



**MEETING DATE:** November 10, 2021

**LOCATION:** Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams

**ATTENDING:** Linda Mealey-Lohmann, Ali, Van, Romi Slowiak, Bill Zajicek, Ping Wang, Kao Lee Thao, Caroline Van, Regina Rippel, Susan Klevan, Jack Byers, Bill Pesek, Jijun He, Christina Morrison, Carol Brash, Meichun Jia, Jeff Vang, Stuart Knappmiller, Haoyu Zhao, Thangying Chuyangheu, Vallen Herr

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL:** Brett Hussong, Ellen Stewart

**COUNCIL:** Ward 1 Council Member Dai Thao

**NOTES BY:** Brett Hussong & Ellen Stewart, November 17, 2021

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**PURPOSE OF MEETING:**

To review the location, size and design elements of the Hmong Plaza.

**Agenda:**

Review of the last meeting

- Intro
- Review of Hmong migration story
- Presentation online

Advisory committee role

Project background

Meeting goals

Original design intent of the space

Potential locations and design elements

Role of committee:

- Assist P&R and assist MN China Board with the overall design consensus and direction
- Attend the virtual meetings and guide design
- Find patterns, forms, spaces, locations, materials, cultural stories for the plans and design

**Tentative Schedule:**

**Sept 2021**      **Phase II Dedication**

**Oct – Dec '21**    **Pre-Design**



- 1<sup>st</sup> Advisory Meeting – Mon Oct 18 – Microsoft Teams Mtg
  - Project Introduction and Background
  - Introduction to Chinese Gardens – Carol Brash
  - Hmong Migration Story – Jeff Vang
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Advisory Meeting – Nov 3 – Microsoft Teams Mtg
  - Discussion about design elements for the Hmong Plaza
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Advisory Meeting – Nov 17 – Microsoft Teams Mtg
  - Discussion about design elements for the Donor Wall and Moon Bridge
- 4<sup>rd</sup> Advisory Meeting – Nov 30 (tentative) – Microsoft Teams Mtg
  - Discussion about design elements for the Hmong Plaza and Pavilion Landscape

**Jan 2022 Schematic Design**

- Public Meeting #1

**Feb 2022 Design Development**

- Public Meeting #2

**Feb – Mar '22 Construction Documents**

**Apr – May '22 Bidding**

**Summer 2022 Phase I Construction**

**Meeting Purpose:**

Location of plaza

Size of plaza

Symbols and patterns.

(Note: we did not review specific designs such as lengths and heights of features – that will be determined by public artists and landscape architects with the City as well as Chinese designers)

**2017 Master Plan:**

Original design from 2017 included plaza for up to 50 people – intimate site in harmony with other elements of the garden

Design features included Hmong cultural elements

**Questions sent out last night and some responses received**

What is the purpose of the space?

Celebration, education, meditation, Tai Chi, Qui Gong, Yoga

Cultural bridge and strengthen friendships

Display Hmong arts and heritage

Hmong contribution to St. Paul

Peace and tranquility



Desire to have capacity of 200 people or 3,500 SF

200-person capacity does not necessarily go well with the site, nor does it go well with the concepts of intimacy and peace, tranquility.

**Questions Regarding Location:**

If at this site (China Garden), should it be 50 person?

Should alternate sites be considered if it is to be more than 50 people?

Brett has reviewed alternative sites with Parks and Recreation programming staff to understand underutilized spaces that may work within the park.

**Alternative Sites (for Hmong Plaza):**

*(Note: See DAC #2 presentation for alternate maps)*

**Concept A** is what was proposed in 2017.

3500 SF impacts oak trees, requires retaining wall, and it is not in keeping with the intention of this site.

No longer intimate.

Possible to have people seated with 3,500SF

**Concept B.**

Access bridge takes people to a lowered site that is fairly flat. Could get chairs for 200 people. Provides space outside of that plaza area for overflow or stage.

There is one tree that could be affected by construction.

There is an existing pathway so there is infrastructure there, but it is not ADA and would need to be reworked.

**Concept C**

Picnic Island.

Southern area. (better than northern because of grading and floodplain location)

Benefit is a view to the pavilion so there is a visual connection, so it feels incorporated.

There is a lot of space. Some of it does get programmed so we would need to look at best location.

ADA access available but it is a long way to get to the spot.

Near the floodplain

More difficult to construct on an island due to logistics which would lead to increased costs. May reduce the number of amenities or features due to added cost.

We would also potentially compete with other picnic pavilion events

**Concept D**

Near amphitheater.

Selected because it has existing infrastructure and is near a parking lot

ADA access needed.



May compete with picnics and pavilion events  
Would require removal of vegetation.  
Least preferred by programs  
Another pro is that it is not on an island

Possible to look north of the archway?  
Could be potential but difficult because would still have to cross the bridge and there are several mature trees.

Ying:  
Too late to change the location.  
According to Fung Shuei – need to keep the site  
New border could hold 200 in current site  
Evaluation committee would like to keep current site  
Capacity is increased because Hmong community was to create open space for non-Hmong and Chinese to use too.  
Already did feng shui blessing and site dedication.

Jack Byers:  
How much can microclimates effect the designs and the space. Has that been talked through?  
Brett: Southern exposure has been considered  
Area with amphitheater is a bit more shaded.  
Many of the sites are comparable but being on the island is likely a different microclimate compared to upland areas. More analysis is needed.

Romi:  
In the consideration of keeping it where it is, perhaps we should look at different ideas for the different locations – some may be less obtrusive. There may be design solutions that allow the plaza to be there.

Linda:  
If this is a 200+ person space, what programming are we talking about? Wedding plus the 200 guests?  
We need to consider other support facilities.

Brett:  
Hard to look at just space and size without deviating from the master plan. Building an event space is different than designing an intimate space. If we are building 200-person space, are we comfortable with this location? It is possible but we are using the entire green space between pavilion and archway.

Jijun:  
Alternate location would be best. Plaza uses would include event space, ceremonies, bday, graduation, and interested group getting together. The plaza would be too close to the path and there should be some separation. We should leave distance from the public eyesight. That is one concern. Another, as



Brett mentioned, will push boundary of the pavilion to the archway. We have a good design of the garden and don't want to push out of harmony. If plaza to be expanded, move it to another location. Maybe to NE of the current place. Existing slopes and vegetation need to be considered if moved.

Christina:

Who will be the final decision maker?

Brett: I am guiding the process and creating a transparent process. Not sure we will have a decision tonight by everyone and will need to discuss internally.

Christina:

I have been confused. As originally conceived, it was a cultural education space with small seating area. Now it seems Hmong Advisors and Hmong community want an event center with cultural symbols, performances, and a much larger number of people. Social venue is quite different from what was originally planned and what people were informed of. Not in favor of expanding the size in this spot. Not talking microclimate or vegetation, but about the total design and harmony of the garden. If we expand the plaza at this spot, it would overpower the pavilion which is a magnificent piece of the garden. Would be ideal to preserve the historic beauty and atmosphere. If everyone wants performance stage or social venue, then separate location or separate stage should be considered at one of the other options. Not in favor of Hmong plaza being expanded.

Haoyu Zhao:

How was 15sf per person calculation come up with?

Brett: looked at size recommendation for similar event/plaza areas.

Haoyu: without knowing frequency and type of events, want to take one step back and look at flexible space that can be both intimate and occasionally expanded. Concept B is most preferred because it is still very connected to Chinese Garden with arch around island. Visually connected. More spacious than the Hmong Plaza location. If we can use this space we can have maybe 300 people. No vegetation to contend with. Closer to the parking lots and access roads. More open and accessible.

CM Thao:

What is the SF of non-Hmong infrastructure? It would be helpful to know. To understand which is which. Answer (Note: Calculated after meeting from 2017 Master Plan and does not include shared landscape space):

Chinese building infrastructure: 5,577 SF

Hmong dedicated infrastructure: 3,284 SF

Ying stated the spiritual significance of the blessing ceremony, can we hear from the people who oppose it? Those who suggest moving the plaza, do you understand the significance of the ceremony and moving it?

Do they understand or need more information?



Third question. Is 200 arbitrary? Could it be 150?

Brett: relying on Hmong Advisory group for capacity.

Ying: Why didn't we talk about it before? Based on what he heard, it sounds like there is a desire to detach the Hmong Plaza from the China Garden which is not friendship. Not sure what the problem is because the current pavilion in Changsha has a large plaza behind it. Does not agree with changing of the location. Hmong people came from China. Does not feel good about detaching from China Garden

Susan:

50-person light use cultural center to 200 person events would think that there would need to be additional amenities like restrooms, security, etc.

William Zajicek:

Original design was turned over to parks in 2016. 200 capacity came up when they were in China and talking with primary architect (Jennifer) who's jaw dropped and she doesn't think the larger plaza will fit. Some question about how big that would be. Now seeing what the impact would be of a 200-person plaza in this space. Should not be developing a fully functional event center here. To have an event where you are providing meals or anything like that, you would have to rent picnic pavilion or golf course clubhouse. Does want to see the Hmong Plaza in the garden. It was part of the original idea and would like to see a way to accommodate it. Had a fashion show at the pavilion this fall with close to 200 people and it didn't work well because it isn't designed for that. Can have a designed plaza without a fixed capacity.

Ping:

Chinese people do understand what you mean by spiritual. For Hmong Plaza, we can still keep original idea of the site. If you want to expand function for an event, maybe find other place in the park. Also, didn't see blueprint of the stage for 200-person audience. Would like to see that before making final decision.

Jijun:

How to make the plaza work best for your purpose? Cultural events and ceremonies. I don't think the current location is right for those. Move to northwest. Still in China garden. Should not detach Hmong Plaza from China Garden.

Carol:

Had no idea that there was discussion about 200-person space until September. Completely understands why that site would now be very important due to the ceremony. Appreciate that Hmong advisors want this to be for the community but thinking about the green space that so many people appreciate about this, and knowing that the space would not be used year round due to the lack of a roof over it, would be taking away from what the site is appreciated for. Very large for this spot and agrees that if there is a desire for an event center, that be considered elsewhere.



Haoyu:

Understands Feng Shui is important but without rigorous evaluation of spatial impact, does not see the expansion as necessarily being different than original design of the garden. Does not want to cause any unnecessary competition for the Pavilion. One is tall architectural feature. One is flat space.

Linda:

Can Carol talk about Chinese Garden Principles if we want to accommodate what Ying is talking about? Programming impact and physical impact overwhelming the space.

Carol reiterated what Haoyu said about keeping spaces both equally visually interesting. Having gigantic space would be hard due to the balance.

Vallen:

Values that many people have concern and now it looks like we need to detach and not comfortable with that. Seems capacity or having the area of the whole garden – what has been dedicated China v Hmong. Is there a requirement for or distance between the plaza, pavilion, and gateway?

Ali

Appreciates all the statements made. Expansion needs to be an extended discussion. Need to recognize that from the archway the eye and the body are to be carried through to the pavilion and the lake. Garden is infinite and can be considered as a whole. Plaza carries civil and symbolic purpose which is different than a square or piazza. Plaza is a place where one considers in a pausing moment the cultural affliction in this case of the Hmong story. If we detach these pathways that guide the eye from archway to the pavilion, we are not able to consider the value of the site in relation to the pavilion. Plaza is not a plaza without the triangulation.

[8:00 PM] Brash, Carol (Guest)

I would also point out that in other Chinese gardens in the US (IE the Huntington) the event space is kept separate from the contemplative garden space, but they are visually connected.

[8:03 PM] Brash, Carol (Guest)

The ying yang of the original design between the plaza and the pavilion is balanced, as Ali intimated.

[8:04 PM] Stuart Knappmiller (Guest)

How will we deal with bikers especially who aren't stopping to contemplate?

Brett:



Will talk with designers and consider options before moving forward. Looking for opinions and thoughts about uniqueness and significance of the patterns that should be incorporated into the plan

## **Emailed Comments:**

Hi Hello Artists and Architects and China Garden Design Advocates,

I was most impressed with the civility and respect at the meeting tonight. Kudos to everyone. I also thought Brett, you did a good job of managing the meeting. thank you.

As to the design questions, if I ever had any doubts, they are now gone. I believe the Hmong Plaza in its original spot needs to be a quiet educational space, consistent with a China garden's appreciation of nature and balance within it.

In the meantime, I would love to see an event space somewhere in the area. I played with the idea of a compact venue for Hmong and, as Mr. Ying pointed out, all cultures to have events, and had fun trying to flesh out one based on circular nature of the Hmong pandau Elephant's Foot. In the attached design the center (a drain!) is also a Hmong symbol, the one for Home. I am not an architect, and for handicapped access, one of the entrances needs to be a proper slope, not stairs, but I am not the one to calibrate that. The raised pattern of the foot, the walls, need to become mosaic elements on the ground where access is necessary. But you get the idea.

I am just throwing this out there to get everyone thinking about possible design solutions that may also minimize impact on the site, wherever this large gathering space may be. This concept might work in any of the alternative locations, plus one Bill saw on the hill behind the pavilion near the pump house, an area that already has a depression.

Let's keep our minds open. And stay together.

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Last night's meeting was very informative for me, especially learning that additional plans for the plaza have been laid out a very long time ago. So it must be somewhat frustrating for people who were part of the original designing to "start over again"

What I took away was a sense that the already dedicated site would be best for the Hmong plaza. I liked what Ali stated, that this place should have a spiritual feeling within the whole "garden" To me it sounds like the goal of this plaza would be a celebration of the Hmong



heritage, a cultural monument. I liked the idea of keeping it a place of thoughtfulness and meditation; a smaller place that could be expanded occasionally depending on need.

I definitely feel that Hmong designs, symbols and art should be incorporated in the walls and backdrop; using them on the floor may be tough on the materials due to MN bitter winters.

I am looking forward to see how this develops.

**From:** William Pesek <williampesekcity@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Monday, November 15, 2021 8:26 PM

My vision and thoughts and with all due respect for those who have shared their own visions and thoughts to date.

Early on, when I first began communicating with Linda about 14 years ago, which lead to my selecting a location for the pavilion; then, a simple structure in our minds, about the size of a two car garage, 500 square feet, I envisioned a splendid structure, surrounded by nature's flora, with paths flowing from the main pedestrian walk, an even more tranquil atmosphere than Phalen Park's already tranquil natural park's setting. An existing bike path would be rerouted. A traditional perimeter wall would be built on all three sides to further identify this special place. Large welcoming entrance gates would announce the setting. The open non walled face would open to the lagoon serving as a picture frame view to the borrowed scenery of Phalen with its water, willows and the newly installed, Meditation stone carving gracing the opposite side of the lagoon.

This vision segwayed into the Phalen Park's Master Plan, approved by the City and Metropolitan Council, as it is classified as a Regional Park.

Sometime later, and with community input and the guiding hands from our landscape architect, Jennifer, from the firm of Hunan Jianke, Changsha, China, a most wonderful image began to emerge. It included a well deserved tribute to our neighbors living within the throws of Phalen Park. A wall with symbols of our neighbor's Hmong heritage was created and now stands behind the china pavilion building.

Also birthing and part of Hunan Jianke's master plan was the consideration to create an even more inclusive tribute; a Hmong Cultural Plaza, distanced from the pavilion but within the gateways of the garden. It would express the relationship to



their ancestral homeland, the country of China and its historical roots to Hunan Province, where Changsha lies. The footprint of this development suggested that it's projected space could accommodate 50 visitors. (that equates to the size of a typical 3 car garage, using 15 square feet per guest, a good design standard to implement. The average 3 car garage is in the 750 square foot range). It would have its own identity and scale and would serve as an educational venue for Hmong cultural history to be shared.

When this new, beautifully choreographed plan of the envisioned garden and video first arrived, I believe we all were awe stricken with its beautiful charm of a special place, a one of a kind in this city, state and nation.

Hunan Jianke's master plan was the culmination of research, experience and listening to input that had been obtained by initial neighbor input meetings, society input and perhaps a few hints on guidelines set forth by the City.

The plan did not discuss the hows or probability of the degree to which the need for public utilities such as security, water, sewer, electricity, bicycle routing to name a few would come with more in-depth discussions. It was a Concept or Grand Idea. It did lay out a visual perception of what this garden would encompass.

Now, we are working backwards into how this concept was put together and now we are receiving additional input from those interested, we are learning of guidelines set forth by the City and that is a healthy process. As an Advisory Team, we now need to examine and through a consensus process, set the course for creating the best of the best for all.

Now the topic of discussion is focused on creating a larger plaza space, able to accommodate 200 persons. (At 15 sf per person, that's the equivalent of 4-3 car garages in that space or 3,000 square feet or 4 times the size of Hunan Jianke's plan).

We must evaluate the ramifications of such a venue. As rightly mentioned, a ceremonial dedication has already staked its claim on the Hunan Jianke site. Considerations must be pondered so carefully as the land's existing usable footprint can not be compressed to a degree that the space loses its natural proportional beauty and places the adjacent ecosystem in jeopardy.

Yes, I certainly understand the desire and need to create spaces for large events.



Looking around the Park's premise and as already mentioned, we may have some sites that have great potential. At least one of them is the Amphitheater area. It has access to public facilities; ie. water and toilet rooms, can be designed to be more user access friendly, and can be made even more multipurpose in use then it is at present and can be made to be more emergency vehicle accessible. A large picnic pavilion is standing proud just a short distance away already and with improvements would serve as an outstanding center for multipurpose gathering and of course is a great rainy day option.

With that said, having a well designed, scale appropriate cultural plaza is most important. If larger events are scheduled, then perhaps those activities could spill over to the island itself, that location mentioned also in our last meeting. There could be a strong visual presence back to the Chinese pavilion and cultural plaza. There are logistics to every potential site that would need to be considered.

I was also hoping to see mosaics even around the existing pavilion but we have concrete slabs instead. There is an opportunity to create that pattern on the footprint of the cultural plaza but this discussion should come later as our committee's objective is to gain consensus on the scope of Phase 11.

Visions: The cultural plaza should be separated at its greatest of lengths from the main path (and unfortunately bike path) with landforms and vegetation. Keep steps out of this space. Use physical corridors of hardscape and vegetation to display, congregate and reflect. Make it a tranquil more meditative space; an outdoor educational focal point.

Hopefully my thoughts and visions will promote others to express their own feelings. It's most important to receive as much input as possible. I am confident we will arrive at a consensus that is best for all.

Bill Pesek  
Landscape Architect  
Advisor to the Board of Directors  
Member of the Phase II Design Committee

Was a very informative and revealing meeting. (I will need to find out how I can get recognized/tagged for the opportunity to speak at these meetings) Thanks to all who participated.