

San Diego Reader



- Olive Street AIDS memorial park design sent to city for consideration
- from facebook.com/SDAIDSMemorial/

Proposed AIDS memorial for Olive Street

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Intended park land bequeathed to city nearly 100 years ago

By [Marty Graham](#), Oct. 24, 2017

The announcement on September 9th that the San Diego AIDS Memorial Task Force had selected a site — 20 years after the first such task force got underway — isn't sitting well with some community members. The site, [on Olive Street](#) in a park that's taken nearly 100 years to be created, isn't the best choice and the process of selecting it was done in private, community members say.

Amie Hayes, historic resources specialist with Save Our Heritage Organisation and a member of the Bankers Hill Community Group, has been sending letters to the task force raising those concerns.

"We've been raising questions for a while," Hayes said in an interview. "It will be unfortunate if this is not the memorial San Diego deserves." The proposed memorial will be in the Olive Street Park — a pocket park where the street dead-ends just west of Maple Canyon. The site was selected in a closed meeting on February 9, 2016, and the notes from the meeting reflect that no one from the public was present.

The task force had set up an online survey, but who voted and how many times wasn't part of the survey, Hayes said.

"There's definitely some decisions being made without public notice and input, while they're using public money," Hayes said.

Telephone and email messages requesting comment left for task-force members Jennifer Lebron, Jeff Marston, Rabbi Laurie Coskey, and Katherine Stuart Faulconer since Friday generated no response.

Task-force founder Nicole Murray Ramirez, meanwhile, dismissed Hayes's allegations as "misinformed."

"We are not a city task force. We are a volunteer group that has on occasion worked with the city and we are not subject to the Brown Act," Ramirez said. "That said, we've gone to great lengths to let people know about our meeting: we've put them on Facebook and on the web, we contact the AIDS agencies to let them know. There's no secret to what we're doing."

In August, the task force began soliciting [designs for the memorial on its Facebook page](#). Ramirez said the group received 12 designs and has narrowed it down to 3. In the meantime, people have begun challenging the location, including Hayes in an opinion piece on *Voice of San Diego*, and in *Uptown News*.

According to letters sent to the task force, a July 2016 meeting of the Bankers Hill Community Group with people who live near the Olive Street site came up with a family- and children-oriented list of requests, including playground equipment and community gardens. The neighbors didn't want restrooms, reasoning the park is a walk-to-from-home spot.

The AIDS memorial plan is for a quiet, reflective place to remember the more than 8000 people — the vast majority from the gay community — who lived and died in San Diego during the nightmare days before HIV became a manageable condition. It should comfortably accommodate up to 200 people, Hayes said. Other sites, including the UCSD Medical Center complex in Hillcrest, the Truax House, Balboa Park, and the South Embarcadero were also considered.

Some members of the Hillcrest Business Association are saying the memorial belongs in Hillcrest, near the rainbow flag on Normal Street. While the San Diego Unified Port District ruled out the North Embarcadero, it offered space on the South Embarcadero for the memorial.

The plan to have a tribute space has been meandering around for 20 years, limited by a lack of funding. When he was a city councilmember, [Todd Gloria claimed he crafted the city's sale of the Truax House](#), the city's first AIDS hospice, to a local developer so that some funding would come to the project. (It's not clear if it

happened that way; the house and surrounding land were purchased long ago with state highway funds for a freeway extension that was never built. Some say the money had to be returned to the state fund.)

If the 20-year wait sounds slow, consider that the Olive Street land was donated by the Woods and McKee families for a neighborhood park more than 100 years ago, and that the park has remained largely unfunded until recently (and is still not fully funded).

The Metro Community Development Corporation signed off on putting the memorial in the park in an October 19th letter that asks the task force to remember its earlier vision: “As the AIDS Memorial was intended to be a memorial placed in a community park, the Metro San Diego CDC requests that the AIDS Task Force honor its previous commitment to not use more than 25 percent of the land within the proposed Olive Street Park for the AIDS Memorial. This could be done through utilizing the preferred conceptual design for the northern parcel of the proposed park, while the southern parcel would be utilized for community use,” the letter says.

Uptown Planners board chair Leo Wilson said many people – including the planners – are withholding judgment on the plan until they see the final design.

“If it is attractive and limited in size then we believe it will get a lot of support by those on the fence,” Wilson said in an email. “The idea of the memorial being at the northwest side of the site, overlooking Maple Canyon, seemed to receive a favorable reception.”

But some critics say the Olive Street park just isn’t the place.

“A neighborhood park is not the venue and would do the memorial a disservice,” the Bankers Hill group’s letter states.

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[Geranium Oct. 24, 2017 @ 9:17 p.m.](#)

Secrecy seems to be the central theme of this tale. But given the idea of a community park and an AIDS memorial shouldn't be that controversial, its curious both city officials and the memorial task force are so secretive about everything associated with this situation. I think its important to realize the secrecy goes back to the city's initial attempt to sell the Truax house property quietly, even first listing it without the address, and stating the house had no historical value. It was only after the community found out about it did Todd Gloria acknowledge the importance of the house as LGBT landmark, even though he had been in it prior to listing it for sale. Furthermore, why did Gloria's office send a representative to the Bankers Hill community prior to the Truax house situation to announce the funding for the Olive Street Park was in place and the design would start soon, only to have the Mayor's office say, after the Aids Memorial plan was cooked up for Olive Street Park, that there was no funding for Olive Street Park until 2028, unless the community agreed to the Aids Memorial being there.

This whole situation stinks in a petty political way like so many things in this city. Many of us in the community assume there was a well connected developer buyer in place for the very attractive parcel the Truax house sits on. But when Gloria was busted for again being willing to allow another LGBT landmark to be demolished (the Michels-Carey house was destroyed under his watch) he was facing another LGBT public relations disaster. So as Marty's article indicates, Gloria wanted to do more than avoid the problem he wanted to do something that could be perceived as a PR win. Even though at the time the community wanted to have input regarding the sale of the Truax property, Gloria instead denied that and rushed the process. Which is weird given it seems pretty clear none of the proceeds of the sale could be used by the City. And therein lies the the problem, at the core of this process is not respect for the community, whether the Bankers Hill community or those who correctly want an AIDS memorial for very serious and profound reasons. At the core of this process is a public relations stunt for Gloria and Faulconer.

Until all those so intent on keeping the process a secret (and yes that includes the AIDS Memorial Task Force and why are they so concerned about the Brown Act?) this will be a dark situation.