



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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## Planning Department Comments

April 5, 2012

Elizabeth Murray, Managing Director  
San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center  
401 Van Ness Ave, Suite 110  
San Francisco, CA 94102

**RE: War Memorial Court Review Comments**  
**301-401 Van Ness Ave** (Address)  
**0786A/001** (Assessor's Block/Lot)  
**2012.0361E** (Case Number)

The San Francisco War Memorial Complex (including the War Memorial Court, Veterans Building and Opera House) is listed as San Francisco City Landmark #84 and a contributing resource to the Civic Center Historic District as outlined in Article 10, Appendix J of the San Francisco Planning Code. In addition, the complex is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the San Francisco Civic Center Historic District, the San Francisco Civic Center National Historic Landmark Historic District, and as California Historical Landmark #964.

The War Memorial Court was designed by Thomas Church and H. Leland Vaughan in 1935, and constructed in 1936. The War Memorial Court was planned by Arthur Brown, Jr. as part of the overall plan for the War Memorial project, which was partially completed in 1932 with the construction of the Opera House and War Memorial Building. The War Memorial Court is a rare example of a publically accessible garden my master landscape architect Thomas Church. In Church's obituary (appearing in the San Francisco Chronicle on August 31, 1978), the War Memorial Court was noted as "perhaps his best known San Francisco work....revealing Church in his grandest manner of French Baroque."

The War Memorial Court has a high level of historic integrity to support its significance as associated with the War Memorial Complex and Civic Center Historic District. Although some minor alterations were made over time, including the compatible, in-kind replacement of selected plant material, the overall character of the garden today reflects the historic design by Church and Vaughan, as well as the overall plan for the War Memorial Complex by Brown.

### Character-defining Features

The following character-defining features have been identified for the site, based upon review of historic plans, a site visit, and a review of secondary sources about the War Memorial Complex.

- Symmetrical horseshoe shaped courtyard inscribed with a rectangular lawn
- Horseshoe shaped driveway
- Octagonal shaped lawn at east end of court (noted on historic plans as site of future monument)

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- Concrete curbing and brick and cast stone pathways (note: pebble mosaics and decorative brick work removed)
- Boxwood hedges along courtyard perimeter, walkways, and at east end of court (west boxwood hedge was added in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and is not character-defining)
- Plane trees in double allee configuration
- Central axis (entrances into courtyard at east and west ends from this axis. West entrance is currently obscured by boxwood hedge)
- Slight slope increase towards City Hall
- View to City Hall
- Overall symmetry of plan
- Cast and wrought iron ornamental fences
- Bronze lanterns flanking east and west entrances of fence
- Cast iron light standards (character-defining features of Civic Center Historic District, later additions to the War Memorial Court)

#### **Comments on Proposed Changes and Recommended Design Solutions:**

The War Memorial Court is a historic resource pursuant to Article 10, Appendix J of the Planning Code, and proposed alterations to the resource must be approved by the Historic Preservation Commission through the Certificate of Appropriateness process. In order to meet the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Article 10, we recommend the following design solutions to bring the project into compliance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (Standards). Please note that the design solutions proposed in this document are preliminary in nature and additional review may be required:

1. **Removal of hedges:** The removal of the perimeter hedges along the pedestrian walkway is not appropriate, as these are character-defining features that delineate the symmetry of the courtyard and define the historic character of the walkways. Consider a scheme that maintains the 4-part walkway/concrete curb/tree/hedge configuration. As currently proposed, this design element does not comply with the Standards.
2. **Removal of pedestrian pathway paving and curbing:** The removal of the existing pedestrian pathway paving and curbing is not appropriate, as these are character-defining features that delineate the symmetry of the courtyard and define the historic character of the pedestrian walkways. Consider a scheme that maintains the 4-part walkway/concrete curb/tree/hedge configuration. As currently proposed, this design element does not comply with the Standards.
3. **Removal of east hedges and planting beds:** The curved hedges and planting beds flanking the east end of the courtyard are character-defining features of the site and should be preserved. The removal of these elements would alter the symmetrical configuration of the courtyard and create

openness to the east end of the courtyard that is not compatible with the historic character of the horseshoe shaped plan. If seating elements are desired, we recommend inserting benches along the inner edges of the curved planting beds and hedges on either side of the proposed memorial. As currently proposed, this design element does not comply with the Standards.

4. **Re-grading of courtyard and addition of bench wall:** Although the existing topography of the courtyard is considered a character-defining feature of the landscape, we understand that re-grading is necessary to provide ADA access and a low wall for seating. It appears that the proposed re-grading and insertion of a low wall is sympathetic to the historic topography and character-defining features of the site, although further review will be required. We recommend that the perimeter hedges and pedestrian pathway paving and curbing be maintained above the proposed wall, per recommendations 1 and 2 above. Further review will be required to determine if revised re-grading and seating scheme complies with the Standards.
5. **Alteration of lighting scheme:** The proposed lighting scheme is unclear from the presentation packet and we are unable to determine at this time if the proposed lighting scheme complies with the Standards. The lighting scheme should be consistent with the historic character of the site and if new lighting fixtures are proposed, these should be compatible with the materials and configuration of the character-defining features of the site. Further review will be required to determine if the proposed lighting scheme complies with the Standards.
6. **Removal of west hedge:** The west boxwood hedge is not a character-defining feature of the courtyard and the removal of this feature complies with the Standards as its removal will improve the character and integrity of the historic landscape.
7. **Addition of memorial:** The proposed memorial is located within the boundary of the "future memorial" site indicated on the 1935 plans for the War Memorial Court. The proposed design is low in scale and defers to the historic character and character-defining features of the site. As proposed, the design of the memorial within the octagonal site complies with the Standards.

#### **Additional Information Requested:**

In order to facilitate our review of the proposed design, please provide the following information/clarifications:

1. **West entrance:** Clarify what changes will be made to west entrance (stair, paving, gate, etc).
2. **Proposed lighting scheme:** Provide product information, including details for type, finish, location and dimension for the proposed lighting fixtures.

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3. **Turf material/systems:** Please provide specifications for the proposed turf. Specify the species of vegetation proposed, clarify if any synthetic materials will be used, and specify the drainage/support systems that will be added.
4. **Benches:** Please provide detailed information about proposed benches. We will work with the design team to develop a design for benches that are compatible in size, location, finish and form with the historic character of the site.
5. **Demolition calculations:** The “respectful transformation” diagram does not accurately show the proposed demolition of existing features of the courtyard. Please show all changes proposed including the removal of hedges and reconfiguration of the east end/entrance to courtyard not currently shown.
6. **Sections:** Please provide existing vs. proposed sections (much like the existing vs. proposed plans included in presentation packet). Please also clarify the proposed grade change of the courtyard from its existing topography.
7. **Revised plans:** Please revise project plans to retain character-defining hedges, pedestrian pathway paving and curbing. We will work with the design team to develop a walkway scheme based on historic research and existing conditions in order to comply with the Standards.

*GH: G:\Documents\Other\War Memorial Monument Coordination\Comments\_2012-04-05.doc*