

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

E. Keller

NCPC File No. 5907



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

Submitted by the National Park Service

March 30, 2006

Abstract

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

Commends the MLK 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.

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)-41988, and reminds the MLK Foundation to coordinate with the Park Service on the size, location, and programmatic requirements for the Ranger and Visitor Information Kiosk.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

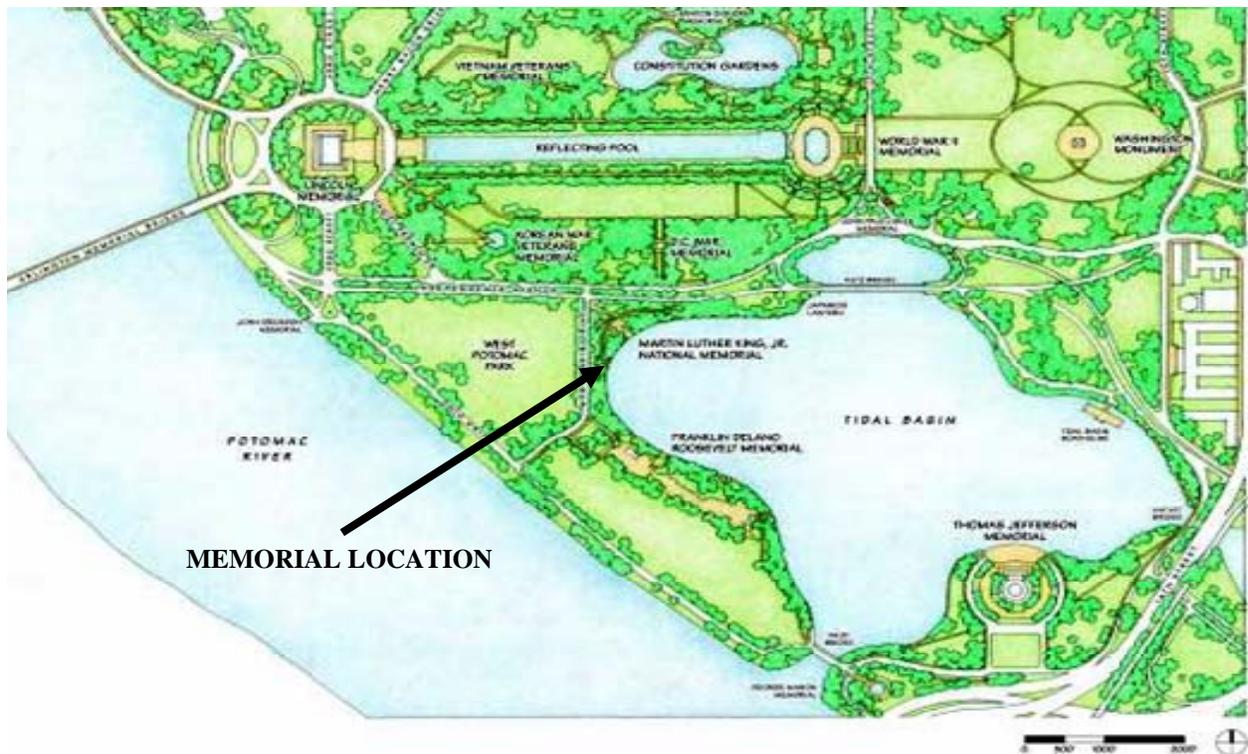
DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Background

The NPS has submitted, on behalf of the MLK 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.

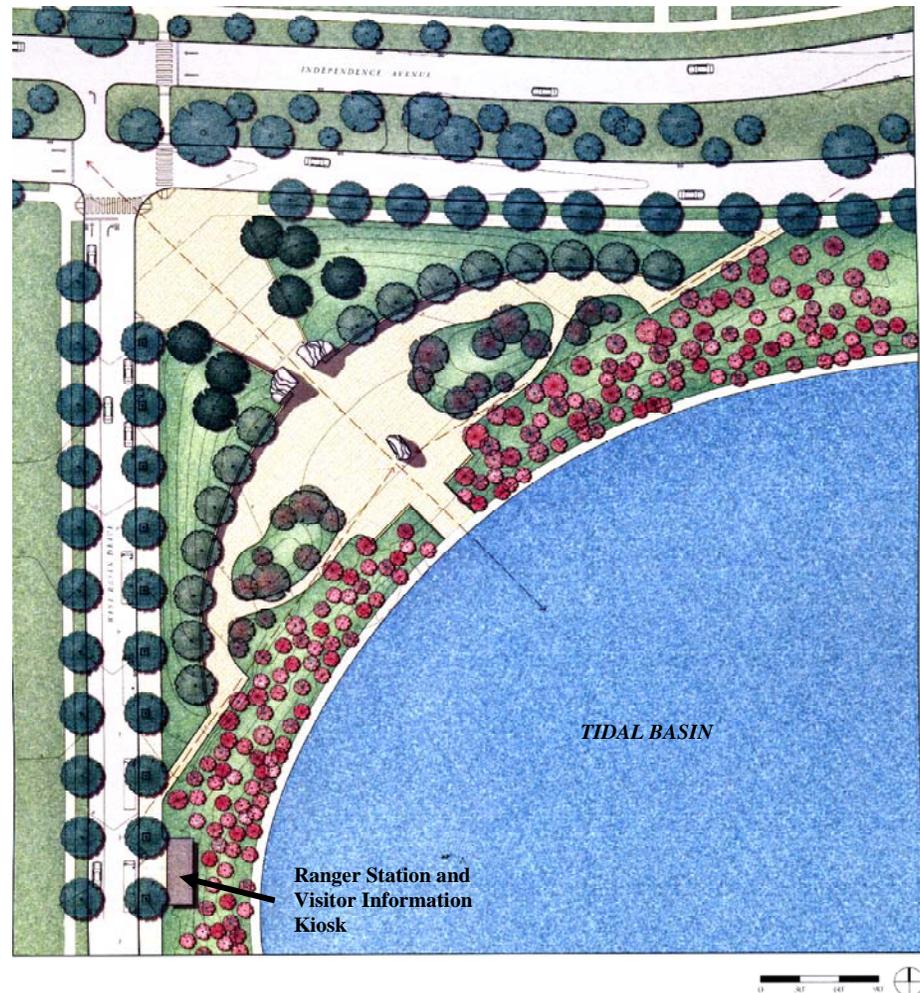
Revised Design Concept

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 arching arms of the crescent visually embrace the adjacent Tidal Basin. The primary vehicle approach to the memorial is maintained from Independence Avenue on the north and from West Basin Drive on the west. Parking is continued in the revised design concept for four tour buses and six handicapped parking spaces along West Basin Drive.

The principal memorial pedestrian access is provided from the intersection of Independence Avenue and West Basin Drive. Additional access points are from a connecting walkway from Independence Avenue and from West Basin Drive. Finally, three access points are provided from the memorial perimeter.

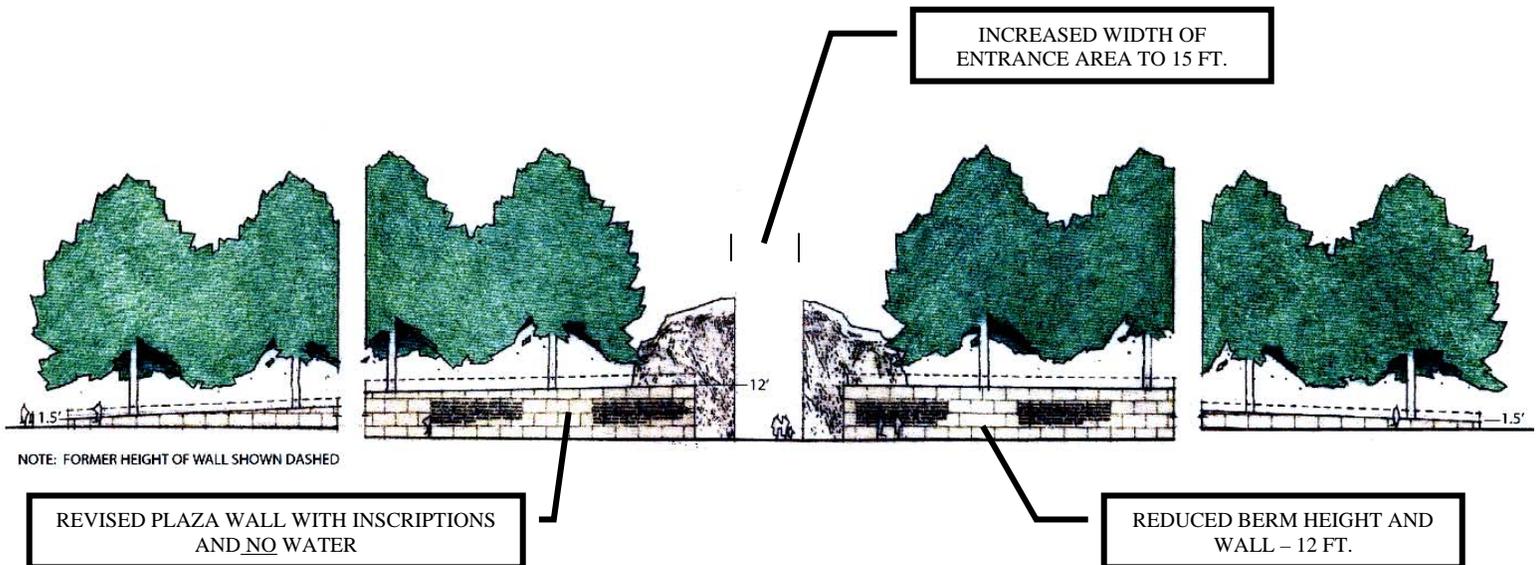
The newly submitted revised design concept features three of the six major elements of the original memorial concept in response to both NCPC and Commission of Fine Arts concerns. The following elements comprise the revised concept:

- *The Mountain of Despair* – This element is a large stone that is approximately 30 feet high and forms a portal for the main entrance to the memorial. This stone would be sliced open to provide a revised 15-foot wide entry portal and gathering point (increase of approximately 3 feet).

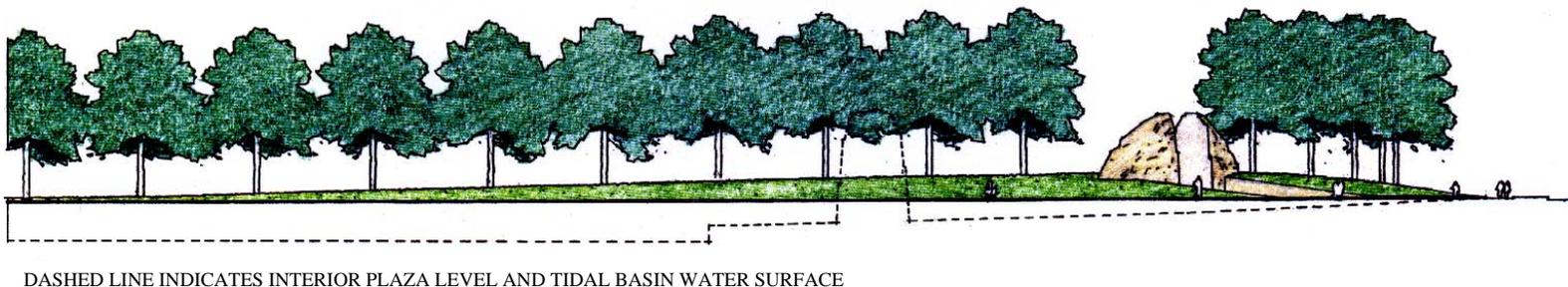


**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL
REVISED CONCEPT SITE PLAN**

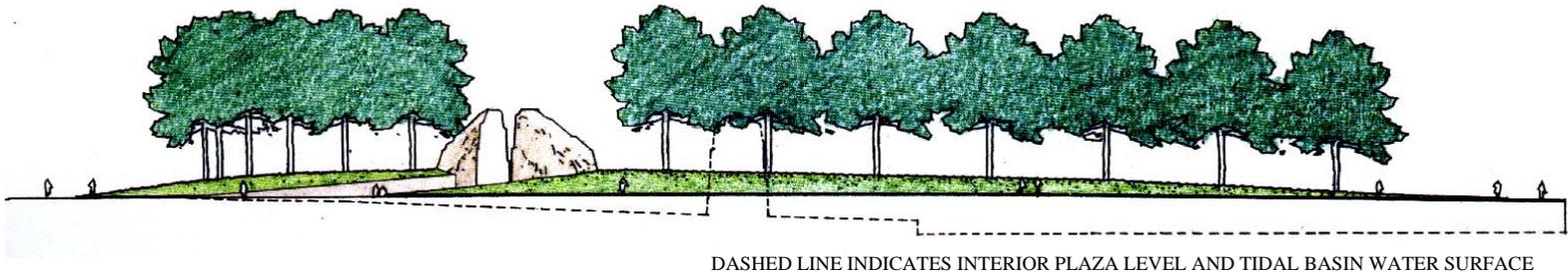
- *Stone of Hope* – The Stone of Hope is the principal element of the Memorial and remains as originally proposed.
- *Landscaping* – The landscaping proposal for the memorial would provide a variety of new plant materials that include additional Yoshino Cherry trees, Crape Myrtle trees, Eastern White Pines, and American Elms as originally proposed. Pavement areas have increased slightly and the earthen berm has been reduced in height by 2.5 feet throughout.



COMPRESSED ELEVATION OF REVISED MEMORIAL BERM, WALL HEIGHT, AND WIDENED “MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR” ENTRANCE AREA, AS VIEWED FROM INTERIOR PLAZA



REVISED MEMORIAL BERM HEIGHT AS VIEWED FROM INDEPENDENCE AVENUE



DASHED LINE INDICATES INTERIOR PLAZA LEVEL AND TIDAL BASIN WATER SURFACE

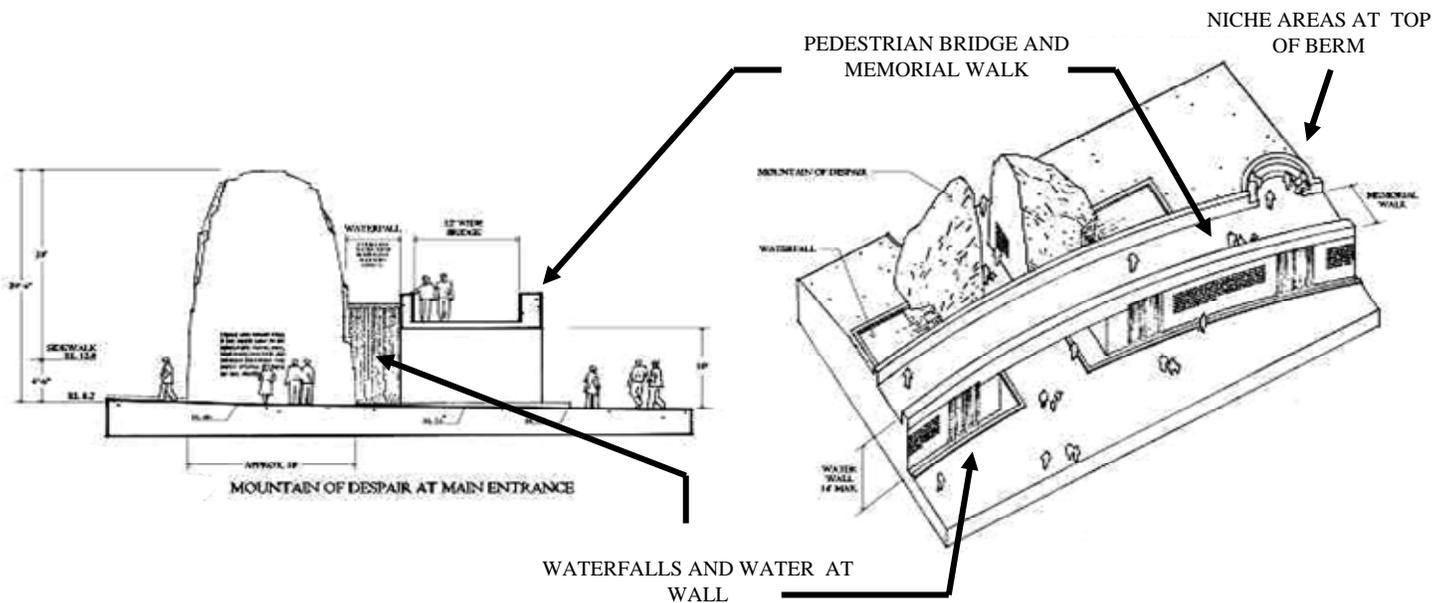
REVISED MEMORIAL BERM HEIGHT AS VIEWED FROM WEST BASIN DRIVE



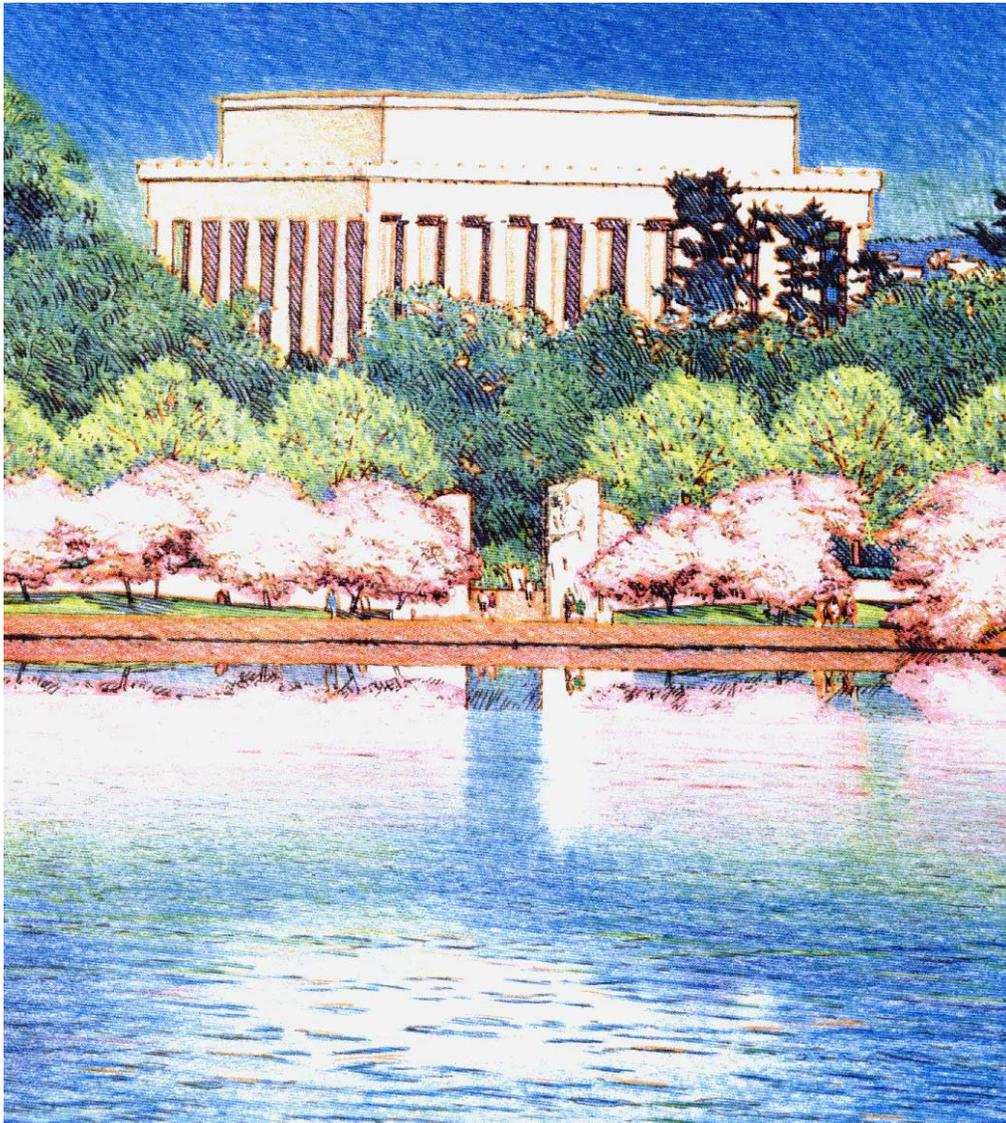
**PERSPECTIVE STUDY VIEW OF MAIN MEMORIAL ENTRANCE
DEMONSTRATING REMOVAL OF PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE AND NICHE AREAS AT
RIGHT AND LEFT**

The revised concept removes three earlier features that the Commission had expressed concern about and where requested to be modified. These were:

- *Memorial Walk* – This element was elevated to a maximum height of 14 feet as it formed a bridge in front of the opening of the mountain of despair. It connected the two elevated niche areas and walk at the top of the berm.
- *Water Element* – This feature formed the basis for the inscribed panels that would be separated by a series of agitated waterfalls. The waterfalls would become more and more agitated as they increase in height as the visitors move toward the central entrance near the “Mountain of Despair”. A thin, calm sheet of water would flow over the inscriptions of the wall that creates the main plaza for the “Stone of Hope”.
- *Niches* – The niches were intended to be places of repose, reflection, and observation. A walkway connecting each area and would provide space to look out beyond the memorial towards the Tidal Basin and beyond. There were proposed to be a total of 15 niches, each with a radius of 7 feet, 6 inches and spaced approximately 34 feet apart.



DETAILS OF WATER FEATURES, BRIDGE, AND MEMORIAL WALK THAT WERE REMOVED FROM THE MEMORIAL CONCEPT DESIGN



PERSPECTIVE STUDY VIEW OF THE REVISED MEMORIAL AS VIEWED ACROSS THE TIDAL BASIN FROM THE VICINITY OF THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

In addition to the three memorial elements described above in the revised concept, the MLK Foundation is proposing a ranger and visitor information kiosk that would include space for a Park Service ranger station, two restrooms, information dispensing area, and a gift shop.

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 MLK 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.

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Staff is very pleased and satisfied with the revisions to the design concept for the memorial and recommends that the Commission comment favorably on the revised concept submitted. The staff commends the MLK 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. The changes achieve the following:

- The Mountain of Despair and the Stone of Hope are the signature elements of the memorial. At the entry portal, two stones remain parted with a more generous width to the pedestrian entry area than previously proposed, yet maintains the focused view through the foreground and into the plaza where the carving of Dr. King resides, emerging, as the Stone of Hope. The removal of the elevated bridge and memorial walk at the top of the landscaped berm is a very successful modification.
- Staff continues to be supportive and pleased with the landscape proposal that appears to seamlessly integrate the memorial’s landscaping with the existing landscaping around the Tidal Basin. The revised design continues to maintain a landscape that establishes additional cherry trees, new Crape Myrtles, Pin Oaks, American Elms, and Eastern White Pines.
- The plaza wall at the berm (formerly the water wall, with its gradation of water intensity) now presents an opportunity of stronger visual focus to Dr. King’s orations through the unimpeded inscribed text area on the stone surface of the vertical wall.

- The revised berm height (reduced by 2.5 feet) visually proves to be less imposing on the wide viewshed of the west end of the Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park, particularly with regard to the views from Independence Avenue.

Although staff strongly believes that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, as revised, will be a successful and most pleasing addition to the Tidal Basin and existing memorials in the area, there remains an element of the memorial that the Commission asked for re-evaluation in December. That component is the Ranger Station and Visitor Information Kiosk at the south boundary of the memorial.

Staff accepts that there is a need for a ranger station and information dispersing window because it has been demonstrated by the Park Service that similar activities are provided at other memorials. However, staff still maintains that the gift shop component is not necessary, nor is it encouraged. The December 2005 Commission review recommended that the MLK Foundation should coordinate with the Park Service on the size, location, and programmatic requirements for the Ranger Station and Visitor Information Kiosk and address these considerations at the memorial's preliminary design stage. Staff reiterates that recommendation and requests that the Commission remind the National Park Service and the MLK Foundation to resolve that evaluation and design solution for the Ranger Station and Visitor Information Kiosk before submitting of the memorial's preliminary design review information to the Commission.

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

NCPC staff has analyzed, in conformance with the requirements of NEPA, the revised concept design. The staff finds the environmental effects of the project and the specified mitigation, as discussed in the project Environmental Assessment (EA) of July 2005 and adopted by the Commission in the November 2005 are still applicable, with no significant or appreciable change to the potential environmental impacts of the revised concept as compared to the original NEPA review. 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 has responded to 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. The reduction in height of the proposed berm in the revised concept appropriately responds to this issue.

Removal of the use of water in the memorial contributes fully to reducing flooding impacts to the memorial's infrastructure, and minimizes excavation and foundation impacts of the planned memorial site due to the reduced need for large pump areas and piping, and the associated maintenance areas required to support those features.

Historic Preservation Act

The Park Service is serving as lead agency for both NEPA and 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 again 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.

NPS continues to circulate a draft of a Memorandum of Agreement 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 current submission responds 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.

The memorial will become a prominent and much-visited attraction in Washington, and will have a strong presence in West Potomac Park, in an immediate setting that is now dominated by the Jefferson Memorial and that also includes the FDR Memorial. The King memorial will take its place among these memorials. The goal of the Section 106 review is to avoid, minimize, or mitigation those effects, and to ensure that the King memorial complements the character of West Potomac Park and that the National Register qualities of West Potomac Park and its contributing historic resources are preserved.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on November 9, 2005. 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 20, 2005, meeting the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed the concept design for the memorial. The Commission thought that generally the proposed design could be very

powerful and that it was an appropriate landscape-oriented solution given its location on the Tidal Basin. They did, however, raise several issues that they felt should be studied further before giving concept approval and are now addressed by the revised concept design.

At the Commission of Fine Arts March 16, 2006, meeting of that body there was full endorsement of the revised concept by the convening members. However, the CFA Chairman requested further evaluation and relocation of the proposed Ranger Station and Information Kiosk. The National Park Service responded indicating that issue assessment was already underway and will be responded to and indicated in future project development.