



Restoring the Heads of State Monument in Flushing Meadows A Plan

by the Flushing Meadows - Corona Park World's Fair Association

David Oats, President | Greg Godfrey, Vice-President | Fall 2006



PROPOSAL FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE "HEADS OF STATE" MONUMENT IN FLUSHING MEADOWS-CORONA PARK

Submitted to the N.Y. City Department of Parks and
the Queens Museum of Art
by the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park World's Fair Association

David G. Oats, President | Greg Godfrey, Vice-President

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This proposal deals with our Association's desire to see the restoration of the "Heads of State" monument in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park to a safer and proper setting where it can become a true historical reminder of the majesty of the rich history of this great urban park.

DOWNFALL OF THE MONUMENT

In September of this year, this tall granite monument located at the entrance to the park near the roadway by the Parks Dept. Olmstead Center and the Billy Jean King USTA National Tennis Center was knocked down and damaged by a speeding vehicle entering the park. The incident highlighted and symbolized a serious question about the issue of vehicular traffic and parking in this park, a concern our Association has taken directly to the Mayor, Parks Commissioner, local public officials and the press. This issue has been documented on our website www.theparkwatchdog.org clearly in photos and text.

The monument, at this moment, lies prone and pathetic on the ground. The Parks Dept. has assured us that it will be up righted. But we feel strongly that more needs to be done to prevent a recurrence of the incident, but more importantly making this monument a more visible, accessible and historically accurate touchstone to the history of Flushing Meadows.

This is why we respectfully submit our proposal in the hopes that this marker could become a monument to the renaissance of the park that is now beginning with the expansion and renovation of the Queens Museum of Art, the Queens Theatre in the Park and the new sports facilities for the Mets, the US Open and the new swimming/ice-rink currently under construction.

THE MONUMENT

The monument in question was one of a series of tall granite markers installed at the points of entrance to the 1964-65 World's Fair. The idea was conceived by Robert Moses, president of the Fair as part of the turning over the park from the World's Fair Corporation to the City Parks Department. Most of these markers are merely inscribed with the names given to the various entrances (New Amsterdam Entrance, Lawrence Gate, Corona Gate, etc.)

The "Heads of State" monument was different. It listed the names of present and former heads of state who visited the two New York World's Fairs which were held in the park (1939-40 and 1964-65) both during the planning and the run of the two international expositions. It is a remarkable list of dignitaries who once walked the fields of this park.

Every U.S. President from Herbert Hoover to Franklin D. Roosevelt (who broke ground for the fair and opened the fair on April 30, 1939) through Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy (who broke ground for the U.S. Pavilion in 1962) to Lyndon B. Johnson who presided over the opening of the second Fair on April 22, 1964.

The marker also notes the visits of King George VI and the Queen of England to the Fair in June of 1939. Also, among others, King Hussein of Jordan in 1964 where he presented the park with the ancient Whispering Column of Jerash; the Shah of Iran, the Queen of Greece, the heads of Mexico, the Philippines, South Korea, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Ireland and Pope Paul VI, the first visit by a Pope to the U.S. on Oct. 4, 1965.

Moses had this monument placed at that location because many of these heads of state entered the fair through that gate. But its location there has proved to be not ideal. Obviously the recent incident that toppled the stone demonstrates that *it is* dangerous and vulnerable. Furthermore, this particular entrance has little room for pedestrians because it has no sidewalks and it primarily acts as an entrance for cars, buses, etc. Therefore its purpose as an historical and educational instrument is limited at best. Very few park visitors ever get to read it.

That is why we are proposing to seize the unfortunate opportunity of its recent accident to not just upright the monument but restore and enhance it in a far more appropriate location in the park.

OUR PROPOSAL

The site in the park we propose is in the direct epicenter of the park's historical axis line which was designed at the creation of the park for the '39 World's Fair, used for the '64 Fair and exists today from the east at the Fountain of the Planets (where FDR dedicated the Fair in the first TV broadcast), down the mall of the Fountains of the Fairs, through the Theme Center site for both expositions (the Trylon and Perisphere in '39 and the Unisphere of '64 and today) ending at the N.Y. City Building - a pavilion at both fairs and the first home of the United Nations General Assembly from 1946 to 1950. Today that building is home to the Queens Museum of Art.

Directly in front of the Museum's main entrance, and the Unisphere, is a park grove that seems to be just waiting for something at its center. We believe strongly that the "Heads of State" monument belongs in that space.

With the exciting new expansion and remodeling of the Queens Museum and its surrounding plaza we believe this idea compliments the educational and historical mission of that institution and provides a safe and publicly prominent and accessible location for telling an important part of this park's remarkable legacy. Its proximity to the peace garden dedicated to the late Israeli Prime Minister Rabin is also appropriate.

We think it would also be advisable to relocate the memorial plaque to the two fallen police detectives killed in a July 4th, 1940 terrorist attack in this park at the British Pavilion at the World's Fair. That plaque is presently almost invisible in a weed overgrown side of the N.Y. City Building. It belongs in this new location alongside the monument to the Heads of State.

PROPOSED HISTORICAL ADDITIONS

In suggesting what we believe could be a beautiful addition to the park, we also propose an addition to the monument to give a more complete history which the monument attempts to convey.

The list of heads of state, compiled forty years ago in 1967 does not tell the whole story. For instance examine the following:

Future U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan visited the '64 Fair. Future U.S. President George H.W. Bush was at the park both at Shea Stadium and the U.S. Open. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton both visited the US Open and Clinton also has been to Shea Stadium numerous times as well as at the recent Billy Graham Crusade in the park, just feet from the proposed monument site.

Emperor Hirohito of Japan visited the park in the 1970's, future president of India Indira Gandhi and future Chancellor of West Germany Willy Brandt gave opening day addresses at the '64 Fair and numerous other heads of state have attended ethnic and international festivals in the park, the Theater in the Park and the Queens Museum over the past three decades. And Pope John Paul II came to Shea Stadium in the park in 1978. None of these are reflected on the present monument and since the monument must be reinstalled - and hopefully in this new proposed location - we strongly suggest that this additional history be added.

The monument is three-sided. Without altering the existing original side, one other side could contain the above updated engravings and the third remaining side should contain information regarding the United Nations tenure in the N.Y. City Building directly across from it. Eleanor Roosevelt, the first U.S. Representative to the U.N., Trygve Lie, the first U.N. Secretary General, and the foreign ministers of many nations worked at that site in Flushing Meadows putting together the postwar world.

Among the momentous events that occurred right there were the creation of the State of Israel, the establishment of UNICEF and, most importantly, the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These are events and personages that should be commemorated for future generations.

The monument exists. The proposed new site in the park is perfect. The monument must be restored anyway. The expense of the additional engravings is minimal and we are sure that a private donor such as the USTA or even a local headstone company might be willing to foot the bill. And we believe this idea would mesh beautifully with the new designs for the expanded Queens Museum of Art.

CONCLUSION

This park has a unique and extraordinary history on the world stage. We believe that history must be communicated through the ages for a greater respect and appreciation of this special place on earth.

The people and residents of the most diverse place on the planet should feel pride in the fact that where the heads of state of the world once walked, those very grounds now belong to them - the citizen kings and queens of Queens - and New York.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Oats
President

Greg Godfrey
Vice-President

October 17, 2006

(The Flushing Meadows-Corona Park World's Fair Association was founded in 1967 to act as a watchdog for this, the largest land-area park in New York City, and to preserve its unique history, physical and natural features and its proper development as a cultural and recreational center.)

First Chairman: Robert Moses (1971-81)

Photo Left: Toppled Heads of State monument at Flushing Meadows, Fall 2006.



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The Heads of State Monument Before It Was Toppled September 2006

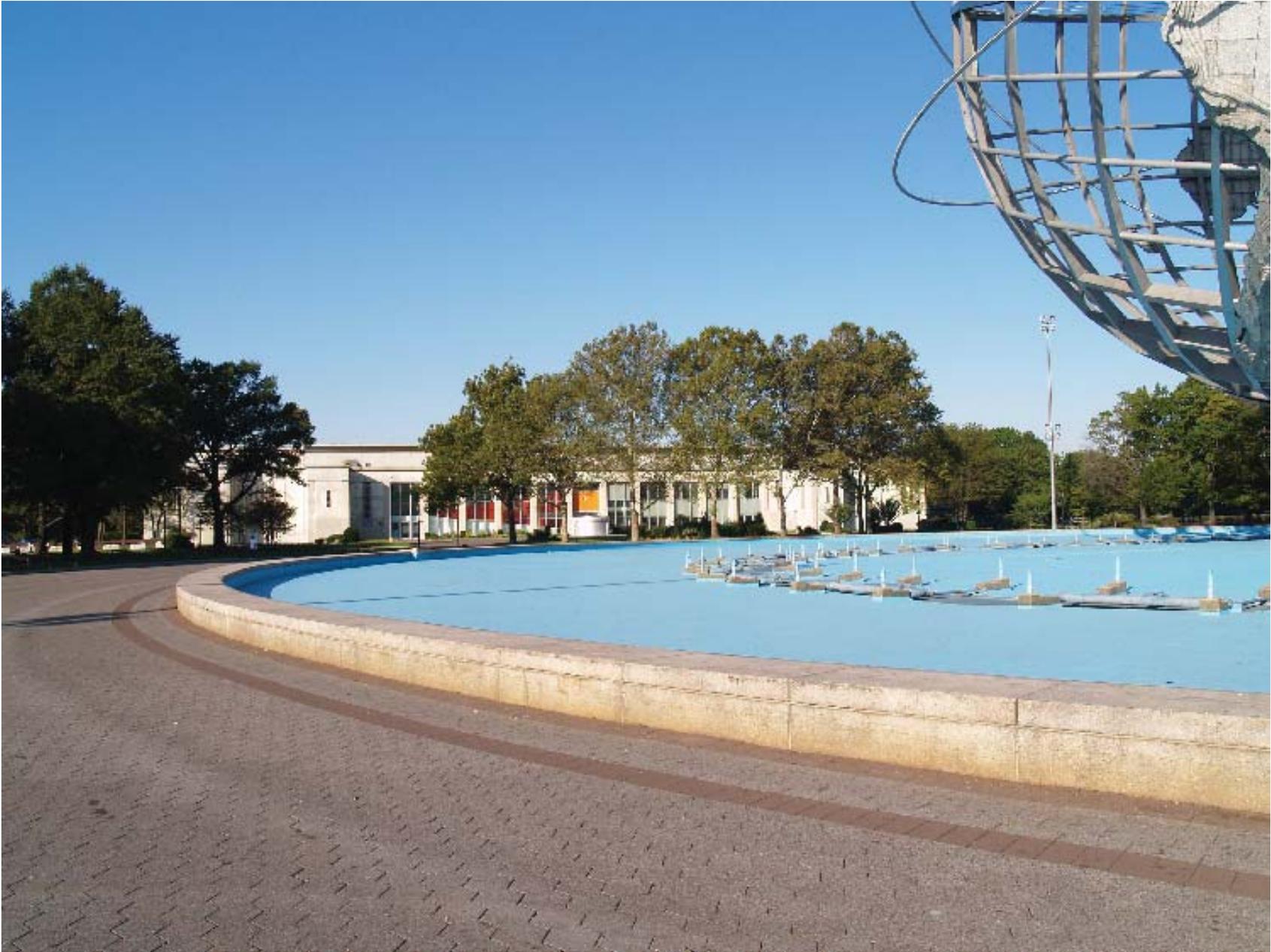


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The Heads of State Monument Toppled
September 2006



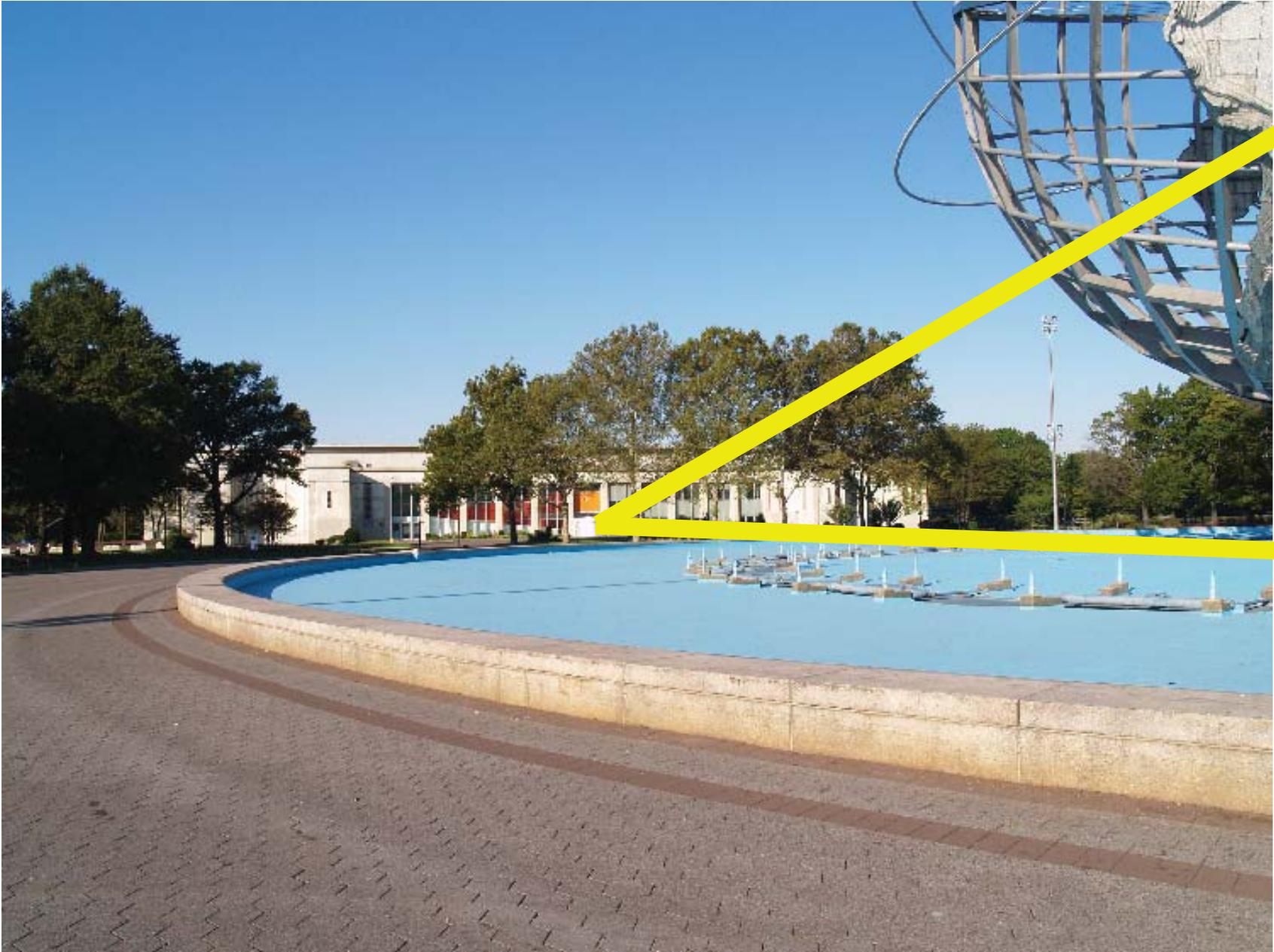
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The Scene

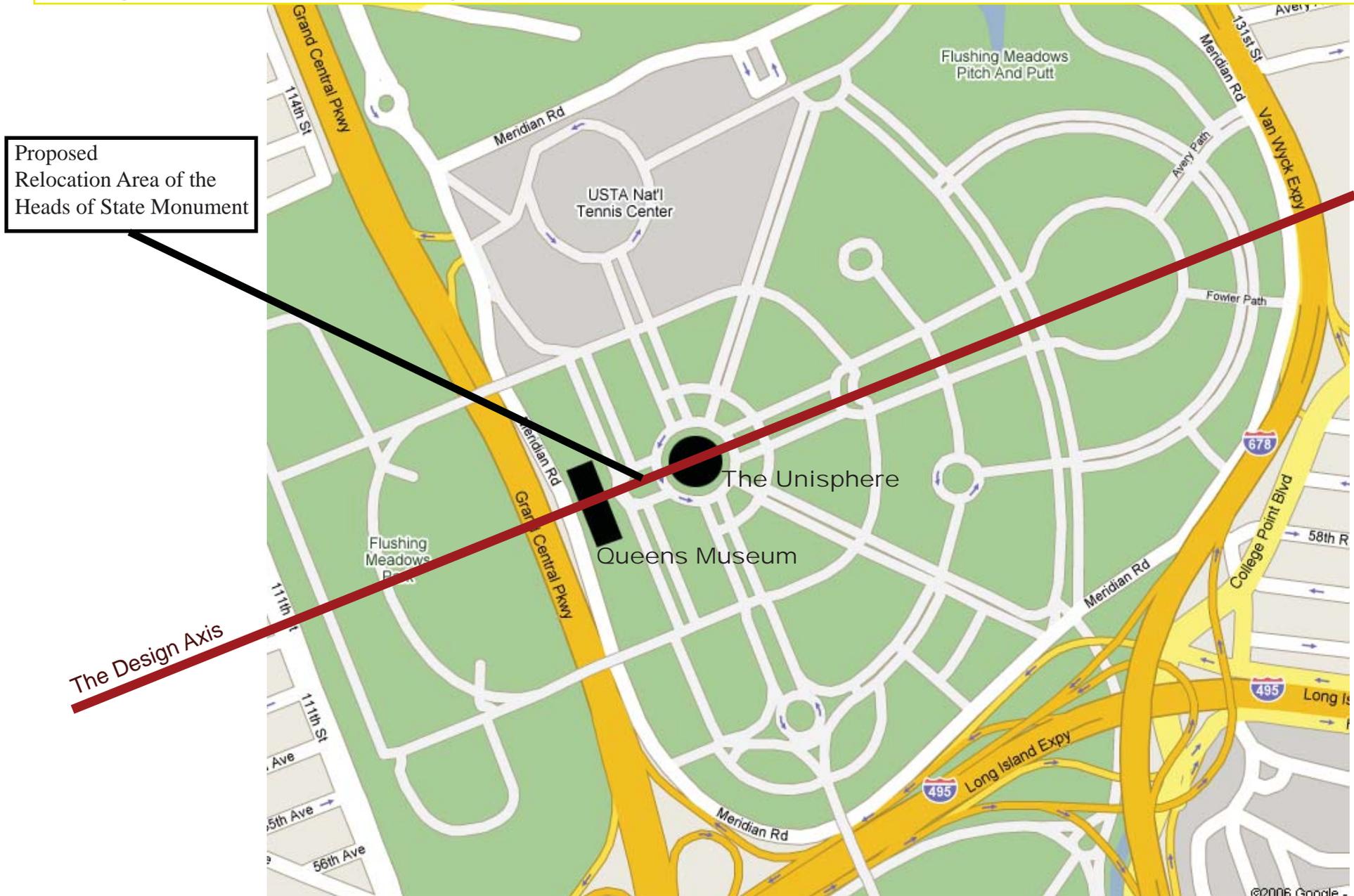


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The Design Axis of Flushing Meadows



Heads of State Monument Relocation in Relation to Design Axis of Flushing Meadows Corona Park





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Rendering of Proposed Relocation for Heads of State Monument



The Setting



