
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center Site Selection Environmental Assessment



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Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center Site Selection Environmental Assessment

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Responsible Federal Agency:
National Park Service (NPS)

Prepared in association with:
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

Cooperating Agency:
National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)

Abstract:

The National Park Service and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund have prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508 (1986)], as amended, National Park Service (NPS) Director's Order #12 (DO-12), and Public Law (PL) 99-652 (the Commemorative Works Act of 1986), PL 106-79, and PL 107-117.

Send direct comments on the EA by June 23 to:

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Planning, Environment, and Public Comment: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/parkHome.cfm?parkId=427>

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1.0 Purpose and Need

**Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center Site Selection
Environmental Assessment**

1.1 Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (the Fund), proposes to secure a site for the establishment of a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center (the Center). The most suitable site for the Center will be selected based on a thorough analysis of alternative locations, including environmental impacts, and the programmatic considerations that would best serve the needs of such a facility. The Center would be planned as an underground educational facility near the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial (the Memorial), which is located in the northwestern corner of the National Mall.

The Fund was established for the purpose of bringing honor and recognition to the men and women who served and sacrificed their lives in Vietnam. The Fund is a non-profit organization authorized by Congress in 1980 to build a national memorial dedicated to all who served with the US Armed Forces in the Vietnam War. This was completed and dedicated in 1982 and transferred to the US in 1984. The Fund works to preserve the legacy of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, to promote healing, and to educate the public about the impact of the Vietnam War.

Public Law 108-126 117 Stat 1348 (November 17, 2003) states that the “Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc., is authorized to construct a visitor center at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia, or its environs subject to the provisions of this section, in order to better inform and educate the public about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Vietnam War.” The Term ‘the District of Columbia or its environs’ means those lands and properties administered by the National Park Service and the General Services Administration located in the Reserve, Area I, and Area II as depicted on the map entitled ‘Commemorative Areas Washington, DC and Environs’, numbered 869/86501 B, and dated June 24, 2003. The Act also requires the Center to be located underground.

National Environmental Policy Act

The NPS and the Fund have prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA, [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508], and NPS NEPA requirements. This EA is also consistent with the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, and NPS policy. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is a cooperating agency for this EA.

This EA seeks to describe and document two proposed sites for a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center, determine potential impacts of the proposed sites on the natural and man-made environment, and recommend mitigation measures related to final approval of the proposed site. The EA incorporates the historic review process by considering the effect of the proposed project on historic and cultural resources and seeking to accommodate historic preservation concerns through historic resource review and consultation. The EA also evaluates a No Action Alternative, as required by NEPA and CEQ, and describes other alternatives considered but rejected.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The proposed action is the selection and approval of a site for the purpose of establishing a visitor center for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. As stated in the authorizing legislation, the purpose of the Center is “to better inform and educate the public about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Vietnam War.” The Center would provide an opportunity to enhance the visitor experience to the Memorial and would be a resource that helps future generations connect our nation’s past with their future. It is intended to be inspirational, educational, and uplifting, a place for healing and reflection.

Existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is located in a 2.2-acre open area of Constitution Gardens at the west end of the National Mall. The grounds of the Memorial include:

- the original Memorial (also known as the Wall) designed by Maya Lin with Architects of Record Cooper-Lecky Partnership and Landscape Architects Arnold Associates, dedicated in 1982; and
- the In Memory Plaque, an in-ground stone tablet located near the Three Servicemen Statue, dedicated in 2004 to those who served in the war and later died as a result of that service, sited and designed by the partnership of James Cummings, AIA, Arnold Associates, and George Dickie, AIA ASLA.

These features were each authorized by Federal law. In addition, the Three Servicemen Statue, sculpted by Frederick Hart, sited by the Cooper-Lecky Partnership in a plaza designed by EDAW, dedicated in 1984 along with a flagpole designed by the Cooper-Lecky Partnership is located just south of the Wall; and the Vietnam Women’s Memorial is located immediately outside of and to the south of the Memorial Grounds. It was also authorized by Federal law. Dedicated in 1993, the Vietnam Women’s Memorial consists of a sculpture by Glenna Goodacre set in a plaza designed by George Dickie, AIA, ASLA.





The central feature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the long chevron-shaped polished granite wall that is commonly referred to as the Wall. It is etched with the names of the nearly 60,000 names of those lost in battle during the Vietnam War. The design for the Wall was selected in May 1981, through a national competition and dedicated in 1982. It has since stood as an international symbol of America's recognition of the men and women who served and sacrificed in Vietnam. The Wall serves as a place of commemoration and contemplation, where restorations, reunions, and healings can occur. More than 64,000 items have been left at the Wall by visitors, offering a compelling picture of the Memorial's impact on society.

The original design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Lin provided only the chevron black granite wall with engraved names of those who had died or were missing in action. The Wall was recessed into the landscape. In the design approval process, pedestrian walks, a protective upper wall, and a lighting system were added to prepare for the functional need of visitors who would come to the Memorial. Importantly, originally, and with objection, there was no American flag, nor was there a figurative representation of the men who answered the call to duty and served in the Vietnam War. As a result, although the design had been approved, due to overwhelming controversy about design and service, no construction permit would be issued by the Secretary of the Interior until such time that there was a commitment to add a flag and sculpture to the Memorial.

With commitment of the approving agencies, the Fund, and the NPS, the design was amended and the site was reconfigured with new walkways so that the flagpole and the statuary could be added. These features now serve as the focal point of the processional entry to the center of the Memorial. While all who visit the Memorial do not begin their visit here, the majority see the flagpole and the Three Servicemen as a point of beginning and preparation for the visit to the Wall and the passage past names of those who are recognized at the site.

Thereafter, in 1988 there was legislation that the women who served in Vietnam were not adequately honored, and then again in 2000, that those who were wounded and died or succumbed to causes related to service in Vietnam must be recognized. The area of the Memorial was carefully reviewed and decisions were made to appropriately locate these additional recognitions.

Proposed Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center

The intention of the proposed Center is to enhance the Memorial experience and educate visitors to the site. The Center would provide a profound and patriotic educational experience. The Center would allow visitors to learn about the Memorial, as well as encourage young people to learn more about the Vietnam War. The Center would be designed to facilitate self-guided tours for small groups of students and tourists. It would also serve as a facility to collect written and digital remembrances of those whose names are inscribed on the Memorial, thus creating a unique historical record for current and future generations.

Congress authorized the facility as an underground facility near the existing Memorial. It is intended that the facility would provide meaning and context, present a personality to the names on the Wall, and educate current and future generations about the Vietnam War, including its national significance, and the effect of the Wall itself on American culture.

1.3 Study Area

Site Location and Description

Both of the alternative sites evaluated in this EA, Sites A and G, are located within the limits of the National Mall. More specifically, the sites are located within West Potomac Park, on parkland administered by the NPS.

Site A is bounded on each of its sides by formal walks and double rows of tree plantings, effectively creating an interior open-space of approximately 2.5 acres. The tree/walk area around the site measures approximately 50 feet wide. Alternate tree spacings conform to the 1933 plans of the Arlington Memorial Bridge Commission, approved by the Commission of Fine Arts on February 4, 1933.

Site G is bounded on three of its sides by formal tree plantings as prescribed in the approved plans of the Arlington Memorial Bridge Commission and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts on February 4, 1933. The most significant departure from 1933 is the construction of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge and I-66 ramp connections with Constitution Avenue and Ohio Drive in 1960-61 which dramatically altered this site. With appropriate setbacks, the open space area consists of approximately 2.2 acres.

Study Area

For the purpose of identifying potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed project, the study area has been defined to serve as a guide within which short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts of the proposed project are analyzed. The study area is estimated as the area extending from C Street to Independence Avenue, and from the Potomac River to 17th Street, NW.

Figure 1-1: Alternative Sites A and G, and Study Area



1.4 Planning Process

1.4.1 Legislative Framework

The visitor center for which a site is being selected was authorized by Title I of Public Law 108-126, 117 Stat. 1348, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center. The full text of the law is provided as Appendix A. Legislation for the Center was introduced in the United States House of Representatives and the US Senate in 2003. HR 1442 was introduced on March 26, 2003 by Congressman Pombo, followed by House Report 108-295. On May 19, 2003, S. 1076 was introduced by Senators Hagel, McCain and Kerry. Senate Report 108-98 accompanied the Senate bill.

It was considered in these reports that “a visitor center would provide an educational experience for visitors by facilitating self-guided tours, collecting and displaying remembrances of those whose names are inscribed on the Memorial, and displaying exhibits discussing the history of the Memorial and the Vietnam War.” S. 1076 proposed that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. be authorized to establish an education center near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Section 101 of the law provides the following direction:

- (1) construct a visitor center at or near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Federal land, in the District of Columbia, or its environs
- (2) the visitor center shall be located underground.
- (3) the Fund shall consult with educators, veterans groups, and the NPS in developing the proposed design of the visitor center.
- (4) the visitor center shall be landscaped in a manner harmonious with the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

According to the Act, the visitor center is to be considered a commemorative work and requires that site and design approval be consistent with the process established by the Commemorative Works Act.

“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, except that (1) final approval of the visitor center shall not be withheld; (2) the provisions of subsections (b) and (c) of section 8908 of title 40, United States Code, requiring further approval by law for the location of a commemorative work within Area I and prohibiting the siting of a visitor center within the Reserve shall not apply.”

1.4.2 Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center Planning

A Site Selection Study was prepared and released for public review in January 2005 to evaluate and recommend a potential location for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center. It evaluated seven sites which are described in 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. The site evaluation team consisted of James Cummings, AIA, the current Architect-of-Record for the Memorial; Arnold Associates, who were the original Landscape Architects for the Memorial; and George Dickie, AIA ASLA, the Architect of the Vietnam Women's Memorial. The purpose of the study was to recommend the most suitable location for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center pursuant to the Act. The intent was to identify a site that would be closely related to the Memorial experience and would support the stated vision for the Center. The study evaluated seven potential sites using the following process:

1. Program Principles for the overall project were developed by the Fund and the NPS, and included the limitations of the authorizing legislation.
2. The objectives for the Center were stated in the form of a Preliminary Design Program (the Program) for the project. (It was understood that the program for the Center will be adjusted as part of the building design process, and as knowledge of the Center, its site, and its exhibit unfold.)
3. Site Selection Criteria were developed in response to the Program requirements.
4. All potential sites were identified, using the guidance of the Program to limit the area of study to the western half of the National Mall.
5. The potential sites were tested against the Site Selection Criteria. Sites clearly not meeting these criteria were eliminated from further consideration.
6. The remaining potential sites were each analyzed in detail.
7. Design Guidelines for each site were formulated to improve conformance with the Site Selection Criteria. Not all sites could be brought into compliance with the Site Selection Criteria.
8. The sites were evaluated on the basis of which Site Selection Criteria they met to determine a recommendation.

The Site Selection Study is provided under separate cover as Appendix B.

Design Competition

Subsequent to the authorizing legislation, the Memorial Fund launched a national design competition, attracting entries from 39 teams of America's best architects, exhibition and landscape designers, and engineers. The selection committee chose the team of Polshek Partnership LLP (architects) and Ralph Applebaum Associates, Inc. (exhibit designers) to collaborate in the design of the Center. Additionally, the landscape design will be planned by Hargreaves Associates. The design of the Center will be focused on preserving the contemplative nature of the Memorial and creating a landscape and design harmonious with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the special nature and sanctity of the National Mall.

1.4.3 Agency and Public Coordination

Environmental Coordination

As part of the preparation of this EA, the NPS has contacted appropriate government agencies, public organizations, and interested citizens. This proposal has been discussed in meetings before the public, including a public meeting on February 22, 2005 during which a full explanation of the site analysis was presented, and a public meeting on June 23, 2005 during which NPS provided an opportunity for public comment on the site selection. The proposed Center was also discussed with the public at several meetings of the National Capital Memorials Advisory Commission.

The consultation process has involved extensive coordination with appropriate agencies and identified stakeholders. In particular, both CEQ and NCPC have provided guidance on the environmental review of the sites.

Agency and public coordination has and will continue to involve the following agencies and organizations:

- National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)
- US Commission of Fine Arts (CFA)
- Federal Reserve Board
- American Pharmaceutical Association
- National Academy of Sciences
- DC State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- DC Department of Transportation (DDOT)
- DC Department of the Environment.
- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A
- Committee of 100 on the Federal City
- National Coalition to Save our Mall

A public and agency review meeting is also planned for June 8, 2006 to be held at the NPS headquarters. Subsequent to the EA process, NCPC and CFA will continue their review and approval roles on the proposed Center including developing design guidelines for the Center.

Historic Preservation Consultation

The NPS initiated NHPA Section 106 consultation with the DC State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on February 17, 2005, requesting comments on the Site Selection Study and Environmental Analysis for the Center. The SHPO responded in writing on March 14, 2005 with both procedural and substantive comments. Regarding procedural issues, the SHPO recommended that NPS and the Fund ensure a measured, balanced, and inclusive consultation process allowing all interested parties a reasonable opportunity to comment before critical project decisions are made. With respect to substantive issues, the SHPO stated that the January 2005 Site Selection Study and Environmental Analysis was not sufficient to fulfill Section 106 requirements. The NPS then held a Section 106 informational meeting on May 3, 2005.

Attendees included the NCPC, the CFA, and the SHPO, among other members of the public and interested parties.

West Potomac Park, the Lincoln Memorial, and the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans are listed as historic resources on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, Arlington Memorial Bridge, the Lincoln Memorial and grounds, the Reflecting Pool, Constitution Gardens, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Women's Memorial, the 56 Signers Memorial, and the Korean War Veterans Memorial are considered contributing structures or sites to the West Potomac Park Historic District. In addition, the alternative sites are located within a Historic District that includes uniquely designed buildings and grounds on the north side of Constitution Avenue selected to frame Potomac Park. The buildings from 23rd Street to Virginia Avenue include the American Pharmaceutical Association, the National Academy of Sciences, the Federal Reserve, Interior South, and the Pan American Annex structures. As a result, a review of the project's potential effects on historic resources is being undertaken consistent with Section 106 of NHPA.

1.5 Environmental Issues Assessed

This EA has been prepared to examine the potential impacts that would result on socio-economic resources, visitation and visitor experience, cultural and aesthetic resources, transportation systems, and natural resources. For each resource discipline, the EA varies in the amount of detail necessary to identify and document the relevant issues. Due to the location and context of the proposed sites, several environmental issues were not considered in this analysis. These include:

Demographics and Environmental Justice: There are no residences located within the project site or surrounding area. The residential community in the vicinity of the project site is extremely limited with a population of 12 people residing within the US Navy's Potomac Annex to the north of the site, as enumerated in the 2000 Census. For this reason, Demographics and Environmental Justice were dismissed as impact topics.

Economic Resources: The proposed Center is a visitor education facility that is an extension of the existing Memorial. It is not expected to include substantial retail services. As such, Economic Resources was dismissed as an impact topic in this EA.

Key issues requiring emphasis in this EA include:

Transportation Systems

- Roadways and Traffic Patterns, including traffic counts, and accident rates
- Parking
- Public Transportation
- Pedestrian Circulation, including pedestrian safety and pedestrian crossings

Cultural and Aesthetic Resources

- Historic Resources, including cultural landscapes, historic buildings, monuments, streets, and vistas
- Visual Resources and Viewsheds, including views to/from the Lincoln Memorial, to/from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and from sites along Constitution Avenue

Natural Resources

- Vegetation, including historic landscapes, trees, and other vegetation
- Air Quality, including localized impacts caused by increased number of visitors, traffic, and buses
- Floodplains, including compliance with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management

Socio-Economic Resources

- Visitor Experience, including noise, lighting, traffic, and crowd impacts on existing memorials such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Lincoln Memorial, and other resources in West Potomac Park and the National Mall
- Land Use, including potential loss of public open space and active/passive recreation

1.6 Cumulative Relationships of Nearby Projects

Section 102 of NEPA, 42 USC S 4332 and CEQ Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA, 40 CFR parts 1500-1508 require the consideration of cumulative impacts that may result from a proposed project. A cumulative impact is the impact on the environment which may result from the “incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.”

Ongoing and planned projects in the vicinity of the alternative sites could result in cumulative impacts when considered together with the proposed construction of the Center. Projects in the area include the ongoing Lincoln Memorial Circle Rehabilitation and Security Improvements; the planned American Pharmaceutical Association building addition and renovation; the proposed United States Institute of Peace headquarters; nearby road improvements; and the planned Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control project at 23rd Street.

Lincoln Memorial Circle Rehabilitation and Security Improvements

The NPS is in the process of rehabilitating Lincoln Memorial Circle, the roadway that encircles the Lincoln Memorial. The project also involves the construction of a vehicular barrier system, and improvements to visitor services at the Lincoln Memorial. The NPS is constructing a vehicular barrier system including: a retaining wall that would extend from Daniel Chester French Drive to Henry Bacon Drive along the west side of the Memorial; bollards that would be placed along the Memorial on the east; a secure access gate on the west side of the Memorial; and two visitor service areas on the north and south sides of the Memorial (including a food concession kiosk to the north). This project is intended to improve traffic flow, provide loading/off-loading for tour buses, increase visitor safety, and improve the overall visitor experience in the vicinity of the Lincoln Memorial. This work is expected to be completed in 2008.

American Pharmaceutical Association

The American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA) is constructing an addition to the rear of its existing office facility located across Constitution Avenue from the National Mall between 22nd and 23rd Streets. The land was formerly under the control of General Services Administration (GSA) and was transferred to APhA.

United States Institute of Peace Headquarters

By Act of Congress in 1996, the United States Institute of Peace was authorized to construct a permanent headquarters building on a site located at the northwest corner of the intersection of 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue, NW. This site, across from Site A and G, is to be developed with a 154,000 square-foot building, the conceptual design of which was approved in November 2002 by the Commission of Fine Arts.

Nearby Road Improvements

Planned road improvements in the vicinity of the alternative sites being considered for the Center include rehabilitation of Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, rehabilitation of Constitution Avenue from 15th Street to 23rd Street, rehabilitation of Ohio Drive from 23rd Street to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkways, planned improvements to C Street between 21st Street and 23rd Streets, improvements to 23rd Street between Constitution Avenue and Lincoln Memorial Circle, and the planned access roadway improvements near the Kennedy Center. The Theodore Roosevelt Bridge improvement project is currently in the preliminary planning stage and construction is not expected to begin until after the Lincoln Memorial Project is complete.

Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control Project

The Army Corps of Engineers has approved an unfunded flood protection project for the purpose of protecting the downtown area of Washington, DC. Modifications to Site G are part of the planned flood protection measures. NPS is currently responsible for constructing emergency closures at 23rd Street and Constitution Avenue, as guided by “Modifications to Washington, DC and Vicinity Flood Protection Project Environmental Assessment (1992).” According to this report, permanent measures to necessary prevent flooding would consist of two earth embankments separated by the eastbound ramp to Constitution Avenue for Theodore Roosevelt Bridge. The earthen berm constructed immediately west of 23rd Street and extending south (parallel) along 23rd Street from Constitution Avenue to Lincoln Memorial Circle would raise the existing grade to the west of 23rd Street.

2.0 Alternatives Considered

**Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center Site Selection
Environmental Assessment**

2.0 Site Selection and Alternatives Considered

2.1 Site Selection

The site selection process for the Center was initiated by the Fund in 2003. The process began with the development of Program Principles based on the stated objectives for the Center. The Program Principles were used to identify potential sites and limit the area of study to the western half of the National Mall.

The site selection criteria (as identified in Section 2.1.1 Past Site Selection Criteria) were then applied to eliminate sites from further consideration, and identify sites in need of more detailed analysis. The site selection analysis was distributed and made available for public review, and a public meeting was hosted by the NPS and the Fund to receive public comments.

2.1.1 Past Site Selection Criteria

Program Principles

Program Principles were established for the Center to aid in the site selection and design processes. The Principles were developed by the NPS and the Fund, and include the limitations of the authorizing legislation. The Program Principles, in order of priority, are as follows:

1. Preserve the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial;
2. Enhance the visitor experience;
3. Comply with the authorizing legislation;
4. Preserve the National Mall;
5. Consider the impacts of the functional requirements of the Center; and
6. Consider the practical concerns of construction.

Mandatory Criteria by the Fund

In addition to the Principles listed above, site selection criteria were established by the Fund to guide their consideration of potential sites. Compliance with the four essential criteria (Mandatory Criteria) were necessary for a site to be acceptable for detailed analysis by the Fund.

1. Not intrude on critical views of the National Mall, notably:
 - a. From the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument
 - b. From the Lincoln Memorial steps and from the Washington Monument
2. Allow the Memorial and the Center to be mutually supporting so that each can increase the other's use by:
 - a. Being within less than 10 minutes aggregate walking time from the bus drop-off to the Flagpole Plaza, using an average walking speed (264 feet per minute, or three miles per hour)
 - b. Visually connecting the Center entry and exit with the Flagpole Plaza
 - c. Not crossing a busy arterial roadway

3. No imprinting on the tranquility of the park's special quiet spaces within the Memorial's Limit of Influence
4. Define a direct, continuous experience between the Center and the Wall, by way of the Flagpole Plaza as the Plaza is the *de facto* entry to the Memorial for most visitors.

Supplemental Criteria by the Fund

Failing to meet one of more of the Fund's Supplemental Criteria did not eliminate a site from recommendation, but any deficiency required careful review before the Fund would give further consideration to a site.

5. Allow appropriate visual identification of the entry for visitors to find the Center, within the constraints imposed by the other Criteria and in keeping with the limited use of signs and other graphics on the National Mall.
6. Avoid distractions from other memorials, and minimize conflicts with other memorial settings.
7. Not require above-grade mechanical equipment and other above-grade building elements within critical views and memorial Limits of Influence as depicted on the Site Analysis Plan
8. Preserve the design quality, transparency of vegetation, gently curving contours, path alignments and plant groupings of Constitution Gardens as a Cultural Landmark, maintaining original concept for grading and planting.
9. Limit damage and prevent loss of all existing trees on the National Mall
10. Protect view to the National Mall from visual intrusion, especially increase service vehicle use.
11. Allow effective skylights outside of critical views and memorial Limits of Influence as depicted on the Site Analysis Plan
12. Provide outdoor paved gathering space, near the Center's entrance (preferably in tree shade) to allow for queuing and gathering for anticipated large groups of people and for possible security screening. Allow gathering space near the Center exit.
13. Permit primary access and egress by accessible walks and ramps to accommodate intensive pedestrian traffic in each direction.
14. Allow accessibility for deliveries, service, emergency and security vehicles within the constraints imposed by the other Criteria.
15. Minimize impact and duration of disruption of the National Mall during construction.

2.1.2 Potential Sites Considered

A Site Selection Study- Environmental Analysis was completed for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center in 2005 by the Fund. The analysis was commissioned to evaluate potential sites for the Center. The site selection study reviewed sites based on their relationship to the Memorial experience and their ability to support the Fund's stated visions for the Center. The vision for the Center included: the site must be closely related to the Memorial to provide an experience that would be extended, related, informative, and supportive of the commemoration present at the existing Memorial; and the site must also be sufficiently independent so that any impact of the Center would not become harmful to the Memorial it supports.

The site selection criteria established pursuant to the authorizing legislation and the Commemorative Works Act (US Code Title 40 Section 8905, et seq.) were used in the consideration of seven potential sites. These sites were all on Federal land either administered by the NPS or occupied by the US Department of the Interior. These sites included:

- A: Parcel north of Lincoln Memorial
- B: Grassy mound between Constitution Gardens Lake and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- C: Entry plaza at the east end of Constitution Gardens at 17th Street, NW
- D: Horse stables south of Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool
- E: Interior South Building (formerly Public Health Services) and an underground site in the front yard
- F: Parking lot north of Interior South Building
- G: Parcel west of 23rd Street, north of Lincoln Memorial

After a preliminary review of the potential sites, five sites were eliminated from consideration (as discussed below in Section 2.1.3 Sites Considered but Rejected). This EA will review two alternative sites in detail: Site A and Site G, as well as a No Action Alternative.

Figure 2-1: Seven Potential Sites Considered



2.1.3 Sites Considered but Rejected

One of the primary requirements for siting the Center is that the visitor experience at the Center should be complementary and almost continuous with the visitor experience of the Memorial. Therefore, the potential relationship of a given site to the existing Memorial was a critical issue in the site selection process.

Site C: Site C occupies an elevated landform to the east of Constitution Gardens Lake. The Site has an attractive view of the Memorial across the lake. Site C was eliminated from consideration primarily based on its distance from the Memorial. Locating the Center on Site C would require more than 10 minutes walking time for visitors traveling from the Center to the Memorial and the pedestrian path to the Memorial would cause interference with the Vietnam Women's Memorial. The site does not relate well to the existing Memorial as a result of its distance from the Memorial and the features between the site and the Memorial. Also, Site C is located in a well-used path between the World War II Memorial and a bus pick-up area.

Site D: Site D is located at the site of the US Park Police horse stables, south of the Reflecting Pool, immediately east of the Korean War Veterans Memorial. The existing features of the site would allow the Center to be unobtrusively located in an existing stand of trees at the south edge of the park. Site D is removed from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and exceeds the desired maximum pedestrian travel time of 10 minutes from the Center to the Memorial. The visitor path would encounter significant interruptions when moving through both the Korean War Veterans Memorial and Lincoln Memorial visitor areas.

Site F: Site F includes the open land (parking lot) north of the Department of the Interior South Building on Virginia Avenue and C Street. Site F is functionally and symbolically removed from the National Mall, isolating it from any opportunity for visual connection with the Memorial, and making it difficult to find. In addition, locating the Center at this site would require visitors to cross Constitution Avenue, a heavily traveled roadway, to get to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior had determined that, due to conflicts with the existing uses in the building, neither the building nor front lawn is available for the use of the Center. Because of the site's drawbacks, further discussions with the Secretary for the use of the site were not sought.

These three potential sites (Sites C, D, and F) lack both convenient pedestrian access and visual connection to the Memorial, and would separate the Center from the Memorial experience. A Center in any of these locations could not become part of the Memorial experience. For these reasons Sites C, D, and F were eliminated from further consideration.

Two potential sites (Sites B and E) were reviewed in further detail, but eliminated from consideration based on design limitations imposed by characteristics of the sites.

Site B: Located immediately east of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Site B occupies the gentle mound in the center of Constitution Gardens just west of Constitution Gardens Lake. The site is located between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Constitution Gardens Lake. Limitations to use of Site B for the Memorial Visitor Center include topographical limitations, visual sensitivity, its relationship to existing memorials, and the extensive site alterations that would be required.

The existing topography and vegetation on the site leaves only a small area of the site, a portion of the southeast hillside, available for the placement of any exposed structure that could be used as an entrance/exit to the Center. Based on topographical limitations, the Center would have to be oriented such that there would be no visual connection to the Flagpole Plaza or the Memorial; the pedestrian pathway from the Center to the Flagpole Plaza would require passage through the Vietnam Veterans Memorial area and directly past the Vietnam Women's Memorial; the Center would be difficult to find; and special efforts would be needed to preserve the existing trees during construction.

Site E: Located within the Department of Interior South Building, Site E would be located north of Constitution Avenue, opposite the west end of Constitution Gardens Lake. Site E is visible from Constitution Avenue when approached from the east or west and from limited areas within the park. Selection of Site E for the Center would require conversion of the existing building space for the purpose of the Center, requiring extensive building renovations. The major limitations of Site E include the lack of visual connection between the entry/exit of the Center and the Flagpole Plaza and the need to cross a busy roadway, which introduces a psychological break in the visitor experience. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior had determined that, due to conflicts with the existing uses in the building, neither the building nor front lawn is available for the use of the Center. Because of the site's drawbacks, further discussions with the Secretary for the use of the site were not sought.

2.1.4 Current Site Evaluation Factors (NPS)

Several site evaluation factors have been established by the NPS to guide the environmental analysis of the proposed sites. Applicable statutes, program principles, environmental constraints, and operational requirements served as a basis for the site evaluation factors.

The overarching goal of the site approval process is to select a site that would allow for the development of a Center that would best: comply with the authorizing legislation; preserve the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial; enhance the visitor experience; preserve the National Mall; consider the impacts of the functional requirements of the Center; and consider the practical concerns of construction.

The environmental assessment of the alternative sites is guided by the potential to meet the following evaluation factors:

- When established, the Center should not intrude on existing critical views of the National Mall, particularly: from the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial to/from the Lincoln Memorial; from the Lincoln Memorial steps across the site, and along Constitution Avenue, Henry Bacon Drive and 23rd Street.
- The developable area within a given site should be determined based on existing constraints including limiting damage and preventing loss of existing trees; minimizing topographic modifications, and avoiding the existing floodplain.
- Development of an alternative site should not distract from or alter the tranquility of the Mall or West Potomac Park's special quiet places, including nearby monuments and memorials (i.e., Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial).
- The Center's entry/exit points should be connected to the primary starting point of the existing Memorial, the Flagpole Plaza, operationally, visually, and emotionally.
- Preference should be given for a site that would allow grading or natural contours to conceal any mechanical equipment necessary for the operation of the underground facility and other possible above ground components such as safety railings. All building apertures should not be visible within critical views.
- Provide outdoor paved gathering space, near the Center's entrance/exit (preferably in tree shade) to allow for queuing and gathering of anticipated large groups of people and for possible security screening. To the extent possible, paved areas should be concealed from view from the Lincoln Memorial and along Henry Bacon Drive and 23rd Street.
- The proposed Center should, to the greatest extent practicable, avoid, minimize, or mitigate other potential adverse impacts.

2.1.5 Future Site Approval Criteria

As provided for in the Commemorative Works Act, the NPS, NCPC, and CFA may respectively develop design guidelines at the time of site approval. The CFA approved Site A in September 2005 on the condition that further justification be given for Site A, and that special attention be given to the treatment of the underground facility (particularly with respect to the entrance and treatment of mechanical equipment). When the CFA approved Site A, they declined to establish design guidelines. The NPS and NCPC will each respectively develop site approval criteria for use in their decision-making. These criteria would likely be formalized as conditions of approval for the preferred site. Suggested design guidelines, developed by the NPS in 2005, are contained in Section 2.2.1 Design Assumptions.

2.2 Proposed Alternatives

2.2.1 Design Assumptions

Several assumptions have been made regarding the proposed Center to assist in the evaluation of the project alternatives. The ultimate decision regarding the establishment of the Center on an alternative site will be influenced by these site development, building program, and visibility parameters.

General Guidance: The Center shall be constructed and landscaped in a manner harmonious with the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and consistent with the special nature and sanctity of the National Mall. The Center is to be respectful of the surrounding area and context. Construction of the Center should minimize disruptions to its setting.

Site Development: The site should be sufficient in size to accommodate a potential construction area that avoids the existing tree canopies (i.e., inside the drip line of the historic American Elm trees), and could readily contain the potential building footprint and underground space. Both sites being considered currently contain active recreational uses. These ballfields would be retained as informal, multi-use recreational fields where possible.

Building Orientation: The orientation of the Center should relate to the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial and be respectful of the context of the National Mall. The entry ramp to the Center should be placed on the side of the site that is closest to the Memorial. Ideally, the entry should be visible both to and from the Flagpole Plaza to connect the two facilities, and be visible from the sidewalks in front of the Center to facilitate way finding.

During the public meetings held to gain input on the siting of the Center, comments received from Vietnam veterans and veterans organizations emphasized the significance of the flagpole elements of the Memorial as an evocative portal to the Memorial experience. This element symbolizes to the veterans the unifying ideals of our democracy for which they fought, sacrificed, and gave their lives. The American flag conveys the unwavering permanency of our national identity and establishes the context for the recognition of heroic human sacrifice during the Vietnam War.

Building Program: The building program is estimated to require approximately 25,000 square feet of exhibit and exhibit support space, maintenance and mechanical space, public entry and visitor services spaces, educational programming space, and administrative space. Exhibit areas would include display and interpretive features. The interior configuration and specific number of floors is unknown; the depth of the facility is estimated to be approximately 30 feet below the existing grade.

Building Entrance: The Center is to be an underground facility with the majority of the building located below the existing grade. Primary access and egress for visitors and support functions would be provided by accessible walks and ramps through a single opening. To reduce the length of the walks/ramps and minimize the size of the building entrance, a portion of the entry portal would need to be located above the existing grade.

Modification of the topography would be necessary to eliminate the visibility of the entry from critical views. Sensitive re-grading of the site would provide a gentle earthen mound that would shield the entrance from surrounding views at a height (a maximum of 10 feet above grade) that would be low enough to allow views through the site to the Lincoln Memorial from Constitution Avenue. A design strategy that would allow the entry to disappear below the lawn in views from Lincoln Memorial Circle and Constitution Avenue, as well as from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, is shown in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2a: Center Design Strategy: Building Entry – Profile View

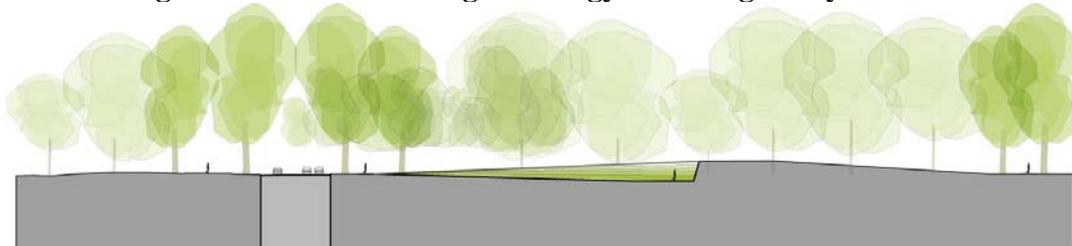


Figure 2-2b: Center Design Strategy: Building Entry – Plan View



NOTE: These graphics illustrate the design strategy for the entrance to the underground Center. As shown in the top graphic, the gentle slope of the ground would be used to shield the entrance from surrounding views except for those directly in front of the facility. As shown in the bottom graphic, the entry ramp would be flanked by sloping terrain so that it would seem that a visitor is entering the side of a hill rather than descending underground.

Memorial Visitor Center Structure and Visibility: The entry to the underground building would be covered by a green, vegetated roof that would appear consistent with the grassy expanse of the National Mall from the vantage point of the Lincoln Memorial and adjacent areas. Building elements, including mechanical equipment, would not be visible, particularly from the Lincoln Memorial. Appropriate design elements may be incorporated to allow daylight to penetrate the space below grade. One strategy to accomplish the need to provide remote emergency egress, air intake and exhaust for the building occupants and equipment, and daylight is to use an open light well. This light well would be recessed into the graded lawn so that it is not visible from any of the surrounding streets or the Lincoln Memorial (see Figure 2-3).

Figure 2-3a: Center Design Strategy: Building Health and Safety – Profile View

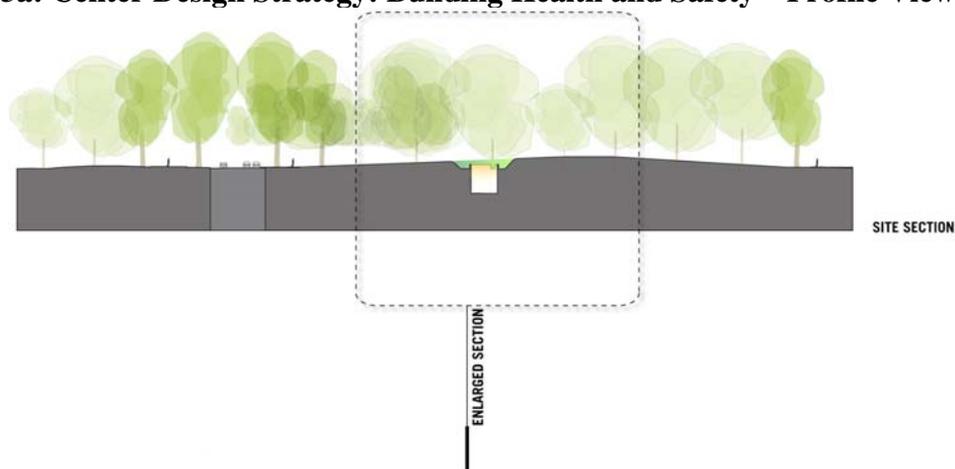
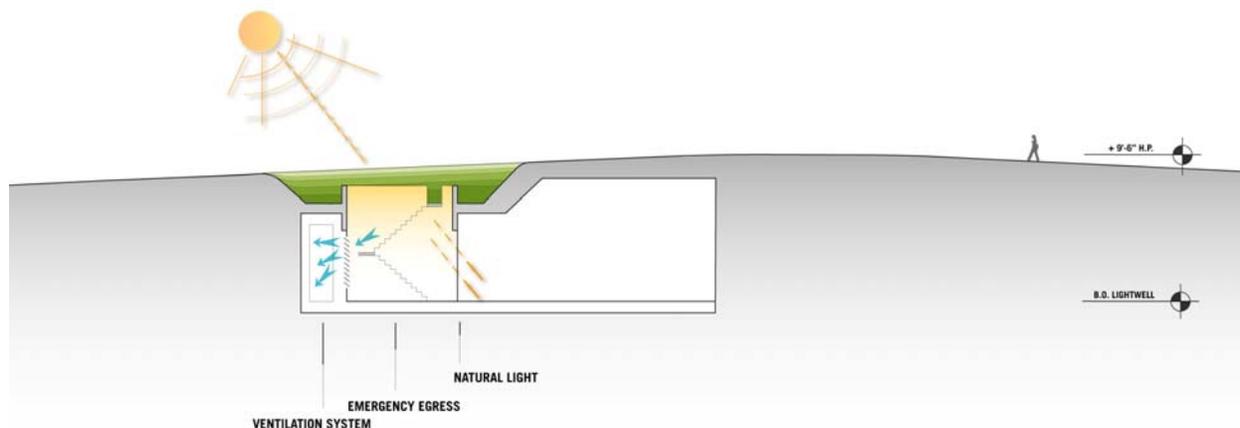


Figure 2-3b: Center Design Strategy: Building Health and Safety – Profile Detail View



NOTE: These graphics illustrate the design strategy for shielding from view those elements needed for mechanical and safety purposes. As indicated in the top graphic, the necessary functional elements for the facility would likely be located away from the entry opening. As indicated by the bottom graphic, the use of a recessed light well would allow for emergency egress (including safety railings), air intake and exhaust, and daylight penetration without being visible from adjacent and surrounding areas.

2.2.2 Alternative Site A

Alternative Site A is located on the National Mall, within the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial and the boundaries of West Potomac Park, approximately 325 feet west of the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is administered by the NPS. The relatively flat site is an open area, bordered by Constitution Avenue, 23rd Street, Henry Bacon Drive, and Lincoln Memorial Circle. Site A is a roughly triangular area, measuring approximately 5.2 acres in size. The central portion of the site, situated within the trees that line the perimeter, includes a 2.5 acre area that could accommodate the Center as part of a planned site, inclusive of the NPS visitor support projects (the NPS concessions kiosk and bus drop-off area that are under construction).

The site is currently used for recreational activities. At present, there are two fenced backstops for ballfields (a third backstop was eliminated for the NPS concessions kiosk now under construction). The site is surrounded by historic American Elm trees. The site is visible from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Flagpole Plaza which has been identified as the main entrance point to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Site A is located outside of the 100-year floodplain; the northern portion of the site is within the 500-year floodplain.

Based on a review of the site, design guidance specific to Site A was prepared in conformance with the Design Assumptions provided in Section 2.2.1, and are illustrated in Figures 2-4:

- Re-grade the site with a gentle rise in a manner that respects the contouring east of Henry Bacon Drive.
- Utilize grade modifications to allow for an entry portal that would accommodate ADA compliance, shorten the length of the entry ramp (thereby reducing the amount of impervious hardscape area), and minimize the size of the building opening.
- Use the future grading of the site to buffer views of the underground building (including its entry and other features) from both nearby Memorials without blocking eye-level views across the site to the Memorials.
- Orient the entry of the proposed building so that it relates to Henry Bacon Drive, is seen from the Flagpole Plaza, and is not visible from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.
- Utilize the bus drop-off, which is under construction along the west side of Henry Bacon Drive, to provide access to the Center during non-peak hours. Peak hour bus drop-off will take place at the current bus drop-off area on Daniel French Drive. Timed tickets will be managed to minimize bus traffic and increase same day walk-up access. No bus parking will be allowed at this location.
- Utilize the signalized pedestrian crossing of Henry Bacon Drive at Lincoln Memorial Circle as the most direct route for direct visitors from the Center to the Flagpole Plaza.
- Add new trees and pedestrian pathways, as necessary, in a manner that provides experiential continuity with the Memorial and its grounds located east of Henry Bacon Drive.
- Conceal night lighting from the views that are available from the Lincoln Memorial and its grounds and the Wall through the sensitive placement and treatment of light sources.
- Do not place signage on the building façade.
- Provide a minimum of two feet of soil cover and lawn over the building entry.
- Accommodate NPS programs to increase the amount of multi-purpose recreational space on the Mall by providing informal recreational space on the balance of the site.

Figure 2-4a
Alternative Site A: Design Guidance – Plan View

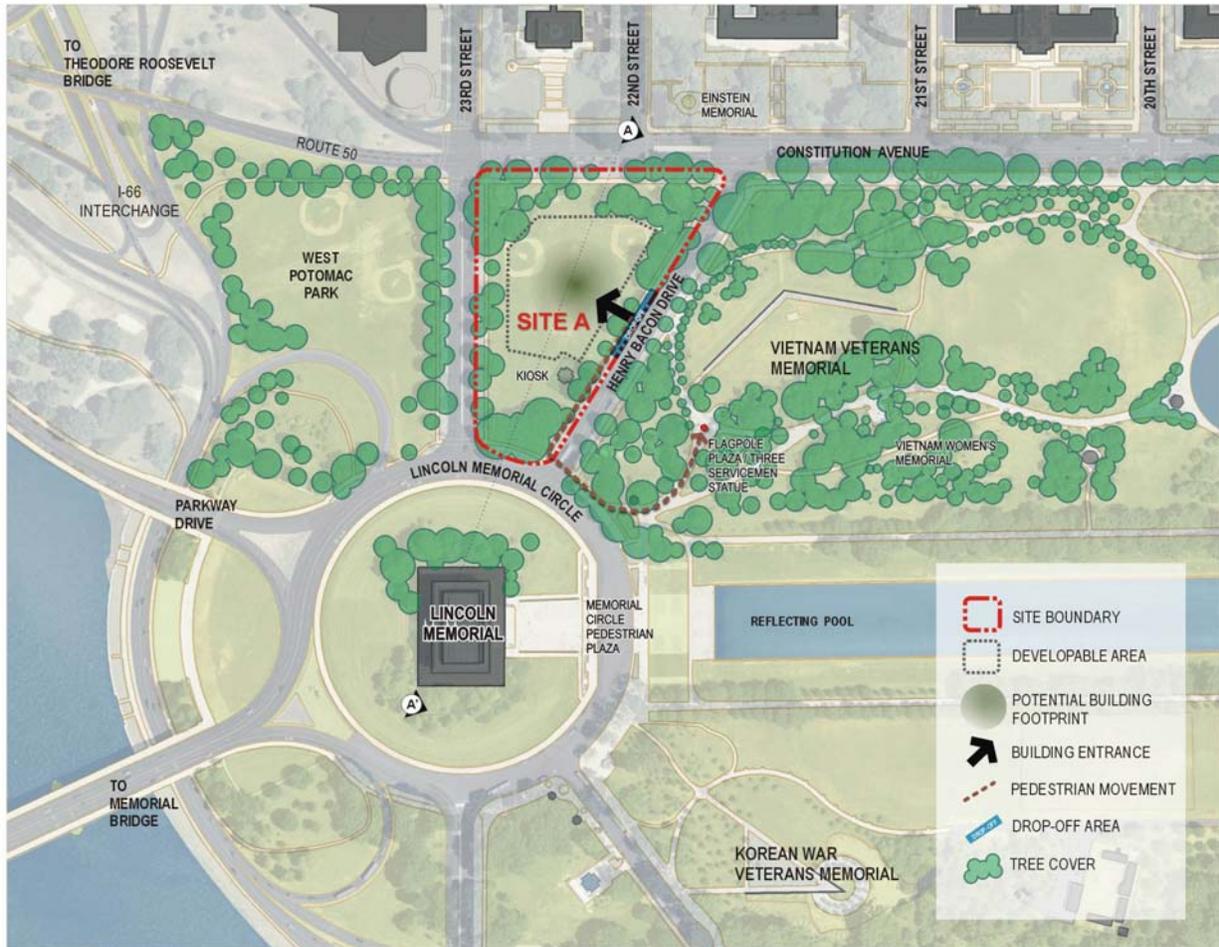
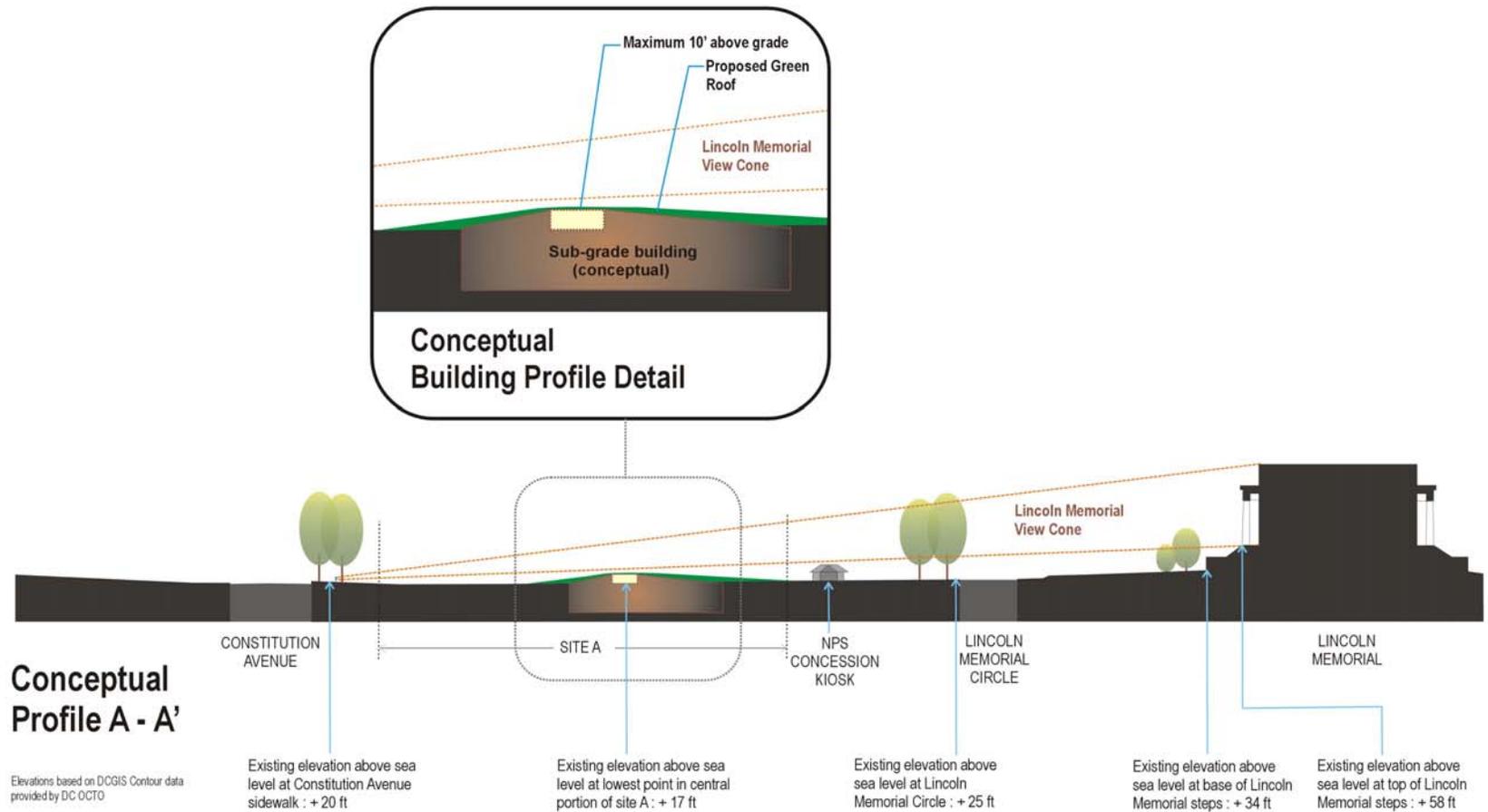


Figure 2-4b
Alternative Site A: Design Guidance – Profile View



2.2.3 Alternative Site G

Alternative Site G is located on the National Mall, within the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial and the boundaries of West Potomac Park, approximately 750 feet west of the existing Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is administered by the NPS. The gently sloping site is an open area, bordered by the Route 50 ramp to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, 23rd Street, Interstate 66, and Lincoln Memorial Circle and its ramp from Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Site G measures approximately 5.2 acres in size. The central portion of the site, situated within the trees that line the perimeter, includes a 2.2-acre area that could accommodate the Center as part of a planned site.

The site is currently used for recreation. At present, there are two fenced backstops for the ballfields that occupy this space. The site is surrounded by historic American Elm trees. The site is not visible from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Flagpole Plaza which has been identified as the main entrance point to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Site G is outside of the 100-year floodplain, within the 500-year floodplain, and outside of the Flood Protection Area along 23rd Street (i.e., the site is below the planned flood protection berm).

Based on a review of the site, design guidance specific to Site G was prepared in conformance with the Design Assumptions provided in Section 2.2.1, and are illustrated in Figures 2-5a and 2-5b below:

- Re-grade the site with a gentle rise in a manner that respects the open space transition from the National Mall to the Potomac River.
- Utilize grade modifications to allow for an entry portal that would accommodate ADA compliance, shorten the length of the entry ramp (thereby reducing the amount of impervious hardscape area), and minimize the size of the building opening.
- Re-grade the site with a gentle rise to buffer views of an underground building without blocking eye-level views across the site to the Lincoln Memorial.
- Any exposed façades of the Center should only be visible from and relate to 23rd Street.
- Orient the entry feature of the proposed building so that it relates to 23rd Street, and is not visible from the Lincoln Memorial.
- Provide a bus drop off within the curb lane of 23rd Street during non-peak hours. Peak hour bus drop-off will take place at the current bus drop-off area on Daniel French Drive. Timed tickets will be managed to minimize bus traffic and increase same day walk-up access. No bus parking will be allowed at this location.
- Utilize the pedestrian crossings of 23rd Street and Henry Bacon Drive at Lincoln Memorial Circle as the most direct route for visitors from the Center to the Flagpole Plaza as the most direct route.
- Preserve the allee of elm trees that visually extends the Constitution Avenue corridor and pathway to the Potomac River west of Site G; and the allee of Elm trees along 23rd Street.
- Conceal night lighting from views that are available from the Lincoln Memorial and its grounds through the sensitive placement and treatment of lighting sources.
- Do not place signage on the building façade.
- Provide a minimum of two feet soil cover and lawn over the building entry.
- Accommodate NPS programs to increase the amount of multi-purpose recreational space on the Mall by providing informal recreational activities on the balance of the site.

Figure 2-5a
Alternative Site G: Design Guidance – Plan View

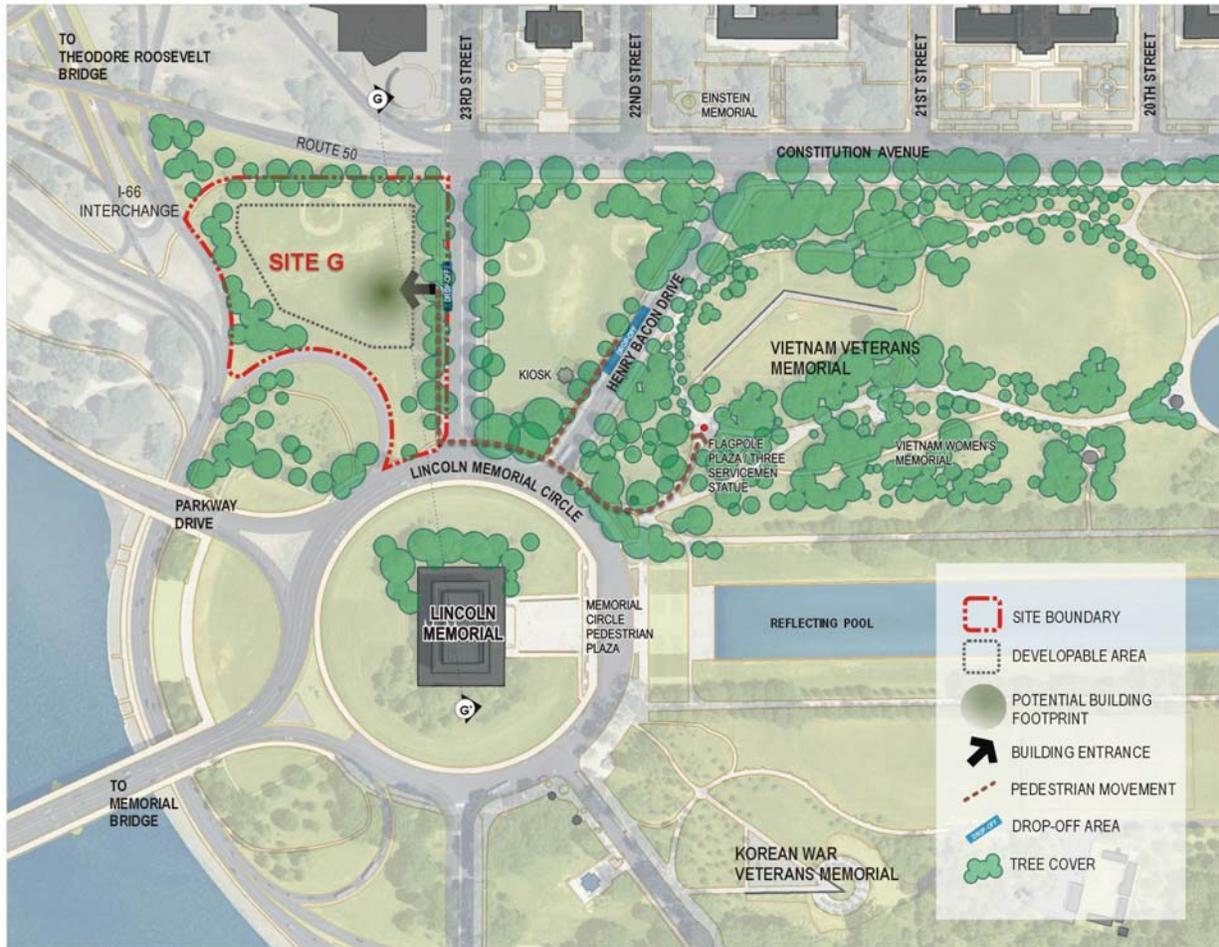
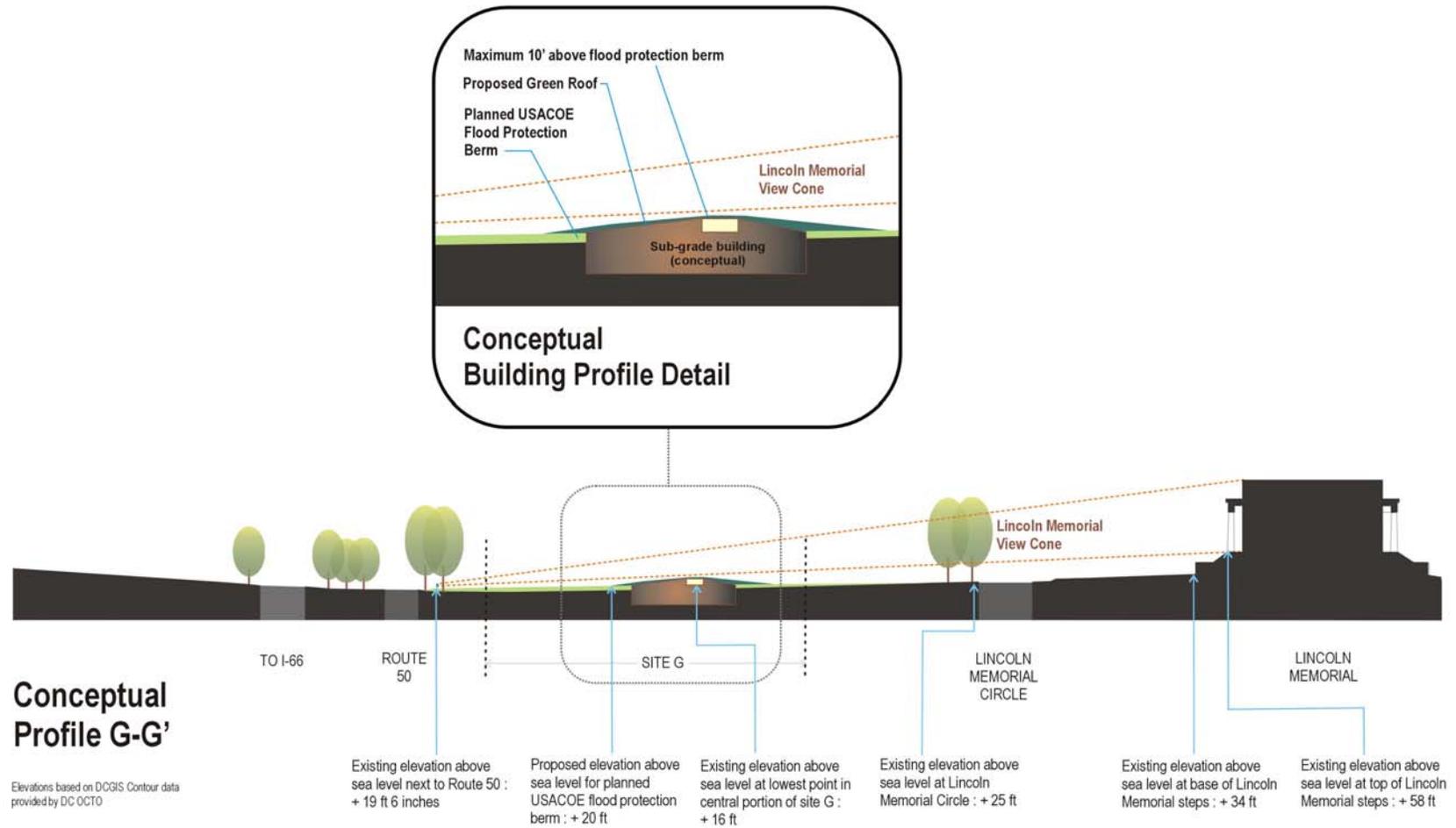


Figure 2-5b
Alternative Site G: Design Guidance – Profile View



2.2.3 No Action Alternative

As part of the environmental analysis process, the consequences of a No Action Alternative are considered. Under the No Action Alternative, neither Site A nor Site G would be selected and approved for the establishment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center. The alternative sites considered would remain in their current open condition and no development, other than which is currently underway on Site A, would occur at this time. The sites would be managed for recreational use consistent with the NPS program to increase the amount of multi-use recreational areas on the National Mall. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund would be without an approved site for the Memorial Visitor Center and would need to continue exploring potential sites for the Center.