

LEA COUNTY VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

INSPIRATIONS AND DESIGN

NARRATIVE FOR SLIDESHOW

Slide 1: Before diving into the proposed design concepts and layouts, we would like to provide a little background on the themes we selected to both organize the space and convey important historical messages.

Slide 2: As we went through the historical information provided by the committee and the Lea County Museum, two strong spatial themes became clear:

1) The Airstrip:

The Hobbs Army Airfield is a historical site in Lea County and was operated during World War II. It held training for bombardier students and of 4-engine pilots in B-17 bombers. Post War, the Army Air Force decided to assign the base for use as an aircraft storage facility. In 1948, the base was closed and the Air Force declared the Hobbs Army Airfield as “surplus”. It wasn’t until the 1950’s that the City of Hobbs began to rehabilitate portions of the base, building a 9-hole golf course at first, then later into a recreation area and industrial park.

We visited the old airfield and found a beautiful public park with a wide assortment of recreational things to do from golf to frisbee to a shooting range. The airstrip was fenced off to the public, but its expanse could still be viewed. When looking at old photographs and aerial views of the base, we mentioned this in a previous meeting, what if the airfield could be remembered in some way at the Lea County Veterans Memorial Park and the stories associated with it could be told?

2) The Target:

The inspiration for this theme sprung from the original map the Committee shared with us of Lea County and all the bomb sites located across Lea County. We wondered if in addition to providing the map on a plaque on a wall that perhaps the actual concentric circles could be something. The “Target” idea reflects the bombardier training taking place at Hobbs Army Airfield, which was an important part of the history of Lea County. This theme was also inspired by the wonderful story of Ellis Byers, whom we read about in the Lea County Museum. The exhibit told the heartwarming story of how Ellis would flyover his family’s house, “the target”, in Lovington, and drop a makeshift parachute constructed out of a handkerchief and an ammunition shell with a rolled paper note inside. It would tell his family to meet him in Hobbs at the airfield if they wanted to go for a ride!

Slide 3: We pulled several proposed design elements from compelling images we found in the historical archives. From top left going clockwise: the grid from the Airfield, for example, can serve as an organizing element for a memorial garden. The next image, to the right, shows runners on a training structure or “banked wall” that is our inspiration for creating an interactive and educational landscape feature. Next is another iteration of the grid that shows more defined buildings placed systematically within the larger grid. We have imagined those buildings as individual memorials or raised planters with rose beds within a gridded walking path. Finally, at the bottom left and middle, we see the “Underground magazine igloo” photo and floor plan. Placing the restrooms and storage buildings within

a proposed berm or small hill, is an opportunity to help visitors experience the types of structure that would have been found at the airfield.

Slide 4: We found several examples of a white “caliche” stone, used both in the landscape, to line the paths at the Hobbs Army Airfield, and in walls and in buildings of ranches and farms across Lea County. It is our understanding that this is still a material that is readily available locally. We think it will be an excellent material for individual memorials in the memorial garden.

Slide 5: We also read quite a bit about Colonel William Shafter and his documentation of Monument Spring on the Hat Ranch. We see here, at the right, an idea of what the monument at the spring might have looked like. It might be possible to recreate the monument as part of the memorial park. The spring was important to travelers as it provided much needed water. The spring could be inspiration for a water feature at the park.

Slide 6: This slide shows a few examples of different kinds of memorials or monuments. Starting clockwise from the upper right corner shows the Korean War stone monument and the Vietnam bronze sculpture (lower right) from the New Mexico Veterans Memorial Park in Albuquerque, a stone plaque option (lower middle), the previous memorial wall at the Lea County Courthouse (lower left), and individual “dog tags” dangling from a stainless steel mesh as memorials or donor acknowledgements at the new Penguin Exhibit at the Albuquerque BioPark Zoo (upper left and upper middle).

Slide 7: The colonnade examples in Lubbock and Santa Fe define spaces that work well with a flag court. A colonnade can create a striking backdrop for presentations and gatherings at an entry or focal point.

Slide 8: At our previous meeting, we discussed the opportunity to work with a local artist and create simple yet meaningful sculpture(s) with steel cutouts or other media. Tina had the pleasure of meeting Charles Fort, an artist/sculptor and rancher from Tatum, when she visited Jim Harris at the Lea County Museum. These sculptures could portray military equipment, such as the bomber planes, military personnel, as well as the other members of the community that support all branches of the military and veterans. Perhaps we can tell the story of the Lea County people like this...“Among the civilian employees at Hobbs was a group of twenty female aircraft mechanics who arrived from Duncan Field in San Antonio in December 1942 to work at the airfield’s Sub-Depot...These employees had been some of the first local residents to be selected by the Army Air Forces for specialized training even before base construction got underway. They included Mrs. Anna Christmas, who trained as a propeller mechanic. Before the war, she had been a practical nurse and had four grandchildren at the time she went to work on the base. When asked why she went through all the effort to be retrained, she replied that she had always been fascinated by machinery and wanted ‘to make a contribution to winning [the] war.’ Mrs. Naomi L. Hogue was the circulation manager for the Hobbs Daily News-Sun when she left for Texas and came back as a mechanic; and Mrs. Lila Herman went to training to learn landing gear repair, how to install wires and cables on the aircraft, and engine installation. She returned to Hobbs to join her husband, who worked on base as a propeller mechanic.” *“Keep ‘Em Flying” The Story of the Hobbs Army Airfield, by William A. Dodge and Timothy L. Sawyer*

Slide 9: We understand the importance of shade in New Mexico, and particularly in Lea County. These are some examples of possible shade structures over gathering areas. The top left is a picture of the New Mexico Veterans Memorial amphitheater, where we took into consideration, the view of the Sandia Mountains and the shade for Memorial Day ceremonies. The structure allowed shade over the

amphitheater seating while also keeping views open to the sky for the ceremonial fly-overs by the Kirtland Air Force Base pilots. We also have an example of a reflecting pool.

Slide 10: As we remember from investigating the Veterans Memorial in Farmington, the landscape plays a very important role in creating comfortable and aesthetically attractive space. We also learned from the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque, that elements like plant colors (red, white and blue), and names (Peace Rose) can further support the educational message of the park. This slide shows different options of planters, both raised, that can serve as benches, and flush at ground level, for ease of maintenance, and pleasant pathways with benches under trees for shade.

Slide 11: Here is a preliminary selection of trees and shrubs adapted to the Southeastern NM climate, these will provide all-season color (red, white and blue, if desired) and textures. These plants have relatively low water requirements and minimal maintenance needs (with the exception of the special variety roses). The trees will provide shade and windbreak, as well as spring and fall color, and a screen to some of the adjacent properties with industrial uses.

Slide 12: This slide brings together several of the elements that we have discussed. We hope you can start to get a feeling for how they might all work together in the park.

Slide 13: The Hobbs Army Airfield or "Airstrip" shape, scaled to fit on the Lea County Veterans Memorial Park site, connects important access points and creates an opportunity for a "looped" history walk. It allows for direct paths to focal points within the park. This diagram shows how the airfield runways could work as a concept and fit as a layout in the park space. We can see that the "Airstrip" concept works well and connects to key access points at the northwest and northeast corners as well as to the stage at the museum, if this is desired in the future.

Slide 14: The "Target" shape of concentric circles allows for more organic shapes within the park with focal points hidden from view that need to be discovered around a bend. This layout references an important historical feature of the military experience in Lea County, the bombardier's training or bomb sites that are sprinkled across the county. This diagram shows how the "Target" concept could fit as a layout in the Lea County Veterans Memorial Park space. The "Target" concept creates a very strong background to the axis running southeast from the northwest corner (where most people will first see and approach the park). The concentric circles could potentially be continued outside the park, within the landscape of the adjacent museum complex or courthouse grounds, if so desired.

Slide 15: "Airstrip" concept: As you enter the park from the northwest corner on Central Avenue, you are drawn in by the colonnade and the Garrison Flag on the berm over the amphitheater or stage area at the southeast corner. The US, NM and POW/MIA flags and steel cutout sculptures on the berm provide a dynamic backdrop and screen from the neighboring industrial area on Avenue A and Eddy Street. As you travel southeast from the colonnade, along the tree lined path, there are many opportunities for memorial statues and/or plaques, and when you look to your left you see the memorial stones and rose garden. This area allows for individuals to remember their loved ones through the purchase of a plaque installed on a caliche stone. If you walk south from the colonnade, the path includes bank walls and berms with five small spaces for a memorial representing the five branches of service. You have the option to experience the "banked walls" we saw used for training at the airfield. You then arrive at the "coffee talk" area, a shaded, small gathering space with tables and chairs at the intersection of pathways in the southwest corner of the park. The restroom/storage building is

conveniently located nearby, nestled into the berm, referencing the underground magazine “igloo”. The open triangular areas leave room for other monuments. The raised berms around the edge of the site protect the site from the drainage on Eddy Street, create a wind break, and provide a feeling of peace and enclosure. This option provides clear visual access to the main gathering area across a strong axis from the entry or the “coffee talk” area.

Slide 16: “Target” Concept: The location of the large US flag makes a strong statement right at the northwest corner entry. This is a prime opportunity to reinstate the previous Lovington Memorial wall. As you travel to the east, you come upon the “coffee talk’ area, nestled within trees and landscaping. The restrooms are located just to the south in the underground “igloo”. As you travel further south, you arrive at the main gathering space and/or reflecting pool. On top of the berm to the southeast, the eight flags can be seen – one for each branch of service as well as the New Mexico state flag, the POW/MIA flag and a US flag. The five branches of service are represented on the outer edge to the northwest as you arrive at the memorial stones and rose garden, with a backdrop of steel cutout sculpture telling the story of Lea County veterans. This option separates the storage building from the restrooms and places it at the southern side of the site. This option creates a more private space in the middle of the park for reflection and storytelling.