

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS MAY 17, 1910

J. CARTER BROWN, Chairman

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ALAN R. NOVAK

SONDRA G. MYERS

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CHARLES H. ATHERTON, Secretary

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MINUTES OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

7 July 1981

The meeting was convened at 10:00 a.m. in the Commission of Fine Arts offices at 708 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Members Present:

Hon. J. Carter Brown, Chairman
Hon. Sondra G. Myers
Hon. Walter A. Netsch
Hon. Alan R. Novak

Staff Present:

Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Secretary
Mr. Donald B. Myer, Assistant Secretary
Mr. Jeffrey R. Carson
Mrs. Sue Kohler
Mr. Richard Ryan

National Capital Planning Commission Staff Present:

Mr. George Evans

I. SITE INSPECTION (9:00 a.m., prior to meeting)

- a. Proposed Apartment House - 24th and Virginia Avenue
- b. Vietnam Veterans Memorial; site inspection, Constitution Avenue and Henry Bacon Drive, N. W.
- c. Old Post Office; site inspection, 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
- d. Marriott/Quadrangle brick sample inspection, 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W. (S.L. 81-18) Square 254.
- e. Shopfront signs - 1301 E Street, N. W.

II. ADMINISTRATION

A. Minutes of meeting of 12 May 1981; approved.

B. Dates of next meetings, approved as: 16 September 1981 (Wednesday)
13 October 1981

C. Public hearing on Georgetown Harbour Associates project at 3020 K Street, N. W. (O.G. 81-87, HAP 81-244); report. The Secretary said it was inappropriate to comment at this time as the hearing was still in progress. He added that the Chairman's statement, read at the hearing, and any other pertinent documents would be appended to these minutes. Exhibit 1.

III. SUBMISSIONS AND REVIEWS

A. National Park Service, National Capital Region

1. CFA 7/JUL/81-1, Vietnam Veterans Memorial; preliminary design review; Constitution Avenue and Henry Bacon Drive, N. W. The members had seen the site during their pre-meeting tour; the Assistant Secretary noted for the record that the memorial would be located on a site between the Lincoln Memorial and Constitution Gardens and that it had been authorized by S. J. Res. 119, 96th Congress. He introduced attorney Robert Doubek, project director of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, who discussed the organization and work of the Fund. It was described as a non-profit, charitable foundation, established in 1979 by Jan C. Scruggs, a Vietnam veteran from Columbia, Maryland. Mr. Doubek said the sole purpose of the Fund was to establish a national memorial to the veterans and dead of the Vietnam War; after accomplishing this goal it would be dissolved. He said the Fund was largely staffed and directed by Vietnam veterans, including himself and professional advisers in the fields of engineering and real estate development. Mr. Doubek stressed that the purpose of the memorial was to acknowledge and recognize the sacrifices of all those who served and died in the war; it would make no statement as to whether the United States' involvement in the war was right or wrong.

Architect Paul Spreiregen was the next speaker; he had been the professional adviser for the competition to choose the design for the memorial. He said it had been felt that the question of a Vietnam memorial was one which needed to be addressed by all Americans; thus the competition had been open to all adult citizens. He said the jury had been instructed to ask two questions as it considered each entry:

1. Was it appropriate for the site? Mr. Speiregen noted here that it was considered important that the dominance of both the Washington and Lincoln memorials, in the same area, not be challenged.

2. What kind of memorial would ^{be} appropriate for this occasion? Mr. Spreiregen explained that consideration had to be given to the fact that it was a memorial to servicemen and women in a war that was lost,

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3.

and a war for a cause that will remain a question. He said the jury had decided that any symbol would be inappropriate for this kind of memorial.

The winning entry was the work of Maya Lin, a senior at Yale University majoring in architecture. She was present at the meeting, and at this point was introduced to read a statement explaining her approach to the design and what she hoped it would accomplish. She described the composition as "a rift in the earth...a long, polished black stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth." The names of 57,692 Vietnam dead as well as those missing would be carved into this wall. Exhibit A

Before the members considered the design, they listened to Scott Brewer read a statement criticizing the design as being hazardous, having drainage problems and being inaccessible to the handicapped, as well as being inappropriate because of its minimalistic nature and lack of nobility. Miss Lin said the hazard of someone falling over the edge of the wall (ten feet at its highest point) would be minimized by the use of a "ha-ha" or a similar natural barrier. Handicapped access down the gentle slope would be facilitated by means of a path, if the grass proved unsuitable for that kind of traffic. Mr. Doubek said drainage questions had already been investigated and were not considered a problem. Mr. Netsch noted that wheelchair access was a problem, but thought it could be solved; he suggested that the Commission participate in finding the solution. As to the appropriateness of the design, Mr. Netsch said there always had been and would be multiple opinions on memorials; his personal opinion was that this design was very effective and not minimal. He pointed out the "quiet symbolism" of the recall of the PFC stripe in the shape of the intersecting walls, a recognition of the importance of the foot soldier in the Vietnam War. He felt the design was at once modest and impressive, noting the ambience created between the observer and nature. Mrs. Myers and Mr. Novak also commented on the appropriateness of the design. The Chairman summarized the discussion, pointing out the importance of the site, and that the design was in fact characterized by nobility in its quiet strength and in its siting between two of the nation's greatest memorials.

The preliminary design was unanimously approved, with further details and materials to be reviewed at a later date. Exhibits A-1, A-2

B. General Services Administration

1. CFA 7/JUL/81-2, Old Post Office renovation; final landscaping and paving plan, 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W. The Commission had seen this site on their pre-meeting tour, and the Assistant Secretary began his presentation by reviewing for them the plans for the surrounding area: the finishing of the uncompleted ends of the IRS building, the development of the atrium between it and the old Post Office, and the special paving for the hemicycle along Twelfth Street. He noted that this master plan study had been instigated by the Commission, which had urged cooperation between the architect who developed the master plan (Harry Weese and Associates)