

Portland Development Commission Design Principles
for the Improvement of the Veterans Memorial Gardens,
Veterans Memorial Coliseum,
Portland, Oregon
August 19, 2011

INTRODUCTION

The Pine Court-Korea Veterans Memorial and The Fountain Court -World War II Veterans Memorial were designed by Skidmore, Owings, Merrill, and constructed as part of the Memorial Coliseum in 1958-1960. The Coliseum, now the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, has been registered as a Historic Landmark. The entire Memorial Coliseum site, i.e. buildings, courtyards, parking lots, plantings, etc, is a Portland Historic Landmark by virtue of its listing in the National Register of Historic Places on September 10, 2009, and exterior alterations are subject to Historic Design Review, a land-use process managed by BDS. The site is also in the Central City Plan Area and is therefore subject to Design Review as well. If conflicts arise between the two sets of approval criteria, the Historic Design Review criteria supersede. The Gardens are identified as part of that designation. The City, its various agencies and the Veterans are embarking on a series of improvement projects to the Coliseum and the Gardens. The Landmarks Designation requires all improvements be reviewed within a single application as presented to both the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the City of Portland Bureau of Development Services (Design Review/BDS). The City of Portland's Historic Design Review process is completely independent of any review by the State Historic Preservation Office and it uses different approval criteria. Early coordination of the separate processes is critical to success. In June 2011, the Portland Development Commission (PDC) retained a consultant to research and engage with various parties to develop a set of Design Principles. The Principles have been reviewed by SHPO and BDS and approved by the PDC, the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) and the Veterans Focus Group (VFG). The Principles will be useful in issuing a Request for Qualifications for artists, designers and landscape architects contracted to design improvements and plan new memorial elements for the Gardens. The Principles will also direct design work, be used as the work's foundation for review and ultimately, create a baseline that all parties can reference as the work goes forward. It should be understood abundantly clear that the resulting document does not substitute for the Historic Design Review approval criteria.

GENERAL EXISTING CONDITIONS OF THE MEMORIAL GARDENS

The Gardens and their associated elements are fine examples of the cool, modernist architecture and memorial designs created and constructed during the early 1960's. Honest, unadorned materials and surface and remembrance elements create a pair of simple, elegant "garden rooms" where fallen Veterans can be acknowledged. However, with any fifty-year-old civic project, materials degenerate and relationships between dated public memorials and an evolving community change. Lack of wayfinding,

intruding (and sometimes inappropriate) ancillary Coliseum uses, and the ongoing consideration of the Gardens as a sacred space all have contributed to the slow deterioration of these Memorials. A series of immediate maintenance initiatives have been identified and delivered to PDC. Those recommendations are not included within this document.

In addition to its corroding physical condition, a severe lack of cohesive content exists within the Memorial Gardens. Visitors are left to wonder about its purpose; how it came about, its sponsors, who the names represent, the criteria used to select the names, historical introductions or narratives etc. normally included in the design of a memorial. This unifying and enriching content must be injected sensitively and surgically into the improvements of the Memorial Gardens and is just as important as the material repairs.

PROCESS

The Principles have been developed through the review of all VFG meeting notes regarding the Memorial Gardens, one-on-one conversations with SHPO, BDS and PDC, and RACC and BOORA architects. It is assumed that prior to the issuance of the final Principles, all of the above will have approved the language contained within.

The Principles development process was kicked-off at a meeting of the Veterans Focus Group. In that meeting they adopted a project Vision establishing the framework for these Principles.

Project Vision:

Ensure Veterans Memorial Coliseum continues to serve the advancement of cultural opportunities of the community and be properly dedicated to the memory of our Veterans who made the supreme sacrifice to preserve for us the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Both SHPO and BDS established the need to "maintain the character defining features" within the Memorial". Furthermore, for these Principles the "character defining features" would be:

Fountain Court

Formal garden room

Fountain as central feature

Etched granite wall

Spare and formal Meisian design aesthetic

Pine Court

Formal garden room

Landscape as central feature

Etched granite wall

Spare and formal Meisian design aesthetic

Conversations with SHPO and BDS have outlined that the improvements to the Gardens shall:

Retain the feel of the "Garden Rooms"

Recognize the formal quality of a "room with something in the middle"

Capture the moment in, which it was made; maintain the character defining features

New elements and the re-configuration of the existing elements shall be in keeping with the style of the building - "no classical statuary, no tall obelisks, keep it Meisian"

Conversations with the VFG have identified the wish to:

Add new content to further tell their story

Create a more emotive experience for the visitor

Capture the spirit of family, the Oregon experience and the scale of Portland

Maintain a formal experience

Explore the ability to make the Gardens non-smoking environs

Prohibit the use of the space for circulation or access for inappropriate facility events, (Fright Town)

Also noteworthy, the VFG Gardens improvement conversations sited the intimate, narrative and human-scaled qualities of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial, the Japanese American Historical Plaza, and the Franklin Roosevelt Memorial in Washington DC. All these memorials use the voice of the individual and a sequential experience. While no specific Principles requiring duplication of these experiences exists; it should prove as useful information for the designers.

OVERARCHING GOALS OF THE PRINCIPLES

1. To repair degraded materials and elements within the Gardens.
2. To create a richer "Memorial experience" for those who visit the Gardens be they school children, Veterans, or merely visitors to the Coliseum facility.
3. To accomplish #1 and #2 above while also adhering to the jurisdictional design requirements as set forth by SHPO and BDS.

4. To clarify the organization of the two Gardens, their linked intent and to further round out the Memorials' experience for the visitor.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR FACILITY SITE & BOTH MEMORIAL GARDENS

1.00 SIGNAGE

1.1 Add the Memorial Gardens to all existing facility wayfinding maps, signage, pylons, etc.

1.2 Add signage above the stairway entries that announces the location of the Gardens.

2.00 LIGHTING

2.1 Provide accent (dramatic) lighting for Memorial elements to enhance the Memorial experience at dusk and into the night.

2.2 Provide site lighting to enable circulation.

2.3 Provide site lighting to enhance safety and security.

2.4 Design accent and site lighting to work in concert. Balance lighting design to enhance the drama and solemnity of the Memorial experience, facilitate the ability to read all Memorial content and avoid hot spots and overtly bathed institutional pools of light.

2.5 Respect Dark Sky principles.

2.6 When down lights are used, seek siting solutions to hide or lessen the presence of the fixture.

3.00 CIRCULATION

3.1 Adhere to all ADA regulations and principles.

3.2 Ensure that visitors in wheelchairs and other mobility devices are able to freely navigate the Memorials and emphasize the ability to access and read all Memorials' content.

3.3 One of the Memorial experiences is the descent from the plaza level, down the stairs into the courts. Consider this entry/descent experience to see if it can be enhanced or improved.

4.00 PAVING

4.1 Both gardens include a "broom finish" concrete perimeter and a more enhanced (exposed aggregate or brick) interior. In the design of new paving, explore the strengths and weaknesses of maintaining this design approach.

4.2 Ensure that all paving is flat under foot and that no materials, matrix or craft detail will in any way create "trip hazards" or optical conditions which could confuse elderly or impaired eyes.

4.3 Ensure that paving materials are easily maintained by standard facility power washing and easily replaced if needed. Materials that encourage moss growth or other intrusive organic material that create "slippery when wet" conditions should be avoided.

5.00 EXISTING FACILITY WALLS, FENCING & OTHER ELEMENTS

5.1 Review all required regulatory signage (no smoking, no skateboarding, etc.) and ensure that their scale, placement, color, typeface, material, etc. does not detract from the Memorial experience. Consider the reduction, elimination or "ganging" of content to reduce clutter. Consider too, how content should be executed in a manner that better suits the honor of the site.

5.2 Remove the two cyclone fenced-in storage areas below the stairs. (assuming that antiquated garbage cans are not needed). If this storage is critical to the operations of the Facility, then design an enclosure permanent, solid and integrated into the complete design aesthetic (materials, detailing, scale and craft) of the Memorial Gardens.

5.3 Include the Facility-required trash receptacles, yet ensure they support the design aesthetic of the Memorial Gardens rather than the Facility. Ensure that these receptacles meet all the operational requirements of the Facility and its staff, Homeland Security, etc.

6.00 EXISTING MEMORIAL ELEMENTS

6.1 Maintain the existing "garden room" feel of the Memorials - "a collection of elements placed within an interior space".

6.2 Retain the major elements - fountain, etched granite walls, descending stairway entry, etc.

7.00 MATERIALS

7.1 All elements of the Memorials shall be highly durable within the public setting and be easily maintained.

7.2 New element materials should fit seamlessly into the Memorials' existing material family through the use of a common material, and/or content, and/or modernist design aesthetic, and/or level of craft, etc.

7.3 Materials shall be of industry-standard finishes and fabrication techniques easily maintained for future generations.

7.4 Each designer, artist and fabricator shall provide a complete Maintenance Document, to include:

- All shop drawings and "as-builts"
- Product names, numbers and fabricators (and their contact information) for every material and finish
- Recommended quarterly, annual and 5-year procedures
- Emergency contacts and an outline of steps to take should an element need repair or replacement

8.00 ADDING NEW CONTENT

8.1 Explore opportunities to get the two Memorials to read as a consistent, cohesive and connected experience.

8.2 Seek design solutions, which clearly define the purpose of each Memorial individually as well as a single gesture.

8.3 Seek for ways to include new content and elements, which would:

- Evoke emotion
- Capture the spirit of families and the Oregon Experience
- Include the additional names of service men and women. This needs clarification by the Vets and could dramatically impact all of the Memorial elements, their scale and content. It is recommended that selection criteria be adopted and that the new names could be included in the new information within the causeway development or affixed to existing blank walls rather than through the addition of new walls.
- Provide narrative, self-guided, content-driven elements, easily understood and absorbed by school children.

8.4 Avoid adding elements that rise above the height of or overpower the scale and presence of the existing elements.

8.5 Avoid the addition of multiple diverse elements, which would impact the sense of the spare, formal, modernist design.

9.00 LANDSCAPING

9.1 Seek ways landscaping can consist of regional species.

9.2 Develop a plant palate, which allows for a healthy vibrant mixture of species that offers a dense presence year-round.

9.3 Ensure that all planting beds and containers include the appropriate infrastructure for irrigation, drainage, soil mixture, etc. to facilitate a healthy growing environment.

9.4 Consider the addition of new planting beds and containers to enhance the "garden" aspect of the Memorials.

9.5 Replace the existing containers with new.

SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE FOUNTAIN COURT

10.00 SIGNAGE

10.1 Consider the removal of the existing bronze plaque, fold its content into additional content and place in a more prominent and readable location within the Memorial (see 8.1 and 8.2).

11.00 CIRCULATION

11.1 Explore the removal or redesign of the enclosure behind the etched granite wall.

12.00 PAVING

12.1 Explore the continued use of exposed aggregate as the preferred material, color, matrix, and detail for the enhanced core of the Gardens.

12.2 Explore the continued use of cast-in-place (CIP), broom finish concrete as the preferred material, color, matrix, and detail for the outer circulation area of the Gardens.

12.3 All paving, both central core and outer circulation, shall work together to reinforce the Memorials as one contiguous place. Different paving may be used to enhance or call attention to areas of heightened interest or specific circulation paths and routes.

13.00 EXISTING RETAINING & FACILITY WALLS

13.1 Explore opportunities to create a more intimate and cohesive Memorial experience by painting the vertical surfaces a different color than the Facility to "frame" the Gardens.

13.2 Replace the "skim coat" application of the south wall with the restoration of the original CIP concrete.

13.3 Create a more historically accurate and aesthetically pleasing rhythm of vent openings on the south wall or reduce their visual impact by adding grillwork, screening or other solutions.

13.4 Consider adding a stepped down CIP planter in conjunction with seating on the etched name flank walls, which could bring more landscape into the Gardens and solve the podium issue (see 9.4 & 12.1).

14.00 EXISTING MEMORIAL ELEMENTS

14.1 Restore the fountain finishes.

15.00 ADDING NEW CONTENT and/or ART (physical or written)

15.1 Consider adding new content to the southern Facility wall or other surfaces.

15.2 Consider opportunities to add a sculptural element(s) to the fountain.

15.3 Consider opportunities to populate the Gardens with multiple elements (see 8.5).

15.4 Consider opportunities to use projections or other electronic media (ensure no sound is associated).

SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE PINE COURT

A Note:

Currently, the court's center contains a raised planter bed surrounded by a black granite retaining wall/seating area with a brick and CIP concrete starburst pattern emanating out from the central plant feature. Investigative work is being undertaken to identify the original circa 1960 design of this feature prior to the installation of the existing central element, which appeared in the 1970's. Until that information can be found it should suffice to say that both SHPO and BDS have voiced a strong preference to return this court to its original design. If information about the origins of that design can't be found, the formal notion of a "garden room" with a significant feature within the court's center should be assumed to be the backbone of any design going forward.

16.00 PAVING

16.1 Explore the continued use of cast-in-place (CIP), broom finish concrete as the preferred material, color, matrix, and detail for the outer circulation area of the Gardens.

16.2 All paving, both central core and outer circulation, shall work together to reinforce the Memorials as one contiguous place. Different paving may be used to enhance or call attention to areas of heightened interest or specific circulation paths and routes.

17.00 EXISTING RETAINING & FACILITY WALLS

17.1 Explore opportunities to create a more intimate and cohesive Memorial experience by considering the option of painting the vertical surfaces a different color than the

Facility to "frame" the Gardens. Note that within this exploration, different colors for each of the Pine and Fountain Courts should be considered.

17.2 Create a more historically accurate and aesthetically pleasing rhythm of vent openings on the north wall or reduce their visual impact by adding grillwork, screening or other solutions.

18.00 ADDING NEW CONTENT and/or ART (physical or written)

18.1 Consider adding new content to the new northern causeway glass wall. This content could be etched, projected or otherwise integrated in/on to the glass curtain wall.

18.2 Consider adding new content to the (interior) northern causeway concrete wall.

18.3 Consider opportunities to add a sculptural element(s) to the court area.

18.4 Consider opportunities to populate the Gardens with multiple elements. Be mindful that a centralized feature (landscaping, art, etc.) within a "garden room" and the wall of names are considered to be essential (by SHPO and BDS) and must remain as the central, overriding elements within the Memorial court.

18.5 Ensure no sound is associated with the new elements except for the interior of the causeway (if desired).