



SUMMARY

Community Workshop 1: Visioning & Positive Change

Date / Time: Saturday, May 13, 2017 (10 AM – 12 PM)

Location: Alaska Center for the Performing Arts | Harrison Lobby

Staff

- Steve Rafuse, Project Manager, MOA Parks and Recreation Department
 - Van Le, AICP, Planning Project Manager, R&M Consultants, Inc.
 - Mark Kimerer, ASLA, Landscape Architecture Lead, Bettisworth North
 - Taryn Oleson, Planner & Public Involvement Coordination, R&M Consultants, Inc.
 - Erik Jones, Landscape Designer, Bettisworth North
 - Molly McCracken, Recreation Events, MOA Parks and Recreation Department
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Advisory Group Members

Dianne Holmes | John Blaine | Tanya Iden | Nina Bonito Romine | Jennifer Richcreek | Darrell Hess | Nancy Harbour | Shannon Kuhn | Elise Huggins | Jonny Hayes | Erin Baca
Ken Pendleton

Total Attendance from Sign-In: 34 (see Sign-In for List of Attendees)

Summary

The first community workshop for the Town Square Park Master Plan was held at the Alaska Center Performing Arts on May 13, 2017 (10am to noon). The meeting is the first in a series of four public workshops. The goal of this first workshop is to set a positive tone for the planning process and to begin identifying the community's vision for the future of Town Square Park.

Introduction and Opening Remarks: The workshop began with introductions and opening remarks. Steve Rafuse, MOA Project Manager provided a brief introduction and overview of the meeting agenda and master plan process before introducing Mayor Ethan Berkowitz, who shared an inspiring message and encouraged continued participation in the process. Following the Mayor's remarks, Steve discussed some of the outreach and meetings held to date and provided a summary of "what we've heard so far".

Large Group Visioning and Positive Change: To set the tone for the larger group discussion, Mark Kimerer, Bettisworth North provided a brief history of past planning and development

for Town Square Park and described the evolution of the park over the years. Building upon this, Van Le, R&M Consultants, Inc. led participants in an exercise to “Dream Big” and share their vision for the next 20 years at Town Square Park. “Large Group Visioning” comments were recorded and are summarized below.

Power of 10 Exercise: Following the large group visioning exercise, Van Le, R&M Consultants, Inc. provided instructions to complete the small group Power of 10 exercise. The Power of 10 exercise encourages groups to identify their top three priority issues or concerns, three short-term ‘clean and green’ ideas, and ten long-term ‘dream big’ ideas for Town Square Park. By asking participants to provide ten different ideas for long-term park improvements, participants are pushed to think beyond their personal interest and consider the needs of everyone from the 8 to 80 year olds. Following table discussions, a representative from each table reported back the common themes and agreement items to the larger group. “Power of Ten” comments were documented and are summarized below.

Wrap Up and Next Steps: After all groups shared their Power of 10 results, participants were thanked for attending and provided information about upcoming Town Square Park meetings and events. A second Community Workshop will be held on June 3rd, 2017 from 10 AM to Noon in the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

Large Group Visioning

Participants were led in a large group visioning exercise. Individuals were asked “if you left Anchorage and came back in twenty years, what would your ideal Town Square Park look like when you returned?” Individuals stood up and described their vision of Town Square Park. Comments were recorded and are grouped by common theme below.

- Food trucks, musicians, an active draw for people – more than sculptures in the park – we need an active reason for people to be in the park
 - The food trucks recently in the park have brought families with kids into the park for the first time in years
 - Walking labyrinth
 - TSP enclosed as an Arboretum for year-round use
 - Timeframe it can be enjoyed in currently is small
- Provide public restrooms – nice ones!
- “Square” and “Park” seem to be in conflict with each other – Squares invite participation in a very different way than a Park – it may be more appropriate for TSP to be a Square
 - Park Strip and Egan Center are underutilized and meet certain needs – TSP needs to fill the gap
- Actually bring the park to the new edges of the space
 - Blurring the line of ownership, what is park, what is PAC, what is parking – bring the park all the way to the front doors of the adjacent businesses
 - Park as the “Front Yard” of the eventual housing that needs to be brought into downtown

- Better connection to the park and all the businesses on the block – they need to be connected and integrated to create the heart of downtown we want and think it should be
- Consider even more than the ‘whole block’ – think of G St. on the other side of the PAC too
- Traffic speeds of 5th and 6th avenue reduced and changed to 2-way streets
- Lighting
- Pieces of art as well as function
 - Include public art, color, vibrant materials – current concrete is not inspiring
 - Color and vibrancy – include art as a way of activation
 - Sculptures ‘not just made of ice’ but for year-round enjoyment
 - Incorporation of water
 - Elevated platform to see the ocean and Denali
- Accessibility to ALL Alaskans
 - Back entrances of the PAC could be open up as a quick-fix to accessibility issues
 - Hazardous for elderly to make it to the park –safe access to the park by vehicle and other transportation modes (bike, walk, transit)
 - Handicap accessibility for the park and the PAC needs to be improved – there’s no loading/unloading area and no access into the park
 - Accessibility in general should be incorporated into both the park and the PAC design
 - Elderly are relocating out of downtown because of very limited access and parking is confusing
 - Everyone’s access must be considered – the Park and PAC access are the same and needs to be addressed together
 - Parking signs are very vaguely worded and is confusing – if people feel like they can’t park, load and unload safely they will not come downtown
- Town Square as a place where young people can imagine and reimagine their city – it should be a safe place made to inspire, allow for and encourage creativity.
 - Dynamic, imaginative, inspiring space for kids
 - Fun and clever
- Safety of people and amenities like tables and chairs is a priority
- Park is too secret – it needs to be opened up – remove the berms and make it feel open and inviting
 - Remove berm between park & 6th avenue to provide views into the park – let people see in as people pass by
 - Openness is important
- Incentivize participation from non-profits to use the park
- Trees in the park provide memories and a connection to history – paving has compromised the original design

Power of 10 Exercise

Participants worked in small table groups of 6-8 people to complete the Power of 10 exercise. Each group was asked to identify their top three priority issues, three short-term 'clean and green' ideas, and ten long-term 'dream big' ideas for Town Square Park. By working together participants are encouraged to share ideas, listen to different perspectives, and find common ground. Comments were recorded and are organized by group below.

Group 1

Priority Issues

- Accessibility
 - ADA compliance, direction of 5th and 6th Avenue to allow pedestrian passenger side of car drop-off
- Colorful, beautiful destination

Short Term "Clean and Green"

- Encourage Vendors – food and music
- Temporary closures of adjacent streets for events (E St)

Long Term "Dream Big" Power of 10

- Labyrinth – holiday/transient adaptable labyrinth
- Wheel-chair accessible (ADA compliant) event with music and food
- Soft place to sit and have a picnic without requirement to buy (brown bag welcomed)
- Relaxing hub for outdoor break - to sit and people watch while doing other downtown activities (eating, shopping, walking)
- Table games – checkers, Maj Jog, chess, backgammon
- Destination Meeting Place and Intersection Hub to go to/come from other places
- Winter use – lighting, ability to still eat (roasting chestnuts), space heaters, activities
- Change Car Traffic – 5th and 6th Ave and parking
- Plug and Play Event Infrastructure – awning

Group 2

Short Term "Clean and Green"

- Provide valet parking on call for PAC
- Portable shell for music with cool tables and chairs that are able to be stored away, covered area for eating when it rains – a Party Truck with all necessary equipment
- Sidewalks with heaters need to be turned back on and continue all the way around the park
- Make a new parking lane to provide improved access on the south side of the park and PAC
- Close streets around the park for 'X' hours a day
- Food trucks in and around the park

Long Term “Dream Big”

- All the buildings around Town Square interact with each other – use the Egan Center
- Make covered walkways to Town Square Park with greenery all year round – provide interesting stuff
- Woonerf Concept (which views streets as social spaces, not just as a vehicle corridor) – do away with the curbs, blend park into the surroundings (bring the park to the front door of the businesses)
- 20 years there will be more places for people to choose to live downtown (not just the expensive inlet apartments)
- Public bathrooms
- Have Kobuk orient itself into the park
- Making 5th and 6th Ave part of the park
- Ephemeral art all summer long (like the old Sky Art Festivals of the 1980s)

Group 3

Priority Issues

- Better universal access to PAC and Park

Short Term “Clean and Green”

- Reactivate E Street Plaza, turn it back on
- Better outreach to residents inviting them to the park – Ex. Contact businesses to tell employees about events, employees tell customers/visitors
- There is currently a lack of furniture – add more tables and chairs, chess and checker tables
- “Classroom in the Park” focused on arts

Long Term “Dream Big”

- Drop the terrain – it’s too high – good example is the Performing Arts Center in Spokane
- Get rid of much of the pavement – for concerts, etc. use of stage, people won’t sit on concrete but they would sit on grass
- Incorporate skateboard park
- Open, grassy spaces where people can lie down, sit and watch what is going on around them
- Year-round sculptures/public art
- Graphics/art incorporated into pavement/concrete
- Adjacent streets are for pedestrians, not vehicles
- Pedestrian connection along E or F Street from Peratrovich Park to Town Square Park to Delaney Park Strip
- Cafes at the end of the park, park edges are the buildings on the other side of the adjacent streets – streets for pedestrians
- Fitness stations

Group 4

Priority Issues

- Late night safety issue – need safety officers, improved lighting and access – use F St by Egan Center and Sky Bridge
- Continue foot patrol officers dedicated to downtown and not share them with Spenard, Mountain View, etc. – dedicate officers to each area so they can focus and productively patrol the area
- More events to reduce undesirable element and reduce permit fees and process to make it easier

Short Term “Clean and Green”

- Half-viewable restrooms so people can't hide in port-a-potties
- Benches and places to sit with games to play

Long Term “Dream Big”

- AK History and culture – displayed – WWII also, statue, walls of history, “history walk”
- Flowers – continue and more of them
- Open streets for pedestrians – like in front of Williwaw/Flattop and F St. plaza of PAC
- Reverse 1-way streets on 5th and 6th so handicap can get out on the sidewalks better (wider sidewalks?) and increase signal length so the handicap can get across the street.
- Keep the trees but placement/layout needs to change
- Using tech apps to incorporate Alaskan culture, history, things to do that use Town Square as a central point and gets people walking around – guiding tours
- Determine carrying capacity of park as it is a small space

Group 5

Priority Issues

- What is an idea of underutilization? Different groups of people, using space differently
- Access busy streets surround the park
- “embracing” as a culture (understanding vs pushing homeless out of the space)
- Parking – too cold to walk longer distances

Short Term “Clean and Green”

- Public piano
- Vendor spaces
- Private/public partnerships
- Free wireless internet

Long Term “Dream Big”

- Year-round utilization of space
- Multi-use buildings that extend to very edge of the park (eliminate 5th and 6th)
- Open but protected, utilizing renewable energy to provide heat for year-round use

- Public bathroom with outreach services
- Enclosed space (green room)
- Winter gardens
- Accessibility lane/thoroughfare
- Permanent structures (stages, tables, benches, auditorium)
- Incorporation of native art/culture (mural)
- Move grassy/elevated space to the middle of the park

Group 6

Priority Issues

- Parking – inclusiveness and coordination with program parking
- Access and heated sidewalks always turned on
- Access and opening into the park (traffic agency)
- Disability and visibility and safety
- Create a pause or destination that has amenities (bathrooms, wash hands, etc.) – facilitate the stay

Short Term “Clean and Green”

- Inject programming – physical (dance lessons, yoga), performances (not all musical), temporary art installations, bring animals from the zoo, education, fair/carnival/bounce house
- Close E Street 5th or 6th for PAC performances as drop off or at programmed hours for lunch in the park
- Make the berms/lawn productive (food, agriculture, etc.) and curb modifications
- Chalk Art Challenge

Long Term “Dream Big”

- Bring down the berms or elevate the center, save the trees, elevated planters
- Consistent community programming (food, education, workshops, activities)
- Performance and installations
- Sculptures/public art
- 2-way 5th and 6th Ave with ADA parking and accessibility/flush access
- Expand/reestablish the ice rink, lighting and improve winter use
- Bathrooms and amenities
- Water feature or interactive ecosystem fountain
- Bring the inside out

Meeting Materials:

- Sign-In Sheets
- Display Boards
- Power of 10 Exercise
- Comment Forms