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National Ideas Competition for the Washington Monument Grounds

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Jury Chooses 24 Bold Ideas for Washington Monument Competition

February 7, 2011 Washington, DC -- A sustainable meadow, pinpoints of light dotting the landscape, a sunken amphitheater suitable for performances and sporting events, and an underground museum space were among the twenty-four ideas selected January 28th from hundreds of entries to the National Ideas Competition for the Washington Monument Grounds. Over 500 participants from across the U.S. and around the world submitted their ideas.

The jury of seven included distinguished designers, historians, a Washington cultural leader, and a futurist. Many of the winning entries offered subtle, minimal interventions that used shadows, low plantings, and contemplative messages, while others proposed major projects calling for cuts into the landscape to create a more welcoming and educational environment for visitors.

More than half of the winning ideas proposed ways to highlight the historically important but overlooked Jefferson Pier that marks the original intended site for the Washington Monument, at the intersection of a line from the Capitol and another from the White House.

Many entries tried to reinforce the geometries intended by L'Enfant and the 1902 McMillan Commission's plans for the grounds of the Monument. Other winners included dramatic new landscape treatments inspired by the historical ecology of this land that was once the shoreline of the Potomac River and Tiber Creek.

"We were looking for intriguing ideas that also captured the special quality of this public open space in the center of the National Mall, and in some cases the best ideas were presented very simply, capturing a thoughtful approach to history and meaning with a compelling design statement or conceptual sketch," said jury chair Raymond Gastil, renowned city planner.

Juror Joy Zinoman, Founding Artistic Director of D.C.'s Studio Theater, was looking for "uncluttered exuberance" and for ideas to humanize the huge scale of the Monument and grounds to create a welcoming space for public events, protests, and musical and theatrical performances. Her favorites included two sunken amphitheatre proposals on the western slope facing the World War II Memorial, and theatrical uses of in-ground lights to intrigue and engage pedestrians as they walk around the obelisk.

Art historian Kirk Savage, author of the award-winning book *Monument Wars*, and David Hackett Fischer, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *Washington's Crossing*, wanted to see designs that reinvigorated the area around the Jefferson Pier to highlight its historical associations with President Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Pierre L'Enfant at the creation of Washington, DC, and the Mall.

For internationally renowned landscape architect Kathryn Gustafson and urban eco-designer Mitchell Joachim, proposals to create a meadow and use vernacular horticulture near the Constitution Avenue boundary are "very timely, educational, and sustainable" responses to the natural ecology of this part of the Mall.

Jurors began the day with a chilly early morning walk on the snow-covered Monument grounds with Mall expert Richard Longstreth of George Washington University who is a member of the Competition Steering Committee. Standing there at the spot where the axis from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial crosses the axis from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial, they were reminded of how powerful the cross axis idea is, how unrecognized the Jefferson Pier marking that spot is now, and how right it is for it to be celebrated. Juror Sara Hart, a New York-based design journalist, confessed, "I was bewildered why there were so many entries that featured the Jefferson Pier but now I can see it is crucially important."

During deliberations, competition Chairman James P. Clark, President of the Virginia Society of the AIA, urged the jury to make a special effort to focus on the essence of the idea since not all entrants had the skills to develop elaborate visual presentations. Clark said: “It’s so easy to be seduced by a beautiful image, but we wanted to make sure that the jury also looked for good ideas hidden in a narrative or simple graphics. This allowed a twelve-year-old to compete against a professional designer.”

The jury wrestled with questions of whether “do no harm” should be the starting point for their deliberations, whether today’s open setting could or should be altered in a way that would interfere with future gatherings, whether any or all types of recreation were appropriate to this site.

Summing up the winning entries, the jurors described what appealed to them about each idea that will be further developed by the semi-finalists in stage two of the competition. For example, they wanted to hear more about the idea for using people’s footsteps to animate new water features – making democratic action visible. Would a footbridge across the Tidal Basin to the Jefferson Memorial successfully connect that remote area to the Monument grounds? How would the pathways cut into the Monument landscape to create 64 different views actually work on the hilly site? How would the underground spaces affect the simple landscape above? Could history timelines be incorporated into the landscape without being too literal and didactic? How would some of the landscape designs address the serious problem of flooding?

Gastil stated that many of the projects are promising but are still early in development. In stage two, semi-finalists will be asked to develop the ideas more fully into potential demonstration projects. The jury expects that at the next stage the ideas will show a clearer understanding of the history of this landscape and public use of this space, as well as the ecological problems such as flooding that pose real challenges to this part of the Mall.

The Washington Monument grounds have a long history of designs that were never implemented or completed. Yet these influenced the evolution of the Monument grounds as well as how people interpret that space. The steering committee for the Washington Monument ideas competition hopes that the winning designs, whether eventually built or not, will continue the rich legacy of how Americans are inspired by this revered public space in the heart of the National Mall.

The 24 semi-finalists are listed below.

To view images of the semi-finalist entries, or for more information about the jury and Competition and to support the next stages of the Competition, visit www.wamocompetition.org.

- Chris Hubbard
- Adam Bossi
- Stephen Lederach and Henry Arnold
- Gloria Lau and Vivian Hu
- Dominique Dupont, Jessica Dunn, and Kristina Guist
- Matthew Witt, Shawn Johnson, and Nicole Crigler
- Luis Longhi
- Julian Hunt
- Catherine Peek-Williams
- Brandon Gordon, Kate Connelly, Risa Abraham, Charly Williams, and Ruemel Panglao
- Marilyn Sheppard
- Jin Woo and Jin Lim
- Grace Lim (under 18)
- Joey Ijjas
- Stephen Fowler
- Sofia Castelo
- Megan Griscom and Elizabeth Stoel
- Karolina Kawiaka
- Patricia Sabin, Enrique Manuel Blanco Lorenzo, and Rebeca Blanco Lorenzo
- Robert L. Miller
- Elizabeth Gresk
- Ken Reed
- Roehrle Zell and Oszkay Zell
- Jacques Prins

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