

Considering the Arch Competition Finalists

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The five finalist's designs for the Arch competition exhibit a very high level of skill and creativity. It is easy to be enamored by the images of what might be.



The Gateway Arch Grounds

Important **planning and design concepts** have been developed by several finalists:

- Maintaining the **central memorial theme**.
- **Expanding the Arch museum** and opening it up to the city on the west side, to the Arch above and to the river on the east.
- **Focusing new development on the north end** of the Arch grounds and tying it directly to Laclede's Landing.
- **Removing the problems of Memorial Drive** as a barrier to the Arch grounds.
- **Keeping the east side of the river green** while introducing a major amphitheater with views back to the Arch and the St. Louis skyline.
- **Moving parking** off the Arch grounds.

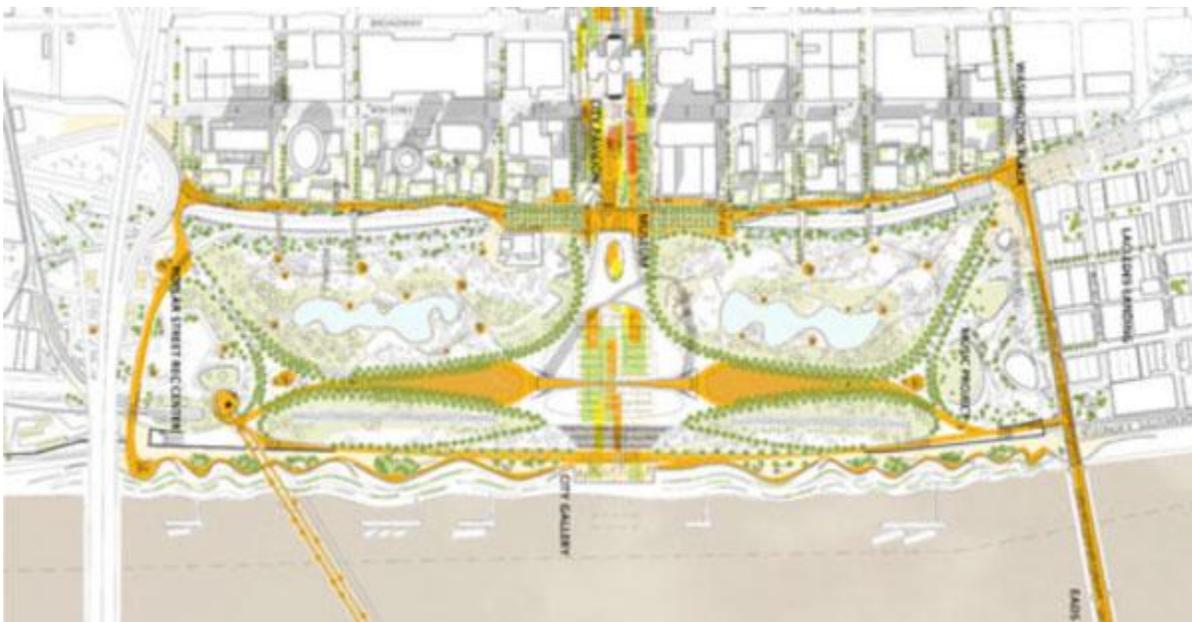
A few very important concepts have been developed by only one or two finalists:

- **Breaking through downtown's wall of buildings** on the west side to connect it with the Arch grounds. We can see what removing the St. Louis Center bridge across Washington Avenue has done to open downtown to the east. Now we need to do some of that between Washington and Pine, as the Behnisch plan does.
- **Making good practical use of the riverfront** while respecting its challenges and getting people out on the river in both high and low water, as shown in the MVVA plan.
- **Understanding that the development process will take many years and advocating the eventual removal of I-70** across the front of the Arch and relocation of the railroad tracks on the east side of the river, again as in the Behnisch plan.

A strong plan can accomplish many important things, but which of the finalists does this best?

Here is a short-hand evaluation of each:

Behnisch reaches out into the city and breaks down barriers creating a vibrant pedestrian environment where Memorial Drive is now. The expanded Arch museum is open to downtown on the west; you can see the Arch above while inside, as well as the river to the east. There are terraces along the river for views across the river. The plan ties in the east side effectively and in exciting ways with a gondola and an amphitheater on the edge of the river. Look closely at the drawings. It requires some effort to understand the illustrations, but is worth it.



Behnisch Team Proposal

MVVA's plan is beautiful and ready to be implemented but it makes little use of the river and lacks major activities and attractions. Perhaps a bit too much emphasis is placed on recreating natural landscapes. It does not remove the barrier between downtown and the Arch grounds and ends up blocking the view toward the river although with the attractive expanded museum.



MVVA Team Proposal

PWP is a beautifully illustrated symmetrical landscape scheme with a huge earth mound on the east side as a unique counterpoint to the Arch. A wild landscape is restored as in the MVVA plan. The Arch museum is opened up to downtown and the berm that blocks views toward the river is reduced but Memorial Drive remains a barrier. Locations are identified for activity centers but they are not developed and the riverfront is not used.



PWP Landscape Architecture, Foster + Partners, Civitas Proposal

SOM presents a very attractive design with building elements on the north and south ends of the Arch grounds. They fit beautifully into the landscape while having the potential to be developed into meaningful activity centers. Memorial Drive problems remain to some extent and there is no meaningful use of the river in front of the Arch. The amphitheater on the east side would have a wonderful view of the St. Louis skyline.



SOM, Hargreaves, Big Proposal

Weiss / Manfredi creates a great loop tying the east and west sides of the river together. It has an interesting and practical approach to using the riverfront at the Arch. It may overemphasize the east side in terms of both design and what is proposed there.



Weiss / Manfredi Team Proposal

Which plan is best for St. Louis? It is difficult to tell, but some have the edge over others in terms of a better planning concept, being more easily implemented, being the more attractive or providing the most activity and action.

In preparation for thinking about the designs, consider a walk on the Arch grounds as they are today.

How will the decision be made? The Arch competition program is such that decisions will have to be made on both the **physical design and the content of the attractions** that are proposed by each finalist. The scope of the competition is so large and varied that one might be tempted to select a piece of one and combine it with pieces of other plans. The competition, however, does not allow for this.

Competitions are somewhat problematic because they do not provide the collaboration between client and designer that is usually important in creating good design. This will be a difficult competition to judge.

The competition jury, of course, is in the best position to decide on a plan. They will spend the time to understand the context, the rules and the detail of the five finalists designs. So our situation as citizens is like following a jury trial in the news. We may not have all the information to make the decision, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't have an opinion.

It is worth seeing each of these designs and forming your own opinion about them. The best way to do this is by viewing the designs at the Arch or at one of the traveling exhibit locations, or by reviewing the plans individually on the competition's website at www.cityarchrivercompetition.org.

The announcement of the winner will be on September 24.

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