

Preliminary Report: Central Park Design & Implementation Task Force

May 14, 2008

Background

For several years the City of Madison, the Center for Resilient Cities (CRC, formerly known as Urban Open Space Foundation), neighborhood residents, local businesses and other stakeholders discussed and planned for a Central Park in the East Isthmus of Madison (please see Figure 1). The City of Madison noted this park in both its adopted Comprehensive Plan and the adopted East Rail Corridor Plan. Informed by an extensive public process involving multiple stakeholder groups such as neighborhood associations, gardeners, skateboarders, the (CRC) developed detailed plans (referred to herein as the “McCarthy Plan,” please see Figure 2), acquired parcels of land, and raised and expended over \$1,000,000 in funds to make the park a reality.

As a way to advance the process, effect review of Central Park by affected City agencies, and advise the Mayor and Council on the role of the City in the Central Park initiative, on January 16, 2007, the Common Council adopted Amended Resolution RES-07-00256, creating a 12-member ad hoc Task Force to answer a series of questions regarding implementation and governance of the proposed Central Park.

The Task Force includes the following members:

William W. Barker - *Park Commission Representative*
Joseph R. Clausius - *Common Council Member*
Bradley C. Mullins - *Area Property Owner*
Amy T. Overby - *Madison Community Foundation Representative*
Nancy T. Ragland - *Mayoral Appointee*
Marsha A. Rummel - *District Common Council Member*
Susan M. Schmitz - *Downtown Madison, Inc. Representative*
Leslie C. Schroeder - *Neighborhood Resident*
Joe Sensenbrenner – *Center for Resilient Cities Board Representative*
Benjamin R. Sommers - *Neighborhood Resident*
Phyllis E. Wilhelm – *MG&E Representative*

As per the adopted Amended Resolution, the charge of the Task Force anticipated a multi-phase approach. At the beginning, the Task Force was to examine and offer a recommendation on the following:

- Review all work to date on the project.
- Consider all of the outstanding issues and determine whether the project should move forward.

Once the preliminary work was done, and the Task Force concludes that the work of the Task Force should continue, the Task Force would answer the following questions:

- Are additional land acquisitions required to make the Park possible?
- Are options for developing the Central Park in phases possible, and if so, develop a phased implementation strategy for the Park.
- What is the final concept plan for the park?
- How does governance, financing, management and maintenance of the park work among the parties involved?
- What is the best plan of action regarding moving the railroad tracks?
- What do stakeholder groups think about this plan?
- What is needed in terms of private fundraising?
- How does the proposed park footprint address the relationship of park space to redevelopment plans in the corridor?
- How does the park's design integrate with other nearby green space?

Lastly, the Task Force shall engage the community, conduct several public meetings as part of the process, and report their findings to the Common Council by January 2008.

The Task Force's final report shall include:

1. A final plan of the park to recommend to the Common Council;
2. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among all parties to deal with ownership, fundraising, implementation, management, and maintenance of the Park;
3. A phased implementation strategy for the Park;
4. A draft fundraising plan.

Work to Date

Since its first meeting in June 2007, the full Task Force has held 22 meetings. In addition, the Task Force has delegated much of the work to various sub-committees to handle the larger issues the Task Force needs to address:

1. Land Acquisition/Rail Relocation (3 meetings to date)
2. Concept Park Plan (10 meetings to date)
3. Fundraising (meetings to be scheduled)
4. Memorandum of Understanding (5 meetings to date)
5. Alternative Design (1 meeting to date)

While good progress has been made, many challenges to bringing this Park to fruition remain; such as the question of moving of the rail line, additional land acquisitions, fundraising for needed capital and operating endowments, and formulating a plan to phase park development. Additionally, the Task Force must identify and make recommendations regarding park ownership, governance and fiscal responsibility. Issues related to funding mechanisms, as well as park development, maintenance and management must be resolved. Further progress on Central Park depends on workable answers to these questions.

Responses to date regarding the charge of the Task Force follow:

- Review all work to date on the project.

The Task Force held several meetings where representatives of the Center for Resilient Cities, City staff to Transport 2020, the East Rail Corridor Plan and the East Washington Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan presented their work and how it relates to the development of Central Park. In addition, the Task Force met on the site and walked it to get a good sense of the context and issues surrounding the development of the Park. In addition, Nancy Fey and Karl van Lith provided training in the Natural Step and helped the committee address integration of this conservation ethic into park design and philosophy.

- Consider all of the outstanding issues and determine whether the project should move forward.

The Task Force supports the idea of a Central Park in the Isthmus. It is an idea worth fully exploring and implementing. The Task Force believes that a Central Park could support other planning and implementation initiatives in the neighborhood and help offset identified park deficiencies, and catalyze neighborhood, business and economic development activity along the Capitol Gateway Corridor. The detail work of the task force related to design, location of park elements, budget, continues.

- Explore additional lands to be acquired.

While some parcels are critical to the success of the Park, not all of the land identified in the most recent working version of the Central Park Master Plan is necessary for the park to be developed initially. More work will be required to identify those parcels as design work progresses.

In addition, the Task Force removed 203 South Paterson Street from the list of properties to be acquired for development of Central Park. The Task Force voted to remove acquisition of the entire parcel, but did not rule out working with the owners of the property to work on the frontage along South Brearly Street as part of the Park's development (please see Figure 3).

Likewise, the Task Force reached consensus that, in order for Central Park to achieve its potential, the area bordered by South Ingersoll Street, South Baldwin Street, East Wilson Street and the existing railroad right-of-way should be acquired.

- Explore options for developing the park in phases and develop a phased implementation strategy for the park.

The Task Force agrees that developing the Park in phases, focusing on the proposed Skate Park on S. Brearly, and the Great Lawn development on S. Ingersoll—both parcels

presently owned by the CRC—merit further discussion and detailed planning. However, the ability to raise sufficient capital to develop, maintain, and provide for the long-term maintenance of the Park is a significant issue that the Task Force has not fully resolved at this point.

- How does the relationship in terms of governance, financing, management and maintenance of the park work among the parties involved?

This is a topic for the Task Force in the coming months as the concept designs are finalized.

- What is the final concept plan for the park?

The Concept Plan Sub-Committee of the Task Force will complete its report on the review of the existing McCarthy Plan and offer certain changes that better reflect the context of the Park both in terms of its location and the uses that are anticipated to come out of the early phases of the concept Plan, and ultimately, implementation. The full Committee will review suggested plan amendments.

The Alternative Design Sub-Committee will work with Madison Gas and Electric to select a landscape architectural firm(s) to help prepare an alternative plan as proposed and funded by Madison Gas and Electric and supported by the Task Force.

- What is the best plan of action regarding moving the railroad tracks?

Task Force consensus exists that realization of a centerpiece-quality urban park, as specified in the modified McCarthy plan, requires rail relocation (please see Figure 4). This is a topic for the Task Force in the coming months as it develops a final concept design. The spur track for MG&E must remain and the relocation plan allows for this. While it may be possible to develop a plan for the park with the rails in their current configuration, the Task Force has determined that the possible introduction of passenger rail services, e.g., commuter rail, will ultimately afford an opportunity to reconstruct and relocate the rail line.

Cognizant of the financial difficulties presented by rail relocation, the Task Force believes that it must also fully explore the option of not moving the rails and develop a park with the rails in their current location. The Alternative Design Sub-Committee will work with Madison Gas and Electric to select a landscape architectural firm(s) to help prepare an alternative plan as proposed and funded by Madison Gas and Electric and supported by the Task Force. That planning process will be undertaken soon and included in the final report of the Task Force.

- What do stakeholder groups think about this plan?

Public outreach, including public meetings will occur as soon as the Concept Plan Sub-Committee finishes its work, the alternative plan is completed, and conceptual plan maps

showing both rail location options are prepared. The alternative plan will require an opportunity for public comment since the development of the alternative plan is a significant departure from what has been shown. The Task Force hopes to have the public meetings as soon as these plans are completed.

- What is needed in terms of private fundraising?

Total Park cost is estimated to be \$30 million. A minimum of \$20 million must be raised from private sources to fully fund and endow Central Park. Full consideration of this issue depends upon acceptance of a park design and the Fundraising Sub-Committee will address this issue in the coming months.

- Review the proposed park footprint and address the relationship of park space to redevelopment plans in the corridor.

With the recent adoption of the East Washington Capitol Gateway Corridor BUILD, TID 36 Plan, an anticipated Neighborhood Conservation District, Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan, and amendments to the East Rail Corridor Plan by Council, the Task Force can address this issue and will by the time of the Final Report. The relationship of the Park to adopted plans in the vicinity, including the proposed land uses that are contained in these plans, is shown in Figures 5 and 6.

- Design integration with other nearby green space.

This will be more fully developed as the Task Force revises the Central Park Plan for presentation to the public. Preliminary analyses indicate the recently completed Isthmus Bike Path and Yahara River Parkway afford excellent linkages of Central Park with other municipal and regional open spaces.

- A final plan of the park to recommend to the Common Council.

This will appear in the Final Report.

- A draft MOU between all parties to deal with ownership, fundraising, implementation, management, and maintenance of the park.

The MOU Sub-Committee is now meeting to develop this element of the project.

- A phased implementation strategy for the park.

The Task Force believes that a phased implementation strategy is in the best long-term interest of the Central Park. A phasing plan and budget will be included in the final report.

Recommendations

The Task Force is fully engaged in the process to handle significant park issues, public meetings, etc. With the recent decision to look more closely at how a park may be designed that works with the railroad tracks remaining in place, more time is needed to explore and develop another park concept plan. The Task Force recommends extension of its work through December 31, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

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