

PORTLAND MAINE

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## **Congress Square Park –**

**Emails/Letters received (not contained in original**

**Housing and Community Development packet)**

**NOT IN SUPPORT OF SALE.**

**Greg Mitchell - Congress Square Park**

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**From:** Sandy Rudman <srudman@crisisandcounseling.org>  
**To:** "nmm@portlandmaine.gov" <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/29/2013 1:55 PM  
**Subject:** Congress Square Park

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Dear Mr. Mavodones,

I am writing to ask that you vote no on the sale of Congress Square Park to Rockbridge Capital. I believe that the sale of any part of this park will be a lost opportunity for green space in the future. I am a neighbor of the park and enjoy it on a daily basis. This will be a loss for neighbors of the park, residents and tourists. I realize that money is tight and there may not be funds to improve the park this year or even next, but I ask that you not make a permanent decision that will take away an important space from the Arts District. The clock standing in Congress Square Park is a daily reminder of past decisions that were made that change the landscape and the loss of public outdoor space is seldom replaced.

Best Regards,

**Sandy Rudman**  
**Director of Operations**  
**Crisis & Counseling Centers**  
**Direct Line: (207)213-4505**  
**Main Office (207)626-3448**

**10 Caldwell Road, Augusta, Maine 04330**

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**Greg Mitchell - Re: RockBridge proposal for Congress Square**

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**From:** Simon Thompson <thompson.simonm@gmail.com>  
**To:** Nicholas Mavodones <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/28/2013 11:37 PM  
**Subject:** Re: RockBridge proposal for Congress Square

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Hi Nick,

I hope this email finds you well and enjoying the improving weather.

I wanted to share with you my thoughts on the RockBridge proposal for Congress Square, and encourage you to oppose it, via email as I will be unable to attend the City Council meeting tomorrow night. I realize that this is a difficult vote and that there are valid arguments presented by both sides, but I simply think that the RockBridge proposal leaves a lot to be desired.

Best,  
Simon

The electronic proposal of the RockBridge development plan details the problems with Congress Square that inhibit it from being a thriving public space. These problems focus on its shape, but also include how the park "lacks visibility to rear of plaza" and is "activated only during performances." The staff editorial by the Portland Press Herald echoes the argument advanced by many of the plan's proponents in stating that Portland would not lose Congress Square entirely with the proposed development and that "a smaller plaza could have a bigger benefit than the current park."

Perhaps, but doubtful. A smaller and revitalized Congress Square would be less of an eyesore than the current park, but the utility of the space would be significantly diminished. I have a difficult time imaging how a space that is only 800 square feet greater than the sidewalk that surrounds it could play host to concerts, rallies, or, really, any gatherings or community events. The current problems with Congress Square that RockBridge highlights are real, but that does not mean that they are terminal. The Square has thrived in the past, and with the proper investment from the public and private sectors, both of whom share a stake in the success of the park, it can thrive again in the future.

For me, the issue boils down to one question. Would Portland benefit more from a large public space that engages and brings together the community, or from another events center located just a block from the Civic Center, coupled with an attractive, but hardly useful, public space? The Press Herald lauds the RockBridge proposal as the first serious one to fix Congress Square, and warns that there is "no reason to assume that [...] a better (proposal) will come along." I challenge the City, working with the private sector, to come up with a better proposal. Portland deserves better, and we should not give up so easily on a public space that offers tremendous potential for the future.

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Simon Thompson | c: 207.838.7147

**Please note:** The above phone number will be discontinued from May 30 to August 22 due to international travel. During this time, please contact me via email.

## Lori Paulette - Congress Square Park

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**From:** "Peter Green" <plgmaine1@gwi.net>  
**To:** <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/28/2013 9:09 PM  
**Subject:** Congress Square Park

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Hi Nick,

In all the publicity about the Park, I haven't heard how much they'd have to pay. Have prices been bandied about?

And I was told that it was not the hotel that first approached the city, but that someone within city government first approached Westin. If this is the case, who was it?

Finally, I firmly still believe the park should be NOT FOR SALE.

Peter Green, Summer St.

**Lori Paulette - Keep Congress Square Park Public**

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**From:** Pat O'Donnell <patodonnell6@gmail.com>  
**To:** <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/28/2013 9:48 AM  
**Subject:** Keep Congress Square Park Public

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Dear Councilor Mavadones,

I don't feel that Congress Square Park should be sold or leased to Westin Hotels for an event center.  
Portland Residents need public space.

Thank you,

Pat O'Donnell

**From:** Rosanne Graef <rgraef@gwi.net>  
**To:** John Coyne <jcoyne@portlandmaine.gov>, Ed Suslovic <edsuslovic@portlandm...>  
**CC:** Alex Jaegerman <AQJ@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/28/2013 7:20 AM  
**Subject:** Congress Square Park  
**Attachments:** CSRDG - 5.22.13 Position.pdf

Dear Members of the Housing and Community Development Committee:

Attached please find a copy of the position I submitted on behalf of the West End Neighborhood Association concerning the current proposal from Rockbridge Capital to build an event center on part of Congress Square Park.

Although I do plan to speak on Wednesday evening during the public comment period, I also wanted to emphasize some additional points.

1) Congress Square is in the center of town. It already has one one-story building on it (the restaurant part of the Westin hotel). The event center Rockbridge is proposing is also a one-story building. This is not an efficient use of in-town space where the code allows up to 150'.

2) What will this proposal provide for Portland in the long run? The current emphasis on housing is to have more dense housing on the peninsula and encourage people to not have cars, but to walk, bike and use public transportation. It's those future residents and the residents already here who will bring long-lasting vitality to the downtown. They need accessible, attractive open space. Congress Square and downtown Portland are parts of more than business parks and retail centers, they are also neighborhoods. This quote from World Changing effectively sums this up:

...the right community spaces are the ones that reflect and respect their surroundings. Every good neighborhood is at its best when it is most like itself.

There are some general strategies that tend to work. Meet the neighbors. Promote good, compact development. People naturally gravitate toward certain locations and atmospheres, so allow established spaces to form around organic hubs.

Really good spaces make us want to hang out. The street, in essence, becomes an outdoor living room. Small parks, bike paths, historic building, sidewalk cafés, street trees, benches, and public art can all make being out in public a pleasure; a well-designed neighborhood keeps us from wanting to retreat to the safety of our isolated homes.

Socialize locally. Networks don't live by bits and bytes alone. Networks are made of people, and in order to do truly remarkable things, people need to get together, rub elbows, trade gossip, try out ideas, flirt, schmooze, encourage, and learn to trust, admire, and love one another. Conferences are great for this. Festivals can galvanize an entire zeitgeist. But movements really rise or fall on the strength of ongoing social events—salons, showcases, the right

bar, the right café, the place it's happening. These "third places" are the epicenter of any movement, whether the goal is overthrowing a dictator or getting a stop sign put in on the school's corner.

WorldChanging, A User's Guide for the 21st Century, Edited by Alex Steffen, 2011

A revitalized and redesigned Congress Square Park could be this "third place" in the heart of Portland.

3) The proposal for an event center would only offer one attraction to Congress Square Park and it is not an option that would have high use by the residents of Portland. Seeking more options for the Park would attract residents and tourists alike and not make one private entity the dominant presence on the entire High Street block from Congress Street to Cumberland Avenue. The City of Portland could retain ownership of the park and offer leases to Rockbridge for outdoor tables next to their restaurant, to the new Vinland restaurant for the same, kiosks could be built and leased to a variety of vendors - flowers, ice cream, fruits/vegetables, newsstand, etc. Games could be installed - chess, over-size puzzles - in addition to plantings and public art that's relaxing and fun to view. A variety of things to do in the park would draw more foot traffic into the entire area. For decades Maine tourism has been built predominantly on individuals and families who visit to see what Maine has to offer, not on conventions and large groups who come with planned activities that engage the bulk of their time and money. More international visitors are coming to Maine and Portland and these individuals and families, foreign and domestic, become part of the residential fabric during their stays. Having places to see, things to do and places to hang out where someone's not trying to suck every dollar out of one's wallet is a huge attraction in Maine and that kind of atmosphere needs to be available in Maine cities as well as in the great outdoors.

4) What's being offered now is heartily supported by business interests, but not by the abutting Neighborhood Associations, Portland Trails, or the Portland Public Arts Committee. This is telling. Many Portland residents who do not have a direct vested interest in the type of activity and clientele this project will draw are opposed, not because they want something for themselves, but because they want something better for the community as a whole. There are those who favor the Rockbridge proposal solely because they doubt the City's ability and political will to do anything else, please don't prove them right.

5) Unfortunately this project have been driven to a position where we're getting one offer and being hustled by an artificial time constriction to make a decision or forever lose an opportunity. The Council members are also being pressed by an equal, and I would suggest stronger, imperative: if you sell the land, it's a public asset that is gone forever. I hope you make the decision to not sell any of the park and to go forward with the RFP requested by the Congress Square Redesign Study Group two years ago.

Sincerely,

Rosanne Graef  
30 Salem Street  
Portland 04102



The West End Neighborhood Association(WENA) would like to see Congress Square, and Congress Square Park specifically, designed, programmed and maintained in a manner befitting its location in the heart of the peninsula and the downtown. This site should not be the "gateway" to anything, but, rather, a desirable destination in its own right.

Over the past 10-15 years, Congress Square Park has been neglected while much attention has been given to other spaces such as Post Office/Tommy's Park, Deering Oaks, Monument Square, etc. A variety of financial and social forces have contributed to the deterioration of Congress Square Park. Perhaps Portland is only capable of concentrating on one public space at a time, resulting in a space needing to hit rock bottom before it can begin to resurface.

In 2008 when the order for the formation of this study group was passed by the City Council, Congress Square Park had reached that point. It's obvious that something needs to happen, but, as it stands now, with the ambiguity of the future ownership of the land the park occupies, this proposal is not it.

While we appreciate what Rockbridge has been through in getting to this stage, we don't think this offer should ever have been made to them by the City in the way in which it was. We could conceivably be comfortable with a long-term lease on the land, but in proposing to sell a public asset without notification to the public, we firmly believe someone made a grave mistake. Any idea to sell should have been an open process, available to all comers and bidders and therein lies our opposition.

We would request that an RFP for full-park designs be issued, as recommended by the CSRSG 2 years ago, so the public can see other visions of what Congress Square Park could be and hear other suggestions for ameliorating its current problems. The study group was tasked with investigating possibilities for improving the park, not with deciding whether it should be sold. WENA would like to see that process followed.

Therefore, on behalf of the West End Neighborhood Association, I vote no on this proposal.

Rosanne Graef  
President, West End Neighborhood Association  
PO Box 7898  
Portland, ME 04112  
[www.wenamaine.org](http://www.wenamaine.org)

**Greg Mitchell - Congress Square**

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**From:** Harlan Baker <hbaker@maine.edu>  
**To:** <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/28/2013 7:19 AM  
**Subject:** Congress Square

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Nick,

Selling off Congress Square to Rock Bridge is a bad idea. I think Portland has been more than kind to developers over the past few decades. This is one time we can say "NO".

Harlan Baker  
44 Mitton Street  
Portland, Maine 04012

## Lori Paulette - Congress Square Park

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**From:** Barbara Pearson <bpear774@gmail.com>  
**To:** <nmm@portlandmaine.gov>  
**Date:** 5/27/2013 10:11 AM  
**Subject:** Congress Square Park

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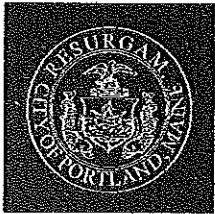
Do not sell Congress Square Park to the hotel. Fix it up so people can enjoy the park. Currently, there are spikes in the flower beds so that people cannot sit on the edge of the planters and a lack of benches, so the park is underused. Public land should not go to serve rich people and luxury activities, but to benefit the citizens.

I have listened to concerts, watched street performances, and otherwise enjoyed the park, and I am a middle class person not whatever sort of homeless person is feared. I have also attended several antiwar demonstrations and other vigils in the park.

Poor people in Portland have already lost enough housing and so forth in the effort to make Portland more upscale. For example, getting rid of the long term rentals and single room occupancy tenants at the Eastland contributes to the homelessness problem.

Building more and more high end hotels and conference centers does not ensure that the city will grow and get more taxes, but only puts the various venues in competition for the market.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Pearson  
Democrat and Psychologist



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Public Services Department  
Michael J. Bobinsky, Director

## Portland Parks Commission

May 24, 2013

Dear Ms. Cameron,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on the proposal by Rockbridge Capital. As we understand the proposal, Rockbridge is seeking to develop some portion of the current Congress Square Park into an events center.

After a presentation by Rockbridge, and discussion among the group, the Parks Commission came up with several comments on the proposal as follows;

- Any building proposal for this location must compliment the form and function of the adjacent public space, and Congress Square as a whole; architecturally, logistically, physically and socially.
- The proposed plaza needs a design prepared by a landscape architect.
- The proposed plaza meets minimum New York City set-back dimension ( 40 feet). This is not sufficient to perform the functions of an urban open space.
- The proposed building use will not sufficiently activate the remaining plaza, and will serve as a barrier to activity by creating a blank edge much of the time.
- If there were to be a building on the site, it should be one that invites and engages the public, such as a restaurant or cafe with outdoor seating, or other public amenity.
- A significant financial commitment to the park and Congress Square improvement plan should be part of any development
- Lease the land long-term, so the parcel remains in City control for future use

Fundamentally, as Council-appointed stewards of public spaces, we need to answer the question; would the disposition of this public park for the construction of a one-story, private events center be something Portland would look back on with pride, or regret? While some elements of the proposed project do have some merit, and the Commission is not adamantly opposed to the idea of a building on some portion of the site, most feel that the current proposal is not strong enough to outweigh the loss of public park space.

Additionally, the Commission feels that if we are to consider a proposal to sell some of the park, we would need to be able to compare this to other options, such as a re-designed park in the same space, a fully designed smaller plaza, and other building or architecture options. To compare between the current flawed design, and the developers proposal sets up a false and limited choice.

Given these numerous considerations, the Parks Commission does not support acceptance of the Rockbridge Capitol proposal.

Thank you for considering our comments and recommendation. We look forward to continued collaboration in the coming months. Regardless of outcome we welcome the opportunity to work together on the new design for Congress Square Park.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Davison". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Diane Davison, Chair  
Portland Parks Commission