



## **5/31 MEMORIAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Monday, January 9, 2023, 4 – 6:30 p.m.

**Location:** Economic Development Conference Room, 4525 Main St., Suite 700,  
Virginia Beach, VA 23462

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

George Alcaraz, Michael Berlucchi (Council liaison), Ervin Cox, Lawrence “Duff” Kliever, Kurtis Hooks, Cosette Livas, Jason Nixon, Tara Reel (via WebEx), Brian Ricardo

### **CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH STAFF PRESENT:**

Ekatarina Andujar (Procurement), Emily Archer (Economic Development), Mari Coronado (Cultural Affairs), Brent Esenberg (Volunteer Resources), Dana Harmeyer (City Attorney’s Office), Beth Hundley (Cultural Affairs), Audravette Jackson (Volunteer Resources), Andre Jenkins (Information Technology), Megan Kenyon (Volunteer Resources), Emily Labows (Cultural Affairs), Drew Lankford (Communications), Chad Morris (Parks & Recreation), Robert Shanks (Communications), John Tigert (Procurement)

### **EXCUSED ABSENCES:**

William Almond, Sharon Felton, Sylvia Strickland, Sabrina Wooten (Council Liaison), Charlotte Zito

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:**

Ms. Beth Hundley opened the 5/31 Memorial Committee Meeting with a remembrance reading of the victims’ names as a reminder of why we gather.

## We remember

- LaQuita C. Brown
- Ryan Keith Cox
- Tara Welch Gallagher
- Mary Louise "Mary Lou" Crutsinger Gayle
- Alexander Mikhail Gusev
- Joshua O. Hardy
- Michelle "Missy" Langer
- Richard H. Nettleton
- Katherine A. Lusich Nixon
- Christopher Kelly Rapp
- Herbert "Bert" Snelling
- Robert "Bobby" Williams

Before introducing the two design firms, Ms. Ekatarina Andujar provided a recap to bring the Committee up to date with the timeline.

- Four (4) qualified submissions were received.
- On November 17, 2022, the panel completed Phase 1 of the project and selected two design firms.
- The two firms selected for Phase 2 of the Project are Dills Architects with SWA and Rhodeside Harwell, Inc. with Kirkland Studio.
- Both firms were invited today for a meet and greet session with each being allotted one hour.

### **A. RHODESIDE HARWELL, INC. (RHI) WITH KIRKLAND STUDIO**

Mr. Elliott Rhodeside introduced himself and his firm, RHI, to the Committee. Key members of his firm attending with him were Project Manager Ron Sessoms, and Senior Designer Derrick Wolbaum. (Other members of the team joined the meeting via WebEx.) Mr. Rhodeside pledged commitment to this special project and expressed the tremendous honor it is to design a beautiful memorial that will meet the expectations of the City, the Committee and all those affected. They aim to learn and connect as much as possible to the victims' families and the community.

The presentation provided information about their team and their experience.

- RHI is a small woman-owned business established in 1986 in Alexandria, Virginia, with offices in Virginia and New York City doing work locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. They are creative, collaborative and compassionate.
- The RHI Design Team consists of: RHI, Larry Kirkland Studio (artist), Clark Nexsen (architecture, engineering & landscape architecture support), The Charette Agency (public engagement and public communications) and Consensus Building Institute (facilitation, mediation and/or conflict resolution).
- The RHI Portfolio includes the following projects:
  - Sycamore Hill Gateway Plaza (Greenville, NC)
  - National Native American Veterans Memorial (Washington, DC)

- George Mason Memorial (Washington, DC)
- For this project, RHI is in partnership with Artist Larry Kirkland from Larry Kirkland Studio. His portfolio includes the following projects:
  - Passage: The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Atlanta, GA)
  - World War II Memorial (Pittsburgh, PA)
  - American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial (Washington, DC)

Mr. Rhodeside concluded his presentation by introducing Project Manager Ron Sessoms to moderate the Q&A portion and presented the following questions to help them develop their design concept.

1. Should the memorial be comprised of one iconic element to recognize the victims as a group or of a series of uniquely individual elements to convey key information about each of the victims?

Committee response:

- *Incorporate a blending of the two elements and share what they did for a living*
- *Provide a symbol and connection to each of the victims*

2. What activities/programs would be appropriate to accommodate at the memorial site? Consideration if that site/space would accommodate program/events?

Committee response:

- *For visitors of the sight to have reflection or contemplation of memory*
- *A calming, serene element that may reinforce water/moving water*
- *The water element used to help muffle passing traffic noise*
- *Something aimed for families and kids that's safe hang out at*
- *Site is potential space for reflection and commemoration*

3. Should the site accommodate a maintenance facility for grounds crew or space for restrooms?

NOTE: Design firm does not usually include restroom facilities on memorial sites

Committee response:

- *This was not a topic the Committee had discussed previously, and members had varied and differing views.*
- *Ultimate consensus was no permanent restroom facility on site, but with the option of bringing in portable restrooms when events, such as a 5/31 remembrance ceremony, warrant.*
- *Discussion dovetailed into conversation about memorial tributes at Building #2, the oceanfront and indoor spaces; however, it was clarified that the firms should refer to the RFP for the expectations set forth in the design competition.*

4. What are the security concerns at the site?

Committee response:

- *In reference to the previous question regarding restroom facilities, there are often negative characterizations of public restrooms, as some get used for other purposes. Some members had significant safety concerns if open public restrooms were to be on site.*
- *Suggestions were made re. having sufficient lighting, perhaps a call box or a gate that could be locked (though some members were opposed to the memorial being closed at any time.)*
- *The prospect of discreet cameras was mentioned; do not want them to obscure the site but may also be an issue for those wanting privacy during reflection.*

5. Are there any other thoughts/hopes related to the design that needs to be shared?

Committee response:

- *Take a look at the memorial at Old Dominion University*
- *Incorporate an earth/engineering element*
- *The victims were public servants, which is a thankless but important and worthy job*
- *Important for the victims to be remembered and this memorial to reflect what they have to the City*
- *Consider that Public Utilities may be within close proximity of the memorial site which may impact some people*
- *Important to recognize not only the 12 victims, but also focus on those injured, those in the building and the first responders*
- *Important to recognize the City of Virginia Beach and all the work the victim's did that was critical to the operations of the City*
- *The members reinforced the need to hear from all stakeholders, and verifying that the families' voices would be heard.*

In response to the question of who handles communication with the families, Ms. Hundley shared that is handled through the Survivors and Families Liaison Shelby Slutzker from Kearns & West.

Mr. Rhodeside shared their team includes an engagement specialist.

6. What are the messages/feelings you would like to see conveyed in the design of the memorial?

Committee response:

- *Victim/employees weren't forgotten*
- *Incorporate a mediation walk; give a sense of peace/reflection*

- *The right design will incorporate all the key points in a restraint, timeless, elegant way*
- *Materials chosen must be of the highest quality because it's a representation of the quality of the people lost, quality of the people who responded and quality of the community; not a time to cut corners*
- *The families should be involved with how much information is shared about the honored individual; how to reflect on their loved one to share with the public*

In conclusion, Mr. Rhodeside and his design team look forward to preparing a design concept to inspire the committee and meet all the needs conveyed.

Ms. Hundley thanked RHI for coming in to meet with the committee and engaging in a thoughtful and thought-provoking process.

## **B. BREAK**

## **C. DILLS ARCHITECT WITH SWA**

Mr. John D. Tigert welcomed and introduced Dill Architects and SWA.

### Introduction/Background:

- Mr. Clay Dills is the design principal and owner of Dill Architects, a Virginia Beach firm in business for over 40 years. Accompanying him was his colleague at Dills, Ms. Gerrie West (studio design director and project architect), and Mr. Dan Affleck of SWA.
- Mr. Dills reached out to SWA because of their work on the Sandy Hook Memorial in Connecticut. Mr. Affleck explained the design concept at the Sandy Hook Memorial included many of the features were what the 5/31 Memorial Committee had expressed as important in its various meetings, and he briefly outlined what they did in Connecticut.
  - One of the strengths of the design was its simplicity: a circle with winding paths and a water feature.
  - The design concept had names of the 26 victims around the circle with a body of water that is constantly moving around the central sycamore tree.
  - It had open space and seasonality.
  - As a community element, the site provided space for anniversary events.
  - The materiality of the memorial made it appear strong, giving it strength and solidity.
  - The design element had a different nighttime aspect.
  - The flow of the water is counterclockwise to encourage movement.

The Committee had discussion on the process involved with putting the Sandy Hook Memorial together ranging from cost challenges, infrastructure and design. An important element was the symbolic meaning of the memorial.

The objective of the design firm is to listen and thoughtfully hear from the Committee. They presented the Committee with the following questions.

1. *Describe the overall feeling you see for the future memorial.*

Committee response:

- *Seasonality*
- *To never be forgotten of the sacrifices made that day*
- *To feel included*
- *To appreciate your position in the City*
- *To be reflective of the community*
- *Sees memorial as possible tourist site*
- *Site to demonstrate elegance and restraint*
- *To be timeless; classic and impactful*

2. *What are your primary takeaways/thoughts?*

Mr. Affleck shared that his primary takeaway in designing this memorial is the concept of SERVICE and that they will be constructing something for the people who built things for a living. It's about not forgetting these victims.

Committee response:

- *Important to realize that we lost a core piece of the City and hopes this gets captured in the design; term ripple effect used to help people understand how this incident caused ripples in the City; projects came to a halt*

3. *Materials used:*

Committee response:

- *Mindful that its near water so the issue of algae*
- *Pay attention to something that's unique to Virginia Beach*
- *Dull out passing traffic noise to make the site peaceful and serene*
- *Infrastructure set up and proximity was considered when selecting the memorial site*

4. *Features and materials not to be used*

Committee response:

- *No "in your face" elements*
- *This is not Vegas – don't want too much lighting*
- *Parsimony – do not skimp on quality*
- *"Sometimes more is not more."*

## **D. NEXT STEPS**

Ms. Hundley thanked Dill Architects and SWA Group for their time and engaging dialogue with the committee. To conclude the meeting, Ms. Ekatarina Andujar provided the next steps:

- Both firms will meet in person on Jan. 10 with City Staff who are interested in providing feedback to them. All City Staff were invited to participate, but no one is required to do so.
- Family members and survivors who would like to provide input were given the option of speaking directly with representatives from the firms in person, via phone or via written correspondence. The Families & Survivors Liaison will communicate preferences, and the firms will be notified of next steps in that regard.
- Firms will submit proposals by Feb. 24.
- The 5/31 Memorial Committee will interview representatives from both firms.
- The 5/31 Memorial Committee will solicit stakeholder feedback on designs throughout March.
- In late March-early April, the 5/31 Memorial Committee will meet to select one of the two firms, and then make a recommendation to City Council.

## **E. ADJOURN**