

COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. 6597



VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL VISITORS CENTER

On the Grounds of the Lincoln Memorial bounded by Constitution Avenue,
Henry Bacon Drive, Lincoln Memorial Circle, and 23rd Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the National Park Service

December 6, 2007

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of comments on concept design pursuant to Public Law 108-126 and the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 8905).

Commission Action

The Commission:

Previously approved on August 3, 2006 “Site A for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center, on the parcel bounded by Constitution Avenue, Henry Bacon Drive, Lincoln Memorial Circle, and 23rd Street, NW as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(73.10)42074, conditioned upon the implementation of the package of mitigation set forth in the design guidelines below that is necessary to reduce the otherwise significant impacts of the proposed action, as indicated in the Executive Director’s finding of no significant impact for the site selection.”

Comments favorably on the design elements of the proposed Visitor Center that meet the following mitigation actions established by the Commission at site approval:

- “The Visitor Center’s entrance will be only minimally visible from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to satisfy the project’s purpose and need, but in accordance with the authorizing legislation not interfere with or encroach upon the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.” (#2)
- “To maintain the character of the historic landscape, the Visitor Center’s design concept will be based on maintaining the existing grade, and any new slopes will be gradual. The project will raise the existing site grade only to allow for an accessible entry ramp.” (#3)

- “The Visitor Center’s design will provide only the paved area necessary for visitors to enter and exit the building and which will also provide service access. The design will not include additional paved area for gathering space or queuing.” (#7)
- “The project will not include new vehicle parking areas.” (#8)
- “The Visitor Center will have a single entrance for both visitors and service.” (#9)
- “The project will place new landscaping on the site in accordance with the National Park Service’s Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for the Lincoln Memorial referenced in the Environmental Assessment and will maintain the open grass panel on the site surrounded at the site’s perimeter by elm trees.” (#12)

Comments unfavorably on the design elements of the proposed Visitor Center that do not meet the following mitigation actions established by the Commission at site approval **and requires** the applicant to modify the project design to meet them:

- “The Visitor Center will be constructed underground as required by the authorizing legislation for the project with no portion of the building or related building elements visible from any portion of the Lincoln Memorial steps and podium, from Constitution Avenue, and from within the axial view sheds of 23rd Street, NW and Henry Bacon Drive, NW.” (#1)

While the submission materials depict that the building is to be built underground, they also depict that some building elements are visible from the Lincoln Memorial steps and podium, from Constitution Avenue, and from within the axial view sheds of 23rd Street, NW and Henry Bacon Drive, NW. Project design revisions should reduce the scale of building openings and the protrusion of building elements that are visible from these areas.

- “The Visitor Center will not intrude into the landscape. No protrusions such as skylights, monitors, light wells, or sunken areaways, will be visible from the sidewalk surrounding the site.” (#5)

The submission materials depict that the building’s exhibit walls with skylights and sunken courtyard areaway are visible from the sidewalk surrounding the site. Project design revisions should ensure that these elements are not visible from the surrounding sidewalks.

Finds that there is not enough information to evaluate whether the design elements of the proposed Visitor Center meet the following mitigation actions established by the Commission at site approval **and requires** that the applicant provide further information on and analysis of these design elements prior to or during the preliminary design phase:

- “The Visitor Center will be designed such that light emanating from the Center’s interior will not be visible from any portion of the Lincoln Memorial, from Constitution Avenue, and from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial so as not to interfere with or encroach upon the Lincoln Memorial or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.” (#4)

and

- “The Visitor Center’s site lighting for public safety will not interfere with or encroach upon views to and from the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.” (#6)

The applicant has not yet designed the project lighting. Project lighting should be designed to meet these mitigation actions.

- “The Visitor Center’s associated pedestrian street crossing points will be designed to address traffic impacts effectively and to protect pedestrian safety.” (#10)

The applicant has not yet designed the project’s pedestrian crossing points. Project pedestrian crossing points should be designed to meet this mitigation action.

- “The Visitor Center will be constructed only on the portion of the site that lies outside of the critical root zone of existing elm trees. The applicant will develop a tree protection plan to protect and preserve the trees both during and after construction in accordance with standard design and construction procedures.” (#11)

The applicant has not yet demonstrated the actual location of the critical root zone of existing elm trees. Project materials should include a survey of the critical root zone to demonstrate how the project will meet this mitigation action.

- “The Visitor Center design will not impede the use of the site for multi-purpose recreation on the site.” (#13)

While the submission states that an estimated 40% percent of the site will be available for multi-purpose recreation, the configuration of the space changes the nature of the landscape and limits the types of activities that can be accommodated on the site. Project materials should depict what types of recreation activities can be accommodated on the site to meet the mitigation action.

- “The Visitor Center will be designed without guardrails or perimeter security elements.” (#14)

The submission states that the Visitor Center will be designed without guardrails or perimeter security elements. Project materials should demonstrate in greater detail how the sloped areas will eliminate the need for guard rails while ensuring pedestrian safety.

- “**Requires** the National Park Service to reconstruct softball fields lost as a result of this project on another site within one-half (1/2) mile of Site A, in accordance with the mitigation required in the Executive Director’s finding of no significant impact for the project.” (#15)

While NPS has indicated that it will seek to restore active recreation ball fields in the vicinity of the polo grounds located in West Potomac Park, NPS has not yet provided detailed information on this approach. Project materials should depict where these ball fields will be located in order to meet the mitigation action.

Notes the importance of the Commission's consultation process **and recommends** that the applicant continue to meet with staff for consultation during the development of preliminary and final design phases to facilitate the Commission's review of the project under its statutory review and approval process.

Deborah B. Young
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission