



South Park Blocks Master Plan

Community Advisory Committee

Tuesday, October 29, 2019, 5:30pm – 8:00pm

1900 SW 4th Ave, Room 2500 B, Portland, OR 97201

Committee Members in Attendance: Jessica Engelmann, Lisa Frisch, Amber Holland, Keith Jones, Amanda Keasberry, Mack McFarland, David Newman, Stephanie Parrish, Wendy Rahm, Kathy Russo, Maya Sykes, Andrew VanDerZanden, Mason Wordell

Committee Members Absent: Gaylen Beatty, Judy BlueHorse Skelton, Julie Bunker, Michelle Comer, Nicholas Fazio, Randy Gragg, Savahna Jackson, Melinda McMillan

Community: Thomas Ray, Jo Durand, Marion McNamara, Deanna Mueller-Crispin

PP&R Staff: Tate White, Barbara Hart

Project Consultant Team: Laurie Mathews (MIG), Rachel Edmonds (MIG), Teresa Cheney (Mayer Reed), Shannon Simms (Mayer Reed), Gwen Shaw (Toole Design)

Facilitators: Kristen Bishop (LCA), Zachary Johnson (LCA)

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome & Introductions

Barbara Hart opened the meeting at 5:35 and reviewed the agenda. Committee members then introduced themselves.

Previous Meeting Summary Review

Kristen Bishop presented the previous meeting summary. CAC members provided the following questions and comments, with responses from the project team in *italics*:

- I would like further clarification on the Tate's explanation about whether the South Park Blocks are a good candidate for preservation. Are you following the Secretary of the Interior standard?
 - *Tate defers to the consultant team as she was just repeating their previous comments about taking a rehabilitation approach. Yes, the consultant team is well aware of the standards.*
- When will safety be discussed?
 - *Safety is a lens through which we can look at the design concepts and it should be talked about throughout the process, including during tonight's discussion.*

The CAC then unanimously approved the previous meeting summary.

Public Comment

- Jo Durand, a downtown resident and member of Friends of the South Park Blocks, asked if the design concepts presentation would be made publicly available.
 - *Tate White: Yes, this same presentation will be presented to community groups. It will ultimately be posted online.*



- Deanna Mueller-Crispin, a downtown resident, expressed concern that bikes, pedestrians, and scooters sharing the same space as part of the Green Loop is a potential safety concern that should be considered.

Review of Project Goals

Barbara Hart reviewed the project goals and the CAC goals. Questions and comments from CAC members noted below with responses from PP&R in *italics*:

- Are these different from the priorities that we identified?
 - *Yes, these are the overall project goals.*
- What do you mean by adjacent uses?
 - *This includes the buildings that line the park, sidewalks, and streets.*
- Does that include residential, the university, and cultural institutions?
 - *Yes, those are all included alongside streets and transportation.*
- For goal #3 [Better understand, respect, and reflect the complexities of the park blocks' history], I would say you should refine that to include elements that need to be protected for historical preservation purposes.
 - *The project goals are not going to change at this stage since they were discussed at meeting #1, but we appreciate and take note of this comment.*

Draft Concepts Presentation & Discussion

The Design Team led by MIG gave a presentation on the draft design concepts. Laurie Matthews (MIG), Rachel Edmonds (MIG), Shannon Simms (Mayer Reed), and Gwen Shaw (Toole Design) presented three concepts: Emerald Arrow, Braided Districts, and Mirrored Chain. The team emphasized the “kit of parts” approach that is seeking to incorporate the best elements of each concept into the preferred concept. Questions and comments from CAC members during and after the presentation are noted below with responses from the Design Team and PP&R in *italics*:

- Has the design team analyzed the impact of the Green Loop on existing structures, particularly in the cultural district?
 - *Yes. The presentation will go into more detail on Green Loop concepts.*
- Regarding the tree analysis, is there a plan for the replacement of existing trees?
 - *Yes. Each concept address tree succession planning.*
- Regarding the tree succession strategy, the trees shown in green are what is left after removal?
 - *The green represents the trees that are considered to be healthy and in good condition at this time.*
- How would the Farmers Market function under the Emerald Arrow concept?
 - *The market would function similar to today. It would potentially benefit from a renovated plaza outside the Smith Memorial Student Union.*
- The images show a lot of hardscape, where is the grass and greenery?
 - *These images are examples, they are not a perfect match but provide a taste of what the proposed improvements could look like.*



- Are these transportation plans compatible with the bus transit streets as identified in Central City in Motion?
 - Yes.
- I understand that Madison is barely used. I am very concerned about closing that block of Main, however. We need car access.
- Can you talk more about the gateway elements?
 - *They are generally programming spots. All the concepts have gateway features at endpoints. We are looking for further feedback on what those gateways might look like.*
- The circulation plans are unique. I think it important to have a straight linear path down the blocks that people can use to get places. I like the Braided Districts concept from a pedestrian standpoint.
- I like the diagonal paths in addition to the central promenade.
- I don't feel like there is a real issue at the intersections. Traffic on those streets is clogged most of the time. I think visibility is important, and there may be a cheaper way to enhance visibility like flashing lights or some paint.
- I am concerned about the idea of narrowing the streets because emergency services utilize that space when they visit buildings along the blocks.
- As far as street closures go, I'd be interested in exploring woonerfs as an alternative to full closures. The woonerfs around Director Park are a good example.
- Bike signals should be explored. I feel that bikes stop at signals but may or may not stop at stop signs.
- The diagonal where the Green Loop goes from one side to two sides should only happen after Market. Trying to make that transition on the Clay or Columbia blocks does not seem like a good idea since so much is happening on those blocks.
- The performance space in front of Lincoln Hall seems weird to me. It doesn't seem to draw people in and sits on a heavy traffic street.
- I like the connection to the Native American Culture Center.
- I am pro on the Main Street closure. The Shemanski/Lincoln blocks are flexible and programming space could be enhanced by having Main closed. I see cars blow the stop sign on Main all the time.
- I like the idea of activating the area in front of Lincoln Hall with a performance area. It gives this space a more open feel and makes it more flexible.
- Director Park was designed for activation but is rarely used for events.
- I think we need to carefully consider the difference between temporary street closures for events and permanent closures. We have 100,000 people that need to get in and out for work, we have students at PSU, and tourists who need to get around. When you talk about taking away road space, it becomes difficult to approve.
- In general, I prefer temporary street closures over permanent street closures. Main has an island in the middle of it that might be able to be redesigned for better pedestrian movement.



- The street closure adjacent to the Vue Apartments should take into account that the street is sloped there, so it is not useful to use it for anything other than maybe the Green Loop.
- I'm concerned about the Green Loop crossing the park diagonally. This takes up park space.
- I'd like to see the Green Loop stay on one side of the blocks. I don't like the idea of having it cross the park.
- Having the Green Loop cross the park could lead to bike/pedestrian collisions.
- Has the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) approved these designs?
 - *These are all conceptual at this stage, but we have reviewed with BPS who has a representative on the Technical Advisory Committee.*
- I appreciate what people are saying about car traffic, but this is an opportunity to give people more opportunity to move around without cars.
- Regarding street closures, I want to clarify that I am opposed to east/west closures, not closures for the Green Loop.
- How would bikes interact with tabled intersections? If it is not convenient for them to have to go up and down to cross the tables.
 - *The tables would bring the intersections up to the curb level, meaning cyclists would stay level the whole time.*
- Do tabled intersections slow cars down?
 - *Yes. Tables are a method of traffic calming because they reinforce the idea that the cars are entering a different space.*
- Are tables or medians more effective at traffic calming?
 - *It is contextual. Different areas would yield different results.*
- Are there examples of tabled intersections in Portland?
 - *In North Portland there is a tabled crosswalk crossing Albina. We don't have a lot of current examples, but Central City in Motion proposes many. They are commonly used in other cities.*
- I would assume that tabled intersections make it easier for people with disabilities to cross from block-to-block. I think this would work particularly well with the central promenade approach.
- The Oregon Historical Society (OHS) would like to have a sightline with the Portland Art Museum (PAM). I would prefer a central promenade over diagonals. I am worried that diagonals will take up quiet space.
- Do the existing planting beds remain on the museum blocks?
 - *Yes, the rose beds remain.*
- Safety is a major discussion as far as plantings go. When there's low vegetation, things happen. People will sleep or throw garbage in those areas.
- In the Lincoln block, it is difficult to keep vegetation growing because people walk through the beds. This should be taken into consideration.
- I am personally not in favor of adding more rose beds. Thinking about climate change and maintenance adding beds requires a lot of work and seems counterintuitive. Maintaining existing beds is great.



- I am concerned about the Green Loop flow during the Farmers Market and other events.
 - *The Farmers Market would be a destination on the Green Loop. It would not be appropriate to expect that people would ride their bikes or scooters through there. They could get off and walk through, or detour to another bike lane.*
- If we're going to have food carts further down, there's potential for bike delivery from the Farmers Market to the food carts.
- The feedback we heard during Sunday Parkways was that the South Park Blocks was the best section to ride or walk through.
- Is Broadway going to have a 2-way bike facility?
 - *We will verify this and follow up with you.*
 - The current plan is for Broadway to have two-way bike facilities north of Harvey Milk and a southbound one-way facility south of Harvey Milk with a corresponding northbound facility on 4th Avenue. This design preserves parking on Broadway.
- It would be good to have a bunch of bike racks around event areas.
- It is possible to require people to walk their bikes through certain areas. They did it down by RiverPlace.
- The Park Blocks were created when evergreens were removed to create a firewall so that fires from the West Hills would not come down into the City. One of the defining features of the blocks is the open space. Deciduous trees were planted in place of the conifers. Deciduous trees should be protected. I think these concepts are protecting them.
- I would be okay with conifers if they have a higher base.
- It would take 10 to 20 years for conifers to reach a height that avoids the safety concerns.
- We need to listen to the experts, who thought that adding conifers would be a good idea. Biodiversity is important for a healthy park.
- A park is artificial. It is not a natural environment.
- The Smith Plaza covering might be a problem due to the open space origins of the park. I think small structures are okay, and temporary structures are certainly not a problem, but I think big structures might be a problem for nomination.
- Safety is a real concern with the Green Loop. Pedestrians and bikes are in conflict. People cross the street outside of marked crossings. I think that needs to be considered when talking about the Green Loop. I don't know whether it would be better to have it on a single street or divided between both sides.

The project team asked for feedback on the character of features like gateways, art, and play structures.

- I like the example images with wooden imagery. There were social seating areas with roofs that I would naturally want to engage with.
- Nature play areas are in high demand. Finding a way to spread them throughout the park would be great as opposed to isolating a play area on one block.



- Play areas should be decentralized and not just a single playground.
- I love the idea of musical instruments. I get nervous that they could become annoying, however, so we should be mindful of where we want quiet hubs and where it's okay for it be noisier.
- I think nature-focused playground could draw a lot of people in. Westmoreland has a lot of these types of playgrounds and they are used by people of all ages as play areas and sitting areas.
- From the PAM perspective, it'd be interesting to consider artist-designed seating, participatory art, experiential art, etc. PAM would be interested in participating in that process.
- I love that a block of Madison is closed in two of these concepts. This will allow greater flexibility for programming. I have mixed opinions on the Main closure, but I lean more in favor of closure.
- There is currently a lack of seating where you can sit and look at the person you are sitting with. More picnic tables and other forms of social seating would be appreciated.
- What are PAM's feelings regarding the Green Loop staying on Park Avenue West alone?
 - Loading and unloading is important. I think there are a lot of people who need to weigh in on how this would work so I am not making a judgement yet.
- Trying to look at the park through the lens of people with disabilities, is it confusing to have diagonal paths versus straight shots?
 - *That is a great question. We are going to be taking these concepts to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for their feedback.*
- I like the idea of adding covered areas. To what extent are historic preservation concerns going to impact the ability to put in new elements?
 - *Design details would need to be worked out. It might be possible to design a shelter space that is compatible with rehabilitation.*
- Is there a way to get around these historic preservation issues?
 - *We need to be thoughtful about how new elements interact with the historical elements.*
- What is the benefit of listing?
 - *There is still flexibility even when it is listed. Listing helps protect historic elements that are important to the character of the park. The Halprin Sequence is a great example of how improvements can occur in a listed park.*

Next Steps

Tate White provided an overview of upcoming opportunities for community engagement.

- November 23rd: Community event in conjunction with the Farmer's Market.
- December 5th: Design Commission and Historic Landmarks Commission joint presentation.
- A second survey is being drafted and will be made available online and in paper format.
- Staff is organizing focus groups with high school students, PSU students, and refugee and immigrant communities.



Evaluation

Kristen Bishop thanked everyone for participating and asked for feedback on positive aspects of the meeting as well as things that should be changed for future meetings.

+ : The handouts were fabulous, readable, and sent well in advance.

Close Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

DRAFT