

Armenian memorial spurs Greenway worry Allowing the proposal could open the door to a rush of competing political groups and causes

By Thomas C. Palmer Jr., Globe Staff | May 2, 2006

A proposal to build a park memorializing Armenian genocide victims on the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway is rattling neighbors and conservancy board members, who fear that it would open the door to an overwhelming number of groups and causes.

The proposal is to put a large sculpture, reflecting pool, and fountain, and 60-foot-diameter paved labyrinth on the southern end of the block near Faneuil Hall. It would be the sole feature of the new Greenway that would honor an ethnic group.

Edwin Schlossberg of New York, a conservancy board member and the husband of Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, granddaughter of Rose Kennedy, said he is concerned that placing one ethnic memorial on the Greenway could "pit one group against another."

"It's so difficult when you open up the door to consideration about people wanting to exhibit discrete things on their mind," Schlossberg said. "This area was one to be developed without that."

So far the Greenway has been designed without monuments or memorials. There is not even a plan for a bust or statue of Rose Kennedy, namesake of the new corridor of parks along the former Central Artery highway. She was the mother of President John F. Kennedy and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the senior US senator from Massachusetts.

"The Greenway, if possible, should stay true to how it's been," Schlossberg said.

The Greenway conservancy board is scheduled today to see for the first time the proposed Armenian park, which is being funded by the Armenian Heritage Tribute and Genocide Memorial Foundation, a group of about 45 Armenian-American churches and cultural groups. The foundation would also create a \$500,000 endowment for maintenance and establish a separate \$500,000 endowment for an annual lecture series to be held at Faneuil Hall.

Donald J. Tellalian of Tellalian Associates Architects & Planners LLC of Boston said the memorial would not be dedicated solely to the 1.5 million Armenians who died in conflict with the Turks early in the last century.

"It will be as universal in its message as possible," said Tellalian who led a design committee of 12 from the Armenian-American community. "This is meant to be celebratory," Tellalian added yesterday, recognizing the "immigrant experience for all -- not just Armenians."

Objections to the memorial concern not only whether a single monument to an ethnic or national group should find a place on the Greenway, they also have to do with the unusual process by which the memorial was proposed and developed.

In 2000, the Legislature passed a brief provision into law directing the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority to study the feasibility of constructing "a monument to the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1922."

It did not specify a location, but the Turnpike is now formally proposing the foundation's design for a parcel of a little less than one-half acre between Cross Street and Surface Road, near Christopher Columbus Park.

Other groups that sought Greenway space, including the Boston Museum Project, went through competitive processes before being designated and were designed within a public process approved by the Federal Highway Administration. That included review by the Turnpike Authority, City of Boston officials, and the community.

The Armenian group's proposal has bypassed that route and is just being made public. It was presented Thursday to a meeting of North End and Wharf District residents.

"The memorial is a wonderful and important idea for our community," said Peter Meade, chairman of the conservancy board. "But there are questions about whether it is consistent with the goals of the Greenway conservancy, and we have to have a discussion about that with the proponents."

State Representative Peter J. Koutoujian, a Waltham Democrat and proponent of the memorial, said at the meeting that details of the plan had been purposely kept under wraps until all public officials were briefed on it.

Fred Yalouris, director of architecture for the Big Dig, called the land "a public park" and said, "We have proceeded with a very public process that has been going on five to six years."

But Rob Tuchmann, cochairman of the Mayor's Central Artery Completion Task Force, and others noted that the group, which oversees Greenway design, has never seen the proposal. "It is certainly not consistent with the spirit of the requirement that they include the three parties -- including the community -- in the design process," said Anne Fanton, former executive director of the Central Artery Environmental Oversight Committee.

Chris Fincham, a resident of Harbor Towers and a close observer of the years-long design of the Greenway parks, said, "All the other parcels, the community was involved in the designs from the beginning. This is an ethnic memorial, and it creates a problem."

Mayor Thomas M. Menino declined comment on the Armenian group's proposal or questions raised about it.

The park would almost certainly be the most distinctive feature of the Greenway, which is under construction and is expected to be completed in 2007.

The sculpture in the proposed park would be a 15-foot-high steel dodecahedron, or 12-sided structure, in the form of a large interlocking puzzle. It would symbolize the 12 provinces of historic Armenia and the Armenians who died in the conflict early last century.

Tellalian said the structure would be pulled apart as it is installed, recalling what happened to the Armenian homeland. Each year, with the assistance of a crane, it would be taken apart again, and reconfigured.

"The immigrants came to this country and began to put themselves back together again," he said. Some in the North End who attended last week's meeting praised the proposed park.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with the design," said Nancy Caruso, a North End community leader. "The problem is with the process. I think what everyone's objecting to is having it pushed down our throats."

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