

Meeting Minutes
Congress Square Redesign Study Group

August 20, 2014 6:00 to 7:30

Room 24, City Hall

Call to order 6:05pm

Welcome and Introductions

In attendance: Co-chair Kevin Donoghue, Co-chair David Marshall, Roseanne Graef, Frank Turek, Alex Landry, Peter Bass, Hilary Bassett, Ralph Carmona (representing Friends of the Parks Commission), Pandora LaCasse, Bruce Wennerstrom, Kristen Levesque, Bree LaCasse, Michael Boucher, Steve Hewins

Not in attendance: Jack Lufkin, Lynn Tillotson, Jon Hinck

Discussion of updated charge

- *Additional members*
- *Expansion of scope*
- *Review and evaluate two redesign options*
 1. *Existing footprint of Congress Square Plaza without an event center*
 2. *Event Center with a public park over the event center*

Councilor Marshall reminded the group that although there are two options to review for the plaza, keep in mind that the whole square is to be covered and additional options may be considered.

Hewins asked how the two-way study affects this work. Cameron replied that the Congress Square design team coordinated with TY Lin (State/High team) to set curb lines that will work for either one or two-way traffic in the intersection. The design work thus far can accommodate either option.

Landry asked whether interim measures could be considered as well. Councilor Donoghue replied that they could as long as the Council charge is met.

Back-up material and work to date:

Attachments:

1. *Council Order 60 08/09 – appointment of committee*

2. *Council Order 34 14/15 – charge to committee*
3. *Memorandum to City Council 7/21/14*
4. *Roof Park cost analysis (Friends of Congress Square Park)*
5. *Report from Project for Public Spaces (Friends of Congress Square Park)*

Staff then presented the back-up material included as attachments. Jaegerman presented the budget estimates and how they were calculated. He noted that the cost estimate for the park over the event center was for landscaping only. Cameron briefly recounted the work that has been done to date, existing and possible funding sources, and the considerations for evaluating the options moving forward.

Councilor Donoghue asked whether staff have further considered the budget estimates that were presented as part of the memorandum to Council on July 21. Jaegerman replied that staff did not invest further time into this because there is no design scheme to use to generate more precise estimates. Cameron then deferred to the CSRSG members P. LaCasse and B. LaCasse to explain the two attachments provided by Friends of Congress Square Park. One attachment was prepared by David LaCasse, in the audience, as an alternative cost estimate based on case studies with pricing data acquired from the architects and design firms of the completed projects. The second document is a report prepared by Project for Public Spaces summarizing and analyzing the visioning data generated through the public visioning process completed by the Portland Planning Department and the assessment work done by the design team hired to date. The report also includes recommendations for design amenities and ongoing management structures.

CSRSG members were then given a chance to respond to the Council discussion from the workshop on July 21, as well to the charge.

Carmona stated that the Parks Commission view was that there is a need for greater Parks Commission involvement. A letter will be sent stating the position that the role of the Parks Commission should be strengthened with a stronger advisory role in the case of the Congress Square redesign.

Graef stated that the biggest question for the West End Neighborhood Association was in regards to the ownership in a hybrid model with the public park on a private roof.

Landry stated that it was difficult to conceptualize a park on a one story building that would work well. The challenges would include making it visible and well-used. Landry also asked whether staff or the co-chairs had feedback on the second cost estimate produced by Friends of Congress Square Park.

Bass mentioned that the concept of a rooftop park is not new and when the Congress Square Redesign process began, this option was discussed. He asked why and how this particular option is back on the table. Marshall asked who, at the time, had discussed that option. Bass responded that it was a discussion between local architects and the hotel. Wennerstrom said that the rooftop option was dismissed at that time because Rockbridge was expected to carry the whole cost. Marshall clarified that he heard, on July 21st from Nathan Smith that the cost of the structure to support a public park roof would be borne by the public. Wennerstrom added that a rooftop park concept came from a desire to find a win-win solution. Bass commented that he was glad to see this option back on the table. Donoghue tried to clarify who would cover the cost of necessary upgrades to the building structure and park in this option. Wennerstrom replied that Rockbridge's understanding was the City would cover that cost.

Levesque stated that she was interested to learn more about the roof option. Donoghue wished to clarify whether choosing the rooftop option would mean the design of the event center building would remain the same as before. Wennerstrom responded that the same square footage would be needed as before but the external appearance could change.

Bassett asked how the analysis that CSRSG is charged with relates to the whole square concept and design. Donoghue stated he thought they were interrelated but not interdependent. He asked what is it important for the CSRSG to consider in making this evaluation. Bassett responded that Greater Portland Landmarks is open to a lot of different options but how the design and future square engages people is at the heart of the matter. There is an expectation for high quality design that respects context.

P. LaCasse showed concern that the cost of the roof option will be very high. She suggested that the CSRSG should consider the visioning and assessment data, which show that people want trees, green, food, tables and chairs, etcetera. She asked whether these desires could be provided for with the roof option. Accessibility of the park is very important and visual sight lines are important. The rooftop option limits both physical and visual access. She further added that food trucks have been successful in this location and a rooftop option would not support this model. Additionally, she felt the CSRSG needs to consider the vision in addition to the cost. In the Project for Public Spaces report, PPS posits that roof parks eventually become very private. Donoghue confirmed that one evaluation criteria for both options should be how well they meet the vision of the community.

Hewins agreed that historic elements and buildings need to be kept in mind. He added that he has a hard time resolving the one-way/two-way question as it relates to this design process. Hewins asked whether it was true that the cost of

the plaza would be the same in both options, as it suggests in the staff *Memorandum to City Council 7/21/14*. He also asked how the staff cost estimates compare with the Friends of Congress Square Park estimates. David LaCasse clarified that their estimates used case studies from existing completed projects from other cities with green roofs or parks over sunken structures. He further noted that the estimates do not include access equipment such as an elevator in the cost. Jaegerman reiterated that the cost estimates depend on what assumptions are made and it is difficult to compare the two because they are based on different assumptions. He further noted that his estimates did not include upgrades to the building structure that would be required to support a park. Hewins went on to add that the Portland Downtown District was supportive of an event center and win-win solutions. They are not in favor of turning this public space into a food truck parking lot; that is not seen as the best and highest use.

B. LaCasse wanted to make sure that the CSRSG uses the data from the visioning process in evaluating options. The Friends group has seen an increase in use based on management, new amenities and events. Management is a critical component to the success of the space in addition to design, so ongoing management and maintenance costs should also be considered. She suggested the CSRSG should clarify whether they were evaluating an elevated green roof or an elevated park. LaCasse liked the PPS recommendation to have a more permanent commercial kiosk or similar in the back corner to activate the back of the park. She felt that a successful park could be created without completely redesigning every aspect of the park.

Turek stated that cost is a big part of the evaluation but evaluation with the vision data is a good metric. He asked how the design meets the vision and needs assessment. He further mentioned that over the course of the summer, there has been a lot of good use of the park. Turek would like to see a cost assessment of how to reuse aspects of the park instead of a complete overhaul. He would like to consider incremental implementation or phasing built into the plan. Turek did not feel the square needed to be designed now, only the plaza. He further pointed out that the Council order calls for necessary improvements. He added that seeing examples of existing public/private roof parks would be helpful.

Boucher made the point that the question should not be about cost but rather about the value we are getting from the redesigned space. He added that by reaching for modest designs we won't achieve the full benefit and vision for the space and meet all the interests and needs. Getting more might cost more but the result would be more value. Boucher further added he had strong reservations about an elevated park – there are inherent limitations on movement when a space is elevated. He added that part of the functionality issue now in the plaza is in part from a change in elevation and lack of visual

connection. Boucher mentioned that other examples of elevated parks have not necessarily been successful – Lincoln Center is under-used; the High Line required a lot of resources and management in the beginning to make it work. He asked how the City will own something on top of a private building. Finally, Boucher asked whether the option to redesign the whole plaza been discounted. Donoghue clarified that was Option 1 of the two options. Boucher’s final statement was that cost should not be a deterrent to doing this the right way.

Wennerstrom felt that to make a decision going forward, CSRSG members need a true scope of work and bids on what it would cost. He further encouraged the group to not lose the vision of the whole square and hoped to do something dynamic.

Hewins leaves at 7:30pm

Next steps

Donoghue reiterated that there are two clear scenarios to evaluate. He asked what is the best way for private entities to add value to public space and vice versa. Further, when considering the event center/park option, it seems that the same footprint is needed. Donoghue asked Wennerstrom to clarify if the same envelope is also needed, or if part of the event center could be sunken. Wennerstrom replied that the same one-story envelope would also be needed to have a street presence, and that the hotel was not interest in sinking the structure.

Marshall stated that he would like to keep an incremental approach in mind. Based on past City projects, \$1.5-2 million seems to be on par for a redesign for this park. He added that every year the City bonds out \$10 million for public infrastructure investments, and therefore, this scope seems feasible. Marshall added that he is excited to talk about the whole intersection and pointed out that some issues of the park cannot be solved without looking at whole intersection. He stated that the decision between one-way and two-way affects some aspects of the design such as the location of stop bars but it appears the configuration of the intersection can remain consistent. Marshall requested examples and hard numbers to give the CSRSG a good idea of the options. He did not feel that the process needs to go as far as a design-bid scenario to make a decision.

Cameron asked CSRSG to determine what information is needed to evaluate and make a recommendation of the options. The responses included:

- A more detailed cost estimate
- An evaluation first of the options against the needs and vision
- A conceptual design of each option

Carmona asked Wennerstrom to confirm that the Westin was not interested in paying any additional amounts to accommodate a park on the roof. Wennerstrom responded that the hotel would not be interested in paying anything more than what they had budgeted for the original event center and that any additional cost would have to be borne by the city.

Carmona further asked if there were concerns about safety with an elevated park because of limited sightlines. B. LaCasse answered that there were concerns about safety. In the current park, the clock location creates a hidden space that allows certain activities to happen out of view of people passing by, which affects safety. In an elevated park, the entire space would be hidden from view of people passing by which would be problematic. P. LaCasse added that successful parks require easy physical and visual access from multiple points.

Bass stated that he saw no need for conceptual designs to facilitate cost estimates. He felt that analysis could be achieved with existing data.

How to consult with Land Bank Commission, Parks Commission, and other appropriate organizations?

Donoghue suggested that the approach here might be that any materials submitted to the CSRSG should also be submitted to the Parks Commission and Land Bank.

Public Comment

David LaCasse: Agreed with Bass that the CSRSG does not need a conceptual design to evaluate the options at this stage. Advocated for using visioning data and examples instead.

Anne Pringle: Agreed that the CSRSG can use examples rather than design to make a decision. She also stated she had trouble locating the Friends of Congress Square Park documents on the City website.

Direction to Staff

The Congress Square Redesign Study Group directs staff to evaluate two options based on conformance with public vision and assessment, cost, and precedents. Marshall moves, Carmona seconds. Unanimous vote (12-0, Lufkin, Tillotson, Hinck, and Hewins not present).

It was determined the next CSRSG meeting will be held in September (date to be determined at a later date), and staff will prepare a report for CSRSG consideration. At that time the CSRSG will decide whether one option is clearly better than the other. At that point, the CSRSG will give direction on whether to proceed with design concepts and for one or both options.

Meeting adjourned 7:55pm