



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL
Tidal Basin

Report to the National Park Service and the
Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc.

December 2, 1999

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc. has submitted a proposed four-acre site adjacent to the Tidal Basin for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. The proposed site has been submitted with design parameters that will be included with the design competition package for the memorial.

Authority

Public Law 104-333, Public Law 105-201, and Public Law 99-652, as amended.

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Rescinds** its March 4, 1999 action approving the East End of Constitution Gardens for the site of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.
- **Approves** a four-acre site adjacent to the Tidal Basin for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.51(08.22)-40723, as well as design parameters as indicated in the attached October 21, 1999 letter to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc. (Foundation), has submitted a proposed site for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial (MLK Memorial). The site is on the northwestern edge of the Tidal Basin. This is one of the few prominent memorial sites remaining in the Monumental Core (within Area I as defined in the Commemorative Works Act).

Site:

The proposed site for the MLK Memorial is a four-acre parcel of land, including West Basin Drive, located on the northwestern side of the Tidal Basin.

The Tidal Basin side of the site is defined by the western edge of the existing walkway along the Tidal Basin.

The northern boundary of the site is approximately 19 feet south of the curb along Independence Avenue.

Setting:

- The Tidal Basin site is a prominent and symbolic location. The site is relevant to its subject of commemoration.
- From the site there are views of the Washington Monument and across the Tidal Basin to the Jefferson Memorial. Views to the Lincoln Memorial are obstructed.
- Placement of the MLK Memorial in this location has the potential to reinforce the formal relationships among these memorials.
- The MLK Memorial also has the potential to enhance the visitor experience through reinforcement of the movement from the Jefferson and FDR Memorials to those on the Mall.
- The most memorable aspect of the site is the expansive view across the Tidal Basin. Also, views to the surrounding memorials provide a sense of grandeur while the inlet of the Tidal Basin provides a sense of enclosure and intimacy.
- The existing cherry trees and the other trees that line the Tidal Basin provide continuity and unity while also reinforcing this sense of enclosure.

Design Parameters:

NPS submission materials stipulate the following design parameters for the design and development of the MLK Memorial. These design parameters have been developed jointly by NPS, NCPC, and the MLK Foundation:

- The size of the site will be approximately four acres. No less than three acres, excluding West Basin Drive, and no more than four acres, including West Basin Drive, shall be devoted to the MLK Memorial.

- The Tidal Basin side of the site will be defined by the western edge of the existing walkway along the Tidal Basin (i.e. where pavement meets grass), thereby excluding the walkway from the site; the northern boundary of the site shall be approximately 19 feet south of the curb along Independence Avenue.
- The Foundation, in collaboration with NPS, will provide a general design for and construction of a relocated West Basin Drive.
- All of the cherry trees along the Tidal Basin must be preserved with the understanding that one to three trees may be removed or repositioned if absolutely necessary for purposes of access between the Tidal Basin walkway and the MLK Memorial at the location of the existing access way.
- No MLK Memorial element shall be placed in the Tidal Basin.
- The existing visual transparency from Independence Avenue to the Tidal Basin shall be maintained.
- The relationship of hardscape to softscape shall be no greater than one-third hardscape and no less than two-thirds softscape (this does not include West Basin Drive or the Tidal Basin walkway).
- No single element of the MLK Memorial shall exceed a height of 20 feet.
- There shall be no museum, bookstore, or other rooms located at the MLK Memorial above or below grade.
- There shall be no restroom facilities in the MLK Memorial.
- There shall be no vehicle parking at the MLK Memorial; however, space for no less than three buses and six disabled spaces must be accommodated along West Basin Drive, or other location as specified by NPS.

Accommodation of Visitors:

West Basin Drive currently runs through the middle of the proposed MLK Memorial site. Recently reconstructed in association with the construction of FDR, it provides one-way movement from Ohio Drive to Independence Avenue. West Basin Drive is required for access to FDR and to relieve Ohio Drive of traffic exiting West Potomac Park to Independence Avenue.

- West Basin Drive is proposed to be relocated to the western portion of the MLK Memorial site. The western boundary of the site has been deliberately drawn to include this road to allow drop-off and entry to the MLK Memorial and to ensure that its design is in keeping with the setting.

- Primary access to the MLK Memorial will be via the Tourmobile and other alternative modes of travel. In addition to the existing Tourmobile stop on Ohio Drive, small tour bus and taxi drop-off areas can be incorporated on-site within the design of the relocated West Basin Drive.
- Access by private automobile will be limited to West Basin Drive. Vehicle drop-off and handicapped parking can be constructed; however, no additional parking will be provided.

Impact on Existing Recreation Facilities and Infrastructure:

- West Potomac Park provides both passive and active recreational open space including a polo field, softball fields, and practice fields.
- The northeastern-most corner of the polo field is located within the proposed MLK Memorial site. The field has been modified to accommodate its current location and NPS has indicated that a further modification to the field to remove this corner from the MLK Memorial site is feasible and will allow the polo field to remain in its current location.
- Other alternatives include reorientation of the polo field and relocation of the two associated softball fields within this area. This could result in a larger (closer to regulation size) polo field.

NPS has provided cost estimates for the relocation of West Basin Drive, the modification and/or reorientation of the polo field, and the required relocation of utilities. The actual costs will be assumed by the Foundation.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its July 1, 1999 meeting, the Commission did not approve a site for the MLK Memorial in the Tidal Basin's general area.

At the Commission's March 4, 1999 meeting, a site at the East End of Constitution Gardens was selected and approved as the site for the MLK Memorial.

CONSULTATION

Since the Commission's March 4th meeting, there have been several meetings between the Foundation, the staff of NCPC, NPS, CFA, as well as a special Work Group of the Commission to examine both the east end of Constitution Garden's site and the Tidal Basin site. It was determined that the Tidal Basin site, with design parameters, would be an appropriate location for the MLK Memorial.

EVALUATION

The Tidal Basin site is an important location deserving of a preeminent memorial. Staff believes the MLK Memorial meets this standard. The placement of the MLK Memorial in the midst of other commemorative works to such renowned world figures as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington—individuals who shaped or changed the course of this Nation's history—will ensure that Dr. King's significant contributions to furthering democratic ideals and the human experience will not be lost on future generations.

The proposed four-acre site, including West Basin Drive, can accommodate the proposed MLK Memorial. One of the key considerations in siting any memorial is potential encroachment and whether the work can be placed within its context without intruding on the setting of other important activities. Staff believes that there is sufficient space within the recommended site to achieve an appropriate setting for the MLK Memorial that is compatible with and supportive of its surroundings. Within the MLK Memorial setting, appropriate entrances can be developed as well as any needed buffers. Both setting and sense of entry are of vital importance in memorial design and each can be attained within the proposed site.

Locating the proposed MLK Memorial on the Tidal Basin site will require some adjustments in existing features in West Potomac Park but should not dramatically alter the character of the area. West Basin Drive, which runs between Ohio Drive and Independence Avenue, provides access to the FDR Memorial. Vehicular access is also needed to the MLK Memorial. Given that West Basin Drive currently bisects the proposed site, retaining it in its current alignment could encumber possible memorial design solutions. NPS and the Foundation have agreed to relocate the road to address this problem. The new alignment is expected to be closer to the western edge of the site outside the zone expected to be used for the principal memorial elements.

The proposed site will also require a minor adjustment in the adjacent polo field so that the polo fields and other recreation activities will not intrude on the four-acre MLK Memorial site. Reconfiguration and reorientation of the recreation facilities in West Potomac Park will allow both activities to co-exist comfortably in the same area.

Finally, the cherry trees along the Tidal Basin are important features of West Potomac Park and the area adjacent to the planned MLK Memorial. The Commission, NPS, and the Foundation have agreed that the structure and arrangement of these trees must be preserved. There is also consensus that views to the Tidal Basin from Independence Avenue should be maintained. Staff believes the design parameters contained in its October 21, 1999 letter to the Foundation will assure that the cherry trees, views through the site, heights of principal memorial elements, vehicular circulation and parking, and other items related to the future design and use of the site will be handled in a manner consistent with the Commission's expectations for this prominent location. (see attachment).

Given the thorough examination of this site and the associated design parameters, staff recommends approval of the Tidal Basin site for the MLK Memorial. Because this site is different from the site approved by the Commission at its March 4, 1999 meeting, it is further recommended that the Commission rescind its March 4th action before taking action on the new submission.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on November 10, 1999, 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 Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the Department of Public Works; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

Several policies contained in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* apply to the proposed location for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial on the northwestern edge of the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park.

- West Potomac Park is an extension of the Mall, a National Landmark. West Potomac Park is also a designated Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. Independence Avenue is a designated Special Street. Applicable policies relating to the protection and enhancement of historic properties, Special Places and Special Streets apply.
- The Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan designates the Mall and East and West Potomac Park for Monumental Park use.
 - Monumental and Decorative Parks...should serve as settings to enhance public buildings, monuments and memorials; as such, their fundamental integrity should be protected...
- Criteria for the location of Cultural, Memorial and Information Facilities contained in the Federal Facilities Element also specify that:
 - Federal memorials, as authorized by the Congress, should locate within appropriate areas throughout the National Capital. Preference should be given to sites within Special Places, along Special Streets, at locations which provide visual prominence, gateway entrances, vistas or overlooks or have special features that would enhance the memorial.
 - Only Federal memorial facilities that are of exceptional national or international significance, such as those associated with presidents and/or momentous national or international events, should locate within the central monumental area.¹

¹ Includes the Mall, the Ellipse, the Washington Monument Grounds, East and West Potomac Parks, Theodore Roosevelt Island, and Lady Bird Johnson Park.

- Memorials to persons or events having strong functional or traditional association with specific areas of the National Capital should be given preference in locations in those areas.
- Memorials should be designed and sited to be sympathetic to their locations.
- Existing Special Places should be protected, enhanced, and strengthened. New ones should be created. Historic plans and their underlying principles should be used for guidance. Civic art should be used to enrich such places and to establish their identity and image.
- The distinguishing qualities or character of Historic Landscapes should be protected and enhanced.
- New sites with monumental potentials should be designed so as to ensure integration with appropriate natural settings and architectural backgrounds, as well as reciprocity with other monuments and with other features of the National Capital.
- The Tidal Basin is located within a floodplain and is subject to periodic flooding. Applicable policies in the Environmental Element state:
 - The site should be returned as close as possible to its natural contours.
 - Floodplain fill should be minimized.
 - Grading requirements should be minimized.
 - Free natural drainage should be preserved.

Historic Preservation

NPS initiated consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on March 4, 1999, advising the SHPO that a design to be proposed for this memorial might potentially have an adverse effect on the landscape and National Register qualities of West Potomac Park. NPS further stated that since there was not a design concept for the MLK Memorial, it was impossible to completely assess adverse effects at the time. NPS stated that it was their intention to consult with the SHPO and the Advisory Council at the appropriate time.

Environmental Impact

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NPS has developed a programmatic environmental assessment for the proposed location and program of the MLK Memorial.

The proposed MLK Memorial site location is considered acceptable to advance the concept site development and design that will incorporate further tiered environmental documentation occurring in conjunction with this effort. At that time, impacts associated with specific proposals for the relocation of West Basin Drive, the provision of access, and assembly will be evaluated.

- The MLK Memorial is consistent with other land uses within West Potomac Park.
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- The proposed site requires the modification of the existing polo field. Further evaluation of the MLK Memorial's impact on the polo field will be discussed in subsequent tiered environmental documentation at the time of concept design.
- Maintaining a traffic circulation route in the vicinity of Ohio Drive is important for the Cherry Blossom Festival and the adjacent FDR Memorial.
 - Relocation of West Basin Drive is required. It is proposed to be relocated to the area immediate west of the MLK Memorial.
- Circulation routes for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic can be reasonably accommodated at the proposed MLK Memorial site.
 - Tour bus and taxi drop-off areas can be incorporated into the relocation.
 - Accommodation for handicapped accessible parking will also be provided. No additional parking spaces will be provided for the MLK Memorial.
- The MLK Memorial site is subject to flooding.
 - As with the existing FDR Memorial, the design of the MLK Memorial will be developed to withstand the impacts of flooding.
 - The proposed action will be consistent with Executive Order 11988, Flood Plain management, pursuant to the NPS statement of findings when tiered environmental analysis is undertaken.



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The Honorable Linda W. Cropp

Executive Director
Reginald W. Griffith

October 21, 1999

Mr. John Carter
Project Director
Martin Luther King, Jr.
National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc.
2313 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

Dear Mr. Carter:

This letter sets forth the parameters for the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial at the proposed Tidal Basin site as discussed at the Task Force meeting on October 12, 1999.

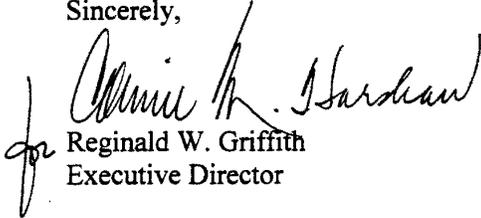
1. The size of the site will be approximately 4.0 acres.¹ No less than 3 acres excluding West Basin Drive, and no more than 4 acres including West Basin Drive, shall be devoted to the memorial.;
2. The Tidal Basin side of the site will be defined by the western edge of the existing walkway along the Tidal Basin (i.e. where pavement meets grass), thereby excluding the walkway from the site;² the northern boundary of the site shall be approximately 19 feet south of the curb along Independence Avenue;³
3. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Foundation in collaboration with the NPS will provide a general design for and construction of a relocated West Basin Drive;
4. All of the cherry trees along the Tidal Basin must be preserved with the understanding that one to three trees may be removed or repositioned if absolutely necessary for purposes of access between the Tidal Basin walkway and the memorial at the location of the existing access way;
5. No memorial element shall be placed in the Tidal Basin;⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Represents substantial change from previous submission.

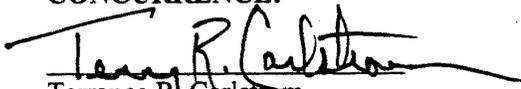
6. The existing visual transparency from Independence Avenue to the Tidal Basin shall be maintained;
7. The relationship of hardscape to softscape shall be no greater than one-third hardscape and no less than two-thirds softscape (this does not include West Basin Drive or the Tidal Basin walkway);
8. No single element of the memorial shall exceed a height of 20 feet;
9. There shall be no museum, bookstore or other rooms located at this memorial above or below grade;
10. There shall be no restroom facilities in the memorial; and
11. There shall be no vehicle parking at the memorial, however space for no less than three buses and six disabled spaces must be accommodated along West Basin Drive, or other location as specified by the National Park Service.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us to discuss what we all agree will be an extremely important and historically significant memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We appreciate your hard work and dedication and look forward to working with you in the future. If you have comments or questions, please contact me or Connie M. Harshaw on 202-482-7211.

Sincerely,


for Reginald W. Griffith
Executive Director

CONCURRENCE:


Terrance R. Carlstrom
Regional Director
National Capital Region
National Park Service


John Carter, Project Director
on behalf of the
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Project Foundation, Inc.
By signing, I agree that, if the site is approved by NCPC, the MLK, Jr. Foundation will not submit to any of the approving bodies a proposal for design that does not fully comply with the above agreed upon parameters.