



## SWA GROUP REVEALS FINAL DESIGN FOR 'MEMORIAL AT HARVEY MILK PLAZA' IN ADVANCE OF SAN FRANCISCO'S PRIDE WEEKEND

*Located in The Castro, the historic heart of San Francisco's LGBTQ+ community, the evolving memorial will emphasize inclusivity, activism, and hope*



*Rendering courtesy Friends of Harvey Milk Plaza & SWA Group.*

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 19, 2021)** – In alignment with San Francisco's Pride Month celebrations, SWA Group has revealed the final design for The Memorial at Harvey Milk Plaza in San Francisco, CA, in honor of the legacy of visionary civil and human rights leader Harvey Milk. Inspired by Harvey's message of inclusivity and his mission of greater social justice, the memorial aims not only to celebrate the past, but also to honor his life's work by providing space that promotes visibility for all marginalized people and a platform for future activism. The design will be shared with the public for feedback via two virtual town hall meetings on June 23 and 24 and via a broader continued online engagement effort.

Located at the corner of Castro and Market, the Memorial at Harvey Milk Plaza will support construction of LGBTQ+ space for the community and offer an opportunity to honor the history of the gay rights movement. The Castro District, a neighborhood at the heart of San Francisco's LGBTQ+ community for decades, remains an iconic and prominent symbol of activism around the globe. The plaza has been the site of countless gatherings and protests, including a candlelight vigil the night of Harvey's untimely death and the White Night riots, which were sparked by the leniency of the sentence handed down to his assassin. The design team is

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working to enhance the function of the Market/Castro transit station that lies beneath the plaza, while striving to create a worthy memorial to Harvey and the movement he helped catalyze.

The selection of SWA by Friends of Harvey Milk Plaza (FHMP) comes after a robust proposal process that included inviting 17 design firms to submit proposals, and interviewing four shortlisted firms. The design is anticipated to be finalized this year, and the project's initial phase of transit station improvements is expected to break ground in 2022. The new design being shared is still preliminary, and FHMP and SWA continue to seek input from the community.

FHMP and SWA have successfully hosted two virtual community meetings, with an additional two planned for June 23 and 24, as well as a robust interactive online engagement platform which solicits broad feedback. Additionally, the design team has met with local organizations including the Historical Society and youth and cultural groups, and is committed to a design that properly represents Harvey Milk and the community the memorial serves.

"Friends and SWA have already begun initial discussions around creating an unconventional and inclusive design process so these qualities of Harvey Milk and his legacy are inherently part of the design that is produced," explained **Brian Springfield, Interim Executive Director for FHMP**. "Throughout this process, we have heard from the community that they want a 'next generation' memorial as unique and unconventional as Harvey himself. Now that SWA is on board, we are excited to re-engage with the public to explore what's possible to honor Harvey Milk in a way that draws attention to the ongoing activism around issues of social justice, which Harvey championed during his lifetime. The memorial will be alive with Harvey's politics including his call to others to get involved."

"We understand the significance of developing the site to become the focal point of Harvey's message and his importance not only for the Castro neighborhood but also for the national and international community", said **SWA Project Lead, Daniel Cunningham**. "We are excited by the potential for the redesign to properly capture the community's ambitions and hopes, and we are committed to a dialogue that will help express them."

He continued, "We believe the memorial should speak as loudly and unapologetically as Harvey did – not only about the progress he brought about but about the work that is still to be done. To be worthy of Harvey's legacy, his memorial should be a living monument – relevant and impactful today – dedicated to realizing his vision of equality and authenticity for everyone, everywhere."

SWA's design encompasses three core elements – **The Pedestal, The Beacon, The Grove**:

## **The Pedestal (Action):**

The Pedestal figuratively and literally elevates some of Harvey Milk's final words – "All I ask is for the movement to continue" – as recorded on the tapes to be released in the event of his death by assassination. Further, it highlights the history of gathering and collective action that has occurred at the intersection, and provides a focal point for large gatherings in the future. The Pedestal also serves as a narrative metaphor: traditionally, one might find atop a pedestal a statue of a historic figure cast in bronze, but at the Memorial at Harvey Milk Plaza, the community itself is being lifted up and celebrated.

## **The Beacon (Visibility):**

Photography played a significant role in the life of Harvey Milk, and as seen through the iconic

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and enduring photographs of Milk protesting and celebrating in the streets of San Francisco. A symbol of Hope and progress, the Beacon acts as a digital monument that can be used to display visuals that tell the story not only of Harvey Milk, but also of the Castro's history, of queer culture, and of the victories and ongoing struggles of the movement. The design is modular, with panels of various sizes that reference the protest signs often present when the community gathers. The Beacon's flexibility will allow it to celebrate current and ongoing events and activism, reminding visitors of the work that has been undertaken previously, and the work still to be done, in advancing the rights of all.

## **The Grove (Voices of the Community):**

Building on community support for a green memorial on the western edge of the site, the Memorial Grove is comprised of 11 ginkgo trees, each with a symbolic meaning. Their number represents the months Harvey Milk served in his position as San Francisco Supervisor prior to his assassination, while each species has been chosen to represent places Harvey lived: a tree from his hometown in New York, a tree from Texas, where he spent a few of his younger years, and trees representing San Francisco. This eclectic collection of complementary but dissimilar trees epitomize Harvey's informal personality and political style, as well as the beauty and diversity of the people of San Francisco. Each November, the month in which Milk was assassinated, the trees turn golden: the color of hope in the pride flag. When the leaves fall, they are carried across the city that Harvey loved. Northwest of the plaza is the reimagined Pink Triangle Park. A blanket of blooming dahlias, the official flower of San Francisco, is planted below the existing granite pylons. In June, Pride Month, the park comes alive with color and until November, the Castro community is invited to take a flower home. Every night, hundreds of "candles" create a glow above the intersection, illuminating the city with hope.

SWA will lead a highly accomplished Bay Area team that shares their desire for an inclusive, pragmatic, and energetic design process. The team includes Civic Edge, an engagement firm who has cultivated partnerships with numerous SF agencies; Volume Inc., a creative agency known for their skill in leveraging visual communication and experience-based design to tell the story of a place; Peoples Associates Structural Engineers and Telamon Engineering (Engineer of Record), both of whom bring expert technical knowledge; and WSP, who will provide lighting design that balances safety, security, and sustainability needs with an artistic touch. The team brings the necessary creativity, vision, and experience both to realize bold and unconventional ideas and to ensure a successfully built project. The project is expected to be funded through a public-private partnership.

SWA has produced significant high-profile memorial projects, including the [Sandy Hook Memorial](#) in Newtown, CT; the [Harry Truman Memorial](#) at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, MO; and the [Grand Candela Memorial](#), dedicated to the victims of the mass shooting in El Paso, TX.

Initial funding for the project has been provided through private and public sources, including a \$1 million grant from the State of California, earmarked specifically to "support construction of LGBTQ space in Harvey Milk Plaza." The project team's next steps include continued design refinements in response to ongoing community input, coordination with various city agencies, and progress through the approvals process, with a goal of being prepared to begin construction in Summer/Fall 2022.

A selection of visuals may be accessed [here](#).



### **About The Friends of Harvey Milk Plaza**

The Friends of Harvey Milk Plaza's mission is to reimagine Harvey Milk Plaza as a welcoming, vibrant space that honors Harvey's life and legacy, celebrates his enduring importance to the LGBTQ+ community, and inspires by acting as a beacon of hope to marginalized communities worldwide. The organization was formed in 2016, in response to SFMTA plans to install an elevator in the culturally sensitive Harvey Milk Plaza. FHMP has worked since its inception to see that the community's aspirations for the plaza are realized during the work planned at the site. Those interested in learning more about FHMP and Harvey Milk Plaza project can visit [www.harveymilkplaza.org](http://www.harveymilkplaza.org).

### **About SWA Group**

SWA Group is a world-renowned landscape architecture, planning, and urban design firm celebrated for its creativity, responsiveness, and design excellence. Our work gives new life to outdoor spaces at multiple scales – from public plazas to waterfronts to entire city districts – harnessing natural systems while enhancing the unique characteristics of each setting. SWA's San Francisco studio is known for its ability to forge distinctive expression in the design of civic spaces, whether in its sensitively-conceived memorial for Sandy Hook in Connecticut or the versatile network of public space that unites San Francisco's new Chase Center. SWA has studios in Dallas, Houston, Laguna Beach, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Sausalito, and Shanghai. For more information, please visit [www.swagroup.com](http://www.swagroup.com).

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