

City of Ashland
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
LITHIA PARK MASTER PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
June 15, 2018

PRESENT: **Parks Commissioners:** Rick Landt, Matt Miller
APRC Staff: Director Michael Black, Interim Parks Superintendent Jeffrey McFarland; Administrative Analyst Betsy Harshman
MIG Consultants: MIG Principal Melissa Erikson, Water Resources Specialist David Gorman, Landscape Architect Kerry KenCairn, Project Manager Laurie Matthews, MIG Principal Dennis Meyer, MIG Principal Lauren Schmitt, Fisheries Biologist Jack Williams
STAKEHOLDER: JoAnne Eggers

ABSENT: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Landt called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. at 51 Winburn Way, Ashland OR.

II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

a. *Discuss Meeting Purpose*

Landt introduced representatives from MIG, including local representatives Kerry KenCairn and Jack Williams. He stated that the purpose of the meeting would be to review highlights from Design Week in preparation for eventual conversion into a Master Plan for Lithia Park. Black added that the meeting would wrap up Design Week and was not intended as a venue for decision making.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There were none.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & GUEST SPEAKERS

a. *Open Forum*

Roger Ramsey of 1410 Woodland Dr. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Ramsey talked about his vision for trails in Lithia Park and connectivity to the surrounding watershed. Ramsey reviewed the challenges of multi-use trails, particularly for mountain bikers wishing to access the downtown area from the watershed. He stated that the primary connection was via Winburn Way in Lithia Park or East 4th Street. Ramsey explained that both approaches were problematic, suggesting that alternatives be addressed as a part of the Master Plan under the category of circulation.

As a possible solution, Ramsey proposed that the east side of Lithia Park be utilized as a trail that would extend from the Loop Road to Lithia Park. He stated that the trail could be gently engineered for use by children and would create a use for a portion of the Park that is currently undeveloped. Ramsey stated that Ashland's mountain bike community would provide volunteers for all aspects of such a project.

Kerry KenCairn of 147 Central Ave. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

KenCairn provided a testimonial about the mountain bike community, noting that their involvement during Design Week had been impressive.

V. ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. *Review Design Week Process to Date - Laurie Matthews*

Matthews noted that the feedback obtained during Design Week had provided many helpful insights and ideas that would aid in the development of a preferred concept or concepts.

In response to a question by Landt, Matthews stated that elements that are viewed with consensus would be presented as an option, while elements that are more diverse might be presented with a set of options. She indicated that it would be unlikely that more than two options would be developed. Schmitt added that it might happen that there is a preferred option for the short term and a different one for the long term. She stated that the plan would be crafted with enough flexibility that once future unknowns become less abstract, amendments of the Master Plan could be accommodated. Black agreed, noting that the plans for the short term might not be the final direction for projects that are slated for the longer term.

Matthews commented that based upon previous feedback it had become clear that there was interest in large ideas where further study would be needed. Schmitt noted as an example, that repurposing the maintenance yard, stating that the concept would require additional thought. The final recommendation might be one that hasn't yet been discussed. Schmitt indicated that the size and scope of the Park might be best addressed with a broad brush while certain areas would require a specific focus based upon the choices made.

Black stated that in his opinion, nothing should be excluded from review. As an example, the Master Plan presents an opportunity to address the shop and office areas of the Park. He stated that feedback was very diverse – for a range of uses. He talked about the Administration Building, highlighting the many iterations that the building had seen throughout the Park's history. He emphasized the dilemma that is presented when comparing one era versus another for historic renovations.

Black noted that the Master Plan presented an opportunity to meet additional needs for Ashland's residents such as more space for community gathering places. He stated that utilizing the existing buildings more fully or re-purposing the buildings could be more valuable than creating more open Park spaces. In response to a question by Matthews, he stated that the maintenance office could be re-purposed and incorporated into a large outdoor open space to accommodate the community. Black emphasized that he was not advocating for a certain option – rather, he wanted to encourage the exploration of alternatives.

Matthews stated that feedback from the community included discussion about access to the Park in that area – and the possibility of the area to act as another connection point or node within the Park. Black replied affirmatively, stating that there were places that could be enhanced for civic uses without being detrimental to the Park's ambiance. He stated that APRC's presence in the Park should be incidental to finding ways to deliver informational services.

He noted that there would be a number of new policies that would be developed based upon recommendations in the Master Plan. If, for example additional public gathering places are planned, then new policies would need to be developed for issues such as crowd management and/or the use of alcohol in the Park would be needed.

b. Feedback from APRC Lithia Park Master Plan Committee Members

Landt relayed his preference for the existing gradation of the Park – as it moves from an urban environment at its downtown entrance into a more natural and less developed environment further into the Park.

Landt stated that he would question a “node” or public gathering space at the current administration location. He stated that there were only two ways to reach the location by vehicle – Granite Street and Winburn Way. Both streets are congested and added pressure could be problematic.

Landt talked about the eastside slope and its’ sensitivity to changes in the climate. Native plants do not thrive there and other ideas for vegetation in the area would be helpful. He asked the MIG consultants to look at the Grants Pass Parkway – for its single zone plantings. Landt advocated for similar plantings, stating that the vegetation seems to thrive without irrigation.

Landt drew attention to the policies that APRC has in place that impact the parks. He asked that the proposed Master Plan be consistent with policy’s that manage vendors, noise, light, and dogs in the parks or that the proposal presents a strong rationale against those policies. Landt noted that storm water management continues to be a concern. He thanked the consultants for their focus in that regard.

Landt asked about an interface with plans that might change the Japanese Garden. Matthews stated that the garden would be incorporated into the overall plan – with special attention to circulation within the park and the interaction with Winburn Way. Meyer added that a series of small terraced garden rooms could include the Japanese Garden.

Miller asked about a unifying theme that would integrate the gardens. Matthews replied that the gardens all have a “garden-esque” quality that while unique to each garden would provide cohesion between the gardens. Black explained that in this case the “themes” would not be the same or repeated in each garden – rather the common element would be how they are situated in each space and interface with the trails throughout. Mathews agreed, stating that they were intended to be design spaces. She stated that the potential use and function could also be part of the relationship to one another without jeopardizing the distinct character that each area has.

Black talked about the Japanese Garden and the garden’s potential as representative of a culture. Improvements would center upon circulation within and accessibility as well as the garden’s authenticity. Matthews noted that the goal would be to respect the legacy that the garden represents but recognize that a plan for the garden should include development for today as well as for its future.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

a. Open Forum

JoAnne Eggers of 221 Granite St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Eggers applauded the Design Week process, highlighting public engagement as key to the development of the Master Plan. She stated that one of the takeaways of the week’s activities was that Lithia Park could not be all things to all people. Eggers noted that it became clear for example, that Lithia Park was not a suitable venue for gatherings where alcohol could be served.

Eggers stated that very little public input had been received regarding special features such as the Japanese Garden and the Perozzi Fountain. She cautioned against committing resources for the maintenance and upkeep of special features without taking into consideration the outsized budgetary impact that such a focus would need.

Eggers suggested that other issues such as accessibility be given priority.

Mike Gardiner of 349 Orange, Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Gardiner noted that the Lithia Park Master Plan would cover a 100-year time-span. He asked whether the plan would periodically be updated - stating that in his experience, Master Plans are periodically reviewed. Landt replied that in his opinion, the purpose of a long-term plan would be to give guidance so that future actions could be integrated in a systematic way. He stated that it made sense to review the plan periodically. Gardiner indicated that periodic reviews also facilitate amendments to the plan based upon changing conditions.

Black noted that discussion about the 100-year time frame during Design Week clarified the intent that the 100-year trajectory would be carried forward when the actual decision-making might be applicable for the next 20 years. He advocated for periodic reviews to ensure that the Park's capital improvement priorities are met and maintenance strategies are reflective of the times and conditions present. He stated that APRC should have a policy in place that mandates periodic reviews.

Landt explained that in his opinion, the Master Plan was a roadmap for the future and should it become apparent that change is necessary, a rationale has to be developed that would justify a new direction. If done in that way, change becomes a conscious decision that includes a public process.

Michael Dawkins, President of the Ashland Garden Club was called on for comments.

He stated that one of the Garden Club's traditional responsibilities was to care for a Rose Garden in Lithia Park. He expressed the hope that the Garden Club could partner with APRC and once again establish a rose garden in the Park. He noted that plans for such a garden call for roses that represent the original plantings to contemporary roses that are recognized each year.

ADDITIONAL INPUT

APRC staff member **Betsy Harshman** commented that the Master Plan team included experts on climate change. She stated that the Master Plan would incorporate that knowledge into a plan for the future.

David Gorman, a water resources specialist from Ecological Engineering and Master Plan team member, commented that the maintenance facility could be re-purposed without compromising restoration of the riparian zone in that area.

Jack Williams, Master Plan team member and fisheries biologist, agreed that the Master Plan would provide guidance for the future as well a blueprint for getting there. He stated that there might be a series of steps to take over time that will lead to results further into the future. He talked about circulation throughout the Park and future transportation changes that would impact the thoroughfare that currently travels through the Park. The Master Plan would outline a starting point with a series of steps or actions to begin with and ideas or values that could be translated into actions for future improvements. He stated that all of the steps or actions were dependent upon funding, capabilities, and other appropriate steps.

In response to a question by Gardiner, Black noted that the City's Comprehensive Plan would not include the details of the Master Plan. Gardiner also asked about a sidewalk on Winburn Way – stating that a sidewalk along the route had been a high priority for APRC. Gardiner noted that plans for a sidewalk had been postponed pending the outcome of the Master Plan. Matthews confirmed that several options were under consideration. Schmitt explained that one-way access was a possibility - limited access another. Limited access would allow shuttle busses and other types of delivery services but not everyday drivers. She stressed that regardless of how it is achieved, there have been three speeds of traffic since the Park's inception – slow (walking), medium (bicycles) and fast (vehicular). Schmitt noted that public comment had indicated that over time the fastest

speeds have become dominant and that residents would like to ensure that Winburn Way facilitates pedestrian traffic.

Ramsey pointed out the dry underused area of the park on the east side could become a follow-the-contours up-trail (multi-use) with connectivity to other trails in the watershed. He advocated for a separate return trail, stating that if that were to happen, it would take much of the cyclist traffic off of Winburn Way.

There followed a brief discussion about the feasibility of such a trail. Black noted that the trails in Lithia Park could provide an option for cyclists but access to the roads for cyclists would remain. Landt noted that consideration should be given to the number of existing trails that travel from the creek to motorways. He stated that some of those paths cause erosion and that simply adding trails might not be the best option. Schmitt agreed, stating that the development of trails must take into account a number of complex factors – whether the soils would support a trail - what the impacts would be and other factors.

Eggers advocated for the large ideas that would become part of the 100-year vision. She stated that regardless of what the future would bring, humans with similar needs would remain.

Black applauded the charette process that MIG had initiated with Design Week. He reported that public feedback had been complimentary, with people engaging in the process. Black stated that Design Week was an excellent example of how things should work. In response to a question, he stated that those who participated were satisfied that they had been heard – but that it was human nature to wait and react to plans once they are presented. Black stated that he would expect more public input and engagement once the preferred alternatives are introduced.

Landt stated that there was still work to be done and members of the public who haven't yet been heard. He talked about Winburn Way and the possible solutions that might be chosen – including ways to introduce simple traffic calming devices that would slow people down. He suggested that the least controversial approaches should be considered. Matthews added that accessibility was also a priority and that thought should be given as to how best to access the Park based upon people's needs.

Schmitt noted that a desired trajectory for Winburn Way might be initiated with a series of steps toward a desirable future outcome. She stated that simple solutions might work best until they are outgrown. When that occurs, it could become the trigger for the next series of steps. She stated that future transportation changes might dictate a change in direction – but that the immediate goal should be how best to accommodate the three speeds of traffic. Gorman agreed, stating that one rationale for crafting a 100-year plan is to initiate changes gradually with a series of interim steps.

Landt noted that one important aspect of the Master Plan should be to limit plans that add to the necessity for additional maintenance. He suggested that the approach with regard to landscaping within the Park should reflect a sensitivity to the level of effort that is needed to maintain the landscaping. There followed a brief discussion about that choice points that could be offered.

Matthews summarized the next steps – noting that there would be additional scrutiny of the data that had been collected. The goal would be to present a preferred option for some elements of the Park and/or refine several preferred alternatives depending upon the complexity of the solutions proposed. Matthews emphasized a process that would culminate in an additional public process in the October to November time-frame.

KenCairn suggested updating the Facebook page periodically so that people could continue to comment or track development of the ideas presented during Design Week. Schmitt proposed a series of photographs depicting elements of the Park that are under review. Black agreed to remain in contact and stated that he would alert the Subcommittee if further discussion was needed. He noted that the Subcommittee would review the preferred options prior to additional public engagement.

Accolades and thankyou's were exchanged. Black noted staff member Betsy Harshman had worked behind the scenes to ensure a smooth process.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT – 11:00 a.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manuel, Assistant
Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

These Minutes are not a verbatim record. The narrative has been condensed and paraphrased at times to reflect the discussions and decisions made. Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission Subcommittee meetings are digitally recorded and available upon request.