

MEETING NOTES / 5 PAGES / SENT BY EMAIL

Project: Children's Wharf Park
Phase: Schematic Design

Meeting Date: 10 February 2016
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Members of the Community

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The following is a summary of discussions during the first Community Meeting that was held on February 10, 2016 at the Boston Children's Museum. This meeting addressed the project schedule, goals, aspirations and initial site impressions from the design team and community members present.

Item No. Issue

1.00 Project Schedule

- 1.1** The proposed project schedule was presented, highlighting a fast-paced design and construction process. The team anticipates a one-year construction period: Fall 2016 through Fall 2017.
- 1.2** The proposed project schedule was presented, highlighting a fast-paced design and construction process.
- 1.3** A date has not yet been set for Community Meeting #2, where initial concepts for the park will be discussed, but the project team is looking to schedule this meeting for some time in March of 2017.
- 1.4** A request was made by a member of the community to follow up after the Final Design phase and share the final park design with the community.

2.00 Project Goals & Design Approach

2.1 The design team presented preliminary and underlining goals for the project and process. These goals include:

- Inclusive play
- A balance of passive and active recreation within the community
- Improve Sleeper Street experience
- Improve pedestrian circulation and safety
- Enhance Harborwalk experience
- Collaborative design process

2.2 A general approach to landscape and park making was discussed, especially those relevant to city parks and playgrounds, citing examples of similar parks by MVVA as potential precedents for this design process. This approach includes a few central principals:

- Places to explore: providing playful environments for discovery and learning for children and families
- Robust naturalism: embracing dramatic insertion of nature in an otherwise urban environment
- Scale, Material, and Texture: use of warm and natural materials within a playground to provide a comfortable and engaging experience
- Range of experience: maximize programmatic range within a small site – provide areas for play, as well as places for public circulation and gathering

3.00 Existing Site Challenges

3.1 The design team presented observed challenges with the existing site conditions. These recorded challenges include:

- Small site – just over one acre
- Great potential for large numbers of visitors and activity
- A need to maintain safe and efficient area for large groups arriving at the park and adjacent Boston Children’s Museum(BCM) at the existing bus drop-off
- A desire to enhance the Sleeper Street experience, especially the relationship between the road, neighbors, and existing BCM parking and service lot
- Adjacent car traffic on Seaport Boulevard and Sleeper Street being a potential safety concern for a future playground

3.2 Community members present brought some additional challenges to attention. These challenges include:

- Harborwalk adjacency: described as a thoroughfare and/or flume with little relationship to the park itself, noting a desire for an engagement between the two entities of the Fort Point Channel
- Lighting: throughout the park, and including the portion of the Harborwalk under Seaport Boulevard, describing this area as slightly detached or potentially unwelcoming at times
- Sleeper Street traffic: concern about the direction of traffic and the bus drop-off

4.00 Existing Site Assets

4.1 The design team presented observed assets and opportunities with the existing site conditions. The intent of the team is to take advantage of these existing assets and integrate their presence in the design of the park. These recorded assets include:

- General location and siting for the park: 5-10 minute walking distance from major landmarks, attractions, and transportation hubs.
- City views across the harbor
- Adjacency to Fort Point Channel: the site's position allows for a borrowed landscape experience of the entire Watersheet, nearby cultural institutions, and activity
- Adjacency to the Boston Children's Museum: great potential for collaboration and extension of the BCM's programming, education, and exploration
- Harborwalk: the public corridor potentially brings additional users to the park, connects it to the surrounding neighborhood, and permits passive engagement with the waterfront.
- Growing Seaport District and Fort Point Neighborhoods: as a neighborhood park, the design process should engage the community's aspirations and foster a sense of ownership of the place once completed
- Proximity to public transportation and parking: many bus stops, red and silver line stops, and public parking lots were recorded as part of the analysis of the neighborhood

5.00 Design Potential

5.1 The design team presented a broad conceptual approach for the site, focusing on four central ideas for the park.

- Inclusive: The park and playground should be one that is accessible, exciting, and welcoming to children and families of all abilities and ages. It should be designed to promote collaboration and interaction through dramatic play experience.
- Civic: The park should embrace the public realm, especially considering the use and adjacency to the existing Harborwalk.
- Natural: A sense of exploration can be an engaging aspect of play, especially in an urban setting. Many of the present community members reacted positively to images of intense planting, stone, and other natural materials in similar parks shown.
- Urban: The park should embrace the surrounding city, the panoramic skyline views unique to this site and neighborhood, and the diverse set of users that will inhabit this future neighborhood park.

6.00 Community Ideas and Feedback

Many additional ideas for the park were presented by the community members present at the meeting. These ideas have been recorded as understood by the design team, and generally categorized as follows:

6.1 Play

- Many recognized the need for playgrounds in the Fort Point neighborhood, noting a lack of true playgrounds within a short distance. The recommendation made was to run with the idea of a playground being central to the desired program for Children's Wharf Park. There are plenty of passive parks in the area to accommodate this type of use.
- Swings: numerous requests for swings of some nature
- Positive reactions to the image of a slide set in a landscape of boulders and planting (MVVA's Teardrop Park in NYC)
- Positive reactions to the image of a play tower looking out over the river (MVVA's Pier C Park in Hoboken, NJ)
- Consider proximity to the Channel as a possible theme or driver in the design for the playground

6.2 Cultural Context

- Artist collaboration within the design team
- Potential event space for small concerts or gatherings
- Lighting: recommendation to tie into the community's "blue light district" initiative
- Bridges might play into the park as a way of tying into the local infrastructure of the Channel, similar to a prior exhibit at BCM about the inner workings of bridges

6.3 Site Boundary

- Consider an active engagement with the Harborwalk and/or Watersheet, suggesting that the boardwalk should not be considered the border of the park, but an active part of it
- Potential for collaboration with BCM to reorganize parking and service area in order to expand the available space for a new playground. Improving the pedestrian experience along Sleeper Street should be considered a priority in this collaboration as well. Some recommendations for sharing this parcel include: building up and over the existing parking lot, reducing the size of the existing lot, and eliminating the current lot. The group understands that whatever potential solutions are studied, there are practical needs of the Museum which need to be maintained, especially for loading and unloading of exhibits.

6.4 Landscape Approach

- Need for shade, both in play areas and adjacent areas for parents or care takers
- Integrated areas for seating close to play areas
- Potential for interaction or relationship between the current BCM landscape
- Incorporation or re-use of the glacial erratic boulders currently on site.

7.00 Next Steps

The design team will be working toward a schematic design to present at the next community meeting, and anticipates that this meeting will take place in March 2016. At this point, feedback

from the community will be recorded and used to refine the final design, with an anticipated ground breaking in early Fall of 2016.

These meeting notes are recorded as understood. Please contact Chris Donohue (cdonohue@mvvainc.com) with any comments or changes by telephone at 617.864.2076 or by facsimile at 617.492.3128 within 10 days of distribution.
