



SUMMARY

Community Workshop 2: Place Audit

Date / Time: Saturday, June 3, 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.

Advisory Group Members

Dianne Holmes | John Blaine | LaQuita Chmielowski | Jennifer Richcreek | Darrell Hess
Sharon Chamard | Sandy Potvin | Jonny Hayes | Ken Pendleton | Caren Mathis

Total Attendance from Sign-In: 29 (see Sign-In for List of Attendees)

Summary

The second community workshop for the Town Square Park Master Plan was held at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts on June 3, 2017 (10am to noon). The meeting is the second in a series of four public workshops. The goal of this workshop is better understand how the physical attributes of Town Square Park and surrounding areas influence park user's overall experience. Input from this workshop will be used to help inform future design, safety, and programming recommendations.

Introductions and Meeting Overview: The workshop began with introductions and an overview of the agenda and master planning process by Steve Rafuse, MOA Project Manager. He outlined the goals and objectives of this process and recapped some of the common themes heard so far.

Recap of Workshop 1: Following the opening remarks, Van Le, R&M Consultants provided a summary of 'what we heard' at the first Community Workshop. During the first workshop, attendees were encouraged to "dream big" and envision their ideal Town Square Park 20-years into the future.

Place Audit Exercise: Steve Rafuse, MOA Project Manager provided an overview and instructions for the Place Audit Exercise. He explained that the purpose of the Place Audit is better understand how the physical attributes of Town Square Park and surrounding areas influence park user's overall experience.

Participants were given two maps: 1) Access and Connections, 2) Uses and Activities. In small groups of two or three, participants had 30 minutes to travel around the park and surrounding areas. They were asked to record observations directly on the maps and highlight areas based on their level of comfort in that given area. Colors were coded similar to a stop light: Green = good, comfortable; Yellow = okay, somewhat comfortable; Red (or pink) = bad, uncomfortable.

After half an hour in the park, attendees reconvened in the Harrison Lobby and settled back at their tables. Groups were given 20 minutes to discuss their observations and create a summary map representing areas where there was consensus for levels of comfort in the park and noting where there was disagreement.

Following table discussions, Mark Kimerer, Bettisworth North prompted a representative from each table to report back to the larger group what their table found consensus on and any issue or opportunities they saw during their site walk. Comments are summarized below and Place Audit Maps are attached to this summary.

Wrap Up and Next Steps: After all groups shared their Place Audit results, participants were thanked for attending and provided information about upcoming Town Square Park meetings and events. The next Community Workshop will be held on August 19th, 2017 from 10 AM to Noon in the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

Small Group Place Audit Exercise Report Back

To better understand how the physical attributes of Town Square Park and surrounding areas influence park user's overall experience, workshop participants spent thirty minutes in the park recording observations and highlight areas based on their level of comfort. Participants then worked in small table groups of 6-8 people. During this time they discussed their findings and tried to synthesize their observations into one comprehensive group map. By working together participants were encouraged to share ideas, listen to different perspectives, and find common ground. Comments were recorded and are organized by group below.

Table 1

- Too much concrete – cold, uninviting “concrete wasteland” in middle of the park
- Hills are too high and turn the park's back on the surroundings - they hide activities and create safety issues
- Planted areas along the F street corridor are pretty good
- Hills should not be higher than the first green spaces by the PAC to increase visibility, while still keeping the green spaces, making it more welcoming
- Stadium seating is too high, intimidating

- Sidewalks feel wide and safe for some members in the group, while others felt the connectivity was poor
- Need a better relationship with the Kobuk - the space at the back of the Kobuk is undetermined space, making it uncomfortable
- PAC needs landscaping to blend in
- Public restrooms are needed
- Blank wall on north side of PAC could use some adornment or a mural
- Typical travel in the area is around the sides of the park because it is not comfortable to walk through the middle – due to poor visibility and an unwelcoming environment
- Needs sidewalk trees along 6th Ave
- Underground the utility boxes along E Street
- Need lighting in the park

Table 2

- Too much concrete in the middle of the park, use different materials like grass
- 5th Ave noise + pollution, make 2-way
- Members of the group disagree on the hills - some want access on all 4 sides while others feel the hills keep noise and pollution out
- Better lighting
- Trees hide buildings in summer
- Flowers and green space = good
- Large groups congregating in areas of the park are intimidating and make it feel unsafe
- Choke point coming in through the E Street plaza is an issue
- More bike parking
- The spot by the Kobuk in the northeast side of the park is unused/unusable space
- Fence by the Kobuk is not good, but recognize why it may be needed
- Parking area by Kobuk is unusable – business vs park?
- Electric boxes by E Street are unsightly and not inviting

Table 3

- No continuity between the park and Egan Center
- 5th and 6th Ave – slow traffic/traffic calming, bike lanes, drop offs, replant tree grates
- More tables and chairs
- Improve lighting
- Screen utilities on E Street
- Steps are dangerous
- Color on steps, or a splash pad
- Hill height is problematic for visibility and safety - they are nice in concept but a lower height limit would be beneficial
- E Street area doesn't feel like it is part of the park – maybe because of the pinch point it creates?
- Spaces in the park that are open are comfortable - areas that are more closed off (berms, trees, tiered areas, fences) feel unsafe
- ADA access to the PAC
- Amenities - more signage and bike parking, trolley system
- 'Welcome' signs are there and say you're at the park, but send a message of "No, you cannot do that activity here" – make them more positive and add an event bulletin board so when you are walking by to give you a reason to stay or return later

- F Street plaza has good connections but needs a focal point

Table 4

- 5th and 6th Avenues should reverse directions or they should become 2-way
- Mounds/berms hide what is happening in the park - berms along 6th Ave are unusable space
- You can't see into the park from the commercial uses on 6th Ave because of berms
- F and E Street entrances feel welcoming but lack a visual focal point
- Generally, the park lacks visual focal points, especially when looking into the park
- Large groups gathering create bottle necks along pathways
- E Street Plaza is unused – what is the purpose?
- Confusing entry along E Street – Kobuk or Park?
- No relationship between the Park and the Kobuk
- No visual or physical continuity between the Park, the PAC and the surrounding businesses
- Middle area is good for events, when there are no events it is just a big concrete area
- Large concrete steps are dangerous
- Elevated brick plaza area – not ADA, what's the purpose?
- Lighting is not good, very dark in winter
- Good views of the whale wall from the park
- ADA Access to PAC - Drop-off lane for the park and PAC needs to be addressed
- NE access walk is pretty but visitors feel uncertain about what lies beyond
- Make a historical walk through the park
- History of bricks is unknown to visitors
- Bike parking needs to be added

Table 5

- Access at the corners of the park is good, but at E Street it bottlenecks into the park in an un-inviting way
- Sidewalk is narrow along PAC south border
- Hill obstruct views from what is happening inside the park – lower hills
- Concrete core is good for events, lost space when not programmed
- Parking and access to TSP and PAC is especially difficult in winter – sidewalks, curbs and ramps are not well constructed and maintained
- Parking and drop-off needs – add temporary areas that are parking/loading zones when events are occurring at the PAC and when there are not PAC events it is used for park space with mobile planters and pop-up park features
- There is nothing for kids and families to do in the park
- Opportunity to make the space by the Kobuk more integrated with the Park
- Kobuk is historic asset
- Utility boxes along E Street “visual blight”
- Respect the legacy of Ruth Moulton

Table 6

- Accessibility and programming are key
- Berms block access and connection into the park, need to be lowered – the park feels like a bowl right now

- Can hills be lowered? Keep visibility while keeping the texture, wavy interest, character
- Hills – Pros: seating for shows, scenic; Cons: Block visibility
- E Street and 6th Avenue is the worst entrance - you don't know you are in the park and what is beyond the berms - pinch points feel unsafe and are unwelcoming
- E Street Plaza is “non-functional”
- Design of Williwaw + streetscape promotes a strong sense of pedestrian oriented place
- 5th and 6th Ave - slow down traffic/too many lanes; noise, too loud to even have a conversation by the sidewalks, preventing it from being a more enjoyed space
- Food and vendors bring in more people and make it feel better
- Relationship between the park and the Kobuk needs to be improved
- Wayfinding signs are nice, but have a negative message, the signs are well placed except for the areas on 6th Avenue
- Graffiti = bad
- Add event board at the entrances to welcome visitors + notify of upcoming events
- Splash pad for summer play, could be used for ice skating in the winter

Additional discussion points:

- Mayday trees in the park are non-native and invasive, and while they are nice to look at, they are negatively impacting our greenbelts and waterways
- Cement, while better for accessibility and allowing events to roll in and out, looks like unattractive cement
- Needs more positive uses – food vendors, activity year-round – flexibility of uses needs to be the priority, not a single use or a few specified uses.
- Accessibility to the park and PAC – the PAC needs a little love
- More young people need to be involved in this process since they tend to be the main users of the space and will inherit it
- We are keeping the park closed off with the berms, everything is a secret - we need to make it inviting, welcoming, green and flexible
- Town Square Park needs to be comfortable with room for everyone, that feels open and free – I want to be inspired when driving by

Post-it Note Comments to Workshop 1 Summary

- More green space would be more attractive
- Railings on stairs for improved mobility
- Make the park more visible from 6th Ave (remove or lower the existing mounds)
- Encourage food trucks
- More activities in the park
- Public bathrooms are needed
- Less concrete
- Keep the hills/mounds and as much grass/green as possible –concrete is so uninviting
- Set up chess tables
- Leave hills high along sides of the park

Meeting Materials Attachments:

Sign-In Sheets

Place Audit Exercise Directions

Place Audit Exercise Results

Comment Forms