



**South Park Blocks Master Plan
Community Advisory Committee**

Wednesday, March 11, 2020, 5:30pm – 8:00pm
1900 SW 4th Ave, Room 2500 B, Portland, OR 97201

Committee Members in Attendance: Jessica Engelmann, Nicholas Fazio, Lisa Frisch, Randy Gragg, Amber Holland, Keith Jones, Amanda Keasberry, David Newman, Stephanie Parrish, Wendy Rahm, Maya Sykes, Andrew VanDerZanden, Mason Wordell

Committee Members Absent: Gaylen Beatty, Judy BlueHorse Skelton, Julie Bunker, Michelle Comer, Savannah Jackson, Mack McFarland, Melinda McMillan, Kathy Russo

Community: Fred Leeson, Story Swett, Thomas Ray, Kyle Leslie-Christy, Devrelle Dumas, Quincy Brown

City of Portland Staff: Tate White (PP&R), Barbara Hart (PP&R), Laura Lillard (BPS), Nick Falbo (PBOT)

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome & Introductions

Barbara Hart opened the meeting at 5:32 and reviewed the agenda. Committee members then introduced themselves.

Previous Meeting Summary Review

Kristen Bishop presented the previous meeting summary. CAC members unanimously approved the previous meeting summary.

Public Comment

- Story Swett, a downtown resident who sits on the Land Use & Transportation Committee of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, stated that master plans should start with a historic understanding of what exists and how it developed over time. Story stated that the process seemed flawed because it was not cataloging characteristics.
- Fred Leeson, a community member, talked about the discovery of a Native American artifact under the Park Blocks in 1962. Fred stated that knowledge of Native American history in the Willamette Valley is scant compared to the knowledge of Columbia River and Pacific Coast Native American history and that it would be fascinating to learn more. Fred appreciated the existing conditions report and hopes that it will be utilized in the development of the master plan.
- Kyle Leslie-Christy, student body president at Portland State University (PSU), noted that 48% of PSU students are experiencing food and housing insecurity and that community gardens could be a practical way to help address some of the issues that present themselves to PSU students.



- Quincy Brown, a PSU student and member of Metro’s Racial Equity Committee, stated that the process should be used to address equity and outreach issues around the park blocks and institutions like the Portland5 and the Portland Art Museum.

Community Comments on Draft Design Concepts

Barbara Hart presented an overview of community engagement activities and the results of the design options survey. Since the concept development workshop, the project team has conducted 16 stakeholder/commission meetings, two student focus groups (Portland State University and St. Mary’s Academy), two CAC meetings, and one community gathering. The team also placed 35 English/Spanish lawn signs in the park. The project web page has received over 15,000 views. The design options survey received 138 response. The survey demographics were similar to last time. Barbara reviewed key findings from the survey report.

Barbara Hart gave a recap of community engagement goals and efforts, highlighting the involvement of students from St Mary’s Academy and PSU who participated in focus groups. She explained the comment report contained all the feedback received from the community during the review of the draft design concepts. Barbara reminded the group that the comment survey is just one of the tools used to gather feedback about the draft concepts. Like all the tools, the survey represents the opinions of the people who participate. As such the survey results are not meant to be generalized as a scientifically valid sample of all Portlanders.

Barbara opened up a discussion about the comment report and engagement efforts. Questions and comments from CAC members are noted below with responses from PP&R in *italics*:

- The first and second bullet points on the key findings seem to be in conflict. Are gateways popular or not?
 - *When we ask the ranking questions that we did, it can come out both ways. There was an option for gateways and the north and south end that was popular and ranked higher than mid-park gateways.*
- Thank for your outreach, it really does make it a difference. It is important to reach out to the Asian community, which is the largest minority in the downtown area.
- The second survey does not capture the urgency of people who do not want to see immediate changes to the park. Twelve comments mentioned frustration with the lack of a none-of-the-above option to the questions. The survey also did not ask people what they liked and wanted to preserve. It did not mention the possible costs of the proposed designs. Ranking questions without a none-of-the-above option bias the survey results. The survey is flawed and there are all kinds of problems with statistics and numbers. What is the base numerator for each question? Are the people that chose not to respond included? Do the people that did not respond constitute people who would have chosen a none-of-the-above option?
 - *This survey is not determinative. It is not meant to be a scientific study, just a glimpse at community opinions. We asked people what they liked during the Visioning process last spring and summer, and the results of the first survey influenced these designs. A report of Community Visioning input, including the*



results of the first survey was presented to the CAC and is available on the project web page.

- People get fatigued when they do long surveys. This is not a funding document, but just a temperature check.
- One thing that I don't see is information about what design concept was most popular. Was this intentional?
 - *The design team will use the results of this survey, the stakeholder outreach, the CAC, and the technical advisory committee (TAC) to guide the creation of the preferred design. This is not about picking any one design. Overall, the Emerald Arrow and Braided Districts had more features that people preferred.*
- Is there a plan to collect additional feedback?
 - *Yes, once we have a preferred draft design, we will present it to you and then take it out to the community for another review We have one more major step ahead to refine the design*
- Has the design team had an opportunity to address an audience?
 - *The design team has presented at previous CAC meetings, the concept development workshop, and at the two community gatherings. They will be at the next CAC meeting as well.*
- I went to the community event and there wasn't an opportunity to present to an audience and gathering feedback. I understand that in the past, people didn't often reach a wider audience, but it feels that we are going from one extreme to the other.
 - *Commission briefings were good for that. I will say two things: 1) I originally scoped this out for the three park design concepts to be more fleshed out before they went to the public. The design team wanted to test their designs early. They really wanted to hear from the community. We ran into challenges with how complex the concepts were. Doing a plan for an existing park is really challenging. The next stage will be a great opportunity for more focused presentations and feedback. 2) When you're talking about buildings or private developments, it's easier for the designer to communicate a singular vision, when you're talking about parks it is more of a complicated process where we need to consider community input, maintenance, and operations among other factors.*
- It can be done. There is maybe still an opportunity to gather people at the museum to hear what the guiding concept/narrative is. There would be a lot more momentum.
- I really appreciate the input of younger students [at St. Mary's Academy]. It was through the student review board whose goal is to get diverse range of student voices. Around 10 students participated. Most students used the park to get around, not as a destination. There was a big emphasis on creating gathering places, group seating, the renovation of Smith plaza, and adding plant diversity while keeping the strip of green



downtown. The parks give a natural element to the school that otherwise wouldn't exist. A lot of people leaned towards the Emerald Arrow concept.

- What are demographics of St. Mary's?
 - *All women. I believe there is a lot religious diversity.*
 - *A little over 50% white.*
 - *Group we met with was a 1/3 students of color.*
- Quincy Brown, PSU: the biggest concern of PSU is that there is no PSU representative on the committee. Engagement with the Native American Student & Community Center is important. Community gardens would address the lack of gathering spaces and could create spaces for outdoor spaces/outdoor classes. Native plantings are important, as well as new designs that are ADA accessible.
 - There are two PSU representatives on the CAC who are not present today. Judy Bluehorse Skelton, Assistant Professor Indigenous Nations Studies and Savahna Jackson, PSU Indigenous Nations Studies student.
- Kyle Leslie-Christy, PSU: A big topic of discussion was the contiguousness of the blocks. We don't see natural ecosystems broken up by roads. When we do native plantings or community gardens, they should be centralized or contiguous. In that planning session, we were told that we were contacted but I hadn't heard anything. Community garden space is a serious need. Forty-seven percent of students are experiencing food insecurity.
- I was unaware of the PSU food insecurity stats. Is there any opportunity for a capstone project to look at feasibility of the community garden? What kind of soil remediation, etc., and what would security look like? These are all huge questions. It would make a fabulous student project. It would either prove the point or suggest looking at other alternatives
 - PSU President: We already have an orchard on west side, so we have people who run spaces like that. There are 1,000 individual volunteers annually. The ability of students to be agents is there.

Green Loop Presentation

Laura Lillard of the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability presented on the Green Loop. The presentation included information on the design principles and implementation strategies, as well as areas where the loop was under active planning or development. Block 216, the Ankeny Food Carts, and the Blumenauer bridge are examples of Green Loop sections that are in progress.

Comments from CAC members after the presentation are noted below:



- From Sunday Parkways, there seems to be a misconception that the Green Loop will add thousands of bikes. There should be more communication about what type of traffic can be expected and how pedestrians and cyclists will be kept safe.
- We are still in the design phase for the loop. This is about creating placing. We are creating a place for food carts on the green loop. We are not looking at just a bike infrastructure/pedestrian infrastructure project, we are creating moments. The Blumenauer bridge is important because it connects Northeast Portland to Southeast Portland. In the event of an earthquake, this bridge is wide enough for emergency vehicles and is seismically safe. We are looking at if municipal broadband could be included. The Green Loop goes right by the Convention Center, which provides an opportunity for 3-4 million visitors to visit businesses without having to use a car. The need for parking goes down.

Development of Preferred Design

Tate White led a discussion about the development of the preferred design and asked for feedback on what should be included. Questions and comments from CAC members are noted below with responses from PP&R in *italics*:

- The survey does represent that gap in the communities that we missed. We talked about it so passionately in the first meeting. We've done all this great work. We're still not hearing from a lot of groups that we mentioned need to be brought into the process. Not sure how we can push ourselves forward, but we need to. In my mind, what we're stuck with is a binary gendered and white vision for the parks.
 - *There are a lot of perspectives we still need to hear from. Hopefully the plan will represent a park that will be utilized by a diversity of people.*
 - Thank you for your concern and commitment to racial equity. I appreciate any and all help from the group to expand and improve our engagement work.
kThe focus of community engagement during the design review process focused on expanding involvement of students, PSU communities of color, the Native American Community Advisory Council and Parks Accessibility Advisory Committee. We designed the student focus groups to hear from a diverse group of student leaders and are very pleased with the diversity of perspectives and the quality of the responses from participants. Consultations with the NACAC and PAAC are ongoing. The partnership with the Farmers Market helped to expand our contacts as well.
- I feel unclear about the historic designation and were the conflict might be between design concepts and historic designation. Does that impact the ability to designated?
- As a corollary to that question, if we put the green loop through the parks, is that voided?
 - *The clear preference for the Green Loop alignment was on Park Ave West which would put the 2-way facility in the right-of-way, outside of the park. The project*



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team is led by an expert in historical/cultural landscapes. The existing conditions report acknowledges what are the significant features. We don't want to propose anything that would impact too much. Tree canopy is impetus and tree succession planting. Want to make sure that we respect its history while providing for all Portlanders.

- The defining characteristics were in the existing conditions report. That report talks about things that should be respected. The deciduous trees in alignment and grassy open space are the key defining characteristics. Central City 2035 does specify that the historic preservation nomination should be put forward now. City Council approved the nomination. It has been suggested that the nomination should precede the master plan.
 - *The promenade and the canopy are the significant features. We have been asked to pursue this master plan now. One example of things that we can work on are the pathways, which are not level and not accessible, but our team knows that there is a way to rehabilitate them without conflicting with historic significance.*
- Could this be partial nomination or does it have to be the whole set of blocks?
 - *There have been suggestions that cultural district blocks are historically significant. The PSU blocks were modified in the 1970s.*
- On this topic, I need more information about why we would support/not support a nomination as it relates to what I'm recommending for the master plan.
 - *We still want to know your ideas and trust the consultant team to balance those ideas with preservation.*
- A nomination would allow for all kinds of new things, as long as the deciduous trees in their alignment with grass areas is preserved. You could still put in a monument, etc. It is still an open space. In the summertime you have shade, in the winter you have sun, in the fall you have color, and in the spring you have flowers.
- The Portland Business Alliance looked at each of the streets and we looked at all modes. Some of the streets that are designated for closure are portals. The block with Madison is underutilized and could be closed.
 - *Northern three blocks are most popular for events.*
- Main is more of an issue, but a case-by-case closure is okay. Safety is a huge issue. When you are obliterating any traffic from the blocks, you are creating a safety issue. When you take cars off a street, it creates safety issues. I don't drive a car, but we've had a bad history of thinking we can eliminate a car when it can have an entrenched negative impact.
 - *If Portland's decides to close their block of Main permanently, would [Portland Business Alliance] support closing the block of Main between the parks?*
 - That would require further study. In general, we would be okay with closing Madison.



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION

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- The Downtown Neighborhood Association would oppose closing Main.
- I'd like to hear the process going forward. What level of detail is the next preferred plan going to be? Will cost estimates be included?
 - *The master plan will stay at a high level. When we find funding, we will do more detailed planning.*
 - *Streets are a critical piece of how the South Park Blocks function today. The streets and blocks have a relationship. These streets used to go all the way through. Only in the '70s they created the PSU campus. PBOT has been working with Parks and Recreation on how to make street crossing safer. The character of these streets does change dramatically. Jefferson and Columbia get busier and our focus would be to reduce pedestrian exposure by making the crossing distance shorter. Clay and Market could receive a median treatment.*
- Will the plan go down to the level of recommended intersection treatments?
 - *Yes, because that impacts the pathways. We are working to understand PBOT's preferences.*
- It is important to note cost and tradeoffs in the next phase.
- One thing that may be missing: the programming and oversight of the spaces. It's about what's around them. Skidmore might have worked better with better ground floor programming. Is there a group that manage the whole of the South Park Blocks or should different entities take sections (PAM, OHS, PSU, etc.)?
- More social seating is an awesome idea. Who is going to maintain it and make sure they aren't stolen? What is the management of these blocks? We could close Madison, and maybe Main, but how is the space going to be managed/maintained?
- Oregon Historical Society (OHS) feels like we share the blocks with the Portland Art Museum (PAM). As much as we would love to help, we are having a hard enough time with our own facility. Going back, I got the impression from the consultants that they advised the incorporation of conifers and that that would not jeopardize the historical preservation considerations.
 - *It is important to look at phasing and what's left over. The tree succession plan is going to be evolving as we create that preferred design. The Urban Forestry Commission is in support of diversification. The trees are coming to the end of their lives. The team has proposed certain types of conifers planted in specific areas, similar to Chapman and Lownsdale Square.*
- Those who live in the area know that Main is heavily used by cars. The Downtown Neighborhood Association never opposes temporary closures, however.
- There is not much support for conifers in your report. 6/7 in ranking. A number of comments mentioned no conifers.



- Activation is often the first thing cut in the budget cycle. Director Park had best laid plans, but parks in downtown that aren't under a 501c3 have safety issues and are under-managed. Activation is a separate line item and is not a guarantee. We have to keep that in mind. The idea of having activation all the time is not going to happen.
- There are institutional structures that don't have ground floor retail along the blocks. This is almost the worst place to take activity away.
- Historic preservation is a big issue. Preserving the character and being innovative are not mutually exclusive. Mutual listening is required. People who are hard core preservationists and those who don't care need to compromise. We have to worry about chairs, management, and maintenance. A piece of design feedback: for social seating, we'd get a bang for the buck if we focused on social seating around Smith Plaza, low hanging fruit in terms in seating issues.
- I really wanted to note that the PSU focus group noted that there is not enough tables/clean spaces to work. I loved the recommendation of having the seating be artistic. It has more respect/interaction/curiosity. I'm very supportive of interesting seating/social gathering spaces. Sitting on benches and talking I don't like.
- I'm supportive of evergreens if they can be incorporated. There are evergreen broadleaves that aren't conifers.
- I'm so excited about the Green Loop. I can bike on Broadway into downtown but have a weird route home. Cyclists are already treating as the Green Loop. If we are lowering traffic levels on Park West, I don't think closing Main is as important.
- We're getting to the point where the Elms are dying. As the climate changes, some trees will survive better. We need to maintain a healthy ecosystem. I'd be curious to see if the designers could provide precedents on conifer and evergreen alleés so we can envision the concepts and translate character into environmental sustainability.
- *Tate White: Based on all the feedback we've received, I do see a path forward for the draft preferred design that I will overview quickly:*
 - *Block 1: partnership with native American student center, native planting, renovate playground*
 - *PSU Blocks: Smith Amphitheater block idea was popular. A lot of value. PSU students' concerns about food insecurity. Social seating.*
 - *Neighborhood Blocks: we'd like to hear more thoughts. More social seating? New art features/interactive features?*
 - *Cultural blocks: people want to see them more connected, with a central promenade.*
- We need something exciting to activate the space. The area with PAM and OHS is a central area. It depends on when you draw the line of the nomination. That's the



obvious location for social activities for the non-academic world. Partnerships, donors, etc., could be sought.

- There is a lot of excitement from PAM about the Madison space. It is a pain to get permitting for a temporary closure.
- Built-in group seating could be beneficial as well as with the artistic touch.
- Block 1, with the improvement of the playground and partnership with Native American Center could be a great learning activity for native plantings.
- Something that the central promenade would be having less blockages if we created raised crosswalks in the streets.

Next Steps

Barbara Hart reviewed the next steps in the process.

We are now working with the design consultants to review the draft concepts in light of your guidance and all the community feedback. The draft design concepts remained unchanged during the community review period. This was intentional to ensure that all participants considered the same set of design options and responded to the same questions between September 2019 and February 2020.

The next CAC meeting will be held in May. At that time we will present the draft design that combines the strongest elements from the three draft concepts. Following the CAC discussion of the draft preferred design, we will begin another round of community review and comment. There will be one additional meeting of the CAC to discuss final guidance on the park design and celebrate all your work. We will be in touch soon to schedule the remaining two meetings.

Tate and I will follow up with a recap of your design discussion to help clarify what we have heard. Please contact us if you have questions or want to talk further about next steps.

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.

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Thank you for food.

It was helpful to have the Green Loop presentation.

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It would have been good to be reminded of the elements that got nixed.

Close Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM.