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Pedro Park 2019 Community Design Advisory Committee Meeting #4 Meeting Minutes*

February 5th, 2019 6:30-8:00 pm
81 on E. 7th St Paul, MN 55101

*Meeting minutes are intended to capture overall participation and summarize comments from City Staff and Advisory Member participants.

Ellen Stewart: (Welcome and Introductions)

Sue Ohlrogge – Renodis

Pat Wolf – Commercial Real Estate

Marc Basara – The Ackerberg Group

Jonathan Flory – The Pointe

Bill Collins – Rossmor Business Association

(Staff Intro)

Ellen Stewart, Landscape Architect and Project Manager for Pedro Park; CJ Fernandez, Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects; Mary Norton, Landscape Architect; Mike Hahm, Director of Parks and Recreation; Alice Messer, Design and Construction Manager. Planning & Economic Development: Dr. Bruce Corrie, Andy Hestness, and Hannah Burchill.

Decision considerations

When we are looking at designing a park, there are many factors - important considerations in the development of a park.

- Historic and physical context,
- funding,
- operations and maintenance so they stay looking nice for years to come
- regulatory reqs. related to health safety and welfare of the public

Site Context

Pedro Park site context, it's bounded on the North by 10th street, the alley to the south, PSA bldg. on the West and Robert St. to the E. We will be talking about the design today and the latest concept, but we will also share how we've looked at the design from the aspect of possible future expansion.

Timeline to date

- This Park has been 13 years in the making since the Fitz. Park plan.
- 2011-2012 a Design Advisory meeting looked at planning and phased approach to design. Over the years, there were several unsuccessful attempts at funding through the CIB process.
- 2017 the HRA requested proposals to explore PSA redevelopment
- 2018 voted to move forward with that development.

- 2019, a mix of previous and new participants in the Design Advisory Committee process to continue shaping this design and where we're headed.

General Considerations for Design for successful public space

Social,
comfortable,
accessible, and
comfortable.

The process for DAC meetings to date reflect the work this committee came together to work on. Several concepts came out of those conversations and continue to evolve to the current design. All reflect priority components that the community expressed for programming.

Turn over to CJ Fernandez - AFLA

Process

Reviewed comments that have been compiled and documented over the years and this idea of engaging the streetscape and future and near-term shade were very important. Desire for performance spaces. Integrating slope across the park and into the design is a challenge but also an opportunity.

Continuing from previous process – review context we began looking at context and how that is done in other places successfully. Based on what we were seeing, maybe this wants to be a more residential feel in the park space, a mix of multi-functional spaces. This is the current design concept.

- Important to plan with potential expansion in mind now to prevent missing an opportunity later.
- A key concept evolution was twisting the primary axis of the space from an EW orientation to NS and embrace that future connection.
- Create a pedestrian thoroughway at the edges and maximize the accessibility of the park.
- Design a park next to a building, not the other way around. It is important to understand how can it successfully coexist with the PSA but feel as it is designed for the public first?
- Accessibility
- Responding to lifting the park on the edges allows for better use of SW corner of park for programming

Keys to this design:

- Desire for this to be different from other downtown parks
- instead should have an urban residential feel, and
- has to be multi-functional spaces and uses
- There is a water feature up more prominent up on the hill and then transitions downward.
- The idea of legacy is something significant. The park holds the Pedro name, and as far as we know it will forever. This is something that is very significant and shouldn't be overlooked, so how can we create a park that can be a legacy to that gift.
- It is the capitol city here also, that is significant and plays to the legacy of a park. We looked at some of these forms in the design, but bringing them into the future for lasting legacy.

Animation:

There is a strong presence at the street edge with this shelter to truly engage the streetscape and provide needed shade. The idea of a “community table” exists underneath. There’s an equity component to this and bringing this down so anyone can use it. There is a unique art element on the building face, we started to pull that into park and celebrate it in different ways. The idea of a more passive space for play is introduced in the SW area of the park. We wanted to recognize that not all children play the same, so providing that option was important. There is a secondary shelter at the southern edge, this can be a literal frame if the park was to expand in the future. The splash component of the water feature is for playful interaction. It would be water on surface, providing an element that doesn’t exist currently for play downtown. The edges at Robert jog in and out of right of way to providing a variety of seating spaces. With the BRT along Robert in the future, this allows for various uses of the edge and circulation. Then there is a dog relief area at the south, provides an enclosed, but designated space for this. One thing we really like about the North corner is it can really be a way to draw people into the park and that there is also an opportunity to introduce public art. The Pedro store front has become the Pedro Park-front with this shelter at the north. I’ll show a diagram shortly that speaks to potential expansion. If the park was to expand, there are opportunities to construct these elements and adapt the park going forward. Before we get to that, are there any questions?

Night animation:

We’d like to light to the canopy of the roof that will give it an illumination at night. We can do this by integrating light fixtures into the community table. There would be up lights to all the trees, corner spaces, and whether or not we have light fixtures that cast it down is something more to come. The directive is to have the park is well lit, fully. The intent is to have it a softer light feel, make sure the elements are highlighted and features. Everywhere we have walking surfaces or walls we will have lights on those faces. The real objective is that we don’t have any shadows or dark spots in the park.

Pat: I think it’s a really nice plan, exciting to see. Concern about the child’s play area if there is a place for someone to hide.

CJ: We’ve thought about it in a few different ways, the lattice work is rendered in a way that feels more enclosed, but intent is that it breathes more and has better sight lines.

Jon: I have two questions – We talked about making the park usable in the winter time. How does it transform in the winter?

CJ: We talked about use and access in the snow – the stairs would likely be roped off, but all walks would be shoveled. I think that different things can happen for snow accumulation in the center. It depends on how it gets activated by the community, the space is there and available in winter however that takes shape, building snowmen etc. I think that’s something that we can work on more clearly defining in future meetings as well.

Bill: I have on my notes, winter usage – how does that fit into the scheme of things? It just occurred to me now that they close the market street to ice rink. We could use some love over on this part of town, could that activity move over here?

Ellen: Thank you Bill, one reason it's over there is that area is paved and can support the rink use and maintenance. It becomes very difficult to maintain an ice rink on grass. It is a balance of maintaining healthy green space in the summer

Jon: My second question, was in regards to the n. structure. Is the surface something that someone could climb up on it?

CJ: It's a precast structure, all edges are radiused so it would be difficult to climb. It is a definite consideration, but it's height and the articulation of the surface that will keep most of the people off.

Bill: I have to leave at 730 so want to get some comments in from my group before I head out. A lot of the surface in previous concepts looked at long sloping sidewalks, would that be a skateboarding issue and is that being taken into consideration? Technology changes quickly, there was no lime bike or bird scooters when we met last time for example. Would that become an issue in the park and how is that considered? Is the bldg. treatment shown in this rendering, what it will look like? Also, is the BRT location shown where it will be in the future?

Marc: Yes, the first floor will be an arcade with retail as illustrated, the upper floors would have windows and balconies.

Bill: We have heard the opposite about the BRT location, that it may be elsewhere on Robert. The current location shown is a problem for us. Also is there a planned bikeway along 10th? Parking is a concern for business owners in the part of downtown. Thing that got least votes was a water feature and now is a central feature – Dog area didn't get much attention. I think the design before was trying to be too many things, this one is more simple and open feeling which is good.

Alice: What we're heard is that the BRT preferred location is here. Capitol City Bikeway would be along 10th street.

CJ: One thing as we talked about in looking at the grades, up at the edge we tried to create a performance related space. There's a couple safety and maintenance concerns, to have full accessibility to all corners. The kinds of events that would happen in this space, could activate those edges. Movies in the park could occur, and utilize the central open space to.

Bill: As a producer, I see issues with the design and open space like it's shown. You may wish to consult with Steve Heckler, as a point person for ways to improve this. I think it would be a very difficult to have that open backdrop for a performance. Also having adequate power is important.

Ellen: Certainly a good point, we have been working with City event staff to discuss what types of performances would be here and what we should consider. We will continue to refine with that in mind. In regard to the water feature, the strategy was to be multi-functional - a way to have some playful interaction that kids and adults can interact with, but can also provide a backdrop to the noise of downtown in this space.

Bill – There just aren't that many kids downtown, I'm not sure how much that would be used.

Jon – There are actually quite a few families at my building, I know they would appreciate the water feature.

Bill – If the bus goes through and bikeway, that will be a parking desert. Very detrimental to the daytime businesses.

CJ: Thank you all for the feedback, I want to transition to looking at the potential expansion diagram. We want to make sure we're planning for it today, if it becomes a possibility in the future. We're studying how the grades could work from 10th street to 9th, they transition extremely well and help us maintain continuous transition between the parks. The arrows are simply showing the connection from Pedro Park and how that expansion could work. We would need to maintain access to the building, these alley access points show this. We would need to introduce a wall on the west side, but it would transition down to be a low wall and out. The edges would be an opportunity to continue to engage that streetscape along Robert and 9th Street.

Right now we don't have any specific program that we're referring to, just want to outline additional programmable space and areas for circulation.

Pat: Is that location where you're showing assuming you would be getting the parking on the west side of the daycare as well?

CJ: Yes, it assumes that piece would be a part of this to allow an alternative alley access to the PSA building.

Ellen: Any other questions on the diagram or concepts?

Bill: No, thank you – I really like the design.

Ellen – Since we have a smaller group tonight, we just wanted to organize a way to capture your feedback. That is this form here, but we can address at the table together. Are certain things that you are attached to or that you like about the space?

Jon – I really like the idea of lighting it at night, using uplighting for it and a softer approach.

Sue -Yes, I prefer that approach to having light poles.

Jon - The play feature / water feature will make it stand out from other parks, I like that is unique to downtown. It looks like a little more greenspace in previous concepts, but it feels much more green and open when we go through it. The biggest thing that I was wrestling with previously when going over to the existing site is imagining how we were going to do all this in the space. There's no way to fit all that into this space. It's surprising, I really like it.

CJ: Yes, it is a challenge for sure and took us a while to get that right balance of programming and circulation spaces.

Sue: The current grade may be throwing you off, once it's leveled off it may feel bigger.

CJ: One of the key changes is the pedestrian space is now all around the park, all four sides. I think engaging the public way around the park helps with this perception and continuity.

Sue: We have all the same stuff as before, but we somehow it feels much better. It's exciting. I worry about the play area thought and will it feel creepy at night? I really like the circular space here the window that looks out, but feels like a place that homeless people may go. I really like the design though.

Alice – Do you think there is an actual need for a play space or does the water feature accomplish this?

Sue – I don't have young kids anymore, but I could see possibly using it with grandkids. Do we have statistics on how many kids are downtown in this location?

Ellen – We do have that data, we could help look into how many are down here. I know the study was done back in 2011, but it's also important to recognize the demographics are changing.

Alice – We talked about the perception of safety here a lot, in some ways it's nice that it's protected from the street. In thinking about parents relaxing with a cup of coffee or something next to the space and not worrying the kids will be too close to the street.

Sue – I think a lot has to do with lighting, so maybe it'll be a non-issue.

CJ – Our directive is to have a well lit park, no shadows. One benefit to the arcade at the building is that it creates "eyes on the park" and this use would be adjacent to the play area. It allows the perception of public eyes and heightens visibility.

Jon – I have a lot of people complaining about the park being an extension of the building. I know that is a concern so wanted to bring it forward.

Ellen – We certainly want this to feel public first, and we want the building that coexist. We think this design actually articulated that relationship really well and hope that feeling comes through in the design. It feels like its own entity because there is more usable space and an orientation North/South rather than E/W with the building.

CJ: Are there any other comments?

Sue: There are a lot of different seating options here which is really nice. I'm looking forward to having lunch there.

Jon – I like the north structure, it's unique and will really make it stand out.

Sue – I actually didn't like it at first, but when I saw it illuminated I really did.

CJ: In MN you don't get the opportunity to be in exterior spaces with a high ceiling opens up and extends outside. This structure plays off that that relationship between inside and out. We took our cues from CHS field and how that mezzanine feels, it's this great experience of being sheltered but still engaging outside.

Jon – I remember looking at these past designs, I thought they would be nice but now that I see this one, I am really excited about it. I think the water feature is great, it doesn't cut up the park and it is one space. It can also function for both kids and adults.

Sue – How does the wood element hold up in MN climate?

CJ: It's an IPE hardwood – it's the only kind that can withstand, it's a 40 year wood. It cleans really well and is resilient in this climate. The concrete is a shotcrete finish, it's smooth trowel and gets anti-graffiti coatings that will help with a belt and suspenders approach. Someone will always figure out a way to vandalize, but we're trying to make it as difficult as possible.

Sue – What is the white band at the edges?

CJ: It's a concrete edging, something to articulate the edge and pattern. The stairs and seating elements are concrete the comes to the site already cast. As we start to dial in these items and evaluate the design, these will refine.

Ellen – The area that is rendered as pavers likely would be a different treatment of the concrete, diff. color, stamping etc. Pavers may not be the most viable solution.

CJ – One thing to note is that in bringing in fill – it's a benefit to bringing in this base and we can really incorporate a lot of BMPs to collect and treat stormwater. Access to stormwater is right next to the site. We'll continue to vet that going forward, but we can do some simple things to make that more beneficial.

Pat – What kinds of things are you thinking of in regards to flowers or color? In reference to the Pedro family, will there be an opportunity to pay tribute to them in public art or some other fasion? Is there an opportunity to incorporate something along the sidewalks and edges?

CJ – I think there is a lot of opportunity, we haven't specifically designed it at this point but intend to look more closely at that going forward.

Pat- I think about what they made in that building, suitcases and luggage - could that be something to pay tribute or incorporate?

Jon – It could also be something to acknowledge travel and all the different types of things they enabled us to do. I really like what you've done here. I think if anything to address, just making sure the production space and sound work well for performance. Even if there isn't something permanent there, could there be a way to bring in temporary screens or performances to make that more workable? It doesn't have to be built in necessarily.

CJ: Yes, it sounds like there is a good resource we can connect with to learn more on that.

Ellen – On that second question, maybe something to take with you and think about as you engage your groups. How do you see your representative group using the park? We want to make sure we're hearing from as many people to hear input on the process. I really appreciate you sharing your comments and time, is there anything else that would be helpful to you in reaching out to your communities?

Jon – Yes, it can be a really tough challenge to get people engaged.

Pat – One thing I would be willing to do would be to have a table set up in the skyway to catch attention over the lunch hours.

Jon – Maybe also Lunds will allow you to set something up in their entryway for an update to catch people.

Sue – Will the video be available? If you can get us that, it would be really helpful to share with groups. I would be happy to share the presentation and plan with my company for more insight.

Jon – It was interesting that I saw the design in the article of concept C rather than from the City. Maybe I missed an email, but it would be helpful to get that information ahead of time. Also, is the open house something that could be incorporated into the art crawl for feedback?

Ellen – My apologies if it was missed Jon, we sent the material from Concept C and the information that was going to the HRA meeting to all members ahead of time. Our intent is certainly to keep members informed and up to speed with the design as it evolves.

Alice – Jon that would be a cool way to engage artists at the crawl about the park, thanks for sharing.

Ellen - Our next meeting will be Feb 20th and are looking at having an open house in early March. We will send out the specifics on those dates and meetings that as they unfold. Thanks everyone!