

NEWS – December 4, 2013 – Robert Whale news reporter

## Veterans salute City's choice of Les Gove Park as site for joint American-Vietnamese war memorial



This architectural illustration shows the proposed joint American-Vietnamese war memorial planned for Les Gove Park.— *image credit: Courtesy rendering/City of Auburn*

The Auburn City Council on Monday approved a request to put the proposed joint American-Vietnamese veterans war memorial in Les Gove Park.

If the reaction of people in the Council Chambers on Monday was any measure, the decision would appear to have ended months of controversy that had threatened to split Auburn's veteran community into two warring camps: veterans who thought Veterans Memorial Park was the ideal place for the memorial; and veterans who insisted that the only memorial in the park should be the one to the United States Armed Forces, and that no flag of any foreign nation, even a defunct one, should ever fly there.

"This project will offer all veterans of the Vietnam War, American or South Vietnamese, a place to celebrate and to remember as well as a place to provide meaningful closure," said Roger Flygare of Federal Way, a veteran. "The City of Auburn is forging in a direction that is new, and at the same time, bold, with common sense, all the while holding positive core values in its reflection of what is important to its citizens. "

Jesse Jose, a member of VFW Post 1741 and a vocal opponent of placing the memorial at Veterans Memorial Park, said Les Gove was "the perfect spot" for it, and he praised the compromise that has it possible.

"We members of VFW Post 1741 see it as a significant battle that we all have won. There should only be one flag at the veterans memorial park, and that's the Stars and Stripes. And there should only be one kind of veteran honored at Veterans Memorial Park, and that's veterans of the United States of America," Jose said.

The resolution specifies a 10-year interval for the American-Vietnamese War Memorial Alliance and its supporters to raise the money to build the memorial, but allows for a review at the expiration of that period to determine if an extension would be necessary.

And, in the English translation of the text on the monument base, the United States is to be listed before the Republic of Vietnam, but on the Vietnamese translation the Republic of Vietnam will come first.

Council member Nancy Backus answered the charge leveled by fellow councilmember Largo Wales at a meeting of the Planning and Community Development Committee chaired by Backus last week that by "sticking the memorial in Les Gove Park," the City was offering it a second-best home.

"It is not 'sticking' the memorial with something less than Veterans Memorial Park. The fact is that the Les Gove Community Campus is supposed to be our main park, our Central Park. And the fact is that, at some point, there is going to be a community center located very near the monument," Backus said. "I would like to see a monument park within the Les Gove Community Campus. I think that this could be a perfect first step to have the monument there."

When Wales spoke up, her eyes ablaze, she made it clear she still believes the City gave the memorial committee the business.

"I am OK with the compromise, and I will take credit for having said, 'sticking it' over at Les Gove Park," Wales said. "My husband's a veteran, I'm a veteran teacher who taught Vietnamese children. Veterans are veterans, veterans need to be in the Veterans Memorial Park. We're equal, we're all veterans fighting for the same ideas."

Tai Nguyen of Lynnwood, born in Vietnam in 1973, grew up there after the United States pulled out.

"This is emotional for me, so thank you for bringing up this wonderful memorial park. This does not bring the pain and suffering to (view), this brings the cooperation, the help that we had from the United States of America, which helped their fellow human beings, not Vietnamese, not American," Nguyen said. "This memorial once again emphasizes that humans can protect each other when we come (together) in the face of fear and destruction."

"I want to thank the City from my heart," said Lan Phan Jones, a member of the memorial committee and the daughter of a South Vietnamese Army veteran.

- ROBERT WHALE, *Auburn Reporter News reporter*
- [rwhale@auburn-reporter.com](mailto:rwhale@auburn-reporter.com) or 253-833-0218, ext. 5052