
GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL, FOUNTAIN FOUR
West Potomac Park East of Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin

Report to the National Park Service

May 4, 2000

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, submits preliminary and final site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial. In 1990 the Board of Regents was authorized by Congress to establish a Memorial to George Mason. The proposed design plans draw upon the original garden design of the site, which included the fountain and a trellis.

Authority

Public Law 101-358, P.L. 102-277 and P.L. 99-652.

Commission Action

The Commission **approves** the preliminary site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial, Fountain Four, West Potomac Park, east of the Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(73.10)-40788.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents (Regents) has submitted preliminary and final site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial. George Mason was a Virginia patriot and colleague of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. His 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights was the basis for the writing of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution. The construction of the memorial will provide for the renovation of one of Washington's intimate designed historic landscapes near the Jefferson Memorial. Historic layouts and photographs have been used as the basis for the design with an objective of providing a modest and contemplative environment.

Site

- The site, near the Jefferson Memorial in West Potomac Park, is referred to as Fountain Four. It is bounded by Ohio Drive, SW on the north and west, and generally bounded by the George Mason Memorial Bridge and its approach lanes on the south and east. The existing fountain feature is a remnant of the early development of West Potomac Park. By 1905, the area was improved by the construction of Fountains 1, 2, 3, and 4. Fountains 1, 2, and 3 were demolished in 1947 for the construction of the 14th Street Bridges across the Potomac River.
- In addition to Fountain Four, the site contains planting beds, walkways and rows of shrubs formally arranged in a circular pattern. The site is enclosed by a hedge, which is surrounded by a variety of trees and shrubs as a backdrop.
- The existing fountain is drained during the winter months to prevent ice damage and to allow for the cleaning and maintenance of the pool bottom.

Design

- The design for the memorial is set within the context of the existing garden and pool. The entrance to the garden will be enhanced with a low curb wall inscribed with text that introduces the memorial.
- The principal memorial element is a slightly larger than life-size sculpture of George Mason. This element is in a sitting position on a bench located beneath a 9-foot high by 72-foot long semi-circular trellis. The portion of trellis that is above the sculpture of George Mason is slightly higher by approximately 1 ½ feet to provide emphasis to the sculptural element. The trellis will be set on axis to the garden entrance and will be located to the rear of the garden against the support slope for the roadway leading to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.

- Two four-foot, nine-inch-high limestone inscription walls will flank the sculpture of George Mason. Each of these walls will be approximately nine feet in length. Both the sculpture and inscription walls will be located on a paved platform underneath the trellis.
- The stone walls will be inscribed with text related to George Mason and the central space within these walls will contain a niche where the life size figurative sculpture is to be located.
- Existing walkways within the site will be renovated and enhanced with new natural stone paving.
- Additional seating will be placed within the garden and under the trellis and plantings will be added at the back of the memorial on the slope embankment to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.
- Supplemental plantings will also be added to complement the existing plantings surrounding the garden and pool.
- Minor alterations to the fountain will be accomplished to improve operational efficiency and enhance the aesthetics of the pool. Low bubblers will replace the existing tall waterspout.
- There will be no new lighting beyond the existing Washington Globe fixtures currently in the garden.

All of the above actions are intended to memorialize George Mason as well as enhance the existing garden.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its November 4, 1999 meeting, the Commission approved the design concept for the George Mason Memorial. At this time, the Commission recommended that the Board of Regents and the National Park Service consider refining the relationship between the sculptural element and the trellis with the objective of giving more prominence to the sculptural element.

EVALUATION

The preliminary and final site and building plans for the memorial remain consistent with the overall parameters established at the time the Commission approved the site. Specifically, the memorial will enhance the existing garden character of the site; will not encroach visually on the Jefferson Memorial or Tidal Basin; and access to the memorial site from the vicinity of the Jefferson Memorial will be via existing paved paths.

Previously, at the design concept stage of review, the staff felt that the relationship between the sculptural element and the trellis could be refined to give more prominence to the sculptural element. The current plans increase the height of the portion of trellis that is directly above the sculptural element to provide more emphasis. Staff concurs with this solution and feels that,

given the location of the sculptural element and bench on axis within the garden and the increased height of the trellis, the sculptural element is given more prominence.

The Park Service advises that there are no plans to provide additional lighting, beyond the existing Washington Globe fixtures, at the memorial site. The existing Pansy Garden is primarily intended to be a “daytime” experience for visitors. The provision of the George Mason Memorial should not significantly add to the current visitor patterns in this area.

Although the Park Service requested both preliminary and final approval, staff recommends that only preliminary approval be given at this time because the project submission does not include sufficiently detailed plans of the trellis structure and the sculpture to warrant final approval.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on April 12, 2000, 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 General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The proposed memorial is in an area designated for Monumental and Decorative Areas and Parks in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with an applicable policy in this element, which specifies:

Monumental and Decorative Parks...should serve as settings to enhance public buildings, monuments and memorials; as such, their fundamental integrity should be protected.

Additional policies contained in the Federal Facilities Element also apply:

The adaptation and refinement processes necessary to complete the central portion of the Monumental Core as a fine work of civic art should be continued in the development of individual project proposals within the existing basic form and framework.

New memorials to be located in the L’Enfant City and environs should be carefully sited to refine and complete the L’Enfant and McMillan plans so far as possible.

The proposed memorial is consistent with these policies.

National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) NPS completed a Finding of No Significant Impact for the memorial on October 13, 1999. Overall, the site contains no major environmental constraints. No wetlands exist at the site and no threatened or endangered species exist in the project area. The memorial would not generate significant traffic, noise or air quality impacts.

Characteristics associated with the site of the memorial include:

- The 100-year floodplain of the Potomac River
- Poor subsurface drainage and a high water table

Neither is a significant constraint to project development.

The new memorial construction will slightly impact existing vegetation. This effect involves only ornamental plantings associated with the site's former use as a remnant of formal gardens that previously existed in West Potomac Park. Currently, an existing circular pool fountain, planting beds, walkways and formal plantings of shrubs are located onsite. As noted in the Environmental Assessment (EA), NPS plans to implement several precautionary measures to protect vegetation in the vicinity of the project:

- NPS will identify and fence the areas involved in the principal work.
- Additional mitigation will include fertilization and mulching of the root zones.

Pedestrian and vehicular modes of travel provide access to the site. Heavy pedestrian use occurs on walkways along the Tidal Basin that lead to and from other monuments and memorials in the vicinity (Jefferson Memorial and FDR Memorial). NPS anticipates pedestrian access will be the primary mode of visitation to the site.

Visitor vehicular parking and public transportation is located in the general area. The EA states that parking spaces exist within a reasonable walking distance of the site at Ohio Drive and East Basin Drive. Bus parking is also available on Ohio Drive in West Potomac Park. The only Metrorail station near the project site is the Smithsonian Station (0.6-mile walking distance). No additional visitor vehicle parking or bus parking is proposed for the memorial.

According to the Park Service the planned memorial as designed will not, over the long term, increase visitation over current levels. Situated "en route" between the more destination-type memorial sites, its visitation would be closely related to visitors viewing the other major memorials.

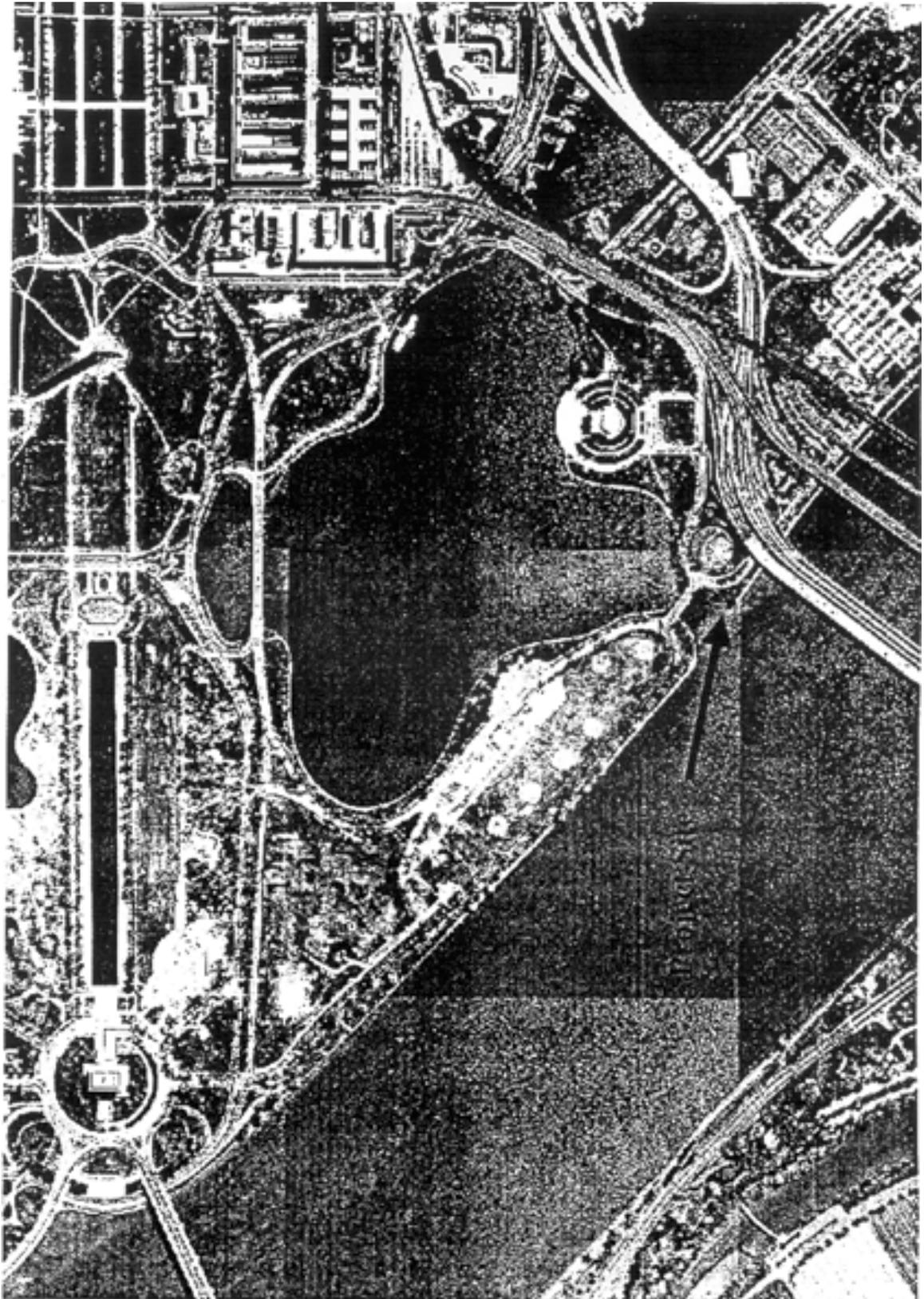
Stormwater and floodplain effects from the new memorial design will not be significant. The memorial design is primarily an open landscape feature with only minor site elements that will

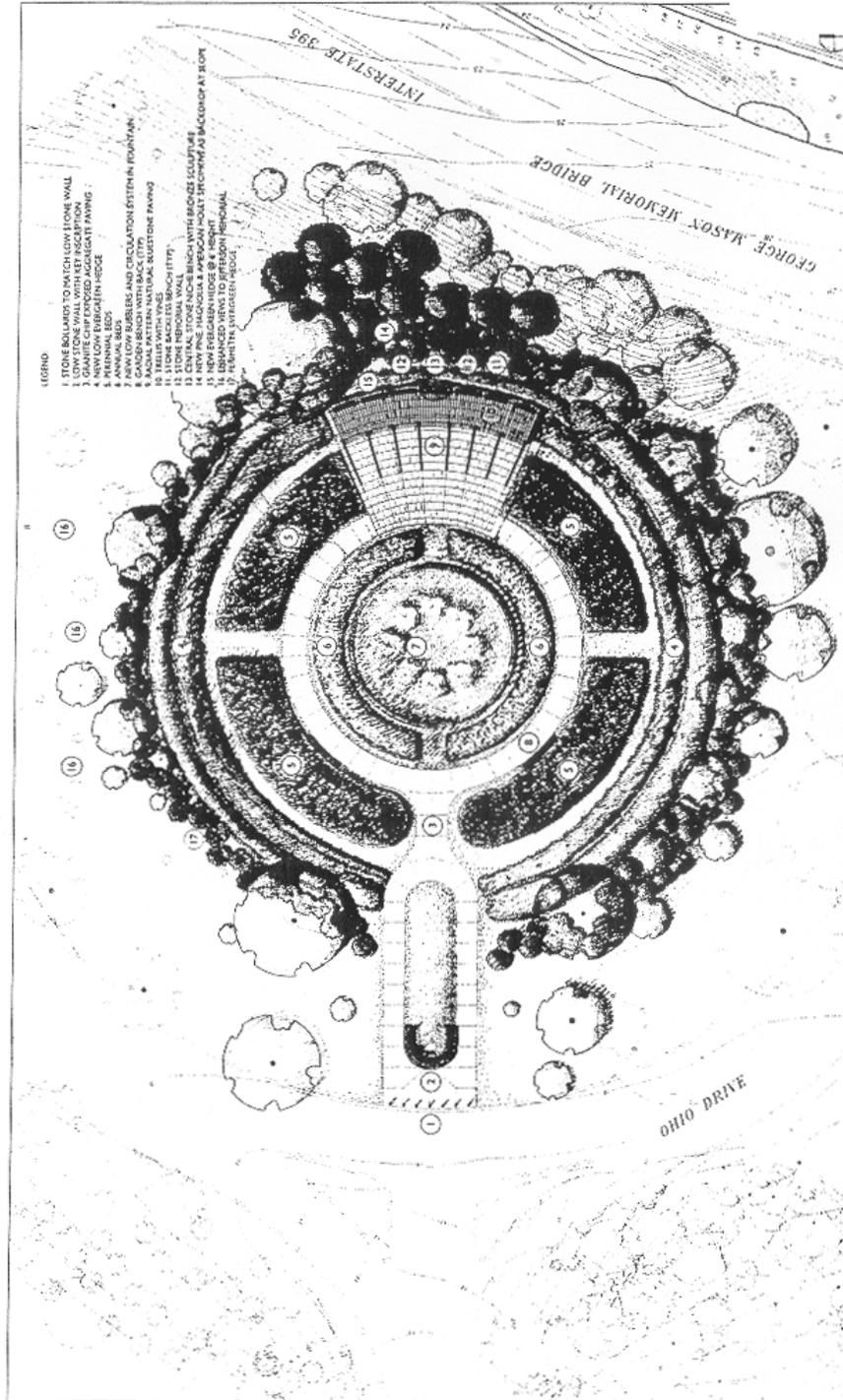
be constructed to withstand flooding effects. No substantial earth grading or other ground surface modifications will occur in the project to impact the existing floodplain storage area. NPS has identified the memorial development as an excepted action under its compliance procedures for floodplain review in accordance with Executive Order 11988. The FONSI serves to inform the public of the NPS determination.

Onsite stormwater presently is discharged into the Potomac River through an established storm drainage system that will be maintained in the new development. Because only minor amounts of new impervious pavement are provided in the new memorial design, no significant effect is derived from those improvements. Subsurface drainage will primarily relate to the establishment of plant growth and new structures in the memorial design (minor retaining walls, sidewalks, and trellis structure) and will be provided by an underdrain system connected to the storm drains. No new additional utilities are proposed, consequently ground disturbance and erosion control will be confined to the immediate boundaries of the memorial site. Erosion control measures will be implemented during memorial construction.

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has concluded its responsibilities under NHPA. The DC SHPO concurred with NPS that the construction of the memorial would have no adverse effect on those qualities of West Potomac Park that qualify it for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board, at its October 19, 1999 meeting, unanimously adopted the design of the George Mason Memorial.





THE GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL GARDEN
Design Development Site Plan

March 2000

