

## **Meeting Minutes (draft, not approved by CSRSG)**

### **Congress Square Redesign Study Group**

November 5, 2014 5:00 to 6:45 pm

Room 24, City Hall

#### **Call to order 4:04pm**

#### *Welcome and Introductions*

In attendance: Co-chair Kevin Donoghue, Co-chair David Marshall, Rosanne Graef, Frank Turek, Alex Landry, Peter Bass, Hilary Bassett, Pandora LaCasse, Bruce Wennerstrom, Sally Streuver (Portland Museum of Art), Bree LaCasse, Steve Hewins, Lynn Tillotson, Jaime Parker, Councilor Jon Hinck, Michael Boucher, Alex Jaegerman (staff), Caitlin Cameron (staff), Jeff Levine (staff)

Not in attendance: Jack Lufkin

#### *Review and accept meeting minutes*

Three amendments proposed to minutes by Bree LaCasse, David Marshall, and member of the public Don Elliot.

**Landry moved, B LaCasse seconded [16-0 passes, Lufkin absent]**

*Presentation of design concepts for two park options and cost estimates (Kaki Martin, KMDG and Tim Love, Utile, and Cordelia Pitman, Wright-Ryan Construction)*

#### *Attachments:*

1. *Memorandum – Staff description, design parameters*
2. *Design Concepts*
3. *Cost Estimates*
4. *Scorecard*

The design team and cost estimator presented the design concepts for each of the options being considered by the CSRSG. Those materials can be found in the attachments.

#### *Questions from CSRSG members:*

Parker asked what the square feet of event space would be. Love responded that the total square feet of event center was 8,300sf with a 5,000sf main event room.

Bass asked whether the concept design represents that 8,300sf of event center space. Martin responded that it did.

Graef asked how the money from the sale of the land would be used in the option 2 scenario – could staff clarify the CDBG situation since this parcel is currently not eligible for CDBG activities. Levine responded that this site is currently not eligible for CDBG funds so the money from the sale of the parcel would be used to offset the cost of a CDBG eligible activity elsewhere in the city unless in the next round of evaluation this area were to become CDGB eligible which is also a possibility.

Graef asked how long that CDBG process would take. Levine responded that next year's round would be for July 2016.

Steuer asked for clarification on whether this group would be making a decision on anything beyond the plaza area at this time since the rest of the intersection, sidewalk and square are depicted in the same way in both options. The response was that no, the design process would continue after this decision to address the remainder of the square and that was not part of the current task given.

Bassett asked about Item 17 in the cost estimate – does the word “excavation” refer only to excavation work for the event center building? Pitman responded that yes, all aspects of Item 17 are exclusions directly related to the event center building itself.

Bass asked the design team to explain how the grade change across the parcel is managed in Option 1. A second question was how much of the roof would need to be taken up by mechanical equipment. Martin demonstrated with the slides that the park surface slopes down from Congress Street to the hotel entry level. The back corner of the park would be elevated with access from ramps and stairs. The mechanical equipment question is a good one and the design team does not have an answer without being able to work with the event center architect. The building needs would have to be developed in tandem with the rooftop park design with coordination on things like that. Love added that in order to maximize the park area, some things like the mechanicals could be incorporated into the screen wall or onto the neighboring roof.

Donoghue asked whether the event center in this scheme was in the same location as the design presented by Rockbridge previously. Love responded that the design team had to change the proportion and position of the event center building footprint in order to accommodate the ADA accessible ramping system on site.

Donoghue further asked whether the design team changed the elevation of the event center. Martin responded that no, the height and level of the event center remain the same and could not be sunk lower because of access reasons from the existing hotel entrance.

Landry asked where there would be railings. Martin responded that railings would be present on one side of each ramp and on top of the roof for those areas where there is a falling safety risk.

Landry further asked what those railings would look like as they appeared to be rendered like glass in the design concepts. Martin responded those details would be worked out – the railings are shown as glass but could be designed in different ways.

Landry asked what the grade of the landforms between the ramps was. Love responded that they did not know the exact ratio but that they were too steep to be occupied. Landry followed with the observation that those areas would be difficult to mow.

Landry also asked about the green space depicted at the back of the alley in Option 2 and what that was intended to be. Love responded that was not meant to be green and was simply the back of the egress alley at ground level as it is now.

Hinck inquired if the Spanish Steps were a part of the influence of the Option 2 design, why were the steps not started closer to the street and why were they made so angular. Love responded that the design intention was to keep a plaza space at the street level to be used for performance. The designers also didn't want to break the façade lines of the existing buildings on Congress Street and just have the canopy peek out past that line. Hinck responded that it was clear the design team had thought about these points and made conscious decisions.

Hinck asked whether the designs need structures and water features in both options and if the designers knew of examples of places that still have working fountains in this climate. Love responded that the structures are critical in both schemes for human comfort and placemaking. The particulars of these elements can be tweaked but they ground the space and the upper trellises indicate the elevated space is open. The fountains are in-ground and can be made to accommodate the weather.

Hewins asked whether either scheme has public restrooms. Martin responded that no, there are not public restrooms in either option. Love added that in his experience, cities do not want the expense of maintaining restrooms.

Turek commented that the square feet of event space as reported in the scorecard does not look proportionate or accurate. Cameron responded that particular line item is for the major open space in each scheme and it is possible the numbers are off slightly.

### *Public Comment*

Barry Hoffman: Asked whether the ADA guidelines are met, what happens at Free Street, and what is the situation with easements.

Judith MacCallister: Asked what the designers have done to prevent people in the park from accessing the lower apartments at the back corner.

John Eder: Asked who is going to bear the additional costs of the event center since the public has already voted against the sale of the land.

Ian Jacobs: Pointed out there should be an allowance for the entry structure and kiosk in the estimate and asked what the cost of those items would be. Also pointed out that storm drainage should be taken into account, especially with ramp ice melt.

Don Elliot: Pointed out that winter happens here and the roof option is problematic in that sense. Urged the CSRSG to keep in mind that this is part of the whole square and would like to see views of the park space from within the square. The pergolas are superfluous and in the way – the square should be open and the surface treatment can add character to the space rather than the pergolas. He prefers the ground-level option.

Carl Eppich: Asked for clarification on the different levels of Option 2 design.

Joan Grant: Pointed out that the park is currently used by ADA users and wondered if it is really feasible to use these ramps. Asked how much it would cost for restrooms which are badly needed. She also asked if these are the only two options to vote on.

Tony Sully: Asked whether Rockbridge would absorb the costs to hold park.

### *Answers to questions*

Jaegerman responded that the easement for egress is retained in both options.

Love affirmed that both schemes are ADA compliant.

Love responded that they weren't aware of the access issues to the neighboring apartments and would need to look at that further.

Pitman pointed out that there is an allowance in Option 1 for the kiosk structure and that dollar amount could be applied to both options.

Martin responded that storm water is an important issue and could be addressed with further design work.

Love pointed out on the slides that the Option 2 has three levels – ground plaza, a mid-level terrace, and then the upper terrace.

Pitman commented that the cost of restrooms would depend on the structure and there is the possibility of using pods. This is something they could find out if needed. Love added that code compliant and ADA restrooms also become more expensive.

Marshall responded that the additional costs would be borne by the public for extra structure. Pitman added that they would need more information for an accurate dollar amount on these costs.

#### *CSRSG deliberation on two options*

Members of the CSRSG provided their opinion on the options and how to proceed:

Tillotson commented that the city has a significant lack of convention space and loses money and events to other cities every week. There is an economic benefit with visitors coming and spending money in the city; it is not just a benefit to the Westin. The goal is to get events here.

#### **The CSRSG moved to recommend Option 1, the ground-level park to Council.**

Parker moved, Graef seconded.

B. LaCasse included a statement (attached) from the Friends of Congress Square Park. She reinforced the role of Friends of Congress Square Park in the future success of the space and asked the CSRSG to join them in believing in the economic and social value of great public space for generations to come.

Graef stated that she has heard nothing that addresses the concerns about ownership and maintenance costs. If these things do not work or it is expensive, what then?

Steuver reads a statement from Mark Bessire stating discouragement at the state of the Schwartz building in the square and the negative impact it has had for several years. The PMA supports Option 1 with further discussion and attention needed.

Hewins reiterated that it's PDD's role to maintain this public open space and is dedicated to that task regardless of the outcome. He supports Option 2 if it works as an urban public space – as a park first and an event center second. He likes both concepts except for the lack of public restrooms. Does not know about the financing but either way, that is not part of the CSRSG purview. He is uncomfortable with the cost estimates and believes they are moot to making this decision because it is too difficult to estimate for Option 2 separate from the event center. The public wants convergence – Option 2

can be a win-win and PDD has similar view on economic value of the event center as Lynn Tillotson. There is a need to create more opportunity downtown.

Bass found both designs compelling. Option 2 takes a lot of space for circulation and getting to the top of the park. Would like to hear from Rockbridge whether Option 2 is even possible.

Wennerstrom responded that these design concepts give the group something tangible to talk about and he is encouraged by both. The event center idea came from data on the need for such a space. The hotel is still committed to finding a win-win and make a structure that works for everyone. Originally, the event center space was 9,600sf and this is smaller, there is a loss of natural lighting, but these things can be worked out.

Turek referred to the statement distributed (attached). He prefers the ground plan park as a vital space for the Parkside neighborhood residents. It is vital to community. A revitalized park space is also an economic development magnet. He also stated the desire to amend the recent open space ordinance to include Congress Square Park.

Bassett thanked the designers for their work and ideas – it was more work than was expected. Both options would activate the space, are dynamic and exciting places. GPL has always been concerned with how the park fits into the entire intersection where there is some of the best architecture in the city. A question for Rockbridge (Wennerstrom) – would Rockbridge be willing to contribute additional investment? Wennerstrom responded that they are willing to talk about it. Bassett continued that both options have good textures and that a ground lease option may be possible for Option 2.

Hinck felt that more discussion was needed about the designs and hoped that the designs would be available online for people to comment on. In Option 1, the diagonal cut through is appealing. In Option 2, the benefits include the views, getting away from traffic, and access to more sun. As a citizen, he would not want to pay more for the benefit to go to someone else and Option 1 is probably better for that return on public investment. He will vote against the motion because he wants to hear from the public before making a decision.

Boucher commented that the traffic changes proposed here are big changes by itself and either option chosen should include these changes. Unifying pavement is strong and creates the illusion of a big open space. There is a balance yet to be struck with diversity and complexity with flexibility and timeless character of the space. Timeless spaces tend to be more simple. Rather than the fragments of elements it would be better to have larger

spaces of each type of space combined. The kiosk might also move to the corner. He proposed making it simpler and more unified. He liked the use of the diagonal but felt it should be scaled down.

P. LaCasse read a statement (attached) which emphasized the important considerations for siting artwork – sight lines, accessibility, and visibility. The ground option allows for more options to site artwork. Accessibility is key – the art needs to be accessible and the ground option works for that. Option 2 has more rigid sight lines, less clear accessibility, and is still not physically accessible to all abilities. The green space is not all useable. Flexibility is key. Option 1 will give what is needed here.

Landry like Option 2 more than he anticipated but there are too many unsurmountable issues. Visual access for neighbors – it is too close to their apartments. Option 1 is not perfect, yet, and there could be more active uses along the back wall. He supports the motion and feels we can arrive at a good solution for the City and hotel.

Parker reminded the group that there has been a long discussion about this space with the consideration of a rooftop option in the past but the ship has sailed on the putting a building on this site. He stated that it feels forced. It is clear what Rockbridge is willing to do and it is not enough. The cost estimates seem low between the two options but cost is less important to the decision. He is looking forward to getting back to the original charge and move ahead and believes through the use of vertical elements there is a way to deal with the problematic back corner.

Hewins asked a procedural question about the Council Order – does the CSRSG have to make a recommendation and if not, why is the group making a motion to recommend one option? Hewins stated he did not think it was appropriate to vote.

Bassett asked what the deadline was from the Council Order. Marshall responded that the Council is expecting the CSRSG to report back on November 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Vote taken on the proposed motion [10-5 passes, 1 abstention, Hewins abstained. Lufkin absent.]**

**Meeting adjourned 6:50pm**