

Fort Laurens State Memorial in the New Millennium

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BOLIVAR, OHIO– Ohio's first official memorial park should go under a major facelift in the new millennium according to the Bolivar, Ohio based Friends of Fort Laurens Foundation. The nonprofit organization released a proposed site plan for the grounds that once encompassed the only American Revolutionary War fort built within the boundaries of what now is the Buckeye State.

The key focus of the proposed site would be the re-creation of the wooden stockade that was originally built in 1778. The fort would be located approximately 200 yards south of its original location.

The Foundation commissioned the Cleveland based firm of HWH Architects Engineers Planners Inc., to develop the site schematic plan. In addition to the rebuilt fort, the new site plan proposes improved parking facilities, an expanded museum/visitors' center, relocated picnic shelters, and signage facing Interstate 77. The HWH proposal also calls for a vegetative buffer consisting of native trees and plants to separate the fort from the existing modern-day park facilities at the north end of the grounds.

"This is a long term plan for the Fort Laurens grounds that will take several years to accomplish," said Foundation Trustee Scott Fisher. "Our first and primary goal is the reconstruction of Fort Laurens. But we thought it necessary and only logical to have a concept for the future of the entire grounds of the Fort Laurens State Memorial."

Craig Brown of HWH called the site plan a simple, yet efficient way of re-creating the 18th century for visitors and history buffs going to the park in the 21st century. "Careful consideration was given to protect the integrity of the park and still be able to accommodate increased traffic flow from an influx of visitors and school field trips."

"Landscape vegetation and buffer zones allow us to develop a realistic 18th century environment around the rebuilt fort. Modern facilities such as the museum, Tomb of the Unknown Patriot of the American Revolution, picnic shelters, restrooms and concessions will be within easy access of the parking areas," said Brown.

The Ohio Historical Society (OHS), which administers Fort Laurens State Memorial for the state of Ohio, has not endorsed the site plan put forth by the Foundation. Fisher said he delivered a copy of the site plan proposal to OHS in April for their consideration.

"OHS may have other ideas or options," said Fisher. "Or, they may propose to do nothing at all due to financial constraints. We are, however, continuing to work together towards the fort's re-creation and that is an important first step."

Fisher said the fort cannot be rebuilt on the original site for three main reasons. A portion of the Ohio Erie Canal, built in the late 1820s, went through the east wall of the fort. "We would have to fill in that part of the canal in order to reconstruct the fort on the original site," said Fisher, "I don't believe that would be possible."

An additional problem was caused in the mid-1970s when the current Fort Laurens Museum was built essentially on the front gate of the original fort.

Finally, Fisher said relocating the reconstructed fort will preserve the original grounds of Fort Laurens for future archaeological and historical research.