



## Summary of Phase II New User/Underrepresented Targeted Community Engagement

Forest Park Entrance and Nature Center Project

August 2017 | Design + Culture Lab, Pamela N. Phan (PM)

From Fall 2016 to June 2017, Design + Culture Lab conducted Phase II community engagement activities. The purpose of Phase II was to assist Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R), project consultants, and staff gain greater detail and understanding of ways groups of color and other underrepresented community members might use or engage with the proposed Forest Park Entrance and Nature Center. To this end, Design + Culture Lab designed a three round focus group process to coordinate with the overall project's site design process. Participating organizations were: the African American Outdoor Association, African Community Council of Oregon, Camp ELSO, and Mujeres en Movimiento.

### Summary Input for Phase II Focus Groups

#### Inclusivity Matters

- *Lowering barriers to access*
  - Safety – Feeling safe from racially/culturally motivated violence is a real experience. What can be done to prevent these kinds of attacks in public spaces?
  - Transportation - transit access to site is limited and unaffordable (time and fare cost)
  - Awareness - Communities who have not traditionally lived on the west side are unaware and unfamiliar with the location amenities of the park.
  - Support - Communities could greatly benefit from funding programs to help learn more about the park and what it offers, and covering transportation costs of getting there.
- *Lowering barriers to racial and cultural inclusion*
  - Design - Communities from various backgrounds suggested welcoming colors, multi-cultural themed art and cultural pieces, and use of languages other than English, as well as authentically incorporating influences from indigenous communities in the Portland area. They desired a global feel that would welcome communities of color, immigrants, or refugees. Flexibility in what spaces could be used for, considering all people with various physical abilities.
  - Program: Communities desired a high level of City supported programming that provided inclusive opportunities for instruction, interpretation, and self-discovery (multi-lingual) about the park, natural sciences, and conservation. Learning through play and experience, guided by new mobile and geo-positioning type technology was also favored by many participants.
- *Developing and Maintaining Relationships*
  - Groups appreciated the initial gesture to develop new relationships with PP&R through this project. Groups asked for PP&R to communicate consistently and on a regular basis, not just about individual projects and plans.
  - *Follow Through - Groups expressed a need for input collected through this project be reflected in the final proposal and that they be kept in the loop about developments for construction and programs at Forest Park.*

#### Entrance and Nature Center is Valued

- Despite concerns about barriers to and lack of awareness about Forest Park, focus group participants generally saw the intrinsic value of creating a gateway that increased access for all residents of Portland, regardless of background, physical ability, or even ability to pay (i.e. parking or other day use fees).
- Using a racial equity lens, some participants questioned whether or not funds to develop an entrance as proposed met the needs of underrepresented groups, or as an alternative perhaps that funds could be used elsewhere to meet those community needs.

## Phase II Focus Groups

Building on takeaways from Phase I detailed in Table 1, Phase II presented an opportunity for Portland Parks and Recreation to engage in deeper discussion with underrepresented community groups. Narrative input and impressions about recreational interests and how individuals might use the facility as proposed, were collected during focus groups, transcribed, and summarized for final reporting. Insights from focus groups were then incorporated as design characteristics and program suggestions in the final Entrance and Nature Center proposal by project leads Dangermond Keane Architecture (DKA).

*Table 1. Phase I Takeaways*

- “New users” are communities that are least often engaged and represented in public decision making. New users are residents from throughout the Portland Metropolitan region who are not traditionally aware or make use of Forest Park currently, and often include people of immigrant, refugee, low-income, or backgrounds of color.
- New users are less likely to know that Forest Park and its amenities exist. They are most often unaware that it is a ‘free’ resource available to them like other parks in Portland.
- Barriers to the use of Forest Park include transportation and transit access, knowledge of parks and recreation on the westside, and cultural norms and traditions they may lead people to other natural spaces such as Multnomah Falls.

Groups were chosen from Targeted One-on-One interviews conducted by Design + Culture Lab and PP&R Engagement staff during Phase I. Selection criteria to participate in Phase II included: interest in the Forest Park project and availability to commit to the 3 round focus group process. Lastly, based on PP&R Engagement Team direction, groups that showed an interest in developing a mutually beneficial long-term relationship with Parks and Recreation - were encouraged to participate. A description of organizations, their activities, and mission are detailed in Table 3.

Session Design - Given the iterative nature of the site analysis and design conducted by DKA and City project team, three rounds of focus group sessions were required to match up with the phases for site design and Forest Park Advisory Group calendar. Table 2 shows the purpose and timing of each round of focus groups in the process. Each session was scheduled with the leadership of community organizations, locations were identified as familiar or “home turf” by groups themselves, and person-to-person turnout conducted by groups themselves. Additionally, meeting resources such as a meeting meal, childcare, raffle prizes, and language interpretation were provided as groups requested, to create an inclusive space for ideation and relationship building. Finally, a small stipend of \$1,000 per organization was provided to support community based activity to these all “volunteer-led” groups during the project.

Most notably Phase I indicated that geographic and transportation access were significant barriers to using Forest Park. Using guided conversations, focus groups uncovered the nature of these barriers, and what community members thought could be done to address them. Design + Culture Lab also uses a community building approach, deepening knowledge, familiarity, and capacity with each round of engagement. This is done through our concept of Human Centered Design in which community members speak for themselves and are recognized as experts of their own experiences in urban spaces. Table 4 below, provides detailed highlights of each session conducted.

Table 2. Phase II Focus Group Purpose

<b>Round 1 Focus Groups</b> Fall 2016	Topic “Preferences” - General concepts for use and design of the park Purpose: Using visual preference prompts, participants reflected on their experiences and preferences about Access and Arrival, Entry Experience, Recreation, Community or Other Uses, Infrastructure and amenities, Interpretation, Education, Play, Stewardship and Park Support
<b>Round 2 Focus Groups</b> April 2017	Topic “Options” - Site layout, space design, and indoor/outdoor design elements Purpose: Presented three design options generated from Round 1 focus group input, collected additional feedback to refine a preferred project proposal.
<b>Final Round</b> June 2017	Topic Present Final Preferred Proposal Purpose: bring Advisory Committee and New User groups together to view final proposal and give final feedback to project consultants and staff.

Table 3. Participating Organizations

	Mission and Activities
<b>African American Outdoor Association</b>	Encourages and supports the efforts of African Americans to get healthy by getting active outdoors.
<b>African Community Council of Oregon</b>	A Council of various African community leaders Portland Vancouver Metro area. They bring together as many African communities as possible to celebration of the wide variety of cultural manifestations of Africa and African people and heritage; provide resources to support activities, projects and events promoted by participating African communities and organizations in Oregon; and promotes and encourage outward manifestations of the deep and authentic African historical and cultural values; and serves as a forum and advisory Council for addressing issues crucial to the welfare and development of members of all African community organizations forming the Council.
<b>Camp ELSO</b>	Camp Experience Life Science Outdoors (ELSO) is a non-profit organization based in Oregon, providing outdoor science summer camps with hands-on experiential learning programs for youth of color. Camp ELSO works to empower youth of color to explore the possibilities of careers in science fields, by exposing them to unique outdoor learning opportunities, while nurturing a love for the outdoors.
<b>Mujeres en Movimiento</b>	An organized group that creates community, and healthy active lifestyles for Latinas through bicycling in the Portland Metro area.

Table 4. Highlights from Focus Groups

**Round 1 Focus Groups**

- November 26, 2016** - African Community Council of Oregon at NE Coalition of Neighbors (NECN)
- Recreation is an important aspect of life for many African immigrant families and individuals.
  - Awareness and education about parks and outdoor activities is imperative if many people in African immigrant communities are to take advantage of them.
  - Community safety concerns in natural spaces:
    - questions about wild animals such as snakes or other predators;
    - concerns about physical safety from attacks by other people (i.e. guns or other weapons); and
    - many families feel more comfortable in large groups and among others of their cultural community.
  - Large group uses that include options to have meals together, play music and dance, and even use space for recreational sports (i.e. volleyball).
  - Cultural space is needed. Places to grow and share different African food traditions, and further support needed community building work for African communities.
  - Some leaders felt that the outdoors could help with the healing process of past traumas that community members may have experienced before their arrival in Oregon.
  - Some leaders indicated a particular need for open space recreation, given that many families live in multifamily buildings. Families would like to make more noise than living in close quarters often allows.
  - Some groups benefitted greatly from collaborative partnerships that provided one time funding for transportation to get youth to a specific park event (i.e. Gray Family Foundation).
  - A great interest in building relationships with Forest Park staff to understand how to use the park and what program are available.
  - Affordable and convenient transportation access to and from NW Portland is needed in order for more families to use the park.
  - Participants: 12

**December 1, 2016** - Mujeres en Movimiento and Camp ELSO at Portland Building

- Safety Concerns
  - People are uncomfortable in new spaces where they aren't familiar with the terrain. Worry about physical attacks by strangers and wild animals.
  - Would there be a phone available in the park for these types of emergencies?
  - Information about trail conditions and other supplies needed (water, flashlight, etc.) is needed to prevent needless injury or loss of life.
  - Wayfinding and maps should be posted prominently to avoid users getting lost.
  - Wayfinding and signage - must support multiple languages.
- Family and Community Friendly
  - make sure that park areas are well lit and there is clear signage to encourage families (i.e. bike or horse trails might frighten young children/toddlers, or older folks);
  - Gear for families to rent/loan: especially for those with low-incomes, can increase access and use;

Round 1 Focus Groups Cont'd

- multiple uses for people with different ability or interest levels (i.e. not everyone wants to or can hike to the top);
- parking and handicap accessibility for all aspects and programs in the park;
- programming and interpretation offered in languages other than English;
- natural play structures can be distinctive and fun for all ages;
- natural covered areas to protect from rain and/or sun;
- accessible, well lit, and clean bathrooms with diaper stations; and
- affordable and sustainable food options on site.
- Technology and Learning
  - should include indigenous stories and traditions as told by those communities themselves;
  - incorporate languages other than English; and
  - smartphone apps to assist in learning, wayfinding, and outdoor literacy.
- Participants: 10 (MeM) and 4 (Camp ELSO)

**February 23, 2017** - African American Outdoor Association at Black Parent Initiative

- Historic perspective that open space and the outdoors at times, represented freedom from slavery, if skilled and knowledgeable about nature and its resources.
- Programs should:
  - Reflect the histories of many communities who use the space. Not just white or black, but many traditions (i.e. medicinal or culinary uses of plants by indigenous or Asian communities).
  - Use technology (i.e. phone apps) that can aid learning for children, but for all ages.
- Accessibility for people of all ages and abilities is critical. How will we get our grandparents/elders to the site, is there a drop off area?
- Parking is also a must. Also is there Trimet access that is simple and affordable?
- Parks should take advantage of income generating aspect of space used as an event rental for weddings and other family/community gatherings.
- Style might be too modern and impersonal.
- Follow through - when will it be built, and does is Parks having a larger discussion about the equitable distribution of resources across projects around the city? Who are these projects being built for?
- Participants: 5

Round 2 Focus Groups

**April 14, 2017** - Mujeres Movimiento at East Portland Community Center

- Conducted workshop in Spanish translation - favoring Spanish speakers.
- Amenities
  - Bike shelter, fix-it station, and parking is important; and
  - Kitchen for classes that are a good place to incorporate family and culture through learning about food and cuisines.
- Design
  - Muted colors of the forest feel Eurocentric or “Portlandia.” Participants felt it was missing color. For instance, one participant experiences a lot of color in the forests

Round 2 Focus Groups Cont'd

of places like El Salvador, and also there are examples of bright colors reflected in our neighborhoods.

- Signage must be inclusive and inviting to those who do not speak or use English.
- Desire for more natural light using windows.
- Pavilion could benefit from a glass roof to bring in the feeling of the sky.
- Picnic tables for larger gatherings and/or families.
- The library area as proposed may not be an inviting space for all people. Latinxs may not immediately feel like this space includes them, as it's currently described.
- Emergency kiosk or phone is still very important.
- Participants: 7

**April 17, 2017-** African American Outdoor Association and Camp ELSO at Unite Oregon

- Outdoor Spaces
  - Concern: are there wild animals in the park?
  - Grotto is nice, and a great example of natural space in urban setting.
  - Design is too modern. There is no presence of any culture, or indigenous influence.
  - Communities from the Global South often convene in circular patterns, this design is very angular, and not inviting.
  - Wetland: it would be great to have space for people and children to play and learn.
  - Is there an attraction that displays conservation? How can you use a water feature to mitigate noise from industrial neighbors? This is a noisy site to begin with, and perhaps that will allow families to be louder if they wish.
  - Will this become a mountain bike super highway?
- Indoor Spaces
  - Lack of color seems cold, uninviting, and void of culture.
  - Lack of windows is worrisome, even though it may be a solution to sound pollution from surrounding industry.
  - Welcoming, inclusive, and universally useable design of the space is important, especially for people who don't come for the hiking.
  - Will there be a place for food to be sold or for families to share a meal?
- Programs
  - People appreciate a place, and brings it value. Food and multigenerational experience that brings ritual that opens up a space.
  - Not a lot of program options for youth and young adults in the Portland, especially with many neighborhoods gentrified - hiking may or may not be one of them. Just depends. Tree houses? Zip lines?
  - Can the City prioritize this as a learning hub, especially for communities of color and new immigrants (i.e. tree recognition from their home countries)? Can they partner with existing features (i.e. June Key Delta House) to enhance learning for our

Round 2 Focus  
Groups Cont'd

- communities?
- Can there be a public health approach to the environment?
- Community Needs and Engagement
  - Not everyone is privileged enough to be invited into a focus group like this, so we do what we can and show up where we can.
  - “Hella black, hella proud” to give input and represent my experiences.
  - This project could be an opportunity to show people of color that they belong “everywhere.”
  - Trimet access is a concern with time it takes to get there and fare cost. A serious concern is a recent report was released about the unsafe and negative experiences of black folks on Trimet.
  - Source of funding for this project: why are we using public dollars for projects like Forest Park? This may not be entirely in-line with what communities of color prioritize or need right now.
- Participants: 4 AAOA and 6 Camp ELSO

**April 22, 2017** - African Community Council of Oregon at NECN

- Outside Design
  - People must feel welcome. Right now it looks made for the typical bearded white man that Portland often speaks to.
  - Don't make assumptions: our traditions and communities also prioritize conservation (i.e. Wangari Maathai a Kenyan woman who championed a worldwide political movement to plant trees).
  - Could there be trees planted from other places and cultures? For example, it would be more familiar for many of our community members to have banana trees (if they can be grown here).
  - There doesn't seem to be recognition or homage to native or indigenous peoples of the Portland area.
  - There should be art or other cultural representations that help us feel like we belong.
  - On signage and through art - must welcome people in many different languages.
  - A different color scheme? Bright colors are more welcoming. Darker colors, not just muted greens and greys.
  - Can pavilion accommodate at least 100 people?
  - Balance outdoor seating and benches. Not too much or too little.
- Inside Design
  - Would like to use it for weddings, dancing, or other opportunities to have a band (inside or outside).
  - Public restrooms a must.
- Programming and Parks Support
  - Docents or tour guides?

Round 2 Focus  
Groups Cont'd

- Parking is a concern - knowing that Parks must balance available space and the natural area, parking to get people there is still a must. Trimet service there is limited, and takes 90 minutes from East Portland if you are lucky.
  - Programs that support community health education in getting active with the outdoors (hiking, sports etc.), as well as food, nutrition, and exercise, and good sleeping. Can the City support as many activities as possible?
  - Can programs reflect more than one culture (dominant Portland), or be cross cultural? There is an opportunity that we don't want to miss here.
- Participants: 14

Final Session

**June 26, 2017** - All Groups and Forest Park Advisory Committee at Unite Oregon

- Appreciation of the thoughtful and inclusive process to open up opportunities for underrepresented groups to give input in a meaningful way.
- Participants saw some of their input reflected in the final proposal.
- Youth participation from these communities is crucial for future projects and participation opportunities - it helps make youth feel ownership of their city if they are helping shape their own future.
- A multi-generational approach to engagement and design in the future will assist in bringing in families from underrepresented communities.
- Still have concerns about follow through and how Parks and Recreation will be able to “build” this project in the future. Funding? Will it be cross cultural or only reflect one dominant culture?
- How do we stay in touch?

**Takeaways from Phase II**

Forest Park Entrance and Nature Center

Overall focus group participants were satisfied with the final proposed site plan for the Entrance and Nature Center. However there were a number of concerns that community groups maintained would be important factors to their continued involvement. It is critical for PP&R and the City be cognizant of these ongoing questions. A healthy dialogue and commitment to equity oriented solutions regarding the lack of geographic and transportation access, and other barriers to inclusion through Parks programming will be necessary moving forward.

Project Process and Engagement Activities

All four groups involved in Phase II appreciated the care by which the consultant team and City staff took in engaging them. General feedback included questions for how to the City could be more flexible with scheduling and “pace” of communities allowing them time to digest and get up to speed on any given project or plan. While the three round process alleviated some of this tension, groups look forward to ongoing and consistent relations. Additionally, inclement winter conditions delayed a number of sessions, and groups appreciated the flexibility to stay involved, and not be rushed through by internal City timelines. Other supports that groups applauded were organizational stipends to support community efforts, meeting meals, childcare, interpretation, and raffle prizes – indicating a commitment to



inclusion during the project. Overall community members felt heard, respected, and that their time was well spent over the three rounds of input.

Finally, follow up to many of the systemic exclusion questions and concerns is essential to building on this experience. In strategic discussion with Parks Community Engagement Team, Design + Culture Lab suggests a firm schedule of individual follow up and direct relationship planning with each organization. It is also important to remember that New Users to the Parks system and programs are not monolithic, and have varied interests. Groups who participated in this project are just four of the many community based groups that engage underrepresented communities in the environment, environmental justice, conservation, and outdoor activity. Design + Culture Lab recommends building on these relationships, as a way to connect with other groups and organizations, and to not limit contact when seeking future input.