



City Hall Park Ad-hoc Committee Meeting - Wednesday, May 16, 2018, 7:00 pm, Conference Room 12, City Hall 5/16/2018

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DRAFT

Committee Members Present: Councilor Kurt Wright, 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), Holli Bushnell (Parks/Clerk's Office – Minutes)

City Council Members Present: Joan Shannon, Richard Deane, Jane Knodell

Staff Members Missing: Kirsten Merriman Shapiro, Laura Wheelock

Others Present – Jeff Hodgson Project Landscape Architect

Meeting Called to order at 7:00pm

1. Agenda

Action, Procedural: 1.01 motion to amend/adopt agenda

Motion by Kurt Wright, seconded by Shannon Bushor

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Aye: Kurt Wright, David Hartnett, Sharon Bushor, VJ Comai, Miro Weinberger, Monique Fordham, Donna Walters

Chair Wright welcomed committee members and public audience to meeting and asked committee members and staff members present to introduce themselves.

2. Walk-through City Hall Park

Informational: 2.01 Walk-through City Hall Park

Committee, staff, and public proceeded to walk around City Hall Park and physically view current tree plan as well as possible changes and amendments to said plan. Presentation was made primarily by Jeff Hodgson and VJ Comai. ADA



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accessibility, tree and soil health, ecological improvement, and historical and modern use of the park were all discussed in relation to the current plan. The park was toured starting in the southeast corner, proceeding to the southwest corner, then north and northwest, and finally returning to the northeast corner. Concerns about the removal of healthy trees were related on multiple occasions. The group proceeded inside at 7:50pm.

3. Presentation by Administration

Informational: 3.01 Presentation by Administration

Parks staff, BCA Staff, and project architect presented the 3 possible options for changes to the current DRB approved park plan. Cindi Wight presented the primary goals of the project – To create a healthy, functioning urban space, a park that can be used by all people during all seasons, to preserve aspects of the historic space, and improve the ecology of the park.

Doreen Kraft shared historical information on the City Hall Park project. She detailed the start of the project in 2010-11, the original impetus for starting the task force which ultimately led to both short term improvements and, ultimately, the plan for the new park. Since its inception in 2012 the park plans have changed dramatically, ultimately shifting to include more tree presentation as well as turf spaces. She reiterated the goals of the park – accessibility, functionality, and ecological health.

Wight then explained that the current goals of the park have been culled from resident surveys, most of which conflict with one another.

At this point Monique Fordham halted the presentation. She asked that instead of reiterating facts that have previously been present we move on to the issue at hand – trees. Kurt Wright insisted that the staff members be allowed to complete their presentation. He reassured Fordham that there would be a comment period later in the meeting. Wight, Kraft, and Jeff Hodgson then continued the presentation.

The desire to retain crabapples, healthy trees, and add more trees on the hardscape areas.

Hodgson presented 3 potential options for adding/retaining trees.

OPTION 1 –

1. A silver maple can be retained by the rain garden in the center of the park as well as the northernmost crabapple tree on the east side of the park. Additionally, 2 new shade trees can be added along the southern edge of the park. Hodgson pointed out that, though the new shade trees will initially be small, their mature canopies will provide significant shade.
2. Instead of simply retaining the northernmost crabapple, the three crabapples furthest from the City Hall steps could potentially be kept. This would require the elimination of the 2 additional shade trees as their canopies would affect the health of the 3 saved crabapples. The silver maple by the rain garden would also be retained in this plan.

Essentially, either of these options would change the paved performance area in front of the city hall steps on Park Lane. The space would be made smaller and the sightlines could not be maintained, but the mature crabapples could be kept.

OPTION 2 –

The gradual slope of the diagonal path that starts in the southwest corner could be adjusted to more closely resemble the current path. This change would allow the red oak on the east side of the path to remain, but would also impact the tree



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canopies, dripline on path, and southwest rain garden. The other impact of this option is that ADA accessibility would be eliminated St Paul St due to grading issues.

OPTION 3 –

By eliminating crabapple trees 2 additional trees can be added to the south east end of the park. As much as we love the crabapples they could not be kept in this scenario because of canopy growth of the new shade trees.

Fordham reiterated her frustration. She took umbrage with the lack of creativity in the new plan options, stating her belief that options 1 and 2 were not genuine and that the committee was being forced towards option 3 as the only choice.

Wright asked that Fordham save her comments for deliberations and that the committee move forward with the agenda and open up the public forum.

4. Public Forum

Action, Informational, Procedural: 4.01 Verbal Comments

Kurt Wright opened up the meeting for public comment at 8:15pm.

COMMENTS –

- Jack Daggitt commented on Park Lane (for city vehicle use). Questioned the cost of the new park. Mayor Weinberger stated that it was 3-4 million dollars. Daggitt went on to say that, as there has not been any damage to the park the work is pointless and too expensive. He believes City Hall Park is too small and would like to see the city enlarge it or purchase new areas to create “pocket parks” throughout the city.

Wright asked that comments be limited to the focus of the committee, i.e. the trees in City Hall Park.

- Charlie Messing expressed a desire to save as many trees as possible, or, at the very least, to remove trees gradually and give the new saplings time to grow their desired canopy before removing old trees. He also questioned the need to make the park ADA accessible, stating that not all spaces need to be for all people.
- James Leas suggested a 4th park design, one in which nothing is changed and the allocated funds are used to repair and rejuvenate the current space as it is.
- Matthew Ennis from Winooski previously vended at the farmer’s market. He feels that shade and trees are the most important aspect of the park both currently and going forward. He agreed with Messing’s suggestion of taking down the trees gradually instead of all at once. He would also like to hear opinions from other arborists.
- Barbara McGrew lives on St. Paul St and fears that there will be too much loss of shade and too much pavement in the park. She prefers to think of City Hall Park as a park, not an “urban space.” She believes that we have all the “modern uses” outlined in the plan currently and that our funds be used to make the park as beautiful as it can be.
- Rick Bragg agreed wholeheartedly with Barbara.

Wright asked that other City Council members share their thoughts on the subject at hand.

- Councilor Shannon likes the trees and grass and would like to see a balance of shade and sun. She stated that balancing all the desires and needs for the park is difficult. We are essentially redesigning this park by committee which is incredibly difficult. She pointed out that many parts of the park are not ADA accessible, so areas that could be should not be modified to exclude those individuals. She also believes that the crabapple trees in their current



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configuration look crowded.

- Councilor Deane shared that, as an architect, he strongly encourages the public to think carefully about all aspects of the park and not simply adhere to the knee jerk reaction of a desire for more trees. He asked that members of the committee look at the proposed 3rd option and attempt to add more trees without causing issues. He also pointed out that, with the addition of 10 to 15 more trees, grass simply will not be able to grow.
- Councilor Knodell declined to comment.

5. Deliberation

Discussion, Information: 5.01 Deliberation

Mayor Weinberger asked the Chair if he believed a consensus could be reached in the remaining time that evening. Councilor Wright expressed his desire to end the meeting by 9pm, with a hope that a consensus could be reached.

Fordham interjected to vent her frustrations about not being heard. She is well aware of the history of the park project. She questioned who is really going to benefit from the changes to the park. She questioned the reasoning behind these changes, stating that, over time, the reasons for the redesign have changed. The concern for public safety in the park could have been remedied by providing around the clock police presence, but there was no follow-through for that possibility. The decaying infrastructure of the park could have been repaired as it happened, but instead the city waited until the situation was dire. Ultimately, what she and the other members of Keep the Park Green want is a park with shade in it. They are not against removing sick trees, but she is concerned that yet more trees will be removed in the rehabilitation process. She and her group want more saplings and "semi-mature trees" planted. She would like to see trees that are in poor health be rehabilitated, not simply removed. She then asked that the committee meet again and that the staff provide another new plan that includes more trees.

Wright suggested that the committee meet again as the remaining time that evening could not accommodate the discussion required to make a decision. He then asked that each committee member comment on the plan.

- Councilor Bushor thanked the planning team. She shared that she likes to think about parks in more traditional sense, but understands that this is a different situation (an urban space). She adores the crabapple trees and wants to look carefully at the possibility of retaining all the crabapple trees. She doesn't understand why we can't keep the crabapples and still have a performance space. She is perfectly comfortable with removing sick or dangerous trees. She likes the idea of removing the trees gradually and is in favor of a slower approach. She does not want to see the park clear-cut.
- Donna Walters shared the background information the independent arborist Keep the Park Green hired to assess all the trees in the park. After sharing his extensive qualifications she shared that he and VJ Comai had a difference of about 10 trees in their assessments of what trees were healthy enough to stay. She also shared the possibility of using suspended pavers in an effort to keep more trees. Those will be discussed at the next meeting.
- Mayor Weinberger reiterated that this committee has a very specific charge. Their intention is not to debate the tree health assessment, but rather to consider the options that were presented that night. There is the potential for additional debate, but believes the committee should speak to the options currently on the table. He believes that the presentation was not suggestive of only one option. His personal preference is option 1B (he loves the crabapples and wants to keep them if at all possible). He also likes option 3 in which a couple more trees are added. He found the second option surprising and compelling, but does not believe that keeping the path in place adds the gains he expected.

Fordham asked that the artist renderings be presented at the next meeting.



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- VJ Comai clarified that he did not suggest the removal of trees but simply assessed the health of the trees. He has studied the assessment of the other arborist and notes that the trees he assessed as being in poor health the independent arborist assessed as being in poor to fair health. As to the suggestion of making these changes gradually, his experience has been that the difficulty of removing old trees after planting new trees is incredibly difficult and the benefit of keeping the older trees longer is outweighed by the dangers of potential damage to the park in general and staff as well as to the new trees themselves. He stated that all the trees in the park currently are of the same age and similar variety, and that this is not the best case scenario for an urban space. His goal is to diversify the tree species in the park as well as the age of those trees. He also pointed out that there is no such official designation as a "semi-mature tree" sharing that, when a tree is removed from a nursery it loses up to 95% of its root system. The larger the tree that's planted, the less likely it is to survive that trauma. He reiterated Mayor Weinberger's point that the most mature, healthiest trees are what the city intends to plant.
- Councilor Wright expressed his hope that everyone on the committee agrees that the park needs to be modified. He spends a great deal of time at City Hall and he never sees his constituents (or even anyone he knows) making use of the park space. He would like to find a way to save the crabapples if at all possible, and would also like to explore the idea of slowly replacing the trees. He wonders if there are enough new trees coming in and questions if those trees will be mature enough to accommodate the desired shade.
- Councilor Hartnett prefers the first option and would like to save all the crabapples if at all possible. He wonders if we could possibly plant new ones. He doesn't like the idea of replacing trees slowly as it would be extremely difficult to do safely and affordably. He would like to see a new, all-encompassing proposal at the next meeting that incorporates aspects of everything discussed. He also asked that the focus of the next meeting be specifically on the trees.

Mayor Weinberger added that although there is a desire for a new plan, the old plan has not failed. The parks team has done a great job. The meeting has catalogued a lot of complaints, but has not put forth a specific idea to add or save more trees. This is something he would like to see next time.

Fordham would like to combine several of the options. She believes her group would be satisfied if the crab apples were kept and 2 additional trees were added.

Comment was concluded at 9:13pm. A date for the next meeting will be discussed at a later date.

6. Adjournment

Action, Procedural: 6.01 motion to adjourn

Councilor Wright called for adjournment of the meeting. All were in favor. Meeting was adjourned at 9:16pm.

