



City Hall Park Ad-hoc Committee Meeting - Wednesday, June 6, 2018, 7:00 pm, Conference Room 12, City Hall 6/6/2018

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DRAFT

Committee Members Present: Councilor Kurt Wright (arrived 7:25), Councilor David Hartnett, Councilor Sharon Bushor, VJ Comai (City Arborist), Mayor Miro Weinberger, Monique Fordham (Keep the Park Green), Donna Walters (Keep the Park Green)

Staff Members Present: Doreen Kraft (BCA), Cindi Wight (BPRW Superintendent), Meagan Tuttle (Principal Planner - Comprehensive Planning, Planning and Zoning), Laura Wheelock (Engineer, DPW), Holli Bushnell (Parks/Clerk's Office – Minutes)

Others Present – Jeff Hodgson Project Landscape Architect

Public Present – Jay Vos, Jon Sicle, Arthur Blackhawk, Carl Koehler, Bradley Stephenson, Charlie Messing, Matthew Ennis, Rik Carlson, James Leas, Steve Goodkind, Joy Cohen, Wayne Senville, Ian Senesac

In the absence of Councilor Wright and at his request, Mayor Weinberg called the meeting to order at 7:15pm

1. Agenda

Action, Procedural 1.01 motion to amend/adopt agenda

Mayor Weinberger welcomed a motion to adopt the agenda.

Councilor Bushor moved the agenda as modified, adding two emails, one from Debra Roseman and the other from Donna Walters. Also moved to add item 1.05 to adopt minutes from May 16th meeting. Councilor Bushor was seconded by Councilor Hartnett.

Donna Walters requested a correction be made to May 16th minutes, striking incorrect information from Option 1B in section 3 regarding a Silver Maple tree as tree was already retained in DRB approved plan.

Mayor Weinberger returned focus to adoption of agenda, motion was moved, seconded, and approved by all.

Monique Fordham asked for clarification on the possibility of a final vote at the end of the meeting. She requested that, as the deadline to complete this process is not until June 18th the committee not foreclose the possibility of another meeting before then. Mayor Weinberger agreed that the possibility of another meeting could be kept open.

Informational 1.02 Communication: AARP, re: Redesign Of City Hall Park





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Waive the reading, accept the communication and place it on file. Communication will be included in discussion at next meeting as item 2.01.

Informational 1.03 Communication: Debra Roseman, re: City Hall Park

Waive the reading, accept the communication and place it on file. Communication will be included in discussion at next meeting as item 2.02

Informational 1.04 Communication: Donna Walters, re: Agenda Items & Requests

Waive the reading, accept the communication and place it on file. Communication will be included in discussion at next meeting as item 2.03

Informational 1.05 Adopt minutes from May 16th meeting

As minutes were only received that evening, Councilor Bushor moved to put minutes into record but not adopt them until they could be properly read and amended. Mayor Weinberger proposed that minutes be posted but action not be taken until next meeting.

2. Public Forum

Action, Informational, Procedural 2.01 Verbal Comments

Mayor Weinberger opened the public forum at 7:21pm and asked that, as time is limited, comments be constrained to a couple of minutes.

Jim Leas – Asked if ADA requirements were clear/known by committee and public. He shared that ADA requirements are related to width and slope of walkways. Wants to insure that everyone knows what the ADA standards are, and pointed out that not everyone knows the details. Requested that we have clear information on what is required.

Rik Carlson –Wants to save as many trees as possible because people like shade. Doesn't want to remove trees solely to aid design. Trees are being targeted for removal because of ADA accessibility. Only one ADA accessible entrance is required to be in compliance. By eliminating more ADA accessible entrances we could save trees 956, 957, and 958.

Matthew Ennis –Upset about trees/deforestation. He shared pictures from other parks to demonstrate that other parks have trees, and also showed pic from jazz fest where people are sitting in the shade. There will be less shade, too much concrete, not enough trees.

Ian Senesac – Owner of Cosmic Grind. Thinks taking down the trees are wrong for aesthetic purposes. Don't cut down the trees.



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Joy Cohen – Ward 2. Spoke with maintenance workers at the fountain. Workers believe that there shouldn't be any water feature at all. New fountain will be more costly, inefficient, and difficult to work on. Concrete plaza could be eliminated and more trees can be saved. She believes that project has been led by design, not by community needs

Brad Stephenson – Ward 3. The park is an intersection and there needs to be lots of areas accessible to disabled people. Accessibility should come first. Park should be open to all citizens; ADA is the law and the right thing to do. Trees are too densely planted and grass can't grow. Removing trees will make park healthier. There haven't always been a lot of trees in the park. He suggests that we plant trees in other park to replace trees that are being removed.

Carl Koehler – Is disabled and an ISA certified arborist who specialized in urban forestry and risk management. The dangerous trees have already been removed. The problem is soil compaction from over-use, and removing trees is not going to fix the problem. Soil needs gentle aeration, and the land needs time to recover. He suggests moving events in the park to other locations so park can recover.

Wayne Senville – Ward 1. Believes ad-hoc committee can reach compromise. 12 trees can be saved according to keep the park green, and he believes that that is a very reasonable goal. He asked that the committee consider Councilor Bushor's suggestion from last time about delayed tree removal.

Charlie Messing – Wants to modify the plan and make the paths wiggle around the trees. The more trees saved the better the park. Shade is necessary for people to use the park. Agrees with keep the park green and hopes for a compromise.

Steve Goodkind – Asked if there is a full size set of plans available. Meagan Tuttle shared that the plans available in Planning and Zoning office. He asked if plans will be adjusted to show new elevations and details. Mayor asked that, as this topic did not relate to the tree discussion, the comments and questions be saved for another time.

Mayor Weinberger officially relinquished chair to Councilor Wright at 7:40.

Jonathan Sicle – The greatest lesson in life is how we view other people and flora and fauna. We've changed the way we think about things that aren't human. Trees bleed, that's where maple syrup comes from. Studies show that grass can feel pain. People with kids should talk to them about the trees and see if they think they're alive. They will be the stewards of the park in the future.

Public forum closed at 7:43pm

3. Committee Discussion

Action, Discussion, Information 3.01 Committee Discussion And Expected Vote

Discussion started by Fordham. Thanked everyone for coming, voicing their opinions, and supporting Keep the Park Green. The info about how many trees were scheduled to be removed was never made available until Keep the Park Green members found it hidden on the DRB website. The tree removal was always kept secret. She feels that the lack of clarity shows poor governance and sleight of hand/deception on the part of the city. Over 200 people have spoken up about this issue, so clearly people care about the trees. She expressed her frustration that every time her group approached the designers they were met with resistance to make any changes. The previous plan was considered by only a handful of historic preservationist, and, moreover, unethical behavior was exhibited by asking the head of the State Historic Preservation Office to support the plan in writing. Keep the Park Green doesn't have to fight with the administration. Originally plan was radically changed. Why do the comments of 150 people not matter? For a 3 million dollar taxpayer funded project there needs to be more flexibility on the part of the administration. All she is asking is to save just 12 trees out of the 27 being removed. Paths could be moved and the park could still meet minimum ADA compliance. She feels



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that saving only three trees is laughable, and that the city must give more than they've already have for consensus to be reached.

Councilor Wright reminded people that the committee was formed to look for compromise.

Councilor Bushor hoped that the administration would come forward and demonstrate a plan at this meeting. She asked if there has been any movement from previous 3 options last time or if the new ideas have been taken into consideration.

Mayor Weinberger shared that there was a meeting to explore more options. While the options were limited, they did look at cutting back on the hardscape and at the delayed removal of trees. Both of these options were deemed untenable. The mayor also shared that there was concern about saving as many trees as possible back in 2016 when plan was first proposed. The current challenge is that, while there has been an attempt made by the administration to listen to and support community members, the possible options never seem to be enough. It seems that there will never be a perfect consensus on this issue. There has already been a lot of compromise, and of course there will be more. The Mayor supports the option to add back three of the six crabapple trees. Saving all six trees doesn't make sense as they are currently too close to each other. He also supports the addition of two more new trees to the design. He reiterated that the park will not be denuded of trees. While parks, planning and zoning, and the mayor's office considered all the options, none of the new ideas were deemed usable. Trying to save all the trees and keep the path straight would damage the park more than help it.

VJ Comai agreed that saving two more crabapples by performance area. He believes that trees are best viewed as specimens when planted in a park. These specimens need room to develop, and fewer crabapples will make the space better. By removing trees the remaining trees will be healthier, better trees. The park must be thought of in the long term, and to only think about what it's going to look like as soon as the construction is done is foolish and naïve. For comparison, Battery Park is 3.7 acres and there are 65 trees in that area, with a total of 18 trees per acre. The trees in Battery are beautiful because they have plenty of room to grow; there is plenty of shade, grass, and sunshine. City Hall Park is 1.4 acres, before 5 dangerous trees are taken down that leaves 56. In current plan 42 trees are left. That's 30 trees per acre including the current hardscape where trees are not growing. In his expert opinion there are too many trees for the long term in the park. By following the current plan we can make the whole park healthier and rehabilitate sickly trees. He's looking for the best case scenario for all the trees and the long term health of the park.

Councilor Bushor asked for a reminder of how many trees are being removed because they interfere with construction.

Jeff Hodgson shared that according to the current plan there are 14 healthy trees being removed. The statistics and classifications of trees scheduled for removal were shared at this time as well.

Bushor asked how many of the trees currently scheduled for removal could possibly be kept and not impact construction.

Jeff explained that, after examining the plans he feels there is one tree that could be kept during construction that wouldn't impact construction issues.

In spite of this information Bushor believes there still should be some discussion over keeping some trees a while longer to see if they could survive through construction and be taken down later if need be. Her wish is for the city to be as green as it can be, and that while the ADA is important, the trees take precedence in her mind.

Councilor Wright asked if ADA accessibility and rules could be clarified.

Hodgson explained that 3 current paths (BCA path to center and both paths to College Street) are too steep in elevation, but are close to meeting requirements while the other 3 paths are well out of the acceptable slope. In the new plan, the BCA path, park lane path, and both college street paths would meet ADA accessibilities.



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A request was made to view the corrected elevations, but Meagan Tuttle pointed out that, at this point the project is only at 30% completed and the city will not have the official elevation information until the project is 60% completed.

Hodgson reiterated that, as it stands, the plan includes four ADA compliant paths. Minimum path width to fit compliance is somewhere between three to five feet depending on the availability of passing and pausing places.

The subject of realigning the path from the southwest corner to the center of the path in an effort to preserve more trees was broached. The primary issue in making that change is the slope and curve of that path affects all the other paths in the park and severely limits or eliminates the possibility of ADA accessibility.

Fordham vented her frustration at the lack of willingness to compromise by the city staff and designers. She feels that a real effort has not been made to accommodate the wishes of the people. To her mind, small changes could be made to the current plan (paths, etc.) that would allow more trees to remain without compromising the goals of the project.

Councilor Hartnett asked to view the photograph of Jazz Fest again and be shown what trees in that image are scheduled for removal. Of the trees in that picture, only one is going to be removed. Judging from that image, it is clear that the park will not be denuded. Hartnett came into this meeting wanting to keep all the crabapples, but after listening to VJ speak, he's not sure he wants to keep the crabapples. His greatest concern at this point is that the park MUST be ADA accessible. His experience as a member of the city council is that too many corners have been cut in other parts of the city (playgrounds, schools, public buildings) when it comes to the handicapped. We should not be doing "just enough to get by." It's not enough to say that "we made code" it's time handicapped people came FIRST. They need to be a priority and we have not given them due justice or prioritized them. He is not willing to say that it is "good enough," it has to be more; it has to be good for everyone.

Councilor Bushor doesn't want to compromise the path. She wants to keep path as is in the current plan, but hopes that trees that are preserved until it's clear they won't survive.

Fordham reiterated that she does not think that just saving the crabapples is enough. She feels that only preserving the crabapples would be an abject failure of her group. She and the other members of Keep the Park Greek want to save at least 8 trees or the community will consider this committee a farce.

At the request of Councilor Hartnett, Comai pointed out that once the crabapple trees grow into one another they start to die. The remaining three crabapples in option one will be healthier than if we kept all of them. Hartnett pointed out that to compromise simply for the sake of compromise without taking the health of the trees into consideration is just as foolish as not trying to compromise at all.

Donna Walters asked to look at artist's rendering that show a perspective from the southwest corner towards center of the park. She pointed out that there is no shade in that picture. She asked to see the shade study and pointed out that the area where people were sitting at Jazz Fest would be completely unshaded. Tuttle and Hodgson pointed out that the drawings have not been changed to include new trees due to budget consideration. Walters feels that there will be no shade in the park; it will be a plaza, not a green space which is not what people want.

Fordham again shared her frustration that the design committee was unwilling to make changes. She feels that unless some changes are made the committee is at an impasse.

Tuttle pointed out that it is not the design committee's mandate to make changes but to provide information on the current plan.

Mayor Weinberger took a moment to point out that the mandate of the ad-hoc committee is not to see if there are any opportunities to add more trees without redesigning the plan, but not to redesign the park.



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Councilor Wright appreciates all the work done on the park design. He is grateful for the arborists and designers and also appreciates the citizens and their opinions. Quite a bit of money and time has gone into this park. He feels that this is the people's park and we need to do right by it. As it is currently, the park is not a place where people want to spend time now. His goal is to have a park that is a place where everyone feels comfortable. While he seeks resolution he feels that if we end with the decision we to only save two trees we have failed. He continues to support Councilor Bushor's idea of phased tree removal. He sincerely believes we can do a little bit better and meet the other side closer to the middle.

Councilor Bushor asked if Comai was free on Monday to go through the park again to view trees and see if there are any trees in close proximity to the path that could be saved. She hopes to come back to the next meeting with something a bit more concrete in terms of trees that can be saved. There must be a way to soften the impact of tree removal over time. She understands the challenges of removing trees when there are other healthy trees in close proximity. She points out that the administration has added three crabapple trees and added two additional new trees. She wants to find a way to get the numbers up a bit higher. She will send her findings of her walk with Comai via email in advance of final meeting. If we can't reach compromise at the end of the next meeting she feels the committee will be at a stalemate.

Councilor Hartnett pointed out that a decision will be made one way or another next time. He was ready to vote tonight, but he asks that we have a current drawing of the park with the trees that are being preserved so the committee can see what's really going to be there. He is not willing to make a compromise that would harm the health of the park and confirms that he will listen to the experts and see where his feelings land.

Councilor Wright asked that another meeting be scheduled before the current meeting is adjourned

After some discussion the next meeting will be on June 12th at 7:30pm at the community room of BPD. The vote will be next week. If there are any new ideas to be presented at the next meeting the committee must be informed beforehand. While proposals may be sent out there cannot be a back and forth (as pointed out by Cindi Wight).

4. Adjournment

Action, Procedural 4.01 motion to adjourn

Councilor Hartnett motioned for adjournment, all were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 9:10pm.

