

City gives go-ahead to lakefront memorial

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port commission, council approve plan for WWII tribute without input from Parks and Recreation Board

With few comments, Port Washington aldermen and Plan Commission members last week gave final approval to the construction of a World War II memorial on the coal dock.

But members of the Parks and Recreation Board, who met the same night, criticized the fact that the Common Council approved the project without any input from them.

“It’s insulting,” Board President Lori MacRae said. “I’m really ticked off.

“I think it’s kind of a neat thing, but we should have been consulted.”

Board member Mary Ann Klotz concurred, saying other people are required to appear before the panel for its recommendation if they want to do something in a city park.

“I think it’s an insult to Derek Strohl, who had to come here 50 times for a community garden and Joe Dean (the alderman who proposed the war memorial) can completely bypass us,” she said.

“It wasn’t done right. It’s a park. It should have come here first so we could give a recommendation to the council.”

MacRae said she thought Veterans Memorial Park might have been a better location for the memorial than a new, showpiece city park, a suggestion that board member Bryan Deal disagreed with.

“The location is key,” he said, noting that a reflection pond and water are important to the World War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

“The water there helps make the memorial,” Deal said. “It’s not the same without the water.”

MacRae replied, “I appreciate your saying that, but I would have appreciated having that discussion here.”

After all, she said, the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for all the city parks.

Parks and Recreation Director Charlie Imig noted that both he and board member Ron Voigt are members of the Coal Dock Committee, which gave approval to the plan to construct a replica of the Wisconsin pillar at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., on the coal dock.

Aldermen may have felt they expressed the board’s views, Imig said.

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Mayor Tom Mlada said Tuesday that he understood the board's concerns, but said there are mitigating circumstances — namely the need to get the project under way because of the number of World War II veterans dying each day and the hope they will be able to see the memorial before they die.

He noted that Voigt is the Parks and Recreation board representative on the Plan Commission and had a say in the project.

The memorial, which will be built by the Stars and Stripes Honor Flight, will be placed on the southeast side of the coal dock.

It will consist of the replica pillar, which will be about 17 feet high and 4 feet wide, with a pathway of engraved bricks leading to it and three flagpoles. The Stars and Stripes Honor Flight will sell the bricks to pay for the project.

A sign will also be erected at the site containing a replica of the stars found on the Freedom Wall at the national World War II monument. The star, which memorializes those killed in the war, will be placed so that the pillar shadows it at 11:11 a.m. on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, he said.

Both the Plan Commission, which recommended approval of the monument, and the Common Council, met in special sessions Oct. 11 to vote on the project.

Special meetings were held so that work on the memorial could begin immediately to ensure the project is completed by Veterans Day. A dedication is planned for Friday, Nov. 9.