

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2009

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:00 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members Senhauser, Spraul-Schmidt, Jones and McTurner present. Absent: Chatterjee, Kreider, Wallace and Young.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW, EXPANSION OF WASHINGTON PARK AND CONSTRUCTION OF AN UNDERGROUND PARKING GARAGE, OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Steven Schuckman, Cincinnati Parks Superintendent of Planning and Design, presented a Master Plan created for improvements to Washington Park to the Board. Dana Baker and Corinne Cassidy representing BDHP were also present.

Mr. Schuckman indicated that the Parks Department has been working with a consultant team led by Human Nature, Inc. and the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) to develop a master plan for Washington Park. The project site covers the entire block bounded by W. 14th, W. 12th, Race and Elm Streets. 3CDC will construct and then operate a new 500-car underground parking garage beneath Washington Park. The park will be renovated and extended over the top of the garage. Mr. Schuckman said that a series of community public meetings were used to gather public input. A steering committee including representatives from the community, Music Hall, OTR Chamber of Commerce, the OTR Foundation, residents and other stakeholders worked with the Parks Department and 3CDC to guide the planning process.

Mr. Schuckman briefly summarized the history, past uses and evolution of Washington Park. He indicated that an existing comfort station, pool, shelter and playground would be demolished leaving only the historic 1911 bandstand. The bandstand will be modified, lowering it 18" and adding a ramp on one side to make it more accessible. New buildings and structures included a civic stage, a concession stand, a comfort station, a bus shelter and portals for the garage. The concession stand will include an audio-visual station so that staff can easily respond to changes in stage conditions. Mr. Schuckman also pointed out that the garage will allow mechanical equipment to be located out of sight in the garage rather than above ground in the park. Additional amenities will include a civic green, a dog park, a playground with themes focused on historic neighborhood development, art and music, an interactive fountain, and a large civic green. New lighting, seating, furnishings, landscaping and walkways will be installed throughout the park.

The historic stone gateways on W. 12th Street will be relocated and new cast stone gateways will be installed to create additional entrances into the park. A 12" tall fence will be installed on the limestone wall that encircles the park to discourage people from sitting on it. The mature trees throughout the park would be retained and horticultural beds would be used to enhance entrances and select areas. An irrigation system will be installed to water plants. Two-way ramps for the garage will be located on Elm and Race Streets.

Using the same model as Fountain Square, the City will enter into a lease agreement with 3CDC to design, construct, maintain and operate the garage. The City will also be contracting with 3CDC to manage events, programming and maintenance of Washington Park.

The Board generally agreed that most aspects of the master plan were handled quite well and focused its comments on modifications to the bandstand, the design of the new buildings, lighting, the garage ramps, signage, and programming.

Mr. Schuckman confirmed for Jones that the 1911 bandstand was original to the park and would not be moved.

Mr. Senhauser expressed his disappointment in the proposed modifications to the bandstand. He commented that bandstands were elevated for a purpose, so that speakers and musicians could be seen and heard above a crowd. By lowering the bandstand, it would take on the appearance of a gazebo. Mr. Senhauser said that the bandstand did not have to be made ADA accessible.

In response to Ms. McTurner, Mr. Schuckman indicated that the structure would still be used as a bandstand occasionally but it would primarily function as a gazebo. Ms. McTurner commented that lowering the bandstand would fundamentally change its scale and design and this would be a disservice to the community. Ms. Spraul-Schmidt concurred, stating that modifying the park's sole historic building should be avoided.

Mr. Schuckman indicated that the planning team had struggled with this issue. He conceded that making the bandstand accessible for everyone will change the structure but felt it was important enough to pursue this modification.

Mr. Schuckman described the proposed lighting plan in greater detail for the Board. He said that a City standard double-head light would be utilized along the street. Single-head lights would illuminate pathways in the park. He said the civic stage would have "twinkle" lights and Tivoli tape lights. Two mastheads similar to those on Fountain Square would light the stage for performances. Temporary, supplemental lighting would be brought in as necessary.

The Board expressed strong reservations regarding the scale, height, and placement of the stage mast lights. Board members pointed out that similar lights installed at Fountain Square were highly visible elements that detracted from the space. The result could be the same in Washington Park and the Board asked if the stage could be lit with a different style of light fixture and indicated options should be investigated.

Mr. Schuckman responded that only two mast lights would be installed in Washington Park versus the four installed in Fountain Square. He also said that the lights would be largely shielded from view by plantings and the existing tree canopy.

Mr. Senhauser noted that the headhouses to the garage, the civic stage and the concession stand had an open, light, transparent design. By contrast, the comfort station had a much heavier, solid feel. Mr. Senhauser suggested that design of the comfort station and how it was articulated should be better integrated with the other new buildings. Mr. Jones agreed and asked if there was any consideration to the comfort station having a more organic form or details such as a green roof.

Mr. Schuckman commented that the comfort station needed to be durable and easily maintained. He said that the comfort station will have a green roof system and a trellis on one elevation. The comfort station could not be wholly transparent like the garage portals, but Mr. Schuckman agreed to investigate design modifications to make the comfort station relate to the other buildings in the park.

Mr. Senhauser read comments from Board member Ken Kreider transcribed from a conversation between staff and Mr. Kreider prior to the meeting. Mr. Kreider indicated he had some concern about the visual interruption of the park space by the Elm and Race Street ramps. He was curious to know if the ramps could begin in the street right-of-way to avoid ramps in the park itself, and if the design team had considered having one exit and one entrance into the garage.

Ms. Baker and Ms. Cassidy responded that the ramps were placed within the park for several reasons. They did not wish to disturb the historic granite pavers along Elm Street. Reducing the width of Race and Elm Street for ramps was also problematic due to an existing bus stop and shelter on Race Street and the potential streetcar route. A single entrance into and exit out of the garage was considered but deemed impractical. During peak usage cars would have stacked out into the public right-of-way to enter and taken too long to exit after an event. Ms. Baker further stated that the Department of Transportation and Engineering was already concerned about the impact of the current proposed on the street grid. In order to minimize the visual and spatial impact of the ramps, they were designed to be as steep as possible and still be safe to navigate.

Ms. Baker confirmed for Mr. Jones that the railings along the ramps represented the minimum height required and that the area around the ramps would be landscaped with trees and low plantings.

Mr. Senhauser asked if the informational kiosk at the corner of Elm and W. 12th Streets would be similar to the one installed in front of the Krohn Conservatory in Eden Park. Mr. Schuckman responded affirmatively saying that it would be an LED kiosk with educational and informational postings for events at the park, Music Hall and Memorial Hall. He said he was aware that there were zoning issues associated with this type of sign. Mr. Senhauser commented that the Krohn Conservatory sign was very bright and felt it was an intrusion that detracted from a significant park building.

Mr. Jones inquired if there were any existing Ohio Historical Markers in Washington Park. Interim Urban Conservator Adrienne Cowden responded that there were not. Mr. Schuckman indicated that various interpretive signs will be installed. The Board agreed that these types of signs were important and noted that they were well done in other parks throughout the City.

The Board raised a number of questions about programming for the park and expressed its desire that Washington Park retain its urban identity. In response, Mr. Schuckman said that the Parks Department would be working with 3CDC to program Washington Park with events and outdoor concerts. Every effort was being made to balance the needs of long-term and new residents and the facilities surrounding the park including Music Hall and Memorial Hall. The Parks Department had attempted to coordinate with SCPA and Cincinnati Public Schools during the planning process. However, how SCPA will ultimately use the park and its facilities is still undetermined. The Board indicated that regardless of how SPCA used Washington Park, there should be easy and direct access between the two facilities.

Mr. Schuckman confirmed for Mr. Jones that community representatives and organizations had been involved in the planning process. He indicated that one of the biggest issues with community representatives was the loss of the deep-water pool operated by the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. He pointed out that various neighborhood agencies operate pools and CRC pools near Findlay Market, on Sycamore Street and on Linn Street will remain open. He said CRC has been replacing swimming pools in the City with spray fountains, which are easier and cheaper to maintain, provide more varied play options and a longer season of use.

Mr. Jones inquired if the park would be used at night. Mr. Schuckman answered that there would be evening events but that the park would close at 10:00 P.M.

BOARD ACTION

No official Board action was required.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Senhauser suggested that the Board may wish to express formally its support of the proposed Cincinnati Streetcar. He said the streetcars are in the interest of historic preservation by promoting livable, walkable communities and supporting the long-term viability of historic districts. Staff suggested the Board may wish to consider acting on a formal resolution in support of the streetcars.

Mr. Jones and Ms. McTurner indicated that the OTR Foundation and Cincinnati Preservation Association was working with City staff on a proposed receivership program for historic buildings and that these organizations have asked for a meeting with various departments to discuss the need for and benefits of historic conservation.

ADJOURN

As there were no other items to be considered by the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Adrienne Cowden
Interim Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser, Chairman

Date: _____