STAFF RECOMMENDATION

D. Levy
NCPC File No. 6597

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL CENTER
SITE SELECTION AND DESIGN GUIDELINES
Site bounded by
Constitution Avenue, 23rd Street, Henry Bacon Drive and Lincoln Memorial Circle, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the National Park Service

September 29, 2005

Abstract

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (Fund), has submitted a proposed site for a Visitor Center (Center) for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Memorial). The Fund is authorized under Public Law 108-126 to construct a visitor center at or near the Memorial on federal land in the District of Columbia or its environs, and has completed a Site Selection Study and Environmental Analysis that included seven potential sites. On May 11, 2005, the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission voted to advance a site bounded by Constitution Avenue, 23rd Street, Bacon Drive and Lincoln Memorial Circle, identified as Site A, as well as the Department of Interior South Building, identified as Site E, for further consideration. Of these, NPS has submitted only Site A and its associated design guidelines for approval.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of site selection and design guidelines pursuant to Public Law 96-297 and the Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 8905).

Executive Director's Recommendation

Advises the Commission that**:**

- Public Law 108-126 permits the Center to be built on federal land "at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the District of Columbia or its environs," but does not stipulate that the Center be constructed on the National Mall.
- The Commemorative Works Act requires that the National Capital Planning Commission, in considering site proposals, ensure that the proposed work "shall be so located as to prevent interference with, or encroachment upon, any existing commemorative work and to protect, to the maximum extent practicable, open space and existing public use."

- Site A is within the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial as identified in the cultural landscape report published by the National Park Service in 1999.
- *The Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* and the Commission's *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* encourage new commemorative works to be built outside of the Mall and the reserve surrounding the Mall.
- The NPS Cultural Landscape Report identifies views from the raised terrace of the Lincoln Memorial north to Constitution Avenue along 23rd Street and the opposing view from Constitution Avenue to the Lincoln Memorial as contributing features.
- Design guidelines included in the Cultural Landscape Report state that the open grass panels between 23rd Street NW and Bacon Drive "should be preserved and kept free of such intrusions as plantings and structures."
- The applicant's *Site Selection Study Environmental Analysis* does not contain sufficient detail to comply with the Commission's environmental procedures for review of site selections.
- The District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer found that the applicant's site selection study did not constitute "a sufficient basis for the National Park Service to make a decision in Section 106 consultation" and that the analysis "did not fully comport with Section 106 review requirements."
- The Commission has as a parallel responsibility under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission advanced both sites A and E for further evaluation, but the National Park Service submitted only Site A to the Commission for action.

Recommends that the Commission:

Disapprove "Site A" for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(73.10)41683, noting that:

- The applicant's own site selection criteria includes the requirement that the Center not intrude on critical views from the Lincoln Memorial, while requiring the accommodation of skylights, outdoor paved gathering space for large groups of people, and accessibility for deliveries, service, emergency and security vehicles.
- The applicant's proposed design guidelines would allow an increase in the elevation of the existing grass panels at Site A of between five and eighteen feet.
- Construction of a visitor center at Site A is likely to result in significant adverse effects to the vistas and landscape of the Lincoln Memorial that cannot be minimized or mitigated, as required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Potential adverse effects include damage to the historic tree canopy along 23rd Street and Bacon Drive during construction, and the introduction of inappropriate building elements into views to and from the Lincoln Memorial, which may include:
    - Skylights
    - Mechanical ventilation shafts and equipment
    - Grass-covered roof sections raised as much as 18 feet over existing grade
    - Emergency egress structures
    - Service and delivery areas
    - Perimeter security devices
    - Paved paths and plazas for large gatherings

- Manipulation of the ground plane to accommodate required ramping and to raise portions of the building above the flood plain

- The pedestrian and vehicular traffic congestion generated by the Center are likely to adversely impact both the physical setting and the visitor experience in this area of the National Mall.
- The design of an underground museum at this location is likely to mimic and therefore detract from the experience of visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, contrary to the legislative requirement to "prevent interference or encroachment upon" the Memorial.
- The applicant has not completed an adequate analysis of 'Site E' in accordance with NCPC's prior requests.

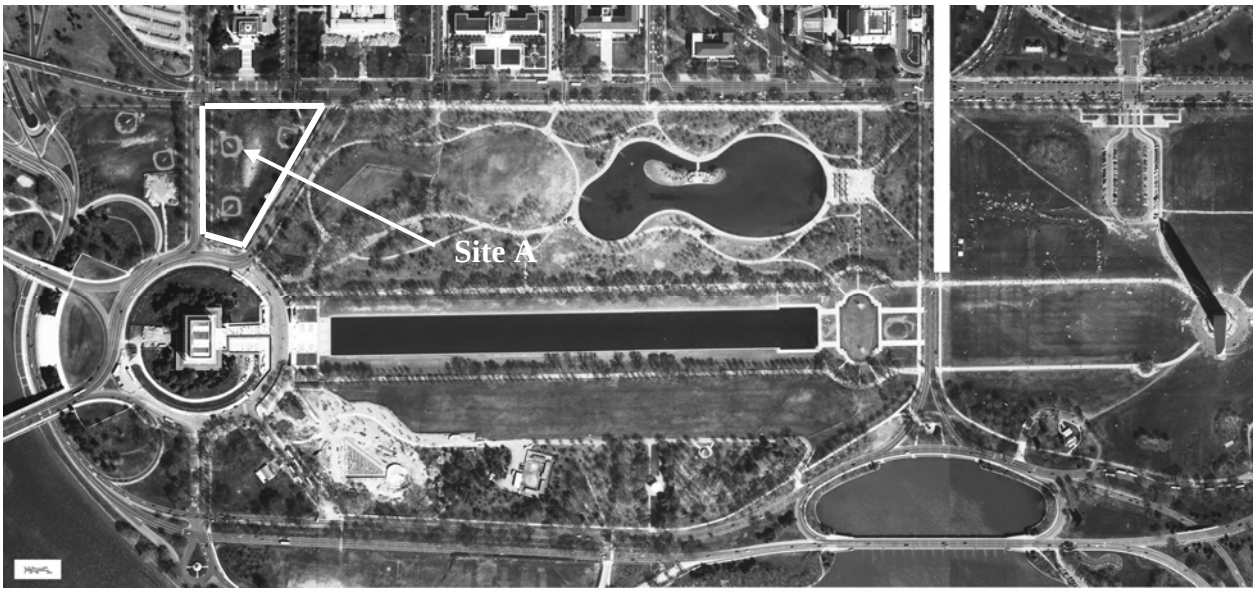
Recommends that the applicant continue to analyze the other sites included in the site selection study and expand the site analysis to include an evaluation of the building yard between Interior South and Constitution Avenue as a potential site for an underground visitor center; and that the applicant consult with staff to ensure that subsequent submissions comply with the Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures for review of site selections.

* * *

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site

The proposed site is located between Constitution Avenue, 23rd Street and Henry Bacon Drive in the Northwest Quadrant of the District of Columbia. The site is on land under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, within the identified grounds of the Lincoln Memorial, directly adjacent to Memorial Circle on the north side of the Memorial. In January of 2005, NCPC granted final approval for the National Park Service to construct a concession stand at the southern edge of the site. The concession stand is currently under construction. Prior to construction, the entire site has been used for active recreation, and contains three softball fields.



'Site A' Location

Background

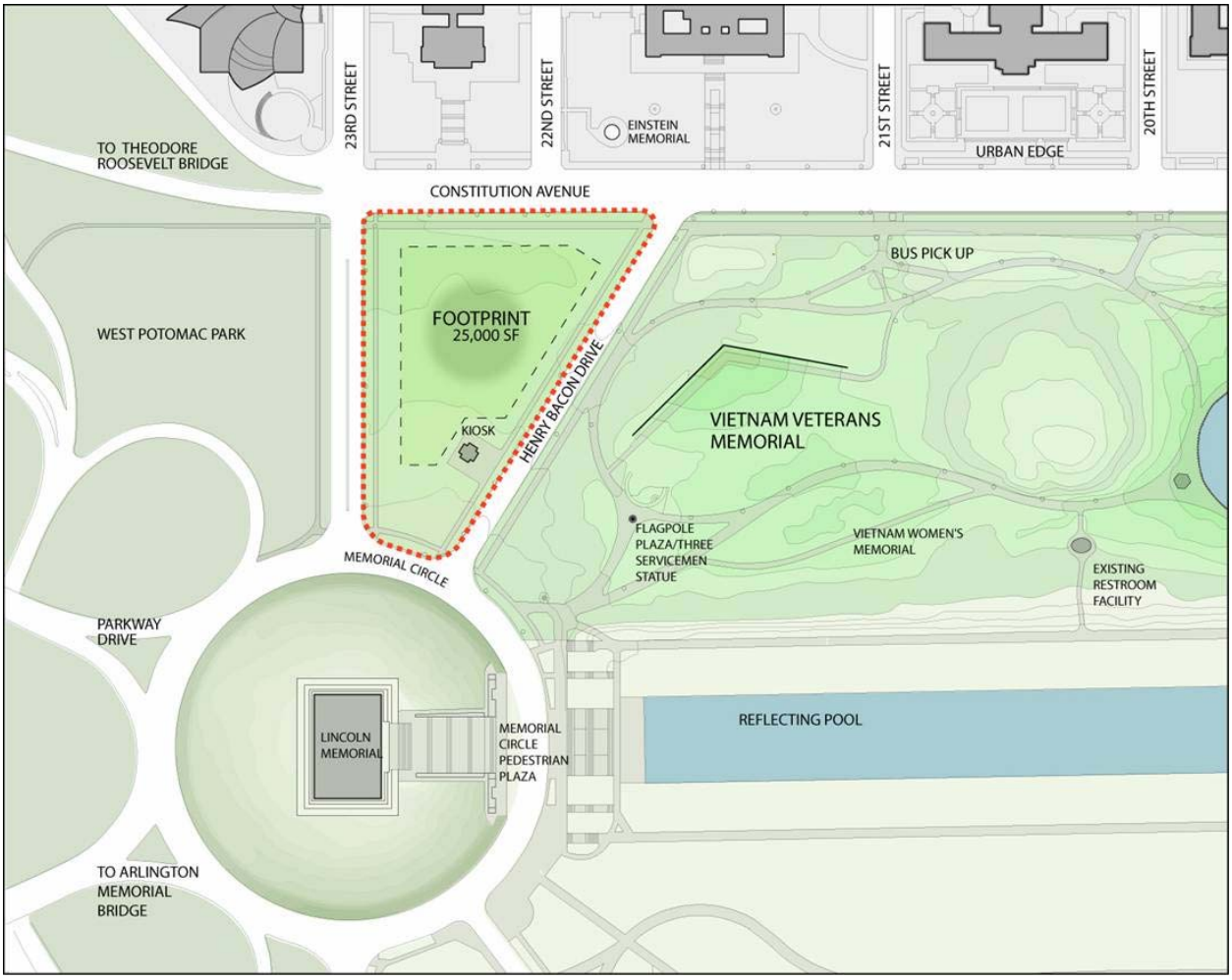
The National Park Service (NPS) has submitted the proposed site for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (Fund), which created the Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedicated in 1982. The Memorial Center was authorized as an amendment to the Commemorative Works Act in November of 2003, which allowed the Fund to "construct a visitor center at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia, or its environs…in order to better inform and educate the public about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Vietnam War."

In May of 2005, the Fund presented seven potential sites to the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) for consideration. After lengthy debate, the NCMAC voted to advance two sites, 'Site A' and 'Site E,' to the Secretary of the Interior for further consideration. In June of 2005, the Fund completed a Site Selection Study Environmental Analysis, which determined that 'Site A' was the preferred site based on the selection criteria developed under the study. Although the NCMAC recommended two sites to the Secretary of the Interior, the National Park Service has chosen to submit only 'Site A' for review by the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA).

On September 15, 2005, CFA considered the applicant's submission of 'Site A' and voted to approve 'Site A' on the condition that the applicant could demonstrate during the design phase of the project that the Commission's numerous concerns about both the site and the applicant's proposed site and building design guidelines could be satisfactorily addressed. CFA reserved the right to withdraw its site approval if such concerns could not be ameliorated. The CFA action is outlined in greater detail at the end of this report.

Proposal

The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Fund, Inc. (Fund) proposes to construct an underground visitor center to support the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Fund's accompanying design guidelines would allow for portions of the existing grass panels on the site to be raised as much as 18 feet above existing grade. Although the program for the Center has not yet been developed, the project's sponsors have indicated that it will occupy approximately 25,000 square feet on one level below ground. At this stage in the project design process, the Fund is unable to state whether that figure represents gross or net square feet. Drawings submitted with the application indicate that the footprint of the building will occupy up to 2.3 acres of the approximately five acre site. The Center's exhibits will be designed to educate visitors about the Vietnam War and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.



'Site A' Footprint on 2.3 Acre Site

<u>Authorizing Legislation</u>

Title I of Public Law 108-126 includes an amendment to the Commemorative Works Act authorizing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. (Fund) to "…construct a visitor center at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Federal Land in the District of Columbia, or its environs…in order to better inform and educate the public about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Vietnam War." Title II of this act limits future commemorative works from being constructed on the cross axis of the Mall or within its identified adjacent reserve areas. Title I requires, among other requirements:

- That the Fund will consult with educators, veterans groups, and the National Park Service in developing the proposed design for the Center;
- That the project will comply with standards applicable to commemorative works related to siting, design, construction and maintenance;
- That final approval of the Center shall not be withheld;
- That the size of the Center shall be limited to the minimum necessary to "…provide for appropriate educational and interpretive functions, and to prevent interference or encroachment on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and to protect open space and visual sightlines on the Mall;"

- And, that the Center "…shall be constructed and landscaped in a manner harmonious with the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, consistent with the special nature and sanctity of the Mall."

The Commemorative Works Act requires that applicants seek site and design approval from both the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission, and authorizes both Commissions to develop site-specific design guidelines to ensure that commemorative works are designed in an appropriate fashion to carry out the purposes of the Act.

Program Principles

According to the project submission materials, the Fund developed six Program Principles to guide the development of the Visitor Center. In order of priority, these are:

- Preserve the Existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- Enhance the Visitor Experience
- Comply with the Authorizing Legislation
- Preserve the National Mall
- Consider the Impacts of the Functional Requirements of the Center
- Consider the Practical Concerns of Construction

The Fund then generated both mandatory and supplementary criteria, against which to judge candidate sites. These are:

Mandatory Criteria

- Not intrude on critical views of the National Mall, notably views from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, and from the Lincoln Memorial steps and from the Washington Monument.
- Allow the Memorial and the Center to be mutually supporting so that each can increase the other's use by being within a ten-minute walk from one another within sight of one another (defined as visual connection between the Center's entrance and the Flagpole Plaza of the Memorial) and without crossing a busy arterial roadway.
- Not impinge on the tranquility of the park's special quiet spaces within the Memorial's limit of influence.
- Define a direct, continuous experience from the Center to the Memorial, as a prelude to arriving at the Memorial by way of the accepted entry point for the Memorial.

Supplementary Criteria

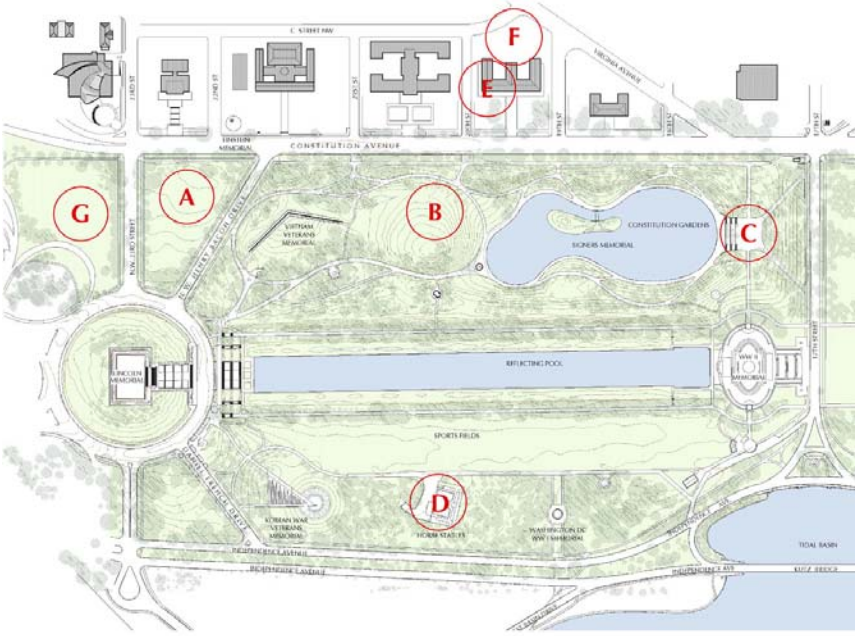
- Allow appropriate visual identification of the entry so that visitors can easily find the Center, within constraints of other criteria and those imposed by the National Mall
- Avoid distractions from other memorials, and minimize conflicts with other memorial settings.

- Not require above-grade mechanical equipment and other above-grade building elements within critical views and memorial limits of influence
- Preserve the design quality, transparency of vegetation, gently curving contours, path alignments and plant groupings of Constitution Gardens
- Limit damage and prevent loss of existing trees on the National Mall
- Protect views of the National Mall from visual intrusion, especially service vehicles
- Allow effective skylights outside of critical views and memorial limits of influence
- Provide outdoor paved gathering space near the Center's entry and exit points
- Permit primary access and egress by accessible walks and ramps
- Allow for delivery, service, security, and emergency vehicle access within confines of other constraints
- And, minimize impact and duration of disruption of the National Mall during construction.

Sites considered

The Fund evaluated seven individual sites against its mandatory and supplementary criteria. All seven sites are characterized as meeting the program requirements of the Center. The sites evaluated are as follows:

- Site A: National Park Service parcel north of Lincoln Memorial (submitted)
- Site B: Grassy Knoll west of Signers Memorial in Constitution Gardens
- Site C: Entry Plaza at east end of Signers Memorial in Constitution Gardens
- Site D: National Park Service stables south of Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool
- Site E: Interior South Building
- Site F: Parking Lot north of Interior South Building
- Site G: National Park Service parcel west of 23rd Street, north of Lincoln Memorial



Sites Considered

Sites C, D, and F were eliminated without detailed site analysis for the following reasons:

- 'Site C' was considered too far away (more than a 10-minute walk from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) and the pedestrian route between the Center and the Memorial intrudes on other existing and planned memorials, and overlaps pedestrian traffic moving between tour buses parked along Constitution Avenue and the World War II memorial.
- 'Site D' was also considered too far away, with an anticipated pedestrian travel time of 11 minutes. Additionally, pedestrians would have to move through both the Korean and Lincoln Memorial areas of influence.
- 'Site F' was considered too visually separated from the Mall, making it difficult to find.

For the remaining sites, the applicant performed an analysis, developed design guidelines, and generated a feasibility statement for each site. The urban design analysis that considered such criteria as pedestrian and vehicular circulation around the site, traffic and pedestrian volumes in the vicinity of the site, existing entry points to the surrounding park lands, views, tree canopy, and nearby activity locations. Design criteria for this site were developed based on this additional analysis. With the exception of 'Site A', all of the other sites were eliminated because they were unable to meet all four of the mandatory criteria. 'Site A' was found to meet all of the mandatory and supplementary criteria.

All sites were evaluated for:

- Circulation (vehicular and pedestrian)
- Vegetation
- Vistas
- Memorial limits of influence
- Historic places
- Contributing historic features
- Historic events
- History of use
- Noise
- Visual activity

<u>Urban Design Analysis and Site Design Guidelines</u>

'Site A'

'Site A' is 5.2 acres in size, measured from the outer curb faces of Constitution Avenue, Henry Bacon Drive, Memorial Circle, and 23rd Street, NW. The proposed building site boundary consists of 2.3 acres situated within the open central portion of the site, beyond the inner edge of the peripheral tree canopy. The proposed 25,000 square foot building footprint would be located within a grass panel that occupies 2.3 acres of the site. 'Site A' occupies the point of lowest elevation on the bowl-shaped parcel, which has been identified by the Fund's architect as a flood zone.

Views

The Urban Design Analysis identifies primary and secondary views in the vicinity of the site. Primary views shown include the view from the Lincoln Memorial toward the Washington Monument, views from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial toward the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, and views toward the Lincoln Memorial from points north along 23rd Street and Henry Bacon Drive. Views along Constitution Avenue and 22nd Street toward the site are characterized as secondary views.

Submission materials indicate that 'Site A' is clearly visible from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and that the Lincoln Memorial is visible from within 'Site A' and through 'Site A' from points along Constitution Avenue. These latter views are defined as "Determinant Views."

Determinant Sightlines

From points along Constitution Avenue facing south through the site, the Fund has developed what it terms "Determinant Sightlines," those sightlines to the Lincoln Memorial through the proposed building site. The result of this sightline study is referred to as the "Lincoln Memorial View Cone." The View Cone originates at a point of approximately five feet in height (eye level) along Constitution Avenue and terminates at the face of the Memorial between the top of the steps and the Memorial's roof. The National Park Service food kiosk, currently under construction on the south end of the proposed building site, sits below the bottom of this View Cone. At the south side of the site, the distance between the existing ground plane and the bottom of the View Cone is approximately 18 feet. The Fund indicates that "the change in grade on the site and any integral entrance façade shall not interfere with the sightline to the floor of the Lincoln Memorial Chamber," or that area within the View Cone.

Proposed Design Guidelines for 'Site A'

Based on the Urban Design Analysis for 'Site A,' the following design guidelines are proposed:

- The 25,000 square foot footprint of the Center (underground as required by the authorizing legislation) shall fall within an approximate 2.3 acre site boundary such that the boundary area falls beyond the tree canopy line along Henry Bacon Drive, Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street, NW.
- The relationship of hardscape to softscape shall be no more than 10% hardscape and no less than 90% softscape of the site boundary, including all new pathways, ramps, and entrance plazas, but not including sidewalks
- Every effort will be made to save existing trees.
- Every effort will be made to maintain active recreational use at the site.
- Requirements for air handling shall not result in vertical structures in the grass panels around the Center.
- Emergency egress shall not be achieved through vertical exit structures.
- The entrance to the Center shall be via a gradual downward slope.
- No additional accommodations for bus drop-off, beyond that currently planned by the National Park Service, shall be made for the Center.
- There will be no separate service ramp or loading dock to the Center.

- The change in grade on the site and any integral entrance face shall not interfere with the sightline to the floor of the Lincoln Memorial Chamber (elevation +58'-8") as taken from the viewpoint of an overage person at any point along the south-side sidewalk of Constitution Avenue (elevation =18'-6").

'Site E'

'Site E' is identified as space within the Department of Interior South Building. 'Site E' was found to have several positive aspects as a potential site, including its location off of the Mall outside of the Mall's quiet areas, only a five-minute walk from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. 'Site E' was advanced by the NCMAC for further consideration, but was eliminated by the applicant for the following reasons:

- Use of 'Site E' requires visitors to cross a busy arterial roadway (Constitution Avenue)
- There is no way to provide a direct visual connection to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- An analysis of the existing building determined that aside from the first floor, ceiling heights would be too low to accommodate the Center, and that many interior modifications would be necessary to utilize the first floor.
- The building does not provide the opportunity for a design that is stylistically linked to the memorial.
- The meaning attached to the building is inconsistent with the meaning of the memorial.
- It will be difficult to modify the building for adequate ADA compliant entry, exit and circulation.
- The pedestrian path from the Center to the Memorial would be likely to dilute the experience of the Memorial itself because of the proximity of the path to the Memorial.

Site Selection Study Conclusions

The study determined that a site must comply with all four of the mandatory criteria to be recommended. The study found that only 'Site A' satisfied all four of the mandatory criteria, and is therefore the only site being recommended for the Center. According to the study, construction on 'Site A' would be required to comply with the 'Site A' design guidelines. The study further states that, "…without actually producing a design for the building, the design guidelines are the most effective way to assure the built project will conform to the Criteria…" and that, "Compliance with the Design Guidelines for Site A, as well as the Site Selection Criteria, does not seem to significantly constrain the development of Site A for the Center."

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff finds that the proposed site, 'Site A', is an integral part of the immediate settings of both the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and that construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center on this site would adversely affect the settings of both memorials. The permanent modifications necessary to the site's landscape required to construct the facility, portions of the facility that are likely to protrude above ground, and the vehicular and pedestrian traffic likely to be generated by the Center will result in significant visual and physical impacts that will erode both the physical setting and visitor experience in this area of the National Mall. Commission policy calls for locating new commemorative works away from the Mall in order to protect existing memorials from intrusion and to prevent the adverse affects that would occur with overbuilding. Commission environmental and historic preservation requirements outline the necessary levels of investigation, consultation, documentation, and mitigation required for project submissions, and the applicant's submission fails to rise to these requirements. Staff focused its review in three areas: the authorizing legislation, applicable Commission policies and responsibilities, and the applicant's submission package.

Authorizing Legislation (Public Law 108-126)

Public Law 108-126 authorizes the Fund to construct the Memorial Center. Following are staff comments on portions of the legislative language contained in Public Law 108-126. Text in asterisks is quoted from the legislation.

"The size of the Center shall be limited to the minimum necessary…"

Because the applicant has not provided any information on the proposed program for the Center, staff is unable to analyze whether the proposed project size of 25,000 square feet meets this requirement of the legislation. A visitor center of this size could have a major impact on the selected site, but staff is not able to determine the probable impact of the proposed visitor center because the applicant has not provided any information on how the Center might be situated upon or incorporated into the site. The proposed site is among the most sensitive of all the sites the applicant considered, situated within the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial.

That the size of the Center shall be limited to the minimum necessary to *"…protect open space and visual sightlines on the Mall…"*

Significant portions of any underground visitor center constructed on 'Site A' would penetrate the ground plane and would therefore be likely to intrude upon visual sightlines to and from the Lincoln Memorial. Additionally, the applicant is calling for warping the ground plane in order accommodate entry and exit to the Center, and allow for portions of the building to occur above the existing ground level. Such warping of the ground plane is likely to adversely affect the ability of the site to be used for recreational purposes in the future.

The Center "shall be constructed and landscaped in a manner harmonious with the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, consistent with the special nature and sanctity of the Mall."

Staff finds that the proposed design guidelines for the site will not adequately protect either the Lincoln or Vietnam Veterans Memorials from probable physical and visual intrusions into existing Memorial grounds. Further, staff is not able to evaluate what improvements to the proposed design guidelines might better protect existing Memorial grounds, because the applicant has not provided enough information on the visitor center program for staff to understand the applicant's intentions for the proposed project.

Because the site is highly visible from both Memorials and constitutes part of the actual grounds of the Lincoln Memorial, staff is unconvinced that revising the proposed design guidelines would result in a building design that does not adversely affect the Lincoln Memorial. The simple act of siting the visitor center on this site would generate a level of visitor activity that would adversely affect both Memorials.

"The project will comply with standards applicable to commemorative works related to siting, design, construction and maintenance."

Public Law 108-126, in addition to authorizing the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Visitor Center, adopted revisions to the Commemorative Works Act limiting the future construction of commemorative works within the cross axis of the Mall or within its identified adjacent reserve areas. The applicant's proposed 'Site A' sits within this reserve. Although Public Law 108-126 authorizes the Fund to construct the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center on federal land at or near the Memorial within the District of Columbia or its environs, it does not specifically call for the Center to be constructed within the reserve. The Commemorative Works Act requires new commemorative works to be sited so that they do not intrude upon existing commemorative works. A visitor center located on 'Site A' would intrude upon both the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. 'Site A' is located within the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial, and as such, it is unlikely that construction of the Center at 'Site A' would not intrude upon the Memorial itself.

<u>Applicable Commission Policies and Responsibilities</u>

The Commission has adopted various policies that relate to the siting of commemorative works. Additionally, the Commission has independent responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106) that apply to this submission, as follows.

Memorials and Museums Master Plan

The proposed site is not included as a candidate site in the Commission's *Memorials and Museums Master Plan*. The *Master Plan* has the following to say about siting new museums and memorials:

> "Preserving the integrity of the Monumental Core, its vistas, open spaces and recreation areas is the primary objective of limiting the number of new museums and memorials.

All new memorial and museum sites should be appropriate to their subject, and respectful of their immediate surroundings and neighborhoods."

The Commission's *Memorials and Museums Master Plan* calls protecting the Mall, existing memorials, views and vistas, physical intrusion into memorial grounds, and for new commemorative works to be located outside of both the cross axis of the Mall and the adjacent reserve. It further identifies over 100 new sites for museums and memorials outside of the reserve. The applicant's proposed 'Site A' sits within the reserve.

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The Comprehensive Plan recommends siting new memorials and museums in accordance with the Commission's *Memorials and Museums Master Plan,* which calls for placing new memorials and museums in areas outside of the Monumental Core.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Commission's environmental procedures for review of site selections in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act notes that the applicant requesting the approval of a site authorized under the Act shall submit an environmental document that considers the potential environmental effects of a site selection decision upon the proposed site and a reasonable range of alternative sites. The level of detail in the environmental analysis should be proportional to the scope of the site decision, including consideration of design guidelines and other criteria required by 40 U.S.C. 8905(b), and in concert with the center's legislative authorization which states…" Chapter 89 of title 40, United States Code, shall apply, *including provisions related to the siting*, design, construction, and maintenance of the visitor center, and the visitor center shall be considered a commemorative work for the purposes of that Act…"

Staff has been provided a limited amount of background environmental information on the site in the submission material presented by the applicant. Staff concludes the site characteristics of pedestrian access, nearby vehicle traffic conditions, and existing vegetation analysis do not adhere to the environmental considerations of the Commission's Museums and Memorials Master Plan, or present a comparable level of investigation. Considering the scale of the proposed preferred visitor center site of over 5 acres and the amount of useable area of that site for a proposed structure, in the range of slightly more than 2 acres, staff finds the site selection environmental evaluation lacking in sufficient detail to assist in determining the appropriateness of that site or others that have been submitted. Examples of this lack of detail include the following:

- No evaluation of potential effects to existing vegetation (trees) or an evaluation of how existing vegetation would be preserved or incorporated into the project plan.
- Incorrect classification of existing Bacon Drive traffic flow designation. This roadway is classified as a Principal Arterial according to the District of Columbia Department of Transportation.
- No information relating to the identification of the intersection at 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue, NW as having one of the highest accident and injury rates within

the western Constitution Avenue corridor, as verified by summary reports from 1/97 to 1/2000 by the District of Columbia Department of Transportation.

- No information indicating Level of Service (LOS) of existing intersections at Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street, and Constitution Street and Bacon Drive, which operate at LOS E and F respectively during morning and evening peak traffic volumes.
- Inadequate characterization of Lincoln Circle and Bacon Drive future traffic control measures and their effects.
- Inadequate appraisal of the guideline requirement for a combined visitor entrance/service access condition, and its vehicle and pedestrian conflict effects, or necessary mitigation requirements, on either Constitution Avenue or 23rd Street NW.
- No review or analysis of effects to existing historic districts in the vicinity of the proposed sites.

The above list of omitted information may affect an adequate review of the current site locations. Staff recommends a re-evaluation of the proposed locations once this required additional information is provided by the applicant. The deficiencies noted above apply to sites A, B, E, and F. The applicant should identify feasible design measures to address the issues pertaining to the preferred site, such as the adverse traffic flow volume and adverse adjacent intersection conditions at 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

NPS initiated Section 106 consultation with the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO) on February 17, 2005, requesting comments on the Site Selection Study and Environmental Analysis for the proposed Center. The SHPO responded in writing on March 14, 2005, encouraging a "measured, balanced, and inclusive consultation process." While the Site Selection Study made a clear presentation of the *Fund's* (emphasis added by staff) preferred site and objectives, the SHPO found that it did not constitute "a sufficient basis for *NPS* (emphasis added) to make a decision in Section 106 consultation. While the document is appropriate for the Fund's purpose, some aspects of its description of priorities, methodology, and analysis do not fully comport with Section 106 review requirements." (See the attached letter from the DC SHPO.)

On April 27, 2005, NPS invited interested parties and potential consulting parties to an informational meeting on May 3, 2005. NPS held a further scoping meeting on June 23, 2005. The National Capital Memorials Advisory Commission also heard from members of the public at its meetings. NPS has not held further consultation meetings or provided further analysis to the parties since recommending Site A.

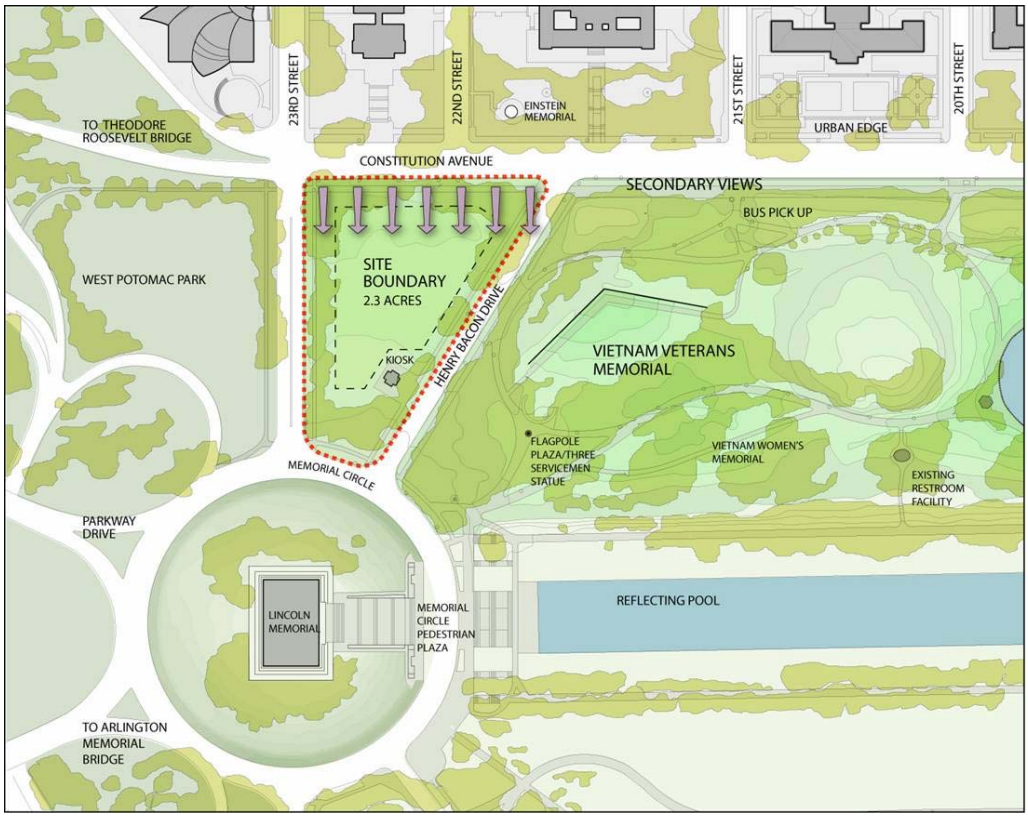
The Lincoln Memorial is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and it, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Constitution Gardens, the Elms, and views to the Lincoln Memorial along the 23rd Street view shed (among other elements) are contributing elements in the East and West Potomac Parks Historic District.

The Commission has a parallel responsibility to NPS's under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The staff encourages NPS--in consultation with the SHPO, the

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Commission, and others--to clearly identify the affected historic resources, as well as the qualities that qualify them for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Although the information about the center's program and design are so limited as to make a full evaluation impossible, the nature and content of the design guidelines and the allowances within them indicate that NPS anticipates that the site could be profoundly altered.

NPS has already heard comments from Commission staff, SHPO staff, and others about the singular importance of the Lincoln Memorial in this setting, and views of it from Bacon Drive, Constitution Avenue, from 23rd Street, NW and from Site A. While the recreational uses of the grounds around the Lincoln Memorial have changed to some degree during the 20th century, the character of the low, grassy setting with trees at the north edge of the site has remained, especially in contradistinction to the hierarchically dominant and ascendant rise of the Lincoln Memorial.

View of 'Site A' from Lincoln Memorial



Determinant Views from Constitution Avenue

View of Lincoln Memorial from 'Site A'

Applicant Submission Materials

The following discussion centers on staff's review of the applicant's submission materials. The criteria discussed below were developed by the applicant to be applied to the various sites that were considered.

Site Location Evaluation Criteria

Staff has analyzed the criteria used to select 'Site A' from among the sites the applicant considered, and disagrees that the proposed site meets all of the applicant's criteria as stated in the project materials. Staff also finds that 'Site E' meets some of the criteria that the applicant states it does not meet.

SUMMARY OF SITE SELECTION STUDY
SITE LOCATION EVALUATION

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	CRITERIA
mandatory criteria	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1a. Not intrude on critical views from the Vietnam Memorial to Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1b. Not intrude on critical views on the Mall from the Lincoln Memorial steps and from the Washington Monument.
	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	2a. Allow the Memorial and Visitors center to be mutually supporting.....Being less than ten minute aggregate walking time....
	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	2b. Allow the Memorial and Visitors center to be mutually supporting.....Visually connect Visitors Center to Flagpole Plaza.
	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	2c. Allow the Memorial and Visitors center to be mutually supporting.....Not crossing an busy arterial road.....
	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	3. Not impinge on the tranquility of park's special quiet spaces within the Memorial's "Limit of Influence".
	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	4. Define a direct continuous experience from VC exit directly to Flapole Plaza.
supplemental criteria	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	5. Allow appropriate visual identification of the entry for people to find Visitors Center.....
	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	6. Avoid distractions by other memorials and minimize conflicts within other memorial settings.
	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	7. Not require above grade mechanical equipment and other above grade building elements within critical views.....
	●	U	U	○	●	●	●	8. Preserve the design quality, transparency of vegetation, gently curving contours .....of Constitution Gardens.....
	●	U	○	○	●	●	●	9. Limit damage and prevent loss of all existing trees on the Mall.
	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	10. Protect views of the Mall from visual intrusions especially including increased service vehicle use.
	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	11. Permit skylights outside of critical views and "Limit of Influence".....as depicted on the Visual Sensitivity Plan.
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	12. Provide outdoor paved gathering space, near the Visitor Center's entrance (preferably in tree shade).....
	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	13. Permit primary access and egress by accessible walks and ramps allowing movement of 800 persons per hour in each direction.
	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	14. Allow accessiblity for deliveries, service, emergency and security vehicles.
	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	15. Causes minimal impact and duration of disruption of the Mall during Construction.
	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	OVERALL SITE RATING

● MEETS CRITERIA ○ FAILS CRITERIA U UNDETERMINED
Note: Criteria numbers refer to general site selection criteria.

Criteria:

1b states that Site A would not intrude on critical views on the Mall from the Lincoln Memorial steps. Site A is clearly visible from the Lincoln Memorial steps and from the upper platform of the Memorial itself. Elements of the building identified in the proposal, including skylights, ventilation shafts and paved gathering areas for large groups of people

also would be clearly visible if located in the existing grassy areas. Locating these elements in shaded areas would threaten the historic tree canopy

2b states that Site A is the only site that would allow a visual connection between the Visitor Center and the Flagpole Plaza. Staff notes that the tree canopy obscures the plaza from portions of Site A, and that it is visible from Constitution Gardens near where visitors would cross Constitution Avenue from Site E

2c states that Site A would not require visitors to cross a busy arterial road, although Henry Bacon Drive is classified by the District Department of Transportation as a Principal Arterial, and carries traffic to and from Memorial Bridge

3 states that Site A would not impinge on the tranquility of the park's special quiet spaces within the Vietnam Memorial's "Limit of Influence," but staff questions whether it is possible to "preserve the existing experience of the Memorial… as a quiet, informal park" with the large numbers of visitors arriving from 'Site A' immediately west, and suggests that visitors from Site E would be more likely to arrive in less disruptive "streams" than in "clumps"

4 states that only Site A would allow a direct continuous experience from the visitor center exit to the Flagpole Plaza, but staff concurs with testimony by the representative of the District Historic Preservation Officer at the NCMAC meeting on May 11 that a gradual approach to the Vietnam Memorial through Constitution Gardens from Site E would be preferable, and closer to the serene setting described by designer Maya Lin in her original concept.

6 states that only Site A would avoid distractions by other memorials and minimize conflicts within other memorial settings, but staff strongly disagrees based on Site A's proximity to the Lincoln Memorial, and finds that Site E is far more likely to meet these requirements

11 states that both Site A and Site E would permit skylights outside of critical views, but staff finds that skylights at Site A would be an unacceptable intrusion into important views and vistas to and from the Lincoln Memorial

12 states that both Site A and Site E would permit a paved outdoor gathering space, preferably in tree shade, but staff finds that a paved outdoor gathering space visible from the Lincoln Memorial would be an unacceptable intrusion, and a paved area under the historic tree canopy would potentially threaten the root system of those trees

14 states that Site A would allow accessibility for deliveries, service, emergency and security vehicles, but staff questions how this will be accomplished given proposed design guidelines prohibiting any service ramp or loading dock other than what is currently proposed for the visitor concession stand currently under construction by the National Park Service

In summary, staff finds that the evaluation criteria used to select a site from among the seven identified possible sites do not result in a site selection that satisfies the mandate of the Commission to protect the National Mall's important historic and cultural spaces. In fact, staff finds that the preferred site does not satisfy all of the mandatory selection criteria established by

the applicant, namely 1b, 2c, and 3. Additionally, given the pedestrian path anticipated by the applicant, staff questions whether 'Site A' meets mandatory requirement 2b.

Staff Analysis of 'Site A'

Staff finds that the Site Selection Study's analysis of Site A mischaracterizes the limits of influence of both the Lincoln and Vietnam Veterans Memorials. The National Park Service's 1999 *Cultural Landscape Report for West Potomac Park and the Lincoln Memorial Ground*s (CLR) illustrates the area as part of the Lincoln Memorial Grounds while the Site Selection Study shows the area of influence for the Lincoln Memorial as ending just south of Site A. The CLR identifies the view from the raised terrace of the Lincoln Memorial north to Constitution Avenue along 23rd Street and the opposing view from Constitution Avenue to the Lincoln Memorial as contributing features to the historic character of the site. And while the report acknowledges that many of the elms that line 23rd Street and Bacon Drive have been replaced over the years due to Dutch Elm disease, and use of the grass panel at the center of the site for recreational purposes is obvious, both the elms and the grass panel are identified in the CLR as intact historic elements of the original design. Staff finds that a visitor center at Site A, including elements such as skylights and paved areas, and the results of grade elevation increases over the center by up to eighteen feet, will be clearly visible from the steps and terrace of the Lincoln Memorial, and that excavation, grade changes and increased pedestrian traffic on the site is likely to damage tree roots and cause severe damage to the surrounding elms.

The area of influence for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is shown in the Site Selection Study as ending at Bacon Drive, yet increased tour bus and pedestrian activity along the Drive will have a clear impact on the western entrance to the Memorial. The National Park Service is currently constructing a concession stand adjacent to Site A, near the intersection of Bacon Drive and Memorial Circle. It will be serviced by a bus drop-off area on Bacon Drive. The Site Selection Study anticipates 800 visitors per hour at the visitor center, with pedestrian traffic between the center and the Memorial crossing Bacon Drive at Memorial Circle. This increases the potential for unacceptable levels of crowding during peak periods at the Flagpole Plaza, where the average hourly pedestrian count, at 1,482, is already the highest in the area. It is possible that while conforming to legislative direction that the center be "at or near" the Memorial, that Site A is "too near" to serve it well.

Staff Analysis of 'Site A' Design Guidelines

The design guidelines developed for 'Site A' could allow the building's above ground components to have an adverse affect on important view sheds as well as the physical and visual aspects of the Lincoln Memorial grounds. It is unlikely that the site will be available for active recreation after a visitor center is constructed below it, particularly considering the applicant's desire to warp the ground plane to allow for ramped entries and exits to serve the Center. Additionally, the guidelines would permit vertical building walls above ground, facing the Lincoln Memorial, as well as mechanical equipment facing either the Memorial of the corner of 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue. It is likely that construction of a below ground visitor center on this site would have a significant adverse affect on the mature trees on the periphery of the site. Service and security vehicles would enter the site from 23rd Street, within a critical view corridor to the Lincoln Memorial. Finally, the added pedestrian and vehicular traffic associated

with the Center is likely to have an adverse affect on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial itself, and the quiet park spaces that surround it. It is possible that in its efforts to fulfill the legislative direction of "at or near," that the applicant proposes to place the Center "too near" the Memorial to serve it well.

The applicant's evaluation of 'Site A' mischaracterizes the limits of influence of both the Lincoln and Vietnam Veterans Memorials. The National Park Service's 1999 *Cultural Landscape Report* for West Potomac Park and the Lincoln Memorial Grounds indicates that 'Site A' is part of the Lincoln Memorial Grounds, and depicts it as an active recreation space associated with the Memorial and describes it an "intact historic grass panel" with "remnant historic tree canopy." Conversely, the submission materials show the Lincoln Memorial's area of influence to end just south of the proposed building site.

View of Lincoln along Henry Bacon Drive ('Site A' at right)

The area of influence of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is shown in the applicant's submission materials to end at the east curb line of Henry Bacon Drive, yet increased tour bus and pedestrian activity along the Drive will have a clear impact on the Memorial.

Staff finds that the site selection study mischaracterizes the function of Henry Bacon Drive, which the District lists as a major arterial. Additionally, the study relies on traffic counts that are 13 years old. Initial staff contact with the District Department of Transportation indicates that

traffic signals on Constitution Avenue might be able to be retimes to support a visitor center located north of the Avenue.

The site selection study mischaracterizes the view shed from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial as only being due east or due north and south or directly to Vietnam, with points in between only being visible in peripheral vision. In fact, 'Site A' is largely visible from the steps and the top platform. The study states that the tree canopy conceals the site from view of Lincoln as well as from 23rd Street north of Constitution Avenue.

The site selection study depicts potential skylights above grade at 23rd Street, NW, with above-grade mechanical equipment placed near the intersection of 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue, an important gateway to both the Lincoln Memorial and the District of Columbia at large. The study also shows 23rd Street being used as a service entrance to the underground facility, but does not discuss the impacts that locating such a service entrance might have on view sheds and traffic in this area.

Affect on Memorial Experience

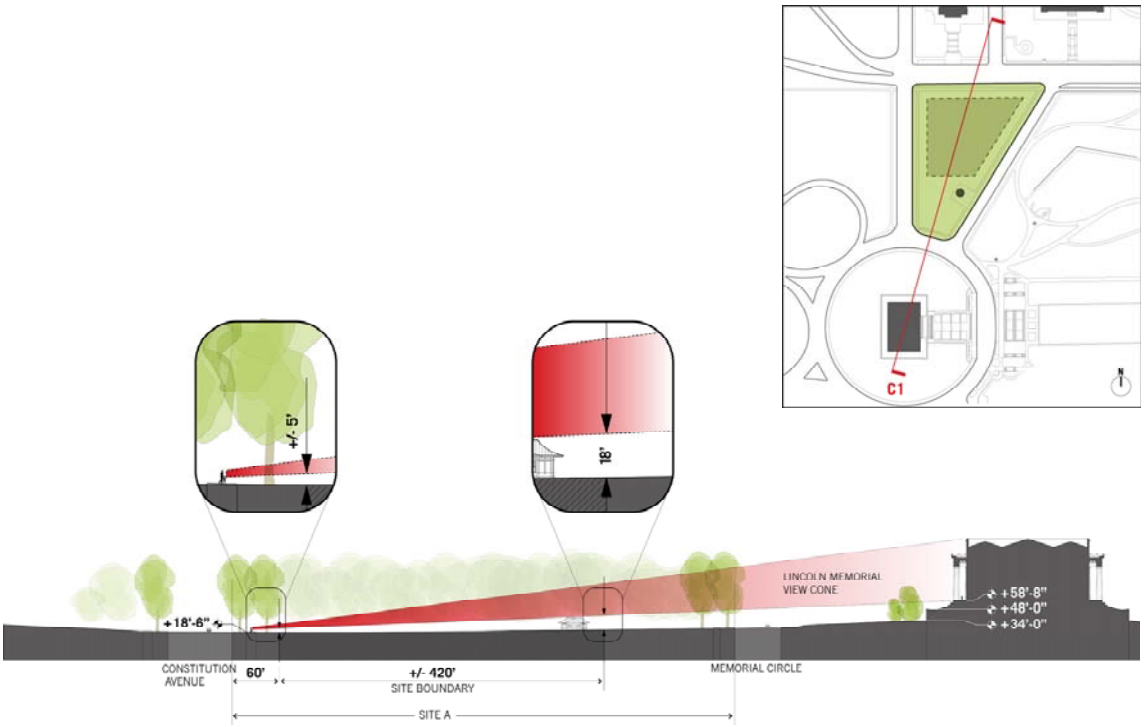
The design guidelines submitted by the applicant prescribe placing the proposed visitor center below ground on 'Site A' in such a manner as to require that entry to and exit from the facility be accomplished by means of shallow ramps to minimize above ground structures on this sensitive site. Such an entry and exit configuration is likely to mimic closely the experience of visiting the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial itself, probably the most powerful aspect of the Memorial's design. Visitors to the Memorial who first experience the Visitor Center may find the powerful design features of the Memorial diluted, the experience diminished, the design merely mimicking that of the Visitor Center.

Lack of Building Program and Adequacy of Design Guidelines

Although not required at the site approval stage, the lack of a defined building program makes it difficult for staff to analyze the potential adverse impacts to this sensitive building site ('Site A'). The design guidelines proffered by the applicant do not satisfy staff's concerns and those expressed by members of the National Capital Memorials Advisory Commission and the State Historic Preservation Officer. The guidelines would allow an above ground portion of the building to be constructed up to 18 feet in height at the south end of the site. Although the applicant states that any elevated portion of the site would be covered in landscape materials, the guidelines would allow an 18 foot high vertical window wall to be constructed along the site's most sensitive side, facing the Lincoln Memorial. Such a window wall would be clearly visible from the steps of the Memorial and from the top of the Memorial itself. Additionally, warping the site to such an extent would make active or passive recreation on site virtually impossible after the building is constructed.

The guidelines state that no above ground portions of the building would be constructed within the grassy panel of the site, but do not preclude that necessary above ground portions would be constructed within the wooded edge of the site surrounding the grassy panel.

Paved areas of the building, including entry and exit walks and gathering spaces at both the entrance and the exit would have a major visual impact on the site, even if held to ten percent (10%) of the site area, and would also impact the physical use of the space at ground level for other active or passive uses.



Proposed View Cone through Site with Buildable Area Below

<u>'Site E'</u>

The applicant did not perform a site analysis for 'Site E' because the site is within an existing building, Interior South. Instead, the applicant performed an analysis of the building itself and determined that it was not feasible to locate the visitor center within the building. Staff finds the applicant's evaluation of 'Site E' lacking in detail compared to that performed for other sites. 'Site E' has the advantage of being near the Memorial, yet it is removed from the Mall sufficiently to limit adverse effects to the Mall and to other memorials on the Mall. Interior South sits directly across the Mall from Constitution Avenue, a gateway to the Mall from the north. The Interior South building has historic connections to American wars and to American protests of war-related action. The term "at or near" used in the legislation authorizing this project is subjective, yet the applicant's submission materials go to great lengths to define it and then to use it to eliminate sites, such as 'Site E,' from consideration. 'Site E' lies within a 10-minute walk of the Memorial, an acceptable distance according to the applicant's own criteria. Visitors would have to cross Constitution Avenue to reach the Memorial from 'Site E,' but they would cross at signalized intersections with marked cross walks, joining many other visitors who already cross the Avenue. Once across, they would find themselves in a tranquil environment en route to the Memorial using pathways on the Memorial's north side. Conversely, visitors leaving

'Site A' would encounter the National Park Service's concession stand and idling tour buses before they reached the Memorial from the Center site. The Department of the Interior initially stated that Interior South would not be available for the visitor center use. The Commission has asked the Department of Interior to reconsider the availability of 'Site E,' but has not yet received a response to this request. In addition to further consideration of Interior South, the applicant could consider siting the Center beneath the south lawn of the Interior South Building, between the building and Constitution Avenue. Such a site has not been considered. Other sites north of Constitution Avenue should also be considered.

CONFORMANCE

National Capital Urban Design and Security Plan

The proposal does not include any information on anticipated perimeter security elements for the project. Although the project is not yet under design, pending site selection, the potential impacts of perimeter security requirements should have been incorporated into the site selection criteria and development of design guidelines.

CONSULTATION

National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

In May of 2005, the Fund presented seven potential sites to the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) for consideration. After lengthy debate, the NCMAC votes to advance two sites, 'Site A' and 'Site E' to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) for review and approval.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal on September 14, 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 of Fine Arts

On September 15, 2005, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed 'Site A' and its associated design guidelines, expressing "great concern about…problems inherent in the only site presented for approval (Site A) due to its proximity to the Lincoln Memorial." CFA acted to give only conditional approval to 'Site A' and to continue consideration of the proposed project on the site conditional on further architectural development of the building and its program to

demonstrate how the complex difficulties of Site A can be addressed in a satisfactory way. CFA asked for "further consideration of the Interior South Building." CFA also expressed:

- Concern with the concept of entering a subterranean interpretive center by long ramps "inappropriately similar to and detract[ing] from the experience of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial itself."
- That "an underground facility is not the same as one that has been merely bermed and covered with soil."
- That a half-buried structure mounded with earth would have an impact on the Lincoln Memorial and its grounds."
- That the technical requirements of underground buildings always require vertical penetrations and appurtenances above the ground plane…"
- And finally, that given the need for excessively long ramps to serve an underground structure on this site, "a better solution might be to create a small entry pavilion to provide access to the facility from the existing grade."

CFA stated that its conditional approval was "pending the presentation of a convincing solution that detracts from neither the setting for the Lincoln Memorial nor the experience of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial."