

Daniel Lurie, Mayor



Kat Anderson, Commission President
Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager

Date: April 2, 2025

To: Recreation and Parks Commission
Capital Committee

Through: Philip A. Ginsburg, General Manager
Stacy Bradley, Director of Capital and Planning

From: Warwin C. Davis, Project Manager

Subject: San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial - Conceptual Design and Naming

Agenda Wording

Discussion and possible action to: 1) Approve a conceptual design for the San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial Project; and 2) Name the memorial the San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial.. Approval of this proposed action by the Commission is the Approval Action as defined by S.F. Administrative Code Chapter 31.

Strategic Plan

Strategy 1: Inspire Public Space - Keep today's parks safe, clean, and fun; promote our parks' historic and cultural heritage; and build the great parks of tomorrow.

Objective 1.4.: Preserve and celebrate historic and cultural resources.

Project Background

In 2019, the Board of Supervisors passed Resolution No. 190223, formally supporting the creation of a permanent memorial in San Francisco to honor the victims and survivors of the Irish Famine, also known as the Great Hunger. This historical event, which took place between 1845 and 1852, led to the displacement of millions of Irish men and women, many of whom immigrated to San Francisco in search of a better life.

Recognizing the significance of this memorial, the Recreation and Park Department (RPD) Capital Division has been working in partnership with the Irish Famine Memorial Committee to identify an appropriate site and develop a plan for its design and implementation. The proposed location for the memorial is in Lincoln Park along El Camino Del Mar, overlooking the 17th hole of the Lincoln Golf Course. Currently as an area of native brush, the site was selected for its



natural beauty and its resemblance to the Irish landscape, offering a meaningful connection to the experiences of those who journeyed to San Francisco during the mid-19th century.

The project will be delivered in two phases -- Phase 1 will include the construction of a concrete plaza, developed in partnership with the Irish Famine Memorial Committee and the Recreation and Park Department. Phase 2 will involve the installation of public artwork, managed in coordination with the San Francisco Arts Commission.

Naming

The proposed name for this site is the San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial. The name is in line with names for other memorials in Lincoln Park, such as the Kong Chow Monument, The Kanrin Maru Monument (also known as the Japanese Monument), and the Holocaust Memorial. The proposed site name has been publicly shared.

Financial Impact: approximately \$500,000

Community Outreach

The Recreation and Park Department, in collaboration with the United Irish Societies of San Francisco and the project design team, hosted a community meeting on November 14, 2024, to provide an update on the Great Famine Memorial Plaza Project and gather public input. During the meeting, the project team presented Phase I of the memorial, outlining the guiding principles shaping its design. Attendees engaged in discussions about the historical significance of the Great Famine and how the project will serve as both a tribute and a reflective space for the community. The meeting provided an opportunity for community members to share their insights, ask questions, and offer feedback on the proposed concept.

Environmental Review

The proposed project is subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). On February 4, 2025, the San Francisco Planning Department issued a Categorical Exemption (2024-008037ENV) for the project (see Exhibit B). Given the site's historical use as a cemetery, there is potential for encountering significant archaeological resources, including human remains. The Planning Department's archaeology staff have required that the contractor follow Recreation and Park Department's relevant archaeological standard construction measures to assess and manage any potential discoveries. This will ensure that any significant archaeological resources encountered are properly documented, that important information is recovered, and that any human remains are treated in a respectful and legally compliant manner.

Additionally, on January 22, 2025, the Planning Department issued an Administrative Certificate of Appropriateness Letter (2024-008037COA) approving the project at the City Cemetery landmarked site, contingent upon the implementation of appropriate measures to protect archaeological resources during construction.



Proposed Design

The Irish Famine Memorial Project will establish a dedicated public space commemorating the victims and survivors of the Great Famine (1845–1852). The design will create a contemplative and educational site through a combination of architectural and landscape elements. As shown in Exhibit A, the proposed project scope includes the following:

- Construction of a cast-in-place concrete platform to serve as the foundation for future memorial artwork. The platform will feature a smooth texture with an unfinished natural concrete color, providing a durable and understated base for the commemorative elements.
- Installation of a metal guardrail to enhance public safety while maintaining an open and welcoming space.
- Future storytelling plaques to provide historical context and narratives about the Great Famine, ensuring an educational component for visitors. (Phase 2 in collaboration with SFAC)
- Incorporation of a metal plant trellis, in a powder-coated “City Green” color to enhance the memorial’s aesthetic and integrate natural elements into the design.
- Lighting enhancements for safety and ambiance, including:
 - Stair and wall lighting, with a recessed wall-mounted, directed lighting style to subtly illuminate pathways and structural elements.
 - Path lighting, utilizing a System Bollard with an unshielded head and safety guard to provide consistent illumination along pedestrian walkways.
- Introduced planting to complement the natural landscape and enhance the memorial’s setting, featuring:
 - Coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*)
 - Grapevine (*Vitis californica*)

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the 1) concept plan contingent on the Archaeological Testing Program findings and exploratory digging prior to construction beginning and 2) naming the memorial the San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial.



Supported By

Former Mayor London Breed
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
Micheál Smith, Consul General of Ireland
San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial Committee
United Irish Society
Irish Cultural Center
Tony Bucher, President, The Irish Literary & Historical Society

Attachments

Exhibit A - Great Famine Memorial: Concept Design Deck
Exhibit B - Categorical Exemption (CatEX)* 2024-008037ENV
Exhibit C - Letters of Support
Exhibit D - Resolution (03.19.19)

