

The Crucial Next Step for the Arch



MVVA Concept

There is a drawback to design competitions. It is the lack of interchange between designer and client, which is fundamental in arriving at most good designs. That is why the next phase of The City + The Arch + The River process to be completed in January is so important. It will turn MVVA's concept into a plan for implementation.

The jury made a wise choice of MVVA's concept. The competition guidelines called for honoring the Arch's immediate surroundings and the MVVA concept does this exceptionally well. It appears the approach can be implemented without major physical or financial feasibility issues, which is no small thing. But the concept is a bit less exciting than one would have hoped for and leaves some problems unresolved.

A significant disappointment is that MVVA's concept does not make good connections with downtown to the west of the Arch grounds. Providing access only at the lid over I-70 is not sufficient and leaving Memorial Drive as a heavy traffic carrier remains an obstacle.

Across from the I-70 lid there is a new, attractive Arch museum entry, but it blocks views from downtown. This would be more acceptable if there were visual and functional connections to the north at Pine, Olive and Locust Streets.

The very important elements at north end of the site adjacent to Laclede's Landing - the amphitheater, ecology center and commons - need to be developed far more in program and design. They are not yet convincing as attractions that will draw people.

The removal of Sullivan Boulevard along the levee is important. However, promoting development of the river's edge for floating attractions is needed. They were an asset in the past that we need again.

Now is the time for MVVA's team to work with their clients and those who can help implement this plan to develop something even better than their winning concept. The City Arch River 2015 Foundation, the National Parks Service, the City and MVVA need to win over all of us from St. Louis to Washington, D.C.

- The city needs to step up and work to remove through traffic on Memorial Drive.
- The State needs to make a serious commitment to try to remove I-70 through this area after construction of the new bridge.
- The private sector needs to commit to opening parts of the Mansion House complex and to develop a revenue-generating commercial area along a placid Memorial Drive.
- Our major institutions need to find meaningful places in this plan to be present in downtown.

The next three months will be crucial. Parts of the MVVA concept may change significantly. All of it will be developed in more detail in configuration and program. MVVA may adopt a few ideas from other competitors while maintaining their strong concept.

Some bigger ideas are needed. These do not have to be completed by 2015, but they need to become parts of the plan including relocating the casino and grain elevators on the east side and opening up the Mansion House parking decks to visually reconnect the city with the Arch grounds and the river. Look east down Washington Avenue and Locust Street where the old skybridges have just been demolished. Now imagine looking through to the Arch grounds. What a change that would make to downtown.

It is important to remember that this was not just a design competition. The skill and experience of the competitors was considered in the selection process. MVVA's team was selected as much for their team as their concept. MVVA's skill and capability provide great encouragement that their design concept will be effectively developed to become the plan we are all hoping for. Getting to that point will be the key to enthusiastic support for the plan, to its funding and to its implementation.