context, and existing conditions. The presentation described the sites' role within Pennsylvania Avenue, the transitional landscape, spatial organization, and current plantings. Phoebe reviewed the objectives of the World War I Memorial, noting that the bas-relief wall has been the primary memorial element throughout the design process.

Phoebe then presented the two designs that were developed in response to comments from previous consultations. The key features of each design are outlined below:

Pool & Plaza Concept

- The concept recognizes that the existing park is spatially organized around the low plaza and pool.
- For the existing park to operate as a national World War I Memorial, the primary commemorative element (the bas-relief wall) must be set within the central landscape plaza.
- The central low plaza would be adapted to feature the bas-relief wall.
- A flagpole would occupy a circular plinth at the kiosk site.

- The vertical surfaces of the tree planters along Pennsylvania Avenue would be rebuilt in bronze and inscribed with WWI stories.

Scrim & Green Concept

- The concept recognizes that the symmetrical bas-relief wall offers the most commemorative impact when set within a space which reflects its dimension, scale, and axuality.
- The scale of the wall in the memorial precinct properly expresses the magnitude of service and sacrifice of American forces in the Great War.
- A flag pole and plinth would replace the kiosk.
- The concept provides a greater choice of universally-accessible circulation throughout the park.

Discussion Summary

The following is intended to be a summary of key discussion points. It is not intended to serve as a transcript or legal record.

Scale and Placement of Wall

- The length and placement of the wall was determined by the space needed to convey the full memorial narrative and the desire for an east-facing wall to achieve appropriate shading of the bas-relief
- The size of the paving area east of the wall was determined by the estimated 30 feet distance from the wall required to fully see the entire bas-relief.
- The text panels included in previous designs have been removed.
- The team considered having water meet the wall, but dismissed the approach from further consideration based on concerns for future maintenance problems. Additionally, the design team also dismissed a cascade of water as a design option, fearing that the moving water would overshadow the wall.
- The World War I Commission and the National Park Service (NPS) confirmed that the touching of the wall by visitors would be acceptable.

Replacement of Kiosk

- The designs include replacing the kiosk with a flagpole and substantive plinth with commemorative content.

Replacement of Vegetation

- Change of crepe myrtles would increase the space for each plant and improve their viability and maintenance.

Alteration of Pool

- The pool would be altered in the Pool & Plaza concept; during the winter months, the pool would be drained.
- The pool size for the Scrim & Green concept was made smaller in order to have an event space on the new lawn, which would also provide relief, especially during the winter, of the dominant hardscape of the current site.

Accessibility and Circulation

- The circulation would be similar to the current park under the Pool & Plaza concept. The central portion of the park would be accessible from the sidewalk via the northern portion of the site around the kiosk.
- The walkway inserted to the south and west of the pool, under both concepts, would meet the bas-relief wall. While providing a path to experience the memorial wall, the walkway would also separate the pool from the stairs.
- The fish scale tile would be removed and replaced due to maintenance and accessibility problems.

Programming

- Programming at the site needs to be considered. The World War I Commission would like to have event space at the site.

Consulting Parties Comments

Overall

- The removal of the cascade fountain would alter the feeling of the park.
- It would be helpful to hear the terms preservation and rehabilitation used to identify specific changes to the park. Also, it would be helpful to show the areas that would be rehabilitated and the areas that would be preserved.
- Participants asked if changes to views from the Willard Hotel would be affected.
- The design should consider the possibility of a larger pool that could function as a plaza in the evening.

Pool & Plaza Concept

- The Pool & Plaza concept would allow better circulation than the Scrim & Green concept; if the stairs were further opened on the western edge, it would allow more interaction with the original Friedberg design. Additionally, a smaller wall would appear more as an object. The Scrim & Green concept appears more static.
- Many of the elements of the site appear to be preserved and grouped, but do not necessarily form a cohesive area. The wall at the west end, the steps along the north and south, and the Pershing Memorial.

Scrim & Green Concept

- The Scrim & Green concept alters the hierarchy of the park by weakening the Pershing memorial relative to the new memorial wall and plaza.
- The Scrim & Green is weaker along Pennsylvania Avenue. The flattening of the topography makes the park less appealing and makes the area feel too enclosed. It also takes space from the memorial and makes it a sidewalk. The low area of the Pool & Plaza would be more inviting to visitors.
- The Scrim & Green destroys much of the park, which has been determined as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
- The scrim would be interactive, and the lawn would be useful for events. The scrim is smaller than the pool and would not need to be emptied in the winter.

Determination of Adverse Effects

Mike Commisso (NPS-NAMA) summarized the preliminary draft determination of effects table prepared for the two concepts.

- L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington: At this time, no adverse effects have been identified under the Pool & Plaza or the Scrim & Green concepts.
- Pennsylvania Avenue NW-White House Cultural Landscape Contributing Features: changes in land use have been identified as a potential adverse effect under both the Pool & Plaza and the Scrim & Green concepts.
- Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site: At this time, no adverse effect has been identified under the Pool & Plaza or the Scrim & Green concepts.
- Pershing Park: The Pool & Plaza and the Scrim & Green concepts would result in adverse effects due to changes in built features and the water feature. The Scrim & Green concept would also result in an adverse effect due to changes in the spatial organization and the vegetation at the site.
- Revising the pool and fountain would result in the most major adverse effect on the park's design. Alterations to the planting plan would also result in a major adverse effect; retaining the existing plant species would provide a simple solution.

Next Steps

The presentation and draft determination of adverse effects chart will be posted to the NPS PEPC system online to receive additional comments. The World War I Memorial will be reviewed at the next CFA meeting on February 16, 2017 and the next NCPC meeting on March 2, 2018. NPS closed the meeting by thanking the participants and stating that feedback is welcome. A following Section 106 Consulting Parties meeting is anticipated for April 2017.