



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: March 2, 2017

PROJECT Vietnam Veterans Memorial "In Memory" Plaque Improvements Vietnam Veterans Memorial West Potomac Park Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7375
SUBMITTED BY National Park Service	NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.43(73.10)44508
REVIEW AUTHORITY Per 40 U.S.C§8722 (b)(1) and (d) and 40 U.S.C§ 8905	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Approval of comments on concept design
	PROPOSED ACTION Approve comments on concept design
	ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA), has submitted concept design plans for the "In Memory" plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the northwest plaza area in West Potomac Park. Installed in 2004, the plaque honors those veterans who died after their service in the Vietnam War, but as a direct result of that service. The plaza is also the location for the "Three Servicemen" sculpture.

The concept design proposes to improve the visitor's experience of the "In Memory" plaque in response to concerns regarding legibility and condition of the existing plaque. A new replacement plaque is proposed to be installed in the same location. The current plaque consists of bronze letters in a granite tablet, which is flush with the existing surrounding plaza area. Despite efforts to improve the conditions of the existing plaque over the years, the issues persist and can be viewed as detracting from the intent to honor those commemorated by the plaque. NPS has submitted three design options for Commission comment regarding the proposed improvements.

KEY INFORMATION

- The "In Memory Plaque" was authorized by Congress pursuant to Public Law 106-214 which permitted the installation of a plaque within the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to honor those veterans who died after their service in the Vietnam War, but as a direct result of that service.
 - The current "In Memory" plaque was installed in 2004, in the northwest plaza area at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in West Potomac Park, adjacent to the "Three Servicemen" sculpture.
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- The current plaque is 24 inches by 36 inches, based on the specifications set forth in the public law, allowing for the plaque to be at least six square feet in size.
 - The plaque has a number of issues related to legibility, visibility, and appropriate treatment.
 - NPS has submitted three design options which will replace the plaque generally in its existing location and size.
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RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Supports the applicant's proposed plaque improvements, including replacing the existing flush plaque with either a 1.25 inch lift or a 2 inch rear edge lift plaque, as these options best accomplish the goals of increasing the legibility and visibility of the plaque, while addressing the issues of standing water and visitors walking on the plaque.

Notes the existing "In Memory" plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in West Potomac Park, Washington, DC has faced a number of challenges regarding its setting, condition and legibility.

Recommends the applicant to explore opportunities to address the pooling of water around the existing plaza area's planting bed, and explore ways to discourage visitors from standing on the plaque area.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Remaining actions (anticipated)	Review of preliminary and final site development plans for the plaque replacement.
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PROJECT ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Staff has evaluated the concept proposal for the replacement "In Memory" plaque by determining its consistency with the relevant policies within the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* and *Commemorative Works Act*. Staff has found the proposed improvements are consistent with the Plan and the Act and will improve the visitor experience. Therefore, staff recommends the **Commission support the applicant's options for plaque improvements by replacing the existing flush plaque with either a 1.25 inch lift or 2 inch rear edge lift plaque, as these options**

best accomplish the goals of increasing the legibility and visibility of the plaque, while addressing the issues of standing water and visitors walking on the plaque.

Analysis

As indicated previously, NPS seeks to improve the “In Memory” plaque, as well as address issues with the condition and perception of the plaque. These issues include legibility and visibility of the plaque, visitors standing on the plaque, and submersion of the plaque following rain events. As such, staff recommends the **Commission note the existing “In Memory” plaque has faced a number of challenges regarding the condition and legibility of the existing plaque.**

The proposed concepts each replace the existing plaque with a new one in the same location that is more readily viewable by visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would achieve the NPS’s goal. The intent of the project is to improve the plaque experience in three ways: (1) create lettering that is legible even when covered by mud, silt, or pollen; (2) make the plaque surface discernable from the adjacent paving to discourage standing on the plaque; (3) improve the visibility of the plaque; and (4) eliminate submersion of plaque following heavy rainfall.

NPS has submitted three design options for consideration. All three concepts include a new gray patina bronze plaque overlay with black lettering, and the use of a darker stone for the base stone to differentiate the “In Memory” plaque from the adjacent paving. The base stone is proposed to be slightly larger than the bronze plaque overlay. NPS has indicated the preferred option is the installation of a 1.25 inch lift stone base overlaid by a bronze plaque with raised black lettering. The overlaying plaque will be the minimal size permitted by the authorizing legislation, which is 24 inches by 36 inches or six square feet. This option was deemed sufficient to raise the plaque out of any ponding water after a rainfall, as well as making it more visible without introducing a significant tripping hazard. The other two design options include a two inch lift at the back edge and a four inch lift at the back edge. Both of these options were deemed by NPS to have the potential to create tripping hazards and visually detract from the adjacent “Three Servicemen” sculpture.

Based upon staff’s analysis, the applicant’s proposal of either a 1.25 inch lift or a 2 inch lift at the rear edge addresses concerns regarding the legibility and setting of the plaque. Further, the 4 inch lift at the rear edge alternative design may potentially result in a tripping hazard for visitors. Therefore, staff recommends the **Commission support the applicant’s proposed plaque improvements to the “In Memory” plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in West Potomac Park, including replacing the existing flush plaque with either a 1.25 inch lift or a 2 inch rear edge lift plaque, as these options best accomplish the goals of increasing the legibility and visibility of the plaque, while addressing the issues of standing water and visitors walking on the plaque and enhance the visitor’s experience with the memorial.** Further, staff suggests the **Commission recommend the applicant explore opportunities to address the pooling of water around the existing plaza area’s planting bed, and explore ways to discourage visitors from standing on the plaque area.**

CONFORMANCE TO EXISTING PLANS, POLICIES AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

As noted above, this project meets basic goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Commemorative Works Act

As noted above, the project meets the criteria set forth in the Commemorative Works Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Commission does not require the conclusion of Section 106 process at the concept review phase.

National Environmental Policy Act

The Commission does not require National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review to be complete at the concept review phase.

CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the proposal at its February 8, 2017 meeting. The Committee forwarded the proposed concept review to the Commission with the statement that the proposal has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer the District Department of Transportation; the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer; the National Park Service; the General Services Administration and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the project at its February 16, 2017 meeting. At that time, he CFA approved the concept with the option of a replacement plaque with a 2 inch lift at the rear edge.

ONLINE REFERENCE

The following supporting documents for this project are available online:

- Submission Package
- Project Summary

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2/15/2017

POWERPOINT (ATTACHED)

NCPC File: #7375

Vietnam Veterans Memorial, “In Memory” Plaque Improvements

West Potomac Park

Washington, DC

District of Columbia Public Library

Concept Review









