

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 5907



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL MEMORIAL
TIDAL BASIN, WEST POTOMAC PARK
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the National Park Service

July 3, 2008

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc. (the Foundation) has submitted preliminary site and building plans for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial to be located in West Potomac Park at the Tidal Basin. The three main elements of the preliminary design include the *Mountain of Despair*, the curved *Inscription Wall* forming the main plaza area of the memorial interior, and the *Stone of Hope* that features the likeness of Dr. King centered within the plaza. The preliminary plans submitted for the National Memorial further the design of the concept of the *Stone of Hope* breaking free from the *Mountain of Despair*. The preliminary plans now fully depict the Visitor Contact Building in its new location and design.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of preliminary site and building plans pursuant to Public Law 104-333, Public Law 105-201, and Public Law 99-952, as amended and the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 8905)

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary site and building plans for the memorial's Visitor Contact Station/Bookstore/Restroom Building only, as shown on the NCPC Map File No. 1.51(73.10)-42570, and;

Notes that the Commission supports the overall design of the memorial, but is unable to move forward at this time because of unresolved issues surrounding the proposed introduction by the National Park Service of perimeter security elements that will impact the memorial design, and because the location of West Basin Drive is subject to change during the conclusion of the Section 106 consultation process;

Discourages the National Park Service from adding perimeter security to the design of the memorial because it is likely to disrupt the design concept for the memorial;

Defers preliminary approval of the memorial other than the Visitor Contact Station/Bookstore/Restroom Building, and requires the applicant to:

- Provide the final alignment and roadway design for West Basin Drive.
- Provide a design for proposed security elements for the memorial, if the National Park Service demonstrates that such security elements are necessary. The submission for perimeter security elements must include a threat assessment supporting the need for, and design and placement of proposed perimeter security elements in accordance with: the Commission’s submission requirements; the Commission’s National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan Objectives and Policies (adopted May 5, 2005); an analysis by the Park Service of how such perimeter security measures are supported in the existing NEPA document for the memorial project (or supplemental NEPA documentation); and evidence of Section 106 compliance for the introduction of perimeter security elements.
- Provide preliminary and final design for the sculpture for the *Stone of Hope*.

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DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Background

The NPS has submitted, on behalf of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc. (the Foundation) the preliminary design for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial.

Site

The site for the memorial is a four-acre, triangular-shaped parcel of land located in West



PROJECT SITE VICINITY LOCATION

Potomac Park on the northwestern side of the Tidal Basin. The boundaries generally include Independence Avenue on the north, the Tidal Basin along the south and east, and a realigned West Basin Drive on the west. The larger setting includes views of the Washington Monument and across the Tidal Basin to the Jefferson Memorial.

The authorizing legislation for the memorial was signed by President Clinton on November 12, 1996. The Commission approved the site for the memorial at its December 2, 1999 meeting.

Preliminary Design Proposal

The preliminary plans submitted for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial implement a project design that is centered on a geometric relationship. The three main elements of the preliminary design include the *Mountain of Despair*, the crescent *Inscription Wall* forming the main plaza area of the memorial interior, and the *Stone of Hope* that features the likeness of Dr. King centered within the plaza. The preliminary plans now depict the revised location of a Visitor Contact Building for the memorial and its intended associated features of a circulation plaza and landscaping.

The primary vehicle approach to the memorial is maintained from Independence Avenue on the north and from West Basin Drive on the west. The principal memorial pedestrian access is provided from the intersection of Independence Avenue and West Basin Drive. Additional access points are from connecting walkways at Independence Avenue and from West Basin Drive further east and south of the main memorial entrance respectively.

The submitted preliminary plans further develop the design direction for the following elements of the memorial:

- The *Stone of Hope*, which features the relief sculpture of Dr. King, maintains its approved elevation of 30 feet-9 inches in height, and has been more fully designed as to its method of construction and its base composition and placement within the plaza pavement. Actual elevation design of the sculpture and physical details of the image in stone are still under development, and will be presented in the final project design submission to the Commission.
- The detailed building and interior space design of the visitor contact station and the expanded use of its area for public restrooms and a bookstore.
- Changes in the preliminary design for the entry plaza situated at the front of the memorial facing the intersection of Independence Avenue and West Basin Drive. The revision now provides a refined and landscaped edge to the entry, with the western plaza areas at West Basin Drive forming a forecourt granite wall that exhibits the title of the memorial and has curved end walls near the sidewalk at the forecourt entry along Independence Avenue and West Basin Drive.

- The memorial interior inscription wall lighting has been modified from the concept design to a continuous below ground light trench in the plaza at the base of the wall. Changes were introduced in response to issues about lighting coverage and the barrier created by the ground surface location of earlier light locations.

Of the preliminary design features, the location and details of the combined Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building are the elements that the Commission has not earlier reviewed or commented on in detail. Moreover, because of the building's location, its connection to the memorial has required introducing a pedestrian crossing point across West Basin Drive. However, the important end-product of the building's location is that it will better focus the approach of a majority of memorial visitors to the central memorial forecourt. Thus, people will experience the memorial from the intended and most desirable direction, by approaching and passing through the *Mountain of Despair* portal pathway, and enter into the plaza featuring the *Stone of Hope*.

The Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building, situated at the west side of West Basin Drive, is approximately 60 feet south of the forecourt entrance to the memorial. A 40-foot wide distinct paving pedestrian cross-walk connects the building and forecourt, and features cast-in-place concrete as the surface material.

The building's exterior consists of granite stone panels, decorative glazing, aluminum window walls, insulated glazing, metal wall panels, and a sun screen system of louvers. Doors are glass with metal framing at the Bookstore and Visitor Contact area, while at the Restrooms the doors are full metal clad hollow-core doors. Metal utility doors are exhibited on the west façade, at the utility rooms.

The building's stone panel exterior consists of 1¼ inch granite veneer backed by 2-inch rigid insulation. The glass curtain wall systems at the retail area are aluminum mullions spaced at 3 feet-10 inches square. The Bookstore's window area has an aluminum shade system of 4-inch wide louvers situated in the mid-height area of the window walls. The translucent curtain walls of the restrooms, at the south end of the building, are spaced on a metal frame module of 4 feet – 7 inches square. The Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building roof consists of a flat, polymer-modified bituminous roofing built on rigid insulation over a metal deck. The highest level of the roof features a one-foot parapet that is faced in the granite veneer.

At the exterior building plaza, the area has an exposed aggregate concrete pavement that is covered by the 8 feet of overhang from the bookstore entrance. Three feet of overhang exists at the sides of the building, for about two-thirds the length, along the building's east and west facades. The plaza contains five granite benches and a high tree canopy that overshadows the seating areas.

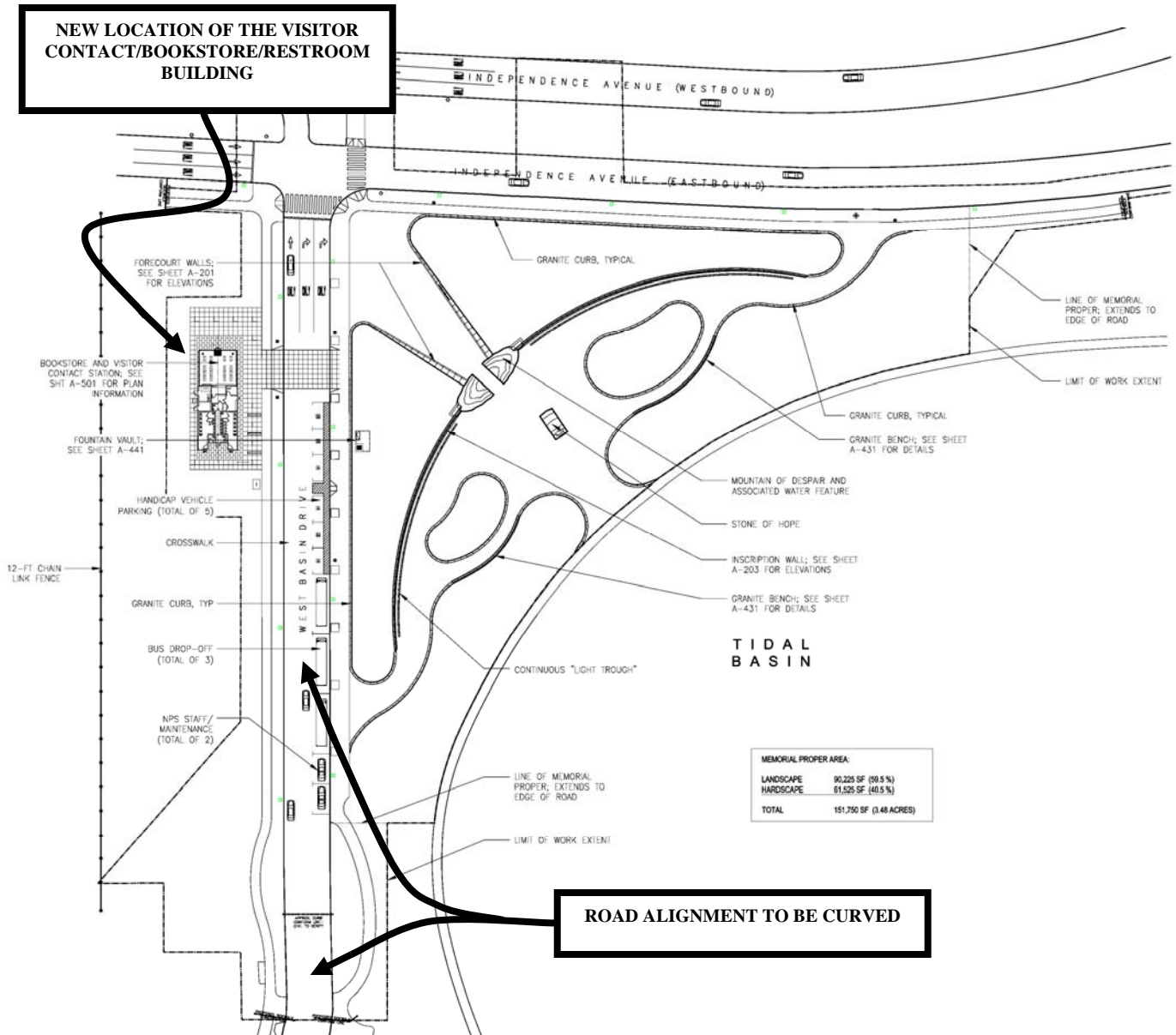
At the memorial itself, the most significant change is the night lighting scheme at the inscription wall that has been re-designed to place a "lighting trench" at the base of the wall. This covered trench contains the light fixtures focused to the elevated wall surfaces and is covered by a flush-

mounted louver that is level with the interior memorial plaza pavement. A detail of this system is shown on page 13.

The final aspect of the submission is the refinement of the plant material design of the memorial that now features additional cherry trees, particularly on the embankment of the memorial, and additional ornamental shrubs (Compact Pink Abelia and Dwarf Sweetspire) and Winter Jasmine that may overhang the inscription wall periodically. Moreover, additional canopy trees have been located at the forecourt area near West Basin Drive.



**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL MEMORIAL
2006 REVISED CONCEPT SITE PLAN**



PRELIMINARY SITE AND BUILDING PLAN OF THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL MEMORIAL

The preliminary landscape plans identify all trees to be 4 to 6 inch caliper specimens and all shrubs to be 18 to 30 inches in height. The planting design of the memorial also features significant areas of bio-retention and soil permeability through the use of structural-cell subsurface structures placed under the West Basin Drive sidewalks and Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building plaza.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its December 1, 2005 meeting, the Commission commented favorably on the overall design concept for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial except for:

- The horizontal bridge of the Memorial Walk, adjacent to the “Mountain of Despair,” which destroys the intended strong visual relationship between the signature “Mountain of Despair” and “Stone of Hope.”
- The narrow entrance portal through the “Mountain of Despair” because it creates the potential to impede visitor movements through the memorial’s main entrance.
- The Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk.

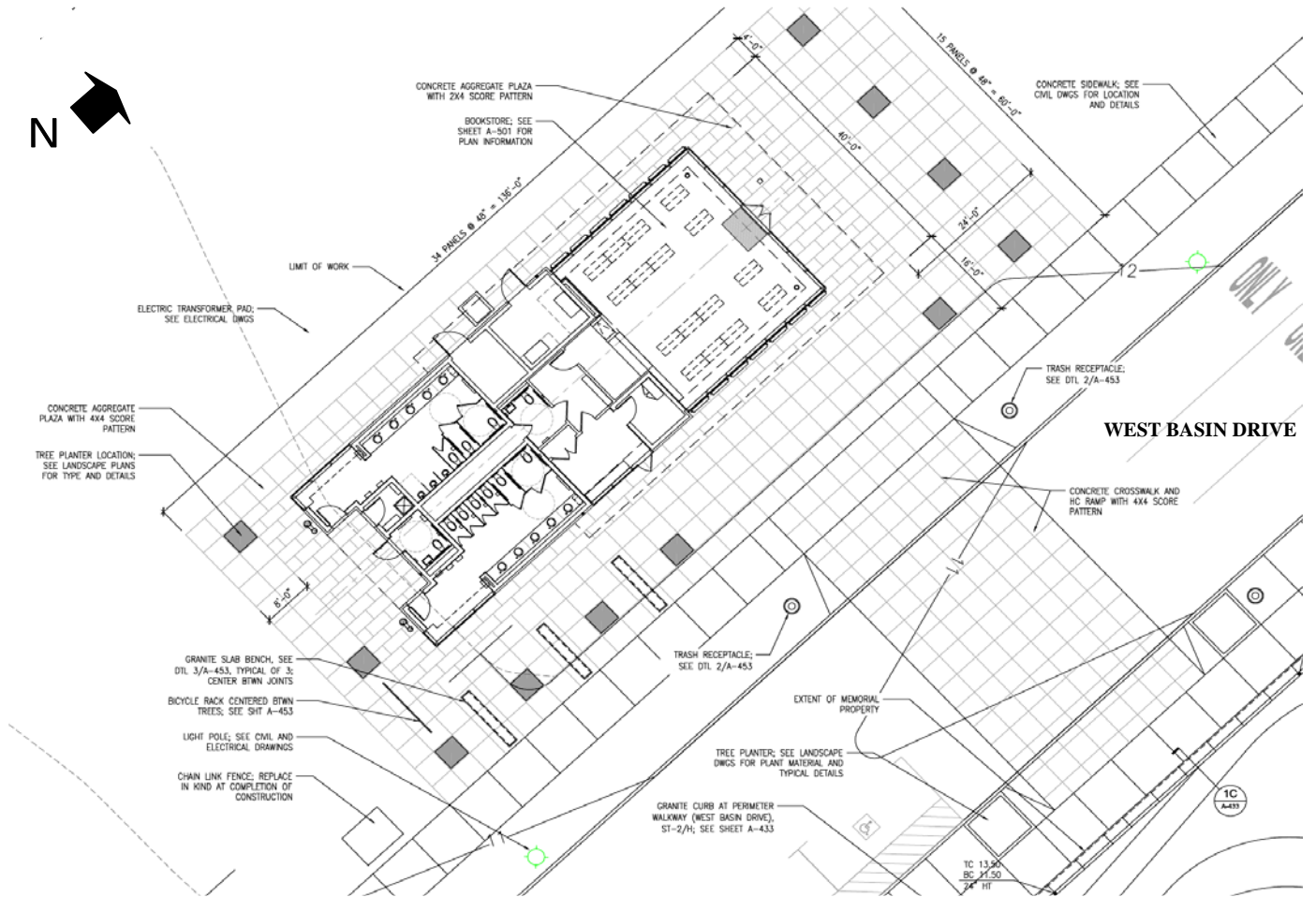
The Commission also recommended that the National Park Service and the Foundation, as they develop preliminary design plans for the memorial:

- Redesign the entrance portal between the Mountain of Despair to remove the bridge of the Memorial Walk that interrupts views to the Stone of Hope and beyond, and to provide more space for visitor movement in this entry area.
- Provide more detailed photo simulations that clearly indicate the visual impact that the berm of the proposed memorial would have on views to the Tidal Basin and beyond.
- Coordinate with the Park Service on the size, location, and programmatic requirements for the Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk.

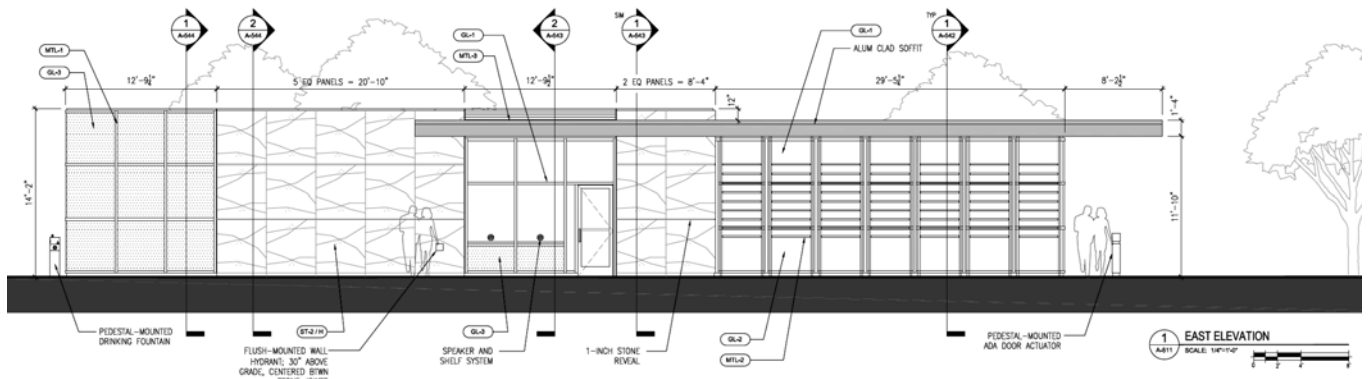
At the Commission’s April 2006 meeting the Commission:

- Commended the Foundation for arriving at a simpler and refined focus to the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial. The revisions appropriately respond to the Commission’s earlier review comments.
- Commented favorably on the revised design concept for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.51(73.10)-41988, and reminded the Foundation to coordinate with the Park Service on the size, location, and programmatic requirements for the Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk.
- Recommended that the opening of the Mountain of Despair be returned to its original design concept of 12 feet, to reinforce the fundamental concept of the Stone of Hope appearing to have been pulled forward from the Mountain of Despair.

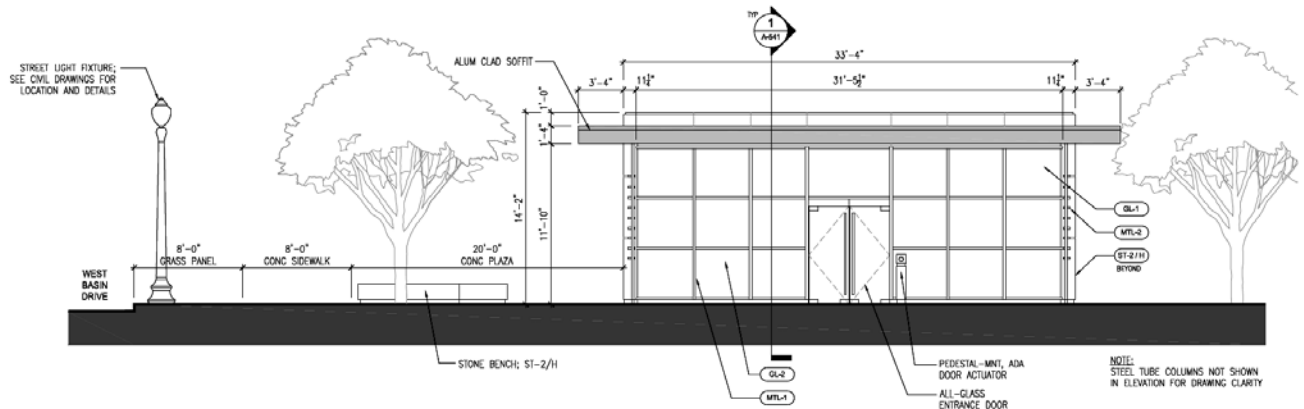
Review of the project at the Commission’s December 2006 meeting resulted in the Commission commenting favorably on the revised design concept for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, as shown on the NCPC filed plans.



PRELIMINARY SITE AND BUILDING PLAN OF VISITOR CONTACT BOOKSTORE/RESTROOM BUILDING



EAST ELEVATION OF VISITOR CONTACT/BOOKSTORE/RESTROOM BUILDING



NORTH ELEVATION OF VISITOR CONTACT/BOOKSTORE/RESTROOM BUILDING



PERSEPECTIVE VIEW OF VISITOR CENTER/BOOKSTORE/RESTROOM BUILDING AS SEEN FROM NORTH

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff is pleased with the progress and preliminary design of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial. The design details included in the preliminary design for the building and many memorial features are highly refined and clearly noted. Furthermore, staff finds the preliminary design of the Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building is light and simple in its material composition; subdued in its massing; and is appropriately located to best serve the memorial's visitors.

Staff has become aware in recent weeks that the Park Service and the Foundation are evaluating and may incorporate a realignment of the south end of West Basin Drive in order to achieve added curvature to the road at the southwest area of the memorial, pursuant to District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office recommendations. Consequently the submitted plans for West Basin Drive are subject to change to reflect this evaluation, which is also the subject of further Section 106 consultation that began on June 30, 2008.

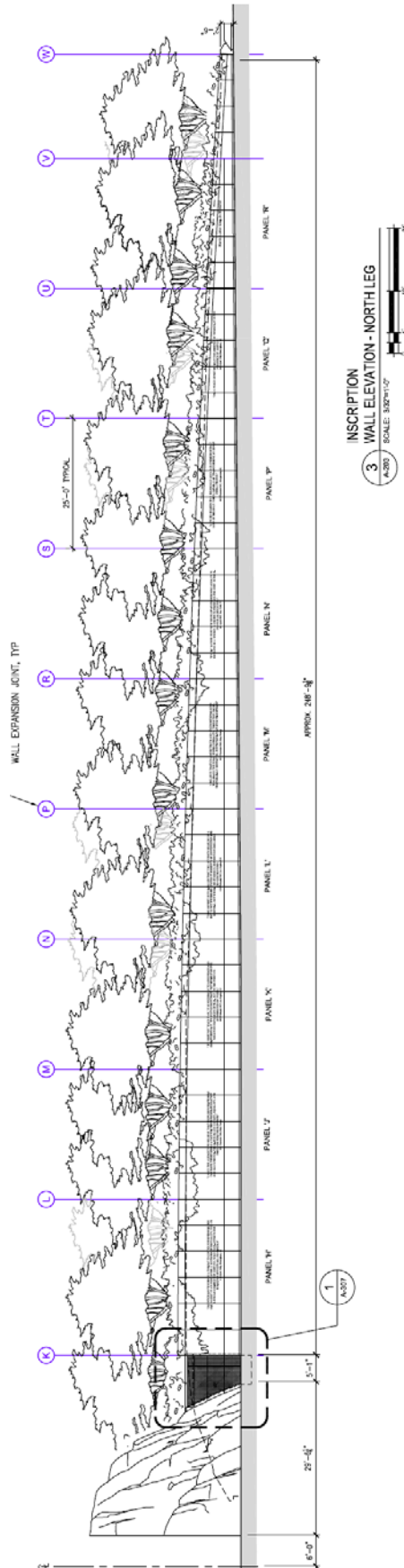
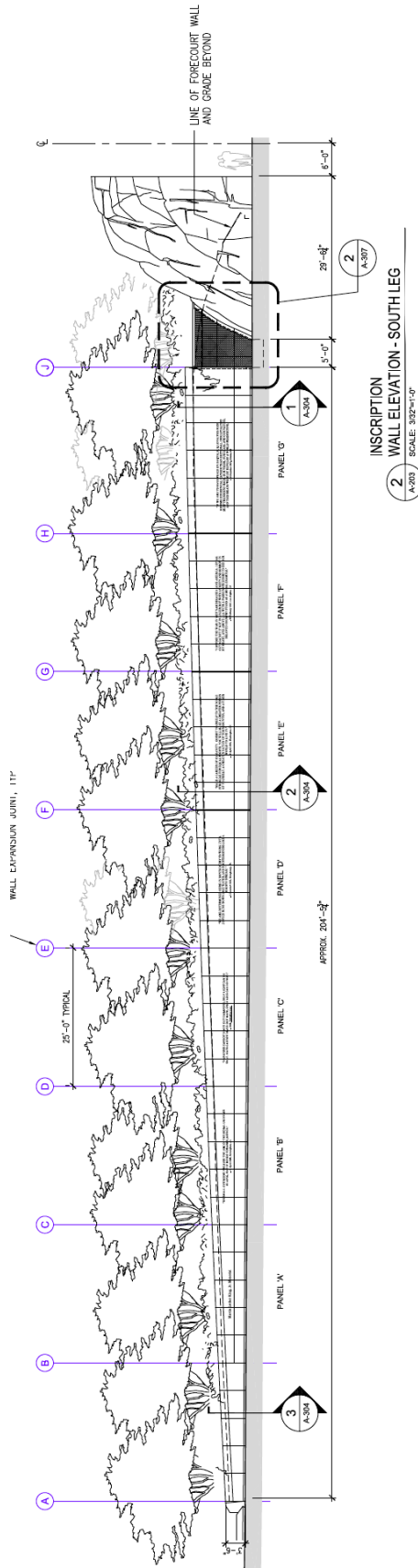
Of more significant concern is that staff has been informed by the Park Service in the past two weeks that a security evaluation of the present design is necessary and will likely result in security barriers at the three entry points to the memorial. At present, the Park Service is considering placing bollards into the memorial design, but has not yet settled on a security solution. NCPC staff has requested a security threat assessment be provided to justify the inclusion of security barriers if the Park Service decides to proceed with requiring them. Staff recommends that the imposition of security barriers into this carefully designed memorial is likely to change the nature of the memorial design enough that granting preliminary approval now would be premature. Consequently, staff recommends the Commission not approve the preliminary site plans for the memorial. In full, the following additional information is required to be submitted before staff can fully evaluate the effects of security elements and other outstanding design changes on the memorial design:

- A revised alignment and roadway design of West Basin Drive.
- Proposed design and location of security elements, if security is deemed necessary. The submission must include a threat assessment, evidence of compliance with NCPC submission requirements and design policies for perimeter security, and evidence of compliance with NHPA and NEPA.
- Proposed design changes for the sculpture for the *Stone of Hope*.

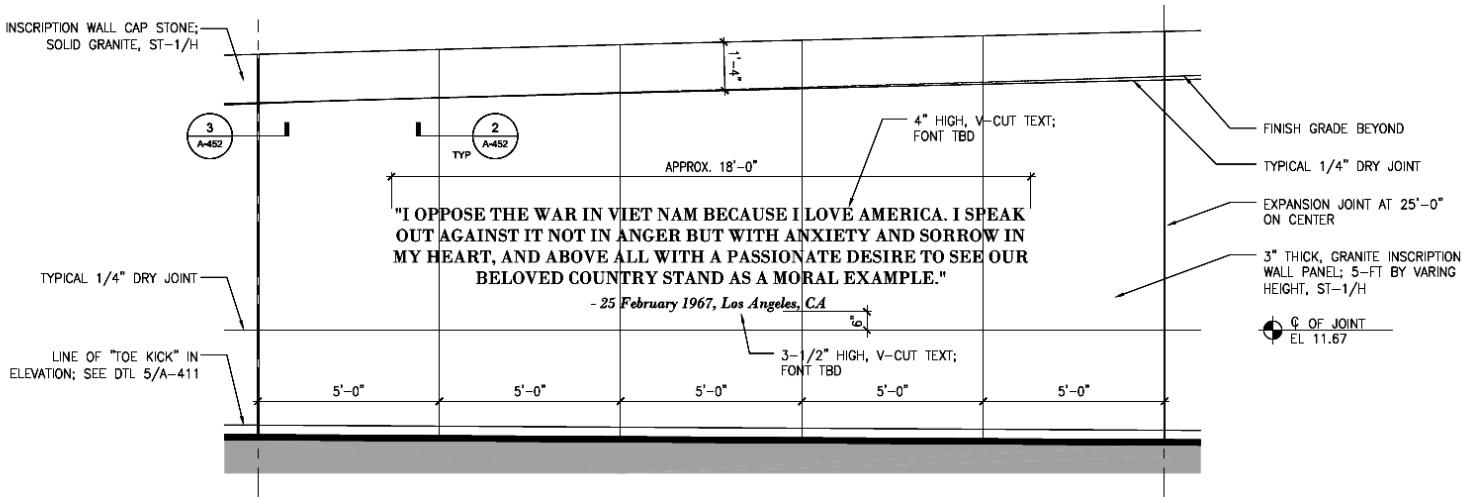
As noted by the earlier description of the sculpture issues, staff was present on June 19th when the Foundation introduced a revised image to the *Stone of Hope* at the Commission of Fine Arts. Staff believes the Foundation and Park Service should submit that revision to NCPC for review at the September Commission meeting along with the other noted items.

Consequently, the staff recommends the Commission:

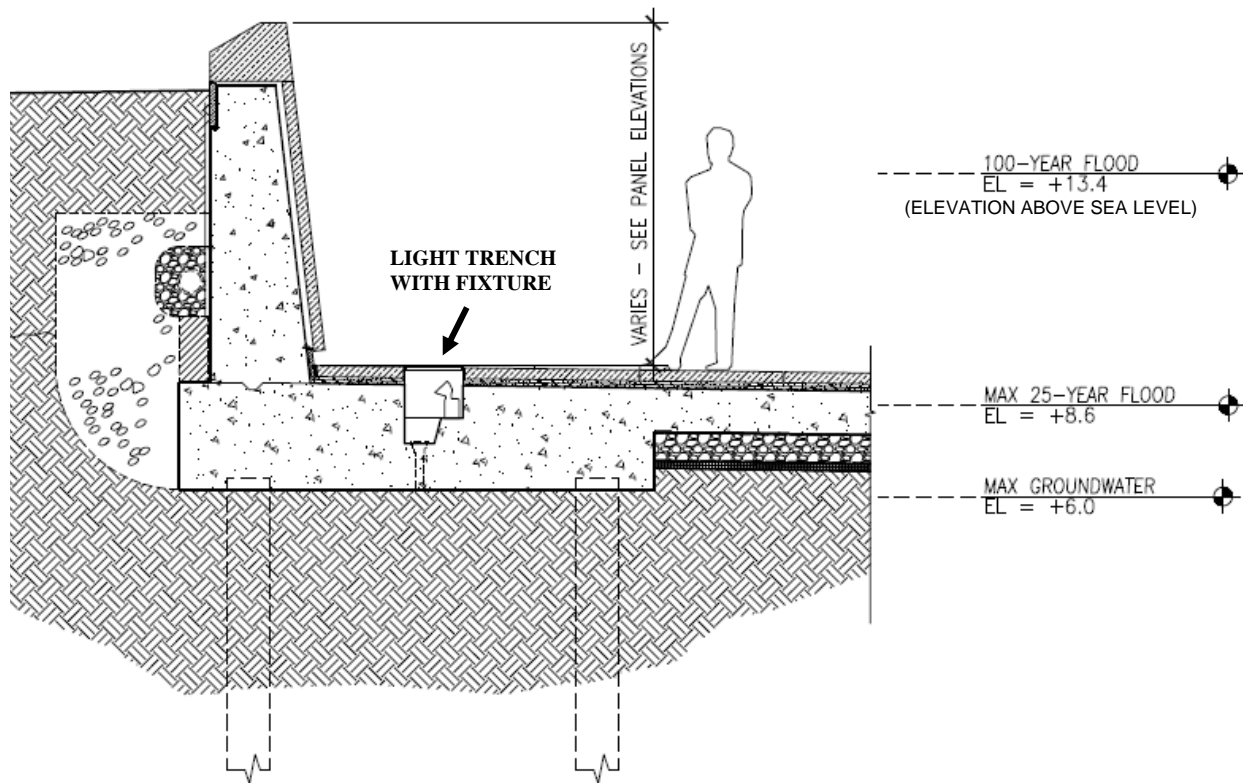
- **Approves** the preliminary site and building plans for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Visitor Contact/Bookstore/Restroom Building, as shown on the NCPC Map File,



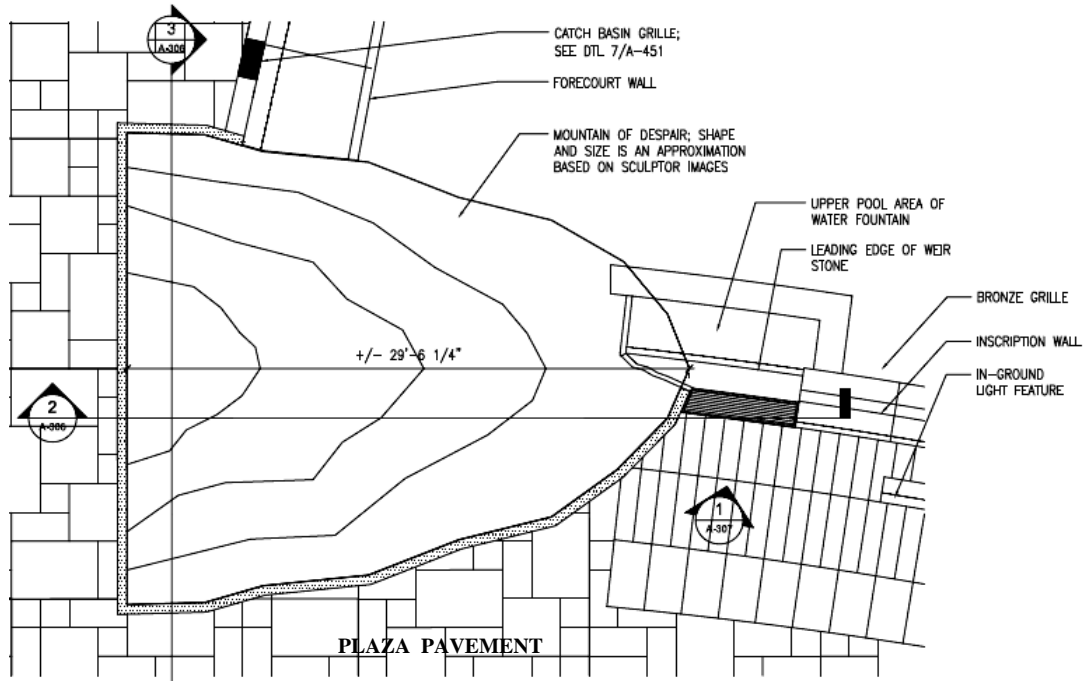
PRELIMINARY DESIGN OF INSCRIPTION WALL TEXT LOCATIONS AS DEPICTED IN INTERIOR ELEVATION



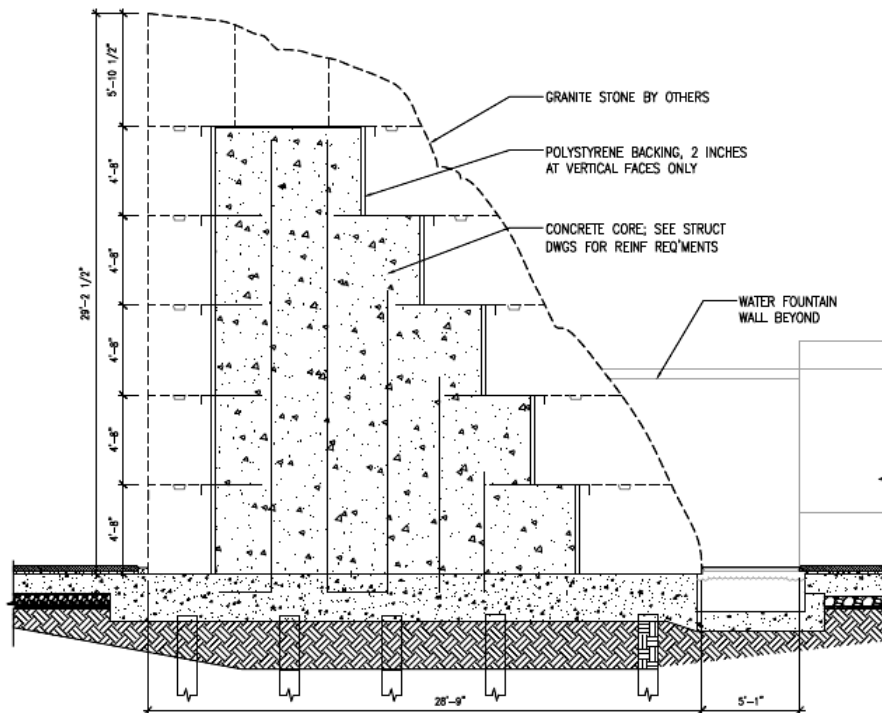
TYPICAL INSCRIPTION WALL PANEL WITH EXAMPLE OF TEXT LAYOUT



SECTION OF MEMORIAL WALL WITH GRANITE VENEER, LIGHT TRENCH, AND STRUCTURAL DESIGN WITH PILINGS



1 MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR
AND WATER FEATURE PLAN
A-306 SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"



2 LONGITUDINAL SECTION
A-306 SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"

**PRELIMINARY DESIGN OF MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR AND ITS MEETING POINT AT
WATERFALL --PLAN AND SECTION**

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital. Specifically, policies contained in the Parks and Open Space Element state that the federal government should:

- Enhance the great cross-axes of the Mall, and protect them from inappropriate development (Policy No. 4, page 109).
- Use monumental parks and landscapes to provide settings for public buildings, monuments, and memorials, and to create special environments for limited activities (Policy No.5, page 109).
- Site memorials in monumental and designed landscape parks in compliance with the Memorials and Museums Master Plan (Policy No.6, page 109).
- Maintain East and West Potomac Park as an extension of the Mall, as a valuable recreational open space, and as a space that can be used for outdoor cultural events, gatherings, and celebrations (Policy No. 8, page 109).

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Staff finds that the preliminary design does not constitute any appreciable change to the potential environmental effects and related mitigation outlined in the project's July 2005 Environmental Assessment (EA) adopted by the Commission in November 2005. Consequently, the Commission's Finding of No Significant Impact remains valid for environmental review purposes in compliance with the Commission's procedures. This finding does not cover the introduction of perimeter security elements into the memorial design.

The preliminary design maintains mitigation actions defined by both the NEPA analysis and the Commission staff comments on the EA. The concept issues of height of the berm and viewshed effects from that feature to and from the memorial have been addressed by the preliminary design implementation and in the further progress of the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation process.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The Park Service is serving as lead agency for the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) compliance. In March 1999, at the time the Tidal Basin site was being considered, NPS wrote to the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) determining that a memorial at that location would potentially have an adverse effect on the landscape and National Register qualities of West Potomac Park.

On September 13, 2005 NPS wrote to the D.C. SHPO determining that the proposed concept design would potentially have an adverse effect on the National Register qualities of West

Potomac Park: “The construction of an earthen berm, above the historically flat topography of the park, will introduce another raised element into the historic landscape.” NPS noted that similar modifications to the 20th-century engineered fill have occurred at other memorials. “As the design development and consultation continue, other potential adverse effects may be identified.”

The letter continues:

Mitigation of the impacts associated with other raised elements in this flat landscape has been accomplished during the design approval process by considering height and visual openings in the design. The Foundation, National Park Service, NCPC and CFA have agreed to limit the access of the memorial design from the area of the historic cherry trees, allowing an entrance, not unlike that of the FDR Memorial, but considerably less than was introduced by the construction of the Thomas Jefferson memorial. This initial mitigation requirement is reflected in the submitted design and will be adhered to by the National Park Service in the ensuing design approval process.

NPS held consultation meetings on September 19, 2005, January 2008, March and April 2008 that included representatives from the Foundation, the DC SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, NCPC, The National Coalition to Save Our Mall, and the Committee of 100.

The Park Service continues development of a draft of a Memorandum of Agreement that will be sent to the agency signatories for their comments. The MOA proposes terms by which NPS will conduct future design review and Section 106 consultation for the project with agencies and the interested public. The MOA also determines the Area of Potential Effect, the determination of effect, and the affected historic resources. NPS, in consultation with the DC SHPO and other parties, has determined that West Potomac Park is the affected area. The historic resources are the contributing structures and features of West Potomac Park.

NPS’s determination of effect is described in its MOA: “The NPS has determined that the Undertaking, which includes site regrading and construction of an earthen berm; the relocation or removal of 9 cherry trees; demolition, realignment and reconstruction of a portion of West Basin Drive and its signalized intersection with Independence Avenue may have an adverse effect on West Potomac Park, properties included in the National Register of Historic Places.”

The major part of the discussion to date in the last months relate to the visitor services contact facility design and the final alignment of West Basin Drive adjacent to the memorial. Comments from the previous consultations have enabled the NPS to resolve the location, and to amend the design to provide some shelter along the building perimeter. Staff notes there remains an issue of the location of the West Basin Drive and its final alignment that must be finalized for the completion of the Memorial Design and the MOA. Further consultation is also required on any proposed perimeter security elements.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the whole of the memorial on June 18, 2008. The Committee forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies represented, the participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the District of Columbia Office of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.



OVERVIEW OF MEMORIAL LOOKING WEST

Commission of Fine Arts

In its meeting of April, 17, 2008, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the revised concept design for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial. The Commission members congratulated the applicant on the overall progress and recommended approval of many components of the memorial. However, the Commission made a strong recommendation to rework the depiction of Dr. King and considered the issue critical to CFA for memorial approval under the Commemorative Works Act.

At its meeting of June 19, 2008, the CFA reviewed a revised sculpture of Dr. King. The revised *Stone of Hope* now depicts Dr. King's form in its same basic appearance of the figure of Dr. King with crossed folded arms at his chest. The image remains centered on the Tidal Basin side of the *Stone of Hope*. The edges of the sculpture are brought forward to reduce the apparent amount of relief of the image thickness at its edges, and the base of the rough stone area has been elevated to just above the knee level of the figure on the left, as one views the figure. The sculpture will also carry a rough stone appearance on the left side in the area of the suit-coat pocket. Further, the face has been somewhat altered to remove some facial-lines around the mouth and cheek area of the head.

The CFA members did request a plaster or bronze maquette of the *Stone of Hope* be delivered for review by CFA at its next meeting, and a sample section of actual stone surface, with sculpted detail, be submitted to gauge the amount of carved relief contrast allowed by the selected stone. The members then moved to endorse the revised concept for the sculpture of the *Stone of Hope*.