

Veterans & City of Wichita Agreement on Veterans Memorial Park 07-18-09 (1)

The City Council is scheduled to vote on the Vietnamese/American Memorial on July 21, 2009 at 9am. We encourage all interested veterans, active duty military & citizens to attend this meeting in a show of support.

In August & September 2006 the Park Board of Wichita had voted to recommend to the City to allow the new memorial to be built in Veterans Memorial Park over the objections of the Veterans Community who spoke in opposition to this issue.

The Veterans communities of Wichita became aware on June 1, 2009 that the Wichita City Council was scheduled to vote on allowing the construction of a Vietnamese Memorial in a prominent position of Veterans Memorial Park in Wichita.

At the June 1st American Legion Post 136 monthly meeting the membership voted unanimously for Post 136 to address this issue in opposition to the proposed memorial and authorized Commander Rick Babinger to speak for Post 136 on this issue.

On Thursday June 4, 2009 four members of Post 136; Dennis Scuffham, Terry Houck, Linda Kirby and John Wilson met in the Wichita Mayor's office with Mayor Carl Brewer & City Councilperson Sue Schlapp to discuss this issue.

June 9, 2009 the City Council heard discussion on the proposed memorial by interested parties and delayed voting on the issue until June 14 asking that the two interested parties, the Veterans and the Vietnamese Community, try to reach a compromise.

June 12, 2009 we formed the Kansas Veterans Action Committee, a coalition of people from various Veterans Organizations, to speak with one voice on the Veterans Park issue.

In researching the facts and history of Veterans Memorial Park KSVAC developed the following platform:

- a) That Veterans Memorial Park should only contain memorials honoring the U.S Armed Forces.
- b) That all memorials in Veterans Memorial Park (with the exception of the Flag Pavilion which was built and renovated with Federal monies.) were built and paid for by various Veterans Organizations and donated to the City on completion and that Veterans Organizations in the Wichita area should have a voice in the development of park.
- c) There was no clear dedication or rules that could be found dedicating Veterans Memorial Park to the exclusive use of memorials honoring the U.S. Armed Forces.

On June 25, July 7 & July 15 a four person panel of members of KSVAC, Doug Brady, John Wilson, Bryson Allen & Phillip Blake attended meetings hosted by Wichita City Manager Robert Layton along with four people of the Vietnamese community to discuss options to the Veterans Park issue. During these meetings the proposed City Council vote on this issue was delayed from July 14, 2009 to **July 21, 2009**.

On July 14, 2009, John Wilson and Linda Kirby addressed the July 14, 2009 City Council meeting to ask the Council to adopt a set of rules and regulations for Veterans Memorial Park and to include the Veterans community in the development decisions affecting the park. We argued that if a set of rules and regulations had been in place for Veterans Memorial Park then the problems on this current issue on Veterans Memorial Park would not have arisen and the Veterans and Vietnamese Communities would not have been driven into conflict with each other.

These meetings resulted in an agreement of all parties involved (*with the exception of John Wilson*) to an agreement that the agenda for the **City Council meeting on July 21, 2009** be changed regarding the proposed Vietnamese/American Memorial to the following:

Kansas Veterans Action Committee

1. A memorial to the United States, South Vietnam and allied soldiers that fought in the Vietnam War and to the United States citizens that have supported the South Vietnamese community would be constructed in a City park, located north and west of the existing Veterans' Park. The memorial would be visually buffered from the Veterans' Park by a berm, minimum of six (6) feet tall, and landscaping. Access for the park would be provided from the riverfront trail. The suggested location and buffering are depicted in the attached drawings. Signage directing visitors to Veterans' Park will be installed at the upper walkway at the south end of the proposed berm at the pedestrian traffic way pointing east to clearly define John Steven's Veterans' Park from other city properties.
2. All land currently owned by the city contiguous with Veterans' Park to the Arkansas River, as well as the remainder of land acquired from Westar north of Veterans' Park, will be immediately added to Veterans' Park.
3. Any land acquired by the City from Westar Energy in the future would be added to the Veterans' Park, if it is adjacent to the park.
4. The City and Veterans' Memorial Park of Wichita, Inc. would develop a master plan for the future development of the park. All memorial requests will be reviewed by a joint committee of city officials and members of the Veterans community. The City's Park and Recreation Director will serve as the designated contact person for assisting Veterans groups with long range planning and the addition of Veterans Memorials.
5. The City Council will designate the current Veterans' Park, and lands identified in item two (2) above, as a memorial park dedicated to the service of United States Military only.
6. The City will adopt a resolution that provides no future alterations or changes will be made to this plan that will, in effect; make the proposed South Vietnamese Memorial appear to be a part of Veterans Memorial Park.

Additionally there were some other points cleared up in that:

- a) Drawings depicting the new memorial showed that the US and South Vietnamese flag poles to be the same height. Doug Kupper of the Park Board assured us this would not be the case and that the actual specifications have the US Flag higher than the South Vietnamese flag. Further, the South Vietnamese assured us that the perspective of the drawing was an error made by the artist and that they never intended to fly the South Vietnamese flag at the same height as the US Flag. As quoted to me, "America is our country now and the American Flag is our flag."
- b) The name of the new memorial as modified by the Vietnamese request; to "the South Vietnamese Community Memorial" and that also the wording on the memorial be changed to include the addition of wording to include the "citizens of the United States" to show their appreciation at being allowed to become citizens of the United States.

The City has granted John Wilson until Monday July 20th to cast his vote accepting or rejecting this agreement to allow him to address and explain the agreement to the Veterans Community.

If John Wilson rejects the agreement on Monday the City Council will still vote on the issue July 21, at the City Council meeting but will not be bound by the agreement and can implement all of the agreement, none of the agreement, parts of the agreement, or order us back to arbitration.

While we would rather have the new memorial located on another piece of land not immediately adjacent to Veterans Memorial Park, we have with the support of the Veterans achieved all of our objectives in this matter. KSVAC, the leadership of Post 136, Post 4 and others involved *recommend* that we accept the agreement offered by the City of Wichita, and the City Council will then vote to accept or reject the entire agreement on July 21, 2009.

KSVAC