

Congress Square Redesign Study Group
Study Group Member Statements

To: Congress Square Redesign Study Group
From: Frank Turek, Parkside Neighborhood Association.
Nov. 5, 2014

The visioning process last year generated a lot of ideas and reflected the hopes of the community for the redesign of the park space as well as the vision for the whole square. We have also had the added benefit of witnessing this summer what can be done with the existing space. It is the combination of these two things have become a metric for evaluating any redesign concept.

This summer of 2014 the Parkside community greatly benefited from the variety activities in the park. To cite one example, the collaboration of PNA, Opportunity Alliance, Space Gallery and Friends of Congress Square Park brought viewings of the World Cup which was of great interests to much of the immigrant community where soccer is the prime sport. I cannot describe the positive energy at these World Cup games where gathered some of the most diverse audiences I've seen in Portland. It is events such as these that bind the residential community of Parkside to the Arts/ Business District of the downtown corridor. There simply exists no other open space in the vicinity that can accommodate these kind of activities.

And while programming is a key factor in what the space can provide to the community, I wouldn't want to gloss over the importance that simple amenities and regular maintenance in the park space. We had a great opportunity this summer to see the success of simple, low-cost amenities and a food truck which alone activated the space more than in the last three years combined.

The park provides a peaceful buffer as Parksiders come up High St. and up into the Congress St. corridor. It's a prime meeting spot and destination for many of us.

While the 'Spanish Steps' idea provides some potentially cool people watching and a nice view of the intersection, it is detrimental to any sense of community gathering point. This past summer we have witnessed the necessity of a wide open space. Any structure, half submerged or otherwise simply cannot accommodate the needs of the community.

sincerely,
Frank Turek
Parkside Neighborhood Association, Treasurer.

Recommendation of the Friends of Congress Square Park for the Best and Highest use for CSP
*based on the design concepts and cost estimates presented by KMDG and Wright Ryan on 11/5/14,
as well as 6 months of successful placemaking initiatives.*

The FoCSP are proud of and inspired by the tremendous results of our placemaking efforts in Congress Square Park over the past six months. Our programming, including amenities such as tables, chairs, umbrellas, planters, and food, as well as the 33 events in collaboration with SPACE gallery featuring local artists and arts organization, brought an estimated 9,000-10,000 visitors into the park. The space has been transformed from an empty and neglected space to a vibrant community gathering space. We are excited by the enthusiasm and interest from stakeholders in the community who want to partner with us to continue to develop and expand our programming model. We thank all those who have worked with us to help make this transformation possible.

We recommend that the Congress Square Redesign Study Group, our community and the City move forward with getting final designs for a ground level park incorporating the entire current footprint. Based on our evaluation, a ground level park is most consistent with the needs and desires of the community as expressed through the data generated during the City's public visioning process, as well as the recent parks referendum. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the designers to help our placemaking efforts inform the final design.

The ground level design concept by KMDG demonstrates that the CSRSR can achieve its desired goals as articulated through the group's visioning statement. Many of these goals are also important shared characteristics of successful public spaces around the country. **The ground level public space is/provides:**

- **More ACCESSIBLE** to a range of users of all ages, physical and financial abilities (especially moms with strollers, young kids, and seniors – these are the users that you want to attract to create a successful park!)
- **More OPEN, INVITING AND WALKABLE** encouraging the pedestrian experience by enhancing visual sightlines and pedestrian access through the space. People can cross through from High to Congress and visa-versa. They can enter from multiple points because of the permeable edges. The outer park draws people into the inner park.
- **FLEXIBLE AND TIMELESS DESIGN** to allow for a **variety of destinations, amenities and activities**, and further, to allow the programming to **evolve with changing community needs** for generations to come.
- **EASIER ONGOING MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT** to ensure that the design does not exceed our community's resources. For example, snow removal at ground level will be far easier ensuring that year-round programming is possible. Easy access to ground level event space will allow for a greater range of events. (How does a band get its equipment to the roof, or a vendor transport tables and goods for a market?)
- **OPPORTUNITY FOR AN ACTIVE EDGE** with retail or food through a permanent kiosk or structure in the back corner.
- **PLAY STRUCTURES** and a variety of spaces that are safe for play and encourage multi-generational activities.
- **BETTER OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC ART** (both permanent and temporary physical and performing because of the flexibility of space) which will **enhance its identity as the heart of the Arts District**
- **BETTER VALUE** - based on these estimates, we get **more quality occupiable space** (for events, performance, standing, sitting, play), for a significantly lower cost. (Based on these concept designs, would cost \$112 per sq ft of occupiable space, compared to \$306 per sq ft for option 2.)

The re-imagining of Congress Square Park and the outer square is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our community to declare the primacy of public life and public space in the 21st-century city, and to be a model for placemaking for cities across the country. Redesigning the entire public space at ground level affords us the opportunity to achieve the park's full potential as a vibrant gathering place, providing significant social and economic benefits for our community for generations to come.

Sincerely,
Bree LaCasse
Board of Directors, Friends of Congress Square Park

THE FRIENDS OF CONGRESS PARK

Mission Statement: The Friends of Congress Square Park is a community non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, enhancement and use of Congress Square Park, a central part of the Portland park system. We are dedicated to the arts, public access and community involvement in Congress Square Park as a means to enhance the livability and economic potential of downtown Portland.

Based on the evaluation conducted with the Congress Square Redesign Study Group and observations through our placemaking efforts, the FoCSP strongly support the redesign of the park in its current footprint at ground level.

The FoCSP:

- Recognize that the success of any public space depends, above all, on its management. The Friends of Congress Square Park are committed to being the place manager of Congress Square Park, and to creating a lasting management structure, in partnership with the City, to ensure ongoing fundraising, programming, and maintenance of this important public space.
- Raised \$37,500 for programming in 2014. The Friends also received \$12,000 in in-kind support and countless hours of volunteer support. (A sub-committee of the FoCSP raised an additional \$85,000 to pay for legal fees and the campaign for the citizen's initiative to save the park and add protections to all our public spaces.)
- Project a \$50,000 programming budget for FY2015.
- Are launching a membership program, and are looking to hire a part-time event programmer and development assistant.
- Are finalists on a \$100k national placemaking grant for expanded amenities and programming for FY2015.
- Are actively collaborating with community partners to seek larger national grants to help further develop our programming model and to bring national investment and attention to our placemaking initiative. (This model could be expanded to other public spaces in Portland.)
- Are collaborating with PDD, Creative Portland, SPACE, VIA, the Open Bench Project, and Pandora LaCasse (among other partners) to continue programming throughout the winter to make Congress Square Park a year round destination. (Programming includes: a new sculptural light installation, Merry Madness, silent video & photo projections during FFAW, activities during Winterfest, and more.)
- Filed for 501c3 status.
- Will commit to raising private funding to help pay for physical improvements and amenities as needed to make up for public funding shortfalls. We have spoken with our donor base and other supporters about giving major gifts to this effort, and have been assured that if the City commits to redesigning the park in its current footprint at ground level, they will financially support the project.

Portland Museum of Art, Congress Square Redesign Study Group,
November, 2014

Thank you Councilors Donoghue and Marshall for convening these meetings to discuss the future of Congress Square. The Museum feels strongly that we must make people and pedestrian traffic the focus of Congress Square and not automobiles. We are also disappointed that the city has not found a way to encourage the owners of the Schwartz Building at 600-604 Congress Street to stop the degradation of that building and its adverse impact on commerce and pedestrians around Congress Square for over four years.

Being asked to review the proposals and make a choice only between the two proposals presented the Museum supports choice number one:

- (1) Existing footprint of Congress Square Plaza without an event center.

In supporting (1) we also desire a more thorough conversation about the design. And we look forward to further attention and discussion of the streetscape of the entire Congress Square.

Thank you,

Mark Bessire, Director, Portland Museum of Art



Lin Lisberger, Co-Chair
Julia Kirby, Vice-Chair
James Cradock
Jenna Crowder
Christopher Devlin
Alison Hildreth
Pandora LaCasse
Councilor Dave Marshall
Tony Muench
Corey Templeton

Management & Administration

Alexander Jaegerman,
Planning Division Director

Caitlin Cameron
Urban Designer, City of Portland

I sit on this board as the representative to the Portland Public Arts Committee. Over three years ago we made the decision to make Congress Sq., which has been designated the heart of the Arts District a priority site for a major work of art. Since then PPAC has committed \$200,000 towards this goal. We have also recently put together an art selection committee comprised of the major stakeholders in this area. The Park has had a renewal of positive activity this summer and fall. The Friends of Congress Square Park and community members have helped to make this area a vital and vibrant space.

Public Art both permanent and temporary can play an important role in creating a sense of place and identity and can be a key factor in establishing a unique and culturally active place and an economic engine for the area. PPAC is excited to join in the effort to make Congress Sq. and Congress Sq. Park a destination place with a distinct identity for future generations by procuring an iconic public art work. We are committed to raising the additional funds that will be needed to make this happen.

Congress Square Park is also an important site for temporary art of all nature. Site-lines, accessibility, flexibility are key elements in the placement of public art both permanent and temporary.

A ground level Park offers a variety of visual experiences from different vantage points whether approaching from the south, north, west or east. Each direction reveals a different perspective of the park and its visual and dynamic role and relationship to all the elements of the entire square. There is more opportunity for an art work to visually engage people from a variety of views and allows for a more dynamic relationship with the surroundings. There is also opportunity to have art that is multi-unit, activating different areas of the park while still maintaining visual connection to the whole. Site lines are limited with a park on the roof. The system of ramps, stairs, platforms that are needed for physical access create rigid spaces and decreased visibility from one area to another.

Physical Engagement in the art piece is very important to the committee. We want people to be able to have multiple experiences and being able to touch is very important for a public work of art at this location. A ground level Park is clearly easily accessible for everyone from multiple

access points along Congress and High St. All areas of the Park could be good sites for a public work of art where the public can engage with it on any level. Accessibility is very restricted with a Park on the roof. Parents with strollers and small children and people like Maureen who lives in the at Congress Sq. Plaza and visits the park daily would struggle to make the trip up this ramping system to attend events or experience public art.

Temporary public art can come in many different forms and a flexible space will allow us to think out of the box. A ground level park is the only option that truly allows for flexibility. Preservation of the historical and Architectural Character is extremely important at Congress Square. The Square is bordered by historical landmark buildings and two of the edges of the Park are multi- levels of cascading brick facades with varying depths and texture of varied window placement. There is beauty in this layered expanse and depth of structure that expands to the sky. The design of the park needs to respect the inherent beauty and integrity of this space. A ground level park can do this. The roof top park design is inflexible in the required standards, creating a maze of diagonal and horizontal lines climbing up and up with rigid lines and structure that combine to create a visual bulk that doesn't fit visually in this historical area of our city. It is visually awkward.

This Park does not have a huge footprint but the surrounding buildings do and the streets are active with traffic moving in four directions. We need a park whose design has been simplified to its essential elements, that speaks to its potential beauty, allows its elements of nature to subdue the surrounding noise and gives us a moment of pause and makes us all feel wonderful when we are there.

Pandora LaCasse
Portland Public Art Committee, member



Councilors:

I have been deeply involved in the Congress Square Park/Plaza debate since I started at Portland's Downtown District about 1 ½ years ago. PDD's position at that time was in support of the City's sale to Rockbridge for the purpose of building a multi-use event center.

It is easy for me to argue this position because I have spent my career in the travel and hospitality industry. I know the critical need for event space in Portland, particularly if we want more visitors here in the off seasons. I do not believe there is a valid argument against the need, and it's important that it's attached to the largest hotel in the city. Moreover, it would provide a boost to the burgeoning Arts District businesses, which continue to struggle. Up to 300 people a night for 150 or more nights a year will help drive new, much needed economic activity in the district!

I met with many members of the community, on all sides of this issue, and I believe I have a pretty complete understanding of everyone's views. I've been educated by several people on the value of world class public space to a downtown, and this has had a profound impact on my views for this important public space.

PDD believes that a "world-class urban public park" can be built, along with an event center on the Congress Square site. We believe it would represent a win-win for city, which as we all know is in need of a unifying resolution to this contentious debate. We are reminded that nearly half of the city's residents, many concerned about rising property taxes, voted for an event center over a public park in the June off-year referendum.

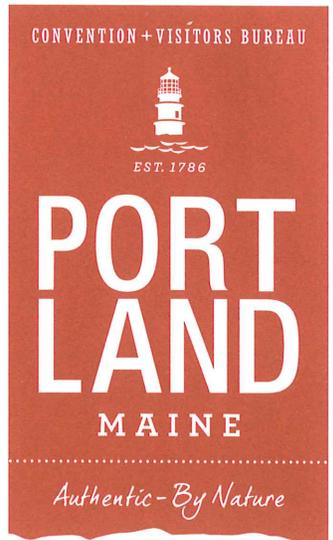
I've built new friendships and renewed older ones during my Congress Square discussions over these past few months. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the Friends of Congress Square, particularly for the Lacasse family, who succeeded in energizing the park over the summer and fall. Still, while we disagree, I think their ultimate goals (and mine actually) can be achieved with a 'park first; event center second' strategy for the space.

My continuing frustration is with people who cannot get past the past. Those who say that Rockbridge had their chance and they blew it, or they don't trust them - this cannot be the position of the Portland City Council! The Council needs to adequately consider the pros and cons of both options and make a decision based on what is the best and highest value for all the city's residents, today and for years to come. Unfortunately, the Congress Square Study Group was not able to come to a consensus on this, and there really wasn't enough time to do a complete and proper analysis.

The City Council cannot afford to let this once in a lifetime opportunity pass without adequately considering a "World Class Public Park with an Event Center" option. The chance to create something truly special is possible here, and as we have discovered, there would be nothing like it in America.

Sincerely,

Steven W. Hewins, Executive Director



Comments on Congress Square Plaza

November 17, 2014

Dear Councilors:

Let me begin by saying that both options being presented are well thought out and offer attractive solutions for Congress Square. The rooftop option, however, provides more than one benefit and is thus, I feel, the better choice.

The benefits of the rooftop plan to Portland are two-fold – first, as a wonderful public amenity, and second, as an economic generator. As a Convention & Visitors Bureau, our mission is to stimulate Greater Portland’s economy through tourism. The rooftop plan wouldn’t just benefit the Westin Hotel – convention attendees that occupy the 5,000 square foot event center will create an economic impact that trickles down to our airport, transportation providers, audio visual companies, restaurants, attractions, art galleries, museums, coffee shops, and small business owners just to name a few.

The rooftop design is also very intriguing. People find rooftop space unique and alluring. With the use of High Street as a thruway from one side of the city to the other, Congress Square becomes a very busy and dangerous intersection for people trying to enjoy the park. The rooftop plan would result in a more relaxing space with beautiful views of the city, providing residents and visitors with a more peaceful experience in the midst of a busy area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynn Tillotson
President + CEO

CONVENTION + VISITORS BUREAU

94 Commercial Street
Portland, Maine 04101
p: 207.772.4994
f: 207.874.9043

.....
visitportland.com

First Name: Rosanne

Last Name: Graef

West End Neighborhood Association

Comments on the two Congress Square Park Design Concepts: I am writing to support Option 1: Ground-level Park for the following reasons:

- * provides more benefit to more people, residents, visitors and businesses alike
 - * flexible uses - now - different kinds of activities can be easily programmed for different-sized gatherings and types of activities
 - * flexible uses - future - if the park is designed without lots of infrastructure and chopped-up spaces, as population density on the peninsula increases and as people's needs and desires change, the space can be more easily adapted than a roof-top space

 - * more affordable - now - the cost estimates are not really comparable since the kiosk/pavilion price was left out of the rooftop option. In addition, if the ground-level park is simply designed, without a lot of extraneous features, it will be less expensive than the plan presented and could be done in phases
 - * more affordable - future - the costs of maintenance and security will be lower and the tasks will be more easily accomplished with the ground level park
 - * CDBG eligibility not guaranteed for the expenditure of any sale price the city might receive from RockBridge and if it were, why should CDBG money be invested in a building that's owned by a private entity that's not creating a truly open and public space for the benefit of the residents of Portland?
 - * not encumbered by what is at this point a vague ownership, liability and responsibility agreement between the City and RockBridge - what would the City really own? Who would have ultimate control of the programming, etc. of a rooftop space. This is clear-cut with the ground-level option, not so with a rooftop park. Within a relatively few years, the City could end up in court against RockBridge and perhaps end up with nothing.

 - * Portland is incredibly lucky to have a public open space in heart of peninsula that's spacious and sunny where people can gather to connect to nature (the sky, birds, greenery, more distant views) and to each other - please do not squander this precious resource!

 - * in closing, keep it simple - the design, the ownership and maintenance agreements
 - * and PLEASE make some provisions for public restrooms
-

First Name: Alexander

Last Name: Landry

Bayside Neighborhood Association

Comments on the two Congress Square Park Design Concepts: A. Value is greater with Option 1. It has more than double the usable space of the rooftop option, and it's all pretty much on one level. Option 2 has half of the usable space. Ramps aren't usable; the green-colored triangles between ramps on High St side are not usable; the stairs aren't usable.

B. Option 1 would be flexible for events & programming, both physically and in terms of being a public space.

Option 2 is nowhere near as physically flexible, and the Westin/Eastland may pre-emptively reserve the space, because of their needs.

C. Edges of Option 1 could be made 'active' in the design process.

Option 2 edges wouldn't be active at all, and provide hiding places in back corner of the loong ramp, and behind the tv-screen.

D. Option 1 improves upon the current Congress Sq Park, and has more room, which would bring more people in.

Option 2 rooftop park will not draw people to it. There are either 43 steps or 481 feet of ramp to go up, to reach it, so it will have fewer people than now use Congress Sq Park.

E. Option 1 concept is flexible, in this design stage, so the design can be fine-tuned.

Option 2 isn't flexible at all. There is comparatively, much less that is changeable in this design.

F. If Option 1 needed adjustment, after it were built, it could be altered later.

If Option 2 were built, it wouldn't be changed for the duration of the 99-year lease.

In summary, Option 1 gives more people enjoying more space, built for less money!

Do you prefer an option?: Option 1: Ground-level Park