

Memorandum
Planning and Urban Development Department
Planning Division



To: Co-chairs Donoghue, Marshall and the Congress Square Redesign Study Group

From: Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer, and Alexander Jaegerman, Planning Division Director

Date: November 5, 2014

Re: Congress Square Redesign – Evaluation of Two Park Design Concepts

The Congress Square Redesign Study Group (CSRSG) is tasked by the Council with evaluating two basic redesign scenarios for Congress Square:

- 1) Redesign of entire Square including existing footprint of Congress Square Plaza without an event center
- 2) Redesign of entire Square including an event center with a public park over the event center

Design Parameters

The design team (KMDG) was engaged according to the direction to staff provided by the CSRSG at the 9.17.14 meeting. A concept design for each options was to be provided for the park space, keeping in mind the needs and vision for the square as a whole. The team was provided with the parameters below with some additional resources as noted. The team obtained the dimensional requirements for the proposed event center under the management of City staff.

Design Parameters:

- Vision Statement (provided in September packet)
- Design Program (below)
- ADA accessible without elevators
- Equal level of finish and quality
- Equal provision of amenities/program – if a programmatic element or amenity cannot be provided, explain the reasoning or constraints

The design team was also provided with the following resources:

- Previous staff memo from 9.17.14 including the precedents/examples (staff)
- Event center design dimensions and parameters (Canal 5 Studio)
- Observations from the park use and events (Friends of Congress Square Park, attached)

Design Program

(with tally of applicable visioning data)

Desired Characteristics:

- Pedestrian Priority (less car dominance) (212)
- Public and Open/Inviting, Accessible (all ages, abilities) (129)
- Neighborhood/Community space (108)
- Safe (65)
- Clean/Maintained (56)
- Preserve and Celebrate Historic/Architectural Character (51)
- Economic Vitality (45)
- Arts District Identity (43)
- Active (40)
- All-Season Use
- Day/Night Use

Activities to be accommodated

1. Access to Green Space/Natural Elements/Enjoying Outdoors (232)
2. Food / Eating (210)
3. Performance (especially music) (152)
4. Events (especially those that activate the entire square - First Friday art walk, Markets) (144)
5. Play and Education (all ages) (107)
6. Art (potentially both permanent and temporary) (85)
7. Sitting/ Relaxing (80)
8. Hotel Entry + Apartment/Restaurant Egress
9. Gathering/Socializing (57)
10. People-watching (43)
11. Wifi/Internet access (36)
12. Restrooms (34)
13. Movie Screening (14)

Elements

1. Green/Landscaped Space (including trees) (232)
2. Seating (varied types/conditions to accommodate dining, people-watching, resting, reading, sun/shade) (113)
3. Water Feature (75)
4. Public Art (63)
5. Games/Interactive Play Elements (44)
6. Unique/identifying material palette and pavers (41)
7. Kiosk or Pavilion/Structure (38)
8. Gateway/Entry/ Place-making structures (28)

Description of Design Concepts

Option 1: Ground-level park with existing plaza footprint

In the proposed Concept 1, this option provides a mix of environments which could include a variety of activities and has flexibility. There are green spaces with lawn, hardscaped spaces near and away from the street, shaded and sunny spaces, play and discovery areas, seating walls, and areas that could accommodate tables and chairs, events, or performances. The space also varies in levels to deal with the change in grade from Congress Street to the hotel – there are distinct areas at each level but all are accessible through the use of ramps. In this concept with the ground-level park option, there is more occupiable space than Option 2 but less green space. The hotel entrance is enhanced with a new vestibule and a kiosk adjacent to provide food or information and an LED screen for movie screenings or digital art. The main axis of the park, which cuts diagonally through the square with a distinctive paving pattern, makes a clear path through the deep space visually and physically with the church and water feature as visual terminuses. The most prominent characteristic of the large park in this concept is the truss pavilion which has a strong placemaking component and brings definition to the space but is, again, flexible – it could be an armature for shade, lighting, performance, and art.

Option 2: Elevated park with Event Center

In the proposed Concept 2, this option provides for a variety of spaces at different levels – the most prominent characteristic being the terraced seating facing Congress Street. There are hardscaped plazas at Congress Street, a mid-level terrace, and then the front of the upper terrace. Landscaping is accommodated with a green lawn on the upper terrace, sloped greens at the ramp, and planters on the seating steps. The upper terrace provides the largest gathering space and would likely be the host to most events. Due to the need for ramps and stairs to travel between the levels of this design, there is less occupiable space than in Option 1 but more landscaped space than Option 1. In this concept, an LED screen adds opportunities for visual interest on the roof from the street and would be a place for screenings and digital art. A water feature was accommodated on the mid-level terrace and in combination with the sloped green spaces gives visual cues to the pedestrian at the street that the upper spaces are open and accessible. There are two trellis elements which provide shade and also placemaking by bringing some verticality to the space. The design is multi-dimensional but has a clear face the museum. A canopy and sign on High Street indicate the building entrance. A distinctive paving pattern at the street brings some unique identity to the space and could be applied across the square.

Additional comments

Building Structure

It is important to note that the cost estimate provided by Wright-Ryan does not include costs associated with having to increase the load-bearing capacity of the event center structure. This is likely an additional cost to the Option 2 budget that would need to be funded by the City or other parties.

Egress and Access

Option 2, the rooftop option, is ADA accessible through a ramp system. However, the concept does not include an elevator core to access this space. The inclusion of an elevator core would increase the cost associated with this option.

Whole Square

It is important to remember that Congress Square program needs and identity should be met throughout the entire Square and not just Congress Square Plaza. The plaza/park space is a significant portion of the public open space and its design and use are crucial to the overall success of the square, but the evaluation of the two options should keep a reasonable expectation of what is possible to achieve in the plaza and which things can or should be achieved throughout the Square and perhaps, in different areas of the Square.

Scorecard

The scorecard is one tool provided to compare the two design concepts. Staff has included some metrics for those elements that may be quantitatively compared (square feet of green space or linear feet of seating wall, for example). The scorecard also allows for CSRSG members to evaluate each aspect of the designs in a more qualitative way, ranking how the design might meet certain program needs and the vision on a scale of 1 to 5.

Attachments: Materials included for review of two design concepts

- Observations of park use, summer 2014 (source: Friends of Congress Square Park)
- Concept Design Images (source: KMDG/Utile)
- Cost Estimates (source: Wright-Ryan Construction)
- Scorecard (source: staff)