

City of Ashland
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Large Donation / Lithia Park Master Plan Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes
October 30, 2017

ATTENDEES

Present: Commissioners Rick Landt and Matt Miller (Miller serves on the Parks Foundation board as well); Parks Foundation board members Marge Bernard and Jeff Mangin; Director Michael Black; Interim Parks Superintendent Jeffrey McFarland; Supervisor for Forestry, Trails and Open Space Jason Minica

Absent: None

CALL TO ORDER

Director Black called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. at the APRC Administration Office, 340 S. Pioneer Street.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

a. Open Forum

There was none

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were none

NEW BUSINESS

a. Large Donation Earmarked for Lithia Park Japanese Garden

Black asked if everyone was aware of the large donation provided by Ashland resident / Ashland Parks Foundation board member Jeff Mangin. Black said he and Mangin sought out possible bidders for the complete renovation of the Japanese-style garden in Lithia Park. He said they were looking for landscape architects with the capability and proven background to design an authentic Japanese garden.

Black said he and Mangin met with two architects: Hoichi Kurisu of Kurisu International and Toru Tanaka of Japanese Garden Specialty, both having strong associations with the Portland Japanese Garden. Black said he and Mangin walked the Lithia Park Japanese-style garden with both architects. Black said no decisions were made as yet; this meeting was an opportunity to update the Subcommittee about the two firms, both capable of doing the work. Mangin said that prior to meeting with the architects, a certain amount of work was required: identifying the architects, talking with them, then checking references from previous clients.

Discussion

Landt said the current Japanese-style garden had too much slope and too many berms. Alternatively, a neglected spot in Lithia Park that was relatively flat, had substantial water and was in need of renovations was the Upper Duck Pond. Landt said utilizing a flat area in need of work and transforming it into something beautiful was an attractive idea. Mangin said his own impetus for using the current location was that the Japanese-style garden had been a favorite spot for his late wife and himself and he wanted to pay tribute to her. Mangin said the current site was perfectly fine for creating a Japanese garden; not all Japanese gardens had large lakes. Mangin said what they were foreseeing for the site included a creek running through, a waterfall and a koi pond on a smaller scale. Mangin said it was amazing what a good designer could do in very small spaces. Mangin recommended that everyone visit the Lebanon Community Hospital to see the spectacular Japanese garden measuring about a quarter of an acre. Mangin said there were many different styles for such gardens, some requiring no water.

Landt said his major concern was that the Parks Commission was preparing to launch a 100-year Lithia Master Plan that would include an estimated cost for maintenance over the next 100 years. Mangin said he was very aware of the maintenance required for Japanese gardens, which was highly specialized. He said he was committed to ensuring that sufficient funding was provided for one full-time, dedicated, trained Japanese gardener for that location. Landt said that over 100 years, that would be a huge amount of money. Black said they did not know at this time how the funding would be laid out for the entire park over 100 years but it needed to be considered. Landt said he often thought about how APRC's maintenance requirements impacted its ability to keep the park system functioning. Landt said if APRC over-committed too far into the future, Ashland's parks could become weeds and dry grass, since maintenance would be unaffordable. Landt said if one considered the Butler-Perozzi Fountain in Lithia Park, it was clear that it didn't get much use because of its location. Landt said regardless of where it was placed, a certain level of effort was needed for fountain repairs and APRC was currently looking at \$250,000-500,000 to restore the fountain. He said this level of restoration was required every 20-30 years.

Circling back to the Japanese-style garden, Black said they hadn't pinpointed the designer so they didn't have a landscape design as yet. Black said it would be an expensive project but they didn't know how much it would cost. He said both architects had suggested hiring someone from Japan to serve as the maintenance person; however, he and Mangin talked about finding an experienced person from the US. Black said they also didn't know the total function of the proposed garden and whether or not revenues could be generated. Landt said he didn't want the project to get too far along, then later discover that the maintenance was unaffordable. Landt asked whether Black and Mangin were already committed to the project and if the garden would require one or up to three maintenance people. Mangin said they believed one full-time person trained in Japanese garden landscaping practices would be sufficient. Landt asked if supplemental help would be needed at times. Mangin said there was a volunteer program in place, with some volunteers already dedicated to the garden. Black said they were thinking that the dedicated Japanese garden maintenance worker could train volunteers and other APRC maintenance staff about the specific work needed in that area. Landt said he would feel relieved to hear that one dedicated maintenance person could do the majority of the work, with others helping on occasion. Landt said he was asking for a maintenance plan.

Mangin said his vision was that all of the funds for maintaining the garden would be paid separately so as not to negatively impact other parks or the overall APRC system. Mangin said he would like the garden to be fiscally self-sufficient. He said there were a number of ways to generate revenues such as admission fees or wedding fees. Mangin said the garden budget was critical and half of the project cost was for maintenance. Black said it was important to map out its maintenance over 100 years and determine how to care for it through an endowment. Mangin said there might be people willing to regularly donate to keep it beautiful. Black said people might see it and consider it a jewel and wish to take part in funding the maintenance. Landt said a Japanese garden in Lithia Park was probably going to be popular in terms of donations of items / amenities rather than for maintenance. Landt said APRC could put up fencing and charge admission but that was unrealistic. Landt said Mangin's endowment was appreciated but finding someone to continue the endowment would be a challenge for the longer term. If a longer-term endowment couldn't be secured, maintenance costs would end up coming out of the APRC General Fund. Landt said it would help him to see examples of other Japanese garden locations that were maintained through long-term maintenance endowments.

Black said this group would be considering all matters under discussion and answering all questions. He suggested moving on to a review of the information gathered by Mangin and Black through their research.

Project Structure, Funding and Proposed Features

Black said the business structure for the garden began with a discussion at an Ashland Parks Foundation meeting in which it was decided to create a Japanese Garden / Large Donation Subcommittee. He said the current funding in place was approximately \$930,000. Mangin said he was committed to increasing that to \$1.5M. Mangin said the garden had a two-fold purpose: one was for the community's needs and the other, tourism. Mangin said Japanese

gardens were tourist destinations. In terms of construction, Mangin said it might be handled by a combination of local and out-of-town contractors, with some construction handled by APRC maintenance staff. Mangin said the garden footprint was three quarters of an acre at the present time and they were looking at the possibility of expanding it to 1.5 acres. Mangin said fencing would be needed due to deer and the fencing would be included in the garden designs. Mangin said garden features might include a koi pond, a waterfall and a natural creek. Black said both designers expressed that, with the right scale, they could fit everything into the expanded footprint. Mangin said water for a fountain could be recirculated within a closed system, possibly using Ashland Creek water. Black said water sources could be the creek or the upper duck pond. Landt said he didn't think they could legally do a water diversion from Ashland Creek. Bernard asked what was preferable about having water from Ashland Creek; Black said it was freely running water. Mangin said it would make for a simpler, healthier system that wouldn't require sophisticated filter systems and pumps. Mangin suggested not shutting down any possibilities. Landt suggested checking with the Division of State Lands or the State Water Board about any water use restrictions.

Garden Styles

Mangin said there were different garden styles and the garden could also have different sections within it. Mangin said Kurisu specialized in healing gardens. A tea house could be included but those were expensive to build. Bernard said the Japanese garden in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park was large and included a tea house.

Garden Cost

Mangin asked if the number \$100,000 per year was a correct salary figure for an employee dedicated to garden maintenance. Black said that was in the ballpark of a \$60,000-per-year employee (salary, plus fringe benefits). Landt asked if a highly trained employee from Japan could be found for \$60,000 per year. Black said his figure was an estimate but they could talk to the two architects to find out if that amount was sufficient. Black said he'd estimated it as a \$30-per-hour job plus benefits.

Financial Donations

Mangin said he received a call from local attorney Jack Davis who asked about placing a memorial bench in the garden for his late father. Mangin said he also spoke to the Director of Horticulture of the Meyers Garden in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Director indicated that he hired Kurisu International to do a \$22-million-dollar project: a 10-12-acre garden. Mangin said the Director told him they set structures and amenities aside for which people could donate, including bridges and benches. Black said in terms of supply and demand, there would not be much in the way of supply and there could be a great deal of demand for sponsored items. Landt suggested charging \$1,000 for an endowed bench, with that price including maintenance. Bernard suggested allowing people to donate to different areas of the garden. She said that would be a way to capitalize on donations at the start of the project. She suggested that each bench have more than one name / donor. Black said APRC hadn't done a good job of defining how long benches in Ashland parks could be dedicated to one donor. He suggested, when replacing worn out benches, that benches could then become open for new donations. Bernard suggested keeping the original donor's name but adding more donors' names over time. Bernard volunteered to speak with experts familiar with naming rights processes and protocols and about how much to charge, among other questions.

Official Announcement and Publicity

Mangin talked about the benefits of making announcements and publicizing projects like this one. He said publicity could benefit the garden and the Ashland Parks Foundation. Budgets were only getting tighter and private monies would help support this project. Mangin said this project would allow for public input opportunities. Black said that could be handled during the Lithia Park Master Plan process. Landt said the two biggest comment points would likely be *barriers* and the proposed *expanded footprint*. Black said PR work was needed to help the public understand that funding for this project was not coming from the General Fund.

Design Process

Landt asked about the vision for the design process. Mangin said Kurisu's design proposal included three phases. In Phase 1, a tour of Lithia Park would be conducted to understand the level of tourism in the park. Bernard asked if the Subcommittee would be the body to determine a favorable price and design or if that would be the responsibility of the Parks Commission. Black said this was the core group working together and talking things through. He compared this process to the process of commissioning a piece of art. Black suggested having this group compile a list of elements for the potential designers. Black said the design, once received, would then go to the Parks Commissioners for approval, then to the Parks Foundation for approval, as they were responsible for payments. He said it would be important to have an agreement or understanding on how the process would work. In terms of public input, he said their feedback would be more about the big picture rather than feedback on the design. With regard to the proposed enclosure, Mangin said he felt that a beautiful enclosure could be built and he hoped everyone would agree about creating some kind of fencing to keep the deer away, as there could be no koi pond without an enclosure to protect against predators.

Architect Quotes

Black said no decisions were needed at the present time but he hoped they could discuss both quotes, which were quite different. Black said Kurisu International was one of the top two Japanese garden landscape architects in the world so very impressive. Kurisu's price was \$146,900 for three phases of design work. Base work came in at \$5,900 (analysis of the site). The preliminary design, sketches and layout design would be \$47,000. Design details (the construction drawing) came in at \$49,000. Black said the technical / mechanical – including the pump system, wildlife deterrent, foot soaking therapy and potential use of Ashland Creek was \$45,000, for a total of \$146,900. Black said nothing had been signed and they were just seeking estimates. Kurisu's proposal was tidy and detailed; even elevations had been included.

When asked for the same information, Toru Tanaka simply sent a prospective sketch. Black said Tanaka liked to be on site during the construction in order to make site changes. Black said Tanaka's proposal was much less than Kurisu's: design service was \$35,000 and design consulting would be billed by the hour. Black said Tanaka's Phase 1 would include site analysis, a conceptual meeting, interviews with Ashland stakeholders and preliminary site design work including master site plan for pond, sandstone garden, tea garden, natural garden, outskirts of Japanese garden areas, prospective sketches and a presentation to the owner for approval. Phase II would include revisions, final presentation and construction. Black said Tanaka was willing to give APRC the plans so they could build it themselves. Mangin said there was a great deal of detail in the building of such gardens and he was sure Tanaka would be on site a lot during the construction and he was much more open to having APRC do the work, which he would oversee.

Mangin said Kurisu was open to having APRC handle the demolition work but was more comfortable using his own crew for construction. Landt asked if the proposals were for the design work and afterwards they would do the construction; Mangin said yes. Mangin said he learned about Kurisu International via Jim Robinson, owner of a Japanese design firm in Eugene who was contacted by Mangin. Mangin said Robinson was the one who asked if he could go to his mentor to see if he would be interested in getting involved in this project. This was how Kurisu came into the project. Bernard asked if Jim Robinson was interested in the project. Mangin said Robinson would be directly involved in the building and he had his own group of people so it would be a joint effort during the construction portion. Mangin said Robinson also designed similar gardens and would be capable but for something like this, he thought that Kurisu would be interested, which he was. Black said Toru Tanaka was selected by the government of Japan to design the garden at the National Embassy in D.C. Landt asked who designed the Portland Japanese Garden. Mangin said it was designed in phases and each individual was its director at the time.

Black said both were very impressive designers. Landt said it seemed like each designer would provide different gardens. Mangin said either one would take them to a completed garden project. Mangin said it seemed that one of

Landt's concerns was potential backend costs for the less expensive quote, with some expenses not being factored in up front. Mangin said they should select based on the best person and not on pricing. He said he was personally drawn to Kurisu because of his involvement with healing gardens, which were unique and a good fit for Ashland.

In considering the two designers, Bernard said the Subcommittee would need to go back to Toru Tanaka and ask for more details. Black said his impression was that Tanaka liked working with people who didn't require extensive detail. Landt said that for a \$1.5M project, \$146,900 was a reasonable cost for design work. Black said for ease of working together, Kurisu would be preferable as he had a detailed plan and was more organized; Bernard agreed.

In terms of moving forward, Black said they were looking for guidance regarding both proposals and which one to hire. Landt suggested waiting for Bernard to get the information she had offered to research. Mangin said it was important for the Subcommittee to do its due diligence and he still wanted to see one of Tanaka's gardens. Bernard said they could either visit the gardens together or visit them alone. Mangin suggested making this decision by the end of 2017. He said the designers were ready to begin working. Landt suggested tying this project together with the Lithia Park Master Plan. Black said the kickoff for the master planning process was early December, with design week happening in early to mid-2018. He suggested having the chosen architect on hand during design week.

In terms of commission involvement, Black said he wanted the commissioners to be aware of what was going on but he didn't want it to appear as though the commissioners had responsibility for oversight of the procedural process. Black said this group would make a recommendation to the Foundation and provide an update to the Parks Commission to make sure they knew a design / architect was being selected and that the entire project would be addressed during the Lithia Park Master Plan process. Landt said he wanted to make sure that both processes were totally integrated. Black said the Foundation needed to approve the hiring of the architect as the funds were being held in the Foundation account. Mangin said the whole point of the Large Donation Subcommittee was to have good representation for both the Commission and the Foundation. For whoever was hired, Black said it was best to work with the principle person at the firm. In the case of Kurisu they might have to work with a project manager rather than the principle; this was something to discuss. Mangin said the project manager might be Jim Robinson. Black said Robinson would be good to have on the ground for some of the design elements. Mangin said he would encourage everyone to think through their own ideas and put them on a paper for a future discussion.

Mangin expressed appreciation for everyone's time. Bernard asked if Black was going to coordinate a visit north to view the Japanese gardens. Mangin said they could stop in Lebanon first and see two at the same time. Landt said he didn't know how realistic it was to get everyone coordinated for the same visit. Bernard said it didn't matter how realistic it was; what mattered was for the process to get started. Bernard said the benefit of going together was so that they could all see and hear the same things at the same time, reducing redundancies and time loss at future meetings. Bernard said a joint visit would be a win-win. Black said it would just be a matter of working with Tanaka because Kurisu's project could be viewed without him. In terms of speaking with the Director of the Meyer Gardens, as previously noted in the meeting, Mangin said he planned to do the same thing with the Director of the Albuquerque Gardens. He hoped to get feedback on what their process was like, what was learned and what would could have been done differently. Mangin said he would share his notes with everyone. Alternatively, Landt suggested getting a list of all public projects within the Willamette Valley, which they could then visit. Bernard suggested going on the visit north before the end of the year, if a decision was needed by the end of the year. In terms of the decision by the Foundation, she said this item could hopefully be discussed and decided upon at the November Parks Foundation board meeting.

SET NEXT MEETING DATE

No meeting date was set.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Wysocki / Susan Dyssegard
Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission