

DEVELOPING A MEMORIAL PARK TO HONOUR THE FOUNDERS OF SINGAPORE

Why a memorial park?

As Singapore marks its 50th year as an independent country, it is timely for the country to develop an iconic monument/landmark to mark this historical milestone and remind Singaporeans how the nation came to be. While there are museums and other historical landmarks that tell various aspects of the history of Singapore, a distinctive monument that commemorates the principles and values that underpin the building of modern Singapore would be a timely and useful addition to our social and cultural landscape.

This monument should not simply narrate a story or honour individual leaders. It will be dedicated instead to half a century of state- and nation-building that was achieved through vision, courage, determination and hard work, as well as the ability to turn disadvantage to advantage.

This landmark will therefore have a dual purpose: to remind Singaporeans of the trials and tribulations that had to be overcome to build the modern nation-state of Singapore, and to memorialize the contributions of the founding generation of leaders and pioneers who led Singapore in the journey from struggling port city to a first world metropolis.

It will also be emphasized that these qualities and values that have helped us develop as a nation-state in the past fifty years are not historically static. They will continue to be relevant as we progress as a nation, and in that regard they are living legacies that will continue to influence and impact our future. The memorial would therefore have a future-orientation as well.

Concept

It is proposed that this landmark be conceived as a memorial park. There are three reasons for this:

1. A memorial park offers a user-friendly and inclusive environment for reflection and contemplation.
2. Setting a monument in an accessible public park is a fitting tribute to the vision of Singapore as a garden city-state. The vision of a garden city encapsulates not only the efforts to enhance the quality of life in a small

city-state but also embodies the ideals of inclusiveness and egalitarianism as national parks are secular, national space open to all, regardless of class, creed or religion.

3. The park is traditionally popular as a place for family recreational activities. Hence, a memorial park will be relevant to our belief in the family as a building block of society and will have a nice resonance to a simpler past.

Location:

We recommend Fort Canning Park as a suitable location for the memorial park. Fort Canning has a long history that is intertwined with that of the city-state: it has served as the seat of power for many of Singapore's rulers during the pre-colonial and early colonial period. The palaces of former Majapahit kings were sited on the hill, then known as Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill), and Raffles built his first residence there soon after his arrival in Singapore.

The residence continued to house succeeding governors until the 1860s, and Fort Canning consequently became known as Government Hill. The National Theatre, located nearby, used to play host to the first few post-independence National Day rallies. The hill is sited near the Singapore River, and offers a good vantage point overlooking the commercial, cultural and civic core of the city.

Fort Canning Hill is also situated close to National Museum, and so can be seen as an extension of the museum experience – e.g. after visiting the History Gallery, visitors may climb up Fort Canning from the back of the museum (via escalators), take a walk through Fort Canning, where they can visit the memorial park.

There is sufficient space at Fort Canning to allow for the construction of a proper memorial that can accommodate large numbers of visitors, and also leave room for the future expansion of the memorial site, if desired. The unique blend of historical relics, lush greenery and expansive lawns makes Fort Canning an attractive and appropriate location for a national memorial park.

What will be featured in the Memorial Park?

The Memorial Park should be tastefully designed and artistically landscaped to convey the spirit of our founding fathers, mainly courage and determination. It should create a contemplative space separate from the usual sights and

sounds of a bustling metropolis, and the design should generate reflection and ultimately instill pride and hope.

The concept is to weave a historical narrative – through stories and messages - around tastefully designed structures and symbols, to inspire through knowing and reflecting. The following values and attributes will be woven into the narrative: courage and resilience, frugality, resourcefulness, meritocracy, multiculturalism, fair and just society, and constant improvement to stay relevant. The message should emphasize how these values and attributes will continue to stand the nation in good stead in the future.

A part of the hill – its most accessible portion – should be set aside for the memorial. This should preferably be the most leafy and quiet section where there is ample space for visitors to mill around, and stay for a period of time, in comfort and quietude, to enjoy the exhibits, and contemplate and reflect the messages that they seek to convey.

Properly planned and landscaped, this site will be a sanctuary for visitors. In an area away from the memorial, event spaces can be set aside where concerts, performances, workshops, talks and seminars can take place. To prevent the memorial site becoming a static space, we suggest having the sanctuary alongside event and exhibition spaces in order to create a living space where visitors can visit repeatedly.

The Nezu Museum in Tokyo, Japan [website: <http://www.nezu-muse.or.jp/en/about/index.html>] and the Kröller-Müller Museum which is located within the Hoge Veluwe National Park in Otterlo, Netherlands [website: <http://krollermuller.nl/visit>] are examples of spaces where greenery, areas for contemplation as well as activity are woven together effectively.

Suggested ideas for the memorial park:

1. Artistic and thoughtful sculptures/features (pools); landscaped gardens for contemplation; spaces for internal exhibitions and talks; some spaces for activities for children. The exhibits could take several forms, from symbolic sculptures to conveying messages, to emblematic representation of Singaporean ideals. What are some examples? The ideals in our Pledge and National Flag? As far as possible, the exhibits and design should not feature personalized monuments to honour individuals. We should avoid the erection of individual statues or busts.
2. In order for the exhibits and information panels at the memorial park to be informative and meaningful, the project should ideally be a multi-

agency effort involving for instance, the National Archives, the National Heritage Board, among others.

3. The park will also be the start and end of a historical walk/trail through the civic district. See Annex A for a proposal on the historical trail.
4. To make the memorial park a ground-up, inclusive effort, it is suggested that young Singaporeans, from schools and tertiary institutions, be invited to submit their ideas for the park. This will give our youths a stake in the creation of the memorial park. Coincidentally, it was an Asian-American student who created the design of the iconic Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. A national design contest had been held for the memorial and the winning entry came from Maya Lin who was an undergraduate from Yale University.
5. Leveraging on technology: The memorial park should incorporate tradition and technology. Visitors should be able to make cognitive, emotional and experiential connections when they visit the exhibits at the memorial. Moreover, technology could be employed to engage visitors before they visit the memorial. Materials can be downloaded through mobile applications, allowing additional interpretive content.

Submitted by:

Halimah Yacob (Mdm)
Speaker of Parliament
Chairman, PAP.SG

This paper was submitted to the Founders' Memorial Steering Committee for its consideration.

ANNEX A

PROPOSAL FOR HISTORICAL TRAIL

The historical trail will carry the narrative of nation-building through landmarks that have special meaning and significance in Singapore's history.

1. Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH)

This marks the start of PAP's political journey – the party held its inaugural meeting at the Victoria Memorial Hall in November 1954 and there is currently a plaque to mark that event. VMH also tells the story of Mr. S. Rajaratnam as the first image people saw on television in February 1963 when VMH hosted the inauguration ceremony of Television Singapura's pilot scheme.

2. City Hall

City Hall is significant as it is the place where Mr. Lee Kuan Yew held his early political rallies. The Cabinet had its offices there, and it is also the site where the early National Day Parades were held.

Suggestion:

The National Gallery of Singapore can put up a permanent gallery featuring paintings and photos of Singapore's pre- and post-independence years.

3. Old Parliament House

The old Parliament House used to be the former seat of government. The Chambers is a good location to tell the story of the parliamentarians. Not only have the original upholstery of the chamber seats been retained, the names of the first post-independence Cabinet members have also been engraved on the seats. This is the place where key political battles were fought – split of the PAP, merger, and various significant pieces of legislation that shaped Singapore.

Suggestion:

The lease for the Singapore Arts House could be taken back, and the space can then be converted into a library where speeches and photographs of Mr. Lee, the Old Guard leaders, Speakers and MPs can be found. The displays will have an interactive element to engage

visitors. This is also a good opportunity to document Singapore's parliamentary and legislative history.

4. Present Parliament House

It may be inconvenient for the public to wander around freely for security reasons, but the location could be marked by a plaque displayed outside the Parliament House ground. The activities around this site could be coordinated with the existing tours and outreach programmes at the Parliament House.

5. Memorial Park at Fort Canning

We can look at ways to create a guided path to the memorial at Fort Canning. The top of Fort Canning Hill offers visitors a panoramic view of the city and can also serve as a contemplative space where people can reflect on the transformation Singapore has undergone over the years – from a port-city under British rule to the modern metropolis it is today.

6. Other Points for Consideration

- Also incorporate the Singapore River as part of the trail because the river embodies the remarkable social, economic, social and physical change which Singapore has undergone since independence. A marker along with photographs and a brief history of the river can be placed somewhere along the riverbank.
- Stories and anecdotes should be incorporated at each of the landmarks as a way to highlight the intended values and message. Stories will hold more interest and meaning than just plain facts and statements.
- Guided walking tours to cover the historical trail can also be organised. There are many different types of ways to promote the historical trail. In addition to guided walking tours, some other ideas could include:
 - (i) A downloadable map and self-guided walking tour brochure
 - (ii) Walking tour app.
