

## Greenway park plaque will mention Armenian genocide Final wording to be determined by city, Turnpike Authority

By Thomas C. Palmer Jr., Globe Staff | November 17, 2007

A park being donated for the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway by the nonprofit Armenian Heritage Foundation will include a plaque that refers to all immigrant groups but also makes an explicit reference to the Armenian genocide of the early 20th century.

Wording suggesting the park commemorates the 1.5 million deaths of Armenians around 1915 at the hands of Turks contradicts the intentions of planners over the last decade, who insisted the Greenway not be politicized or be a place for statues, plaques, or memorials.

Although the wording for a plaque is not final, officials of the Mayor's Central Artery Completion Task Force, an influential advisory group, acknowledged at a meeting this week that the specific historic event would be mentioned.

Nearly 100 years after it occurred, the Armenian genocide remains an intensely emotional issue. Turkey, an ally of the United States in a part of the world where the United States has few friends, rejects the term genocide. The Turkish government has said a proposed congressional resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide would severely damage US relations.

In Boston, the final say on the plaque will be made by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority and the City of Boston, which both support the proposed wording. The city and the agency are negotiating with the task force and the Armenian Heritage Foundation, a local group that is sponsoring the park, on the project.

The park and plaque are the result of a campaign by the local Armenian community since 2000 to find a Boston location for a commemoration of their ancestors. Because the gift of a park was opposed by some planners and community activists, the plaque's proposed wording has been broadened to refer to the diverse set of immigrant groups that, like the Armenians, sought refuge in the Boston area.

One objection has been that the Armenian Heritage Foundation did not follow the specific public process for Greenway proposals approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

"I would like to go on record that this is not acceptable as a process," Anne Fanton, a member of the task force, said Thursday. "We want to be certain that this never happens again."

The proposed park, with a 60-foot-diameter paved labyrinth, a sculpture, and water jet and reflecting pool, has been hailed as inspired in design and supported by many in the North End community.

The issue of the plaque's wording surfaced several times during a Thursday meeting on the park. North End community leader Nancy Caruso said she understood from previous private meetings that the park would be dedicated to all immigrants but not have a specific reference to the genocide.

But, asked specifically whether there would be mention of the words "Armenian genocide," task

force cochairman Rob Tuchmann said, "There will be."

James M. Kalustian, representing the Armenian Heritage Foundation, the group sponsoring the park, agreed. "The current wording as being discussed includes a reference to the Armenian genocide," he said.

Yesterday, Erkut Gomulu, president of the Turkish American Cultural Society of New England, who has opposed placement of the park on the Greenway, said any plaque should not reference a specific group's history.

"It's supposed to be inclusive of all communities, right?" he said. "It's claimed it will not be a memorial. On the other hand it will have 'genocide' in the wording."

The board of the conservancy that will assume responsibility for operating the Greenway once it's completed has called for a moratorium of at least five years on any memorials.

"An awful lot of people have worked hard to try to get to a place that works for everyone," said conservancy chairman Peter Meade. "We want the Greenway to become a non-controversial place where everybody in our community is welcomed."

But Meade's organization does not have an active role in the discussion.

Tuchmann said he did not consider the park or the plaque a memorial. Genie Beal, a member of the task force and chair of the board of the Boston Natural Areas Fund, yesterday agreed.

"It says 'Armenian genocide' in the last line. I think that's a good solution," said Beal. "It's not a memorial, it's a 'thank you' " to the foundation for the gift of a park.

*Thomas C. Palmer Jr. can be reached at [tpalmer@globe.com](mailto:tpalmer@globe.com). ■*