



South Park Blocks Master Plan

Community Advisory Committee

Thursday, September 26, 2019, 5:30pm – 8:00pm

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

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

Committee Members Absent: Gaylen Beatty, Julie Bunker, Michelle Comer, Nicholas Fazio, Randy Gragg, David Newman, Judy BlueHorse Skelton, Maya Sykes, Savahna Jackson

Community: Tim Davis, KJ Russo, Don Hew, Deanna Mueller-Crispin, Jo Durand, Carolyn Lee

Guest Speaker: Ed Washington, Director of Community Outreach & Engagement, Portland State University

PP&R Staff: Tate White, Barbara Hart, Kathy Dang

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome & Introductions

Kristen Bishop opened the meeting at 5:40 and reviewed the agenda. She then asked CAC members to review the June 20, 2019, meeting summary for approval. CAC members made the following comments about the meeting summary:

- Request for additional clarification about why technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings are not public meetings.
 - *Tate White: It is our practice that TAC meetings are closed door; this was verified by our legal office. I will follow up on this again.*
- Request for clarification around whether the South Park Blocks are a good candidate for historic preservation. The intention is to put in on the National Register.
 - *Tate White: From page five of the meeting summary: "The rehabilitation/treatment approach acknowledges current uses and provides flexibility. The park is not a good candidate for a preservation approach because a lot of the functional space is newer." The South Park Blocks have evolved over time, so that is what is being referenced. My understanding is that a preservation approach is not recommended, but a rehabilitation approach is.*

The CAC approved the meeting summary as presented.

Ed Washington, PSU – Presentation and Discussion

Ed Washington, the Director of Community Outreach and Engagement at Portland State University (PSU), presented a history of Vanport and recounted his experiences growing up in the community.



- Vanport was a community built as housing for workers at the Kaiser Shipyards during World War II.
- Vanport featured a school, three recreation halls, two shopping centers, a jail, a hospital, and a post office.
- Vanport had an excellent school staffed with dedicated teachers. The school was integrated so all students were educated together.
- The Vanport flood occurred in 1948 when a railroad berm was breached by rising water. The flood devastated the community, displacing the residents and destroying infrastructure.
- The trees in Vanport were mostly cottonwood trees, which would not be a good fit for the South Park Blocks. Ed suggested an alternative: dedicating certain trees to key figures from Vanport's history.
- Ed explained that PSU began as the Vanport Extension Center in 1946. Following the Vanport flood (1948), the college moved to Grant High School, then to a location in St. Johns, and finally to a building on the South Park Blocks at the site of the current PSU campus
- A Vanport college plaque outside Lincoln Hall and a "Vanport Room" in the Smith Memorial Student Union are the only markers on campus that reference this history and link the two institutions.

Public Comment

- Don Hew, a downtown resident, asked if the project team was considering soil health and utilizing fallen leaves to create healthy planting environments.
 - *Tate: The project team includes landscape architects. The Ecologically Sustainable Landscapes Initiative is looking at "nature patches" throughout the park system.*
- Don replies that not all Landscape Architects are educated about permaculture practices of which he is speaking.
 - *Tate acknowledges this and adds that the park system PP&R employees manage is so large that it will be challenging to apply all the labor-intensive methods he speaks of at such a large scale. However, it is something we will explore.*

Visioning Comment Survey Report

Barbara Hart reviewed the Visioning Comment Survey Report, the themes of public feedback, and the demographics of survey respondents. Barbara noted that the community event feedback and survey are part of community engagement for the project taken together with other feedback, conversations and guidance from the CAC. The survey is a tool that provides a glimpse of the preferences and priorities of people who have participated to date. She explained that it should not be generalized to represent the preferences of all Portlanders. The demographic information is useful to understand who is currently engaged in the project, where the gaps are and focus our future outreach and engagement efforts.



Comments and questions from CAC members are listed below, with Barbara's response in *italics*.

- This is a great report. Thank you for putting it together. I enjoyed reading it and sharing it around my office.
- The amount of data presented is appreciated. Other bureaus should use this report as model.
- There were only 122 responses to the survey and the demographics of the respondents are skewed. I don't necessarily have a solution to this, but it is something we should be aware of moving forward.
- Was there a target sample size? How does this rate compare to other City outreach efforts?
 - *It's difficult to ask people to provide their opinions before they have anything to respond to. Once we have design concepts, it will be much easier to get feedback. We will be doing this in the next phase of outreach.*
- The demographics from the survey match closely with the demographics of Downtown.
- We should look at who is included in this survey data and who is not. For people that are not coming to the park, why not?
- Travelers and visitors are a big user group, but they are difficult to include in a survey.
- It might be worth exploring the possibility of working with Travel Portland to survey visitors.
- The park is a unique feature in Downtown. I don't think we're trying to compete with other parks or draw people in from other areas that already have access to other parks.
- The park is not necessarily a destination, but rather a place to linger while attending other events, visiting cultural institutions, and moving through Downtown.
- If we make improvements that benefit the existing user base, it will also benefit new user groups.
- The Farmers Market just did an expansive survey to reach people who are shopping at the market.
- Programming is what brings people and guests into the area.

Barbara also explained the engagement summary document, which highlights recent outreach efforts. In the next phase of outreach, the project team will be using focus groups and targeted outreach to broaden the diversity of participation and will again enlist CAC members to spread the word with their networks and organizations

Concept Development Workshop Recap

Tate White reviewed the outcomes of the August 6, 2019, Concept Development Workshop. The day-long workshop began with a large-group brainstorming session before breaking out into small groups focused on three main areas: circulation, vegetation, and programming. The workshop outcomes are currently being used to develop draft design concepts that will go back to the public in another round of community engagement.



Comments and questions from CAC members are listed below, with Tate's response in *italics*.

- [The Concept Development Workshop] was fun. There were a lot of interesting ideas.
- Where did concerns about safety fall?
 - *Safety is a lens that needs to be applied to all the different areas. The head park ranger and neighborhood task force sergeant have participated in the process. As the design process continues, safety will be considered.*
- Evergreen trees are a safety concern. There is a fear factor about people being able to hide under/behind them.
 - *There are different types of evergreens that can be considered.*
- [The Concept Development Workshop] was a very good charrette. It was good to get everybody together in the same room.

Next Steps

Barbara and Tate explained the next steps for the project.

- October 29: CAC meeting #4. The design team will present and discuss draft concepts for before they are shared with the community.
- November 23: Community Event at the Harvest Market. This community open house will share the design concepts and gather community feedback as part of the Saturday Farmers Market at PSU. PP&R will send out final information about the event as plans are finalized.
 - CAC comment: There is a scheduling conflict with the Downtown Neighborhood Association's forum on understanding homeless issues.
- December or January (pending): Historical Landmarks Commission and Design Commission.

Evaluation

Kristen asked the group for their feedback on the meeting.

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- I really appreciated Ed's presentation.
- I appreciated the food.
- It was great to get these documents in advance of the meeting.

Close Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.