

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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NCPC File No. 5907



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL—REVISED CONCEPT
TIDAL BASIN, WEST POTOMAC PARK
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the National Park Service

November 30, 2006

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc. (the Foundation) has submitted a revised concept design for a portion of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial to be located in West Potomac Park at the Tidal Basin.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of concept design 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:

Comments favorably on the revised design concept for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.51(73.10)-42150.

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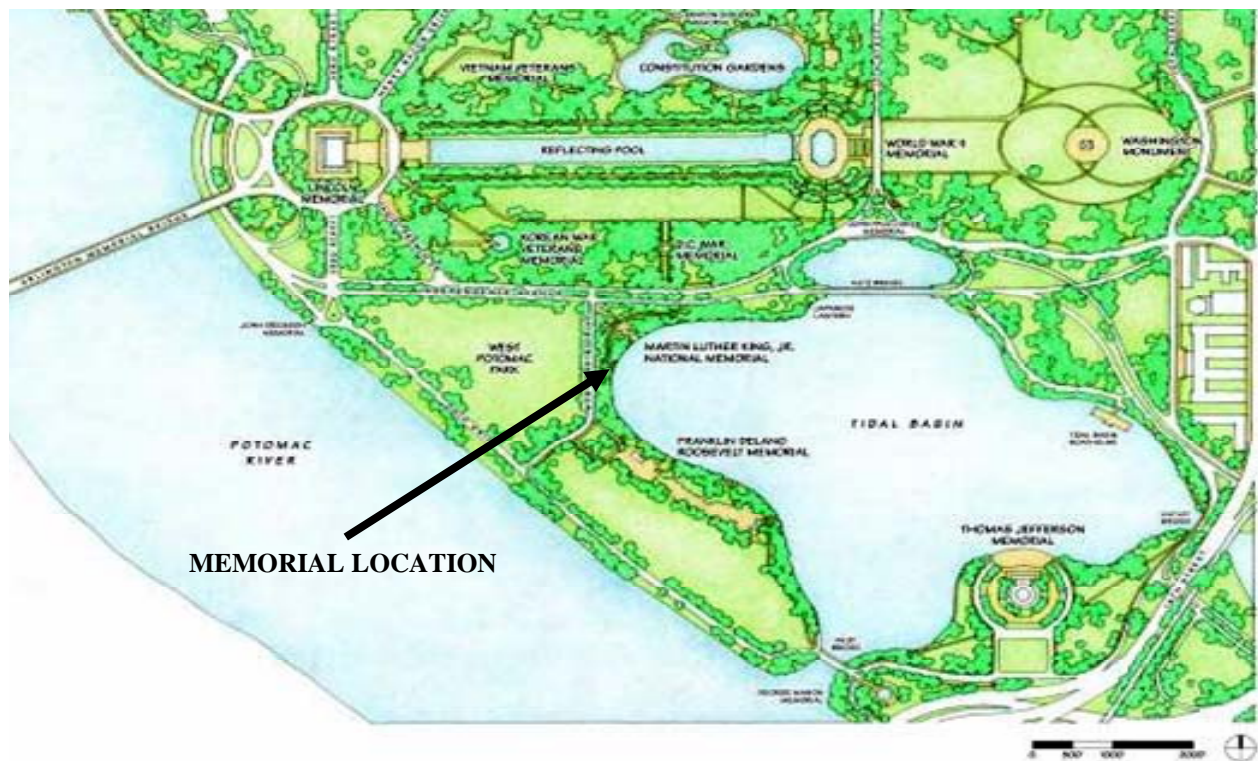
DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Background

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

Site

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



PROJECT SITE VICINITY LOCATION

West Basin Drive on the west. The larger setting includes views of the Washington Monument and across the Tidal Basin to the Jefferson Memorial. Views to the Lincoln Memorial are obstructed. The most memorable aspect of the site is the expansive view across the Tidal Basin while at the same time, the inlet of the Tidal Basin provides a sense of enclosure and intimacy.

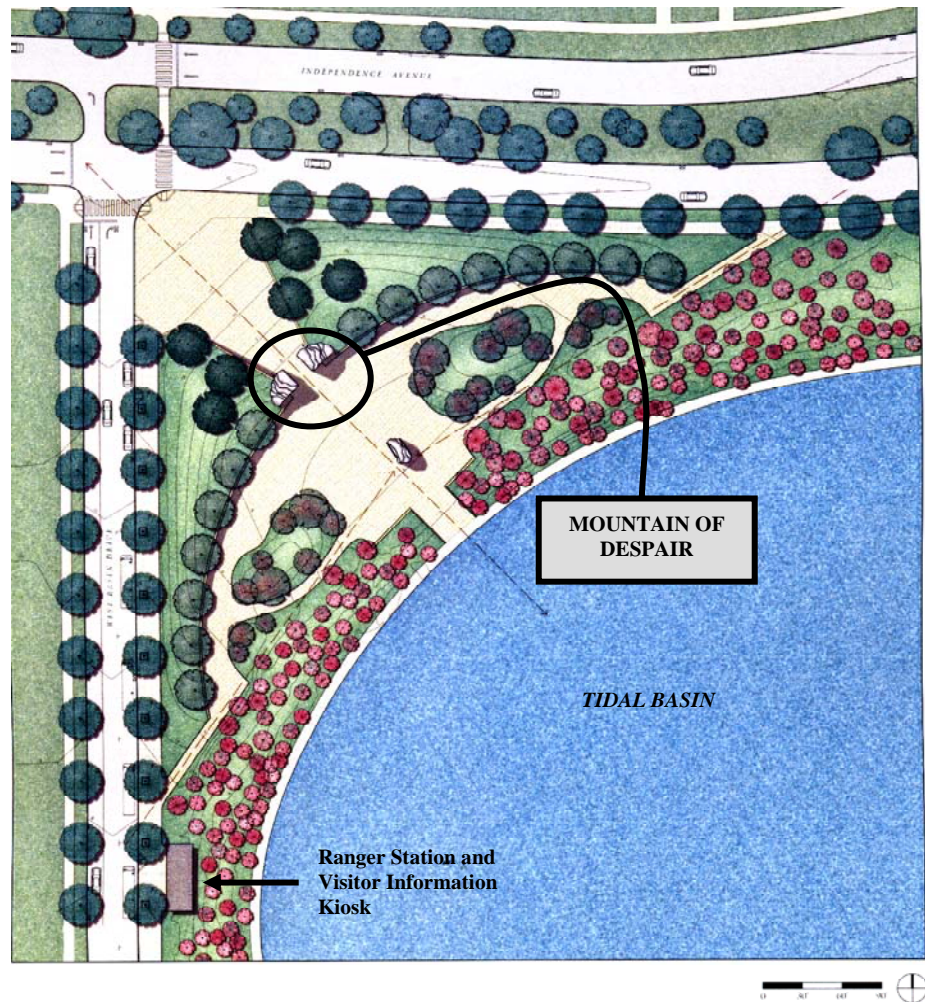
Revised Design Concept

The revised concept for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial is still centered on an overall geometric relationship of a crescent superimposed within a triangle. 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 newly submitted revised design concept features three changes to the memorial layout that was previously approved.

The Mountain of Despair is a large stone approximately 30 feet high that forms a portal for the main entrance to the memorial. This stone is pierced and opened to provide a 12-foot wide entry threshold and now exhibits a simple one-level cascading waterfalls flanking the stones at the interior side of the memorial. The revision to re-introduce water to the portal area is indicated in the following graphic on page 4 and in the subsequent graphics that provide detail on the concept.



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

An additional change occurs at the front of the portal entry facing the intersection of Independence Avenue and West Basin Drive. The revision now provides a more naturalistic and landscaped edge to the Mountain of Despair, by eliminating the retaining walls that were originally featured at the front of the portal area along the entry plaza. This revision is demonstrated in the perspective highlighting that area on page 5.



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL REVISED CONCEPT SITE PLAN

The final alteration in the concept is the relocation of the *Stone of Hope* that features the relief sculpture of Dr. King. This element is now moved approximately twenty feet closer to the

memorial entry point to strengthen the relationship of the stone to the *Mountain of Despair*. This refinement is demonstrated on the revised site plan.



REVISED ENTRY PLAZA EDGE AT THE EXTERIOR OF THE MOUNTIAN OF DESPAIR

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.

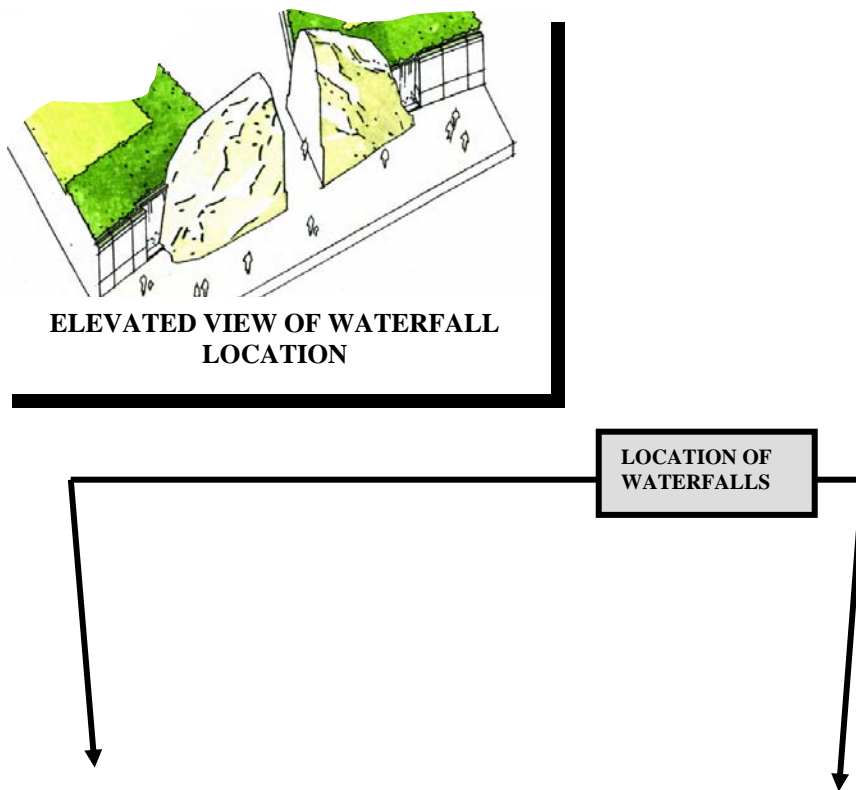
PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff is very receptive to the idea of the re-introduction of water as a transitional element between the portal of natural stone and the finished inscribed wall with Dr. King’s orations. The proposed form of the waterfall and its simple single-height cascade reinforces the simplicity of the other memorial forms, and also relates to the rising wall. Most importantly, the spatial presence, and impact of the strong vertical form of the main interior wall is now transitioned by a fluid and lighter element, which provides the contrast but harmonizing relationship of water and stone within the context of the interior finished wall. The design, with its simpler and restrained water form does not compete nor diminish the *Mountain of Despair*. And while staff enthusiastically supports the concept design refinements, staff is concerned about the interface of the fountain with the larger stones at the portal. Whether this touch-point is achieved by an

altered physical connection or requires a complete break-away from the larger stones of the portal appears to be the dilemma that the applicant has not yet resolved. Staff clearly recognizes the design refinement of the fountain can be pursued and submitted at the preliminary project design submission stage.

As an additional note, staff acknowledges the revised concept plan relocates the Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk, shown on the revised concept site plan, but finds the submission does not described its exterior features or other design aspects for the two structures now indicated. Staff believes the preliminary design stage submission, as recommended in Commission’s April 2006 review, should address those aspects of that project.

Consequently, **staff recommends the Commission comment favorably on the revised concept of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.**





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).

INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE SKETCH VIEW OF THE RE-INTRODUCED WATERFALLS FLANKING THE MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR

National Environmental Policy Act

Staff finds that the revised concept design does not constitute an 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.

The revised concept design maintains mitigation actions defined by both the NEPA analysis and the Commission staff comments on the EA. Primarily this involved the height of the berm and viewshed effects from that feature to and from the memorial, and remains unchanged from the April 2006 approved design.

The reintroduction of water in the memorial will require excavation and foundation development that was fully analyzed by the July 2005 NEPA review. No significant adverse impacts result from the use of water at the memorial nor does the reintroduction of water features introduce qualities or effects outside the EA findings completed by the Commission in 2005.

National Historic Preservation Act

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 a consultation meeting on September 19, 2005 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 draft 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 draft 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."

Staff notes that the previous revised concept submission responded to the recommendation that visual analysis be undertaken to clearly indicate the visual impact that the berm of the proposed memorial would have on views to the Tidal Basin and beyond. Those aspects of the earlier April design remain unchanged.

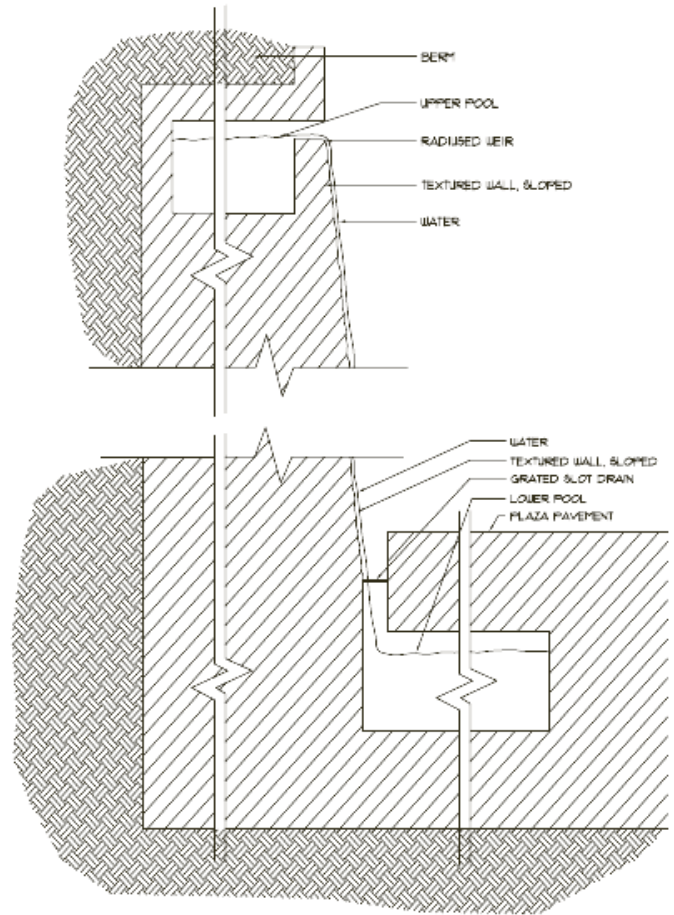
COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the whole of the memorial on November 9, 2005, when a water feature of greater dimension existed within the memorial. 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 Department of Housing and Community Development; the Fire Department; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission on Fine Arts

At its October 19, 2006 meeting the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the revised concept design for the memorial featuring the waterfalls. The Commission did not approve the proposed revision to add the two water features flanking the *Mountain of Despair*. The Commission requested that the design team continue its study of the crucial connection of the water, the Mountain, and the inscribed interior wall, recommending that several alternates be developed for their consideration. It was recommended one of the alternatives should investigate completely separating the wall from the *Mountain of Despair*.



**EXAMPLE WATERFALL CONCEPT DETAILS
INDICATING FORM AND NATURE OF WATER FLOW**