

Key Arts Panel Approves Eisenhower Memorial Design

By BRETT ZONGKER Associated Press
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A powerful commission overseeing civic art and architecture in the nation's capital voted Thursday to approve the general concept and layout of elements in Frank Gehry's design for a national memorial honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts reviewed Gehry's core imagery of the 34th president over the course of two hours, and members voted 3-1 to approve the memorial's major elements. The design has drawn criticism from Eisenhower's family and others.

Gehry has proposed a memorial park with statues and images of Ike as president, as World War II hero and as a young boy from Kansas. The park would be framed by large metal tapestries depicting the Kansas landscape of his boyhood home.

The commissioners suggested one significant change in the concept, however. They urged Gehry to remove two smaller side tapestries and use only one as a backdrop for the memorial park. That would reduce the number of huge stone columns holding them up and open up the park, commissioner said.

The arts commission is one of two panels that must approve the design, along with the National Park Service, in order for the \$142 million project to move forward. The 14-year-old memorial project has been on hold for more than a year after Eisenhower's family and other groups raised objections to the design concept.

In 2011, the fine arts commission granted approval for Gehry's overall concept, including the tapestries that have drawn objections. But the panel had not yet reviewed the plans for statues and stone or bronze images in the central core until Thursday.

The imagery would show Eisenhower as president signing the Civil Rights Act of 1957 to advance equal rights for African-Americans. Other sculptural elements would show the D-Day landing at Normandy in World War II as a backdrop for a statue depicting Eisenhower addressing his troops.

Eisenhower's family and other critics have called for a simple memorial and have objected to Gehry's idea for metal tapestries showing Eisenhower's home. The tapestries, in particular, would make this different from any other memorial in Washington.

A recently published 100-year history of the commission's work, entitled "Civic Art," shows national memorial projects are almost always controversial, from the Lincoln Memorial to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The memorial project must be reauthorized by Congress in order to stay on track this year. A bill in the House, though, has called for the memorial to be redesigned. An analysis of that idea by the Congressional Budget Office last week found that scrapping the current concept and developing an alternate design through a new design competition would cost \$17 million.

Online:

Eisenhower Memorial: <http://eisenhowermemorial.gov/>

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