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Frank Gehry In The Flesh

Thursday, June 3, 2010, 2:35pm EDT | Modified: Thursday, June 3, 2010, 5:25pm



Frank Gehry discusses his chosen design concept in front of the National Capital Planning Commission on Thursday.

Famed architect Frank Gehry presented his own Eisenhower memorial design concept to the National Capital Planning Commission on Thursday.

Gehry, creator of the stainless steel-encased Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, gave a 10-minute speech outlining his thought process behind the \$100 million Dwight D. Eisenhower presidential memorial and its possible use of tapestry.

The soft spoken man opened his presentation with a short introduction.

"It's a great honor to be here and to be part of this historic project," he said.

He says he was drawn to the idea of making carved sculptures in stone. The design unveiled in March includes a central area set back from a number of 80-foot columns framed by large metal panels that will depict images of Eisenhower's life. He presented three memorial design schemes at Thursday's presentation.



Joanne Lawton

"I personally have an aversion to bronze statues," he said. "The ones made in my lifetime are cold and don't move me or a lot of people. I started to develop a palate of ideas on how to talk about him."

The planned memorial will sit on four acres between Fourth and Sixth Streets SW south of Independence Avenue.

He named some challenges the site presents, such as traffic and the surrounding buildings.

"The main issue was how to create a space that we could develop a story about Eisenhower, that would afford people a place to visit and learn about it and in a gentle way...in a garden, so to speak, and tell about his sayings and his persona," he said.

The memorial will feature a grove of oak trees and highlight themes from Eisenhower's life.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission has been working on the presidential memorial since it formed in 1999 and selected the architect in March 2009. In January, it tapped Gilbane Building Co. to manage the design and construction. The group still has to raise the funds for the memorial, but hopes to deliver it by 2015.

Gehry says he has been studying tapestries for "quite a while" and is interested in using them to tell stories of battles and people.

The tapestry for the Eisenhower memorial would stretch across the length of the site and would be raised 15 to 20 feet so that people can see under it. They could also see through the shadowy images, he added. He said the images displayed on the tapestry during the competition process are not final, nor is its form and shape.

"If we choose to use tapestry, we will be very careful so that it will sustain the years and tell the story for many years to come," he said.

The NCPC, which does not take action on informational presentations, will review the memorial in three phases: concept, preliminary design, and final design.

"We look forward to working with Mr. Gehry, the design team, and the Eisenhower Memorial Commission as the project moves forward, and anticipate seeing a concept design this fall," said Preston Bryant, NCPC chairman.

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