

Date: October 28, 2009
To: Park District of Oak Park (PDOP)
From: Wolff Landscape Architecture, Inc. (WLA)
Re: Cheney Mansion Site Master Plan

Subject: Community Meeting 1, October 20, 2009, 7pm
Cheney Mansion, 220 N. Euclid Avenue

1. Introduction

The first community meeting for the Cheney Mansion Site Master Plan was held on Tuesday, October 20, 2009 at 7:00 pm at the Cheney Mansion. Representatives from Wolff Landscape Architecture, the Park District of Oak Park, the Park District Citizen Committee, the Park District Art Advisory Committee and approximately thirty members of the community were in attendance.

2. Project Overview

Mike Grandy, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, PDOP, introduced the project. PDOP is currently developing master plans for all its properties. The Cheney Mansion Site Master Plan is the sixteenth master plan undertaken to date. The Site Master Plan is intended to provide direction for the site moving forward as funds become available. PDOP has allocated \$150,000 in 2011 and 2012 for improvements to the Cheney Mansion site. The master plan will include the approximately two acres of grounds around the Cheney Mansion. While outdoor accessibility to the Mansion will be reviewed, the Mansion itself is not included in the master plan. PDOP recently spent \$600,000 on improvements to the site and building, including restoration of the perimeter ornamental metal fence, masonry tuck-pointing, a new roof, refurbished floors, and kitchen and other interior improvements.

Four focus group meetings with governmental entities, PDOP staff, Cheney Mansion staff, and community organizations were held on October 1, 2009. Minutes from the focus group meetings are available on the PDOP website (www.oakparkparks.com). An online questionnaire was posted on PDOP's website on October 21 and will be available until November 4 to seed additional public input. The presentation materials from this community meeting have also been posted on the PDOP website.

3. Project Overview

Ted Wolff of Wolff Landscape Architecture, Inc. (WLA) presented a brief history of the Cheney Mansion, the Cheney Mansion's mission statement, and a photo inventory of current site conditions.

4. Discussion

Following the presentation there was an open discussion period, prior to which the following questions were posed to the audience to facilitate discussion:

What role do the Cheney Mansion and its grounds fulfill in the Park District of Oak Park?

- What are your feelings about the landscape at the Cheney Mansion?
- What elements would you like to see incorporated into the site?
- What elements would you like to see removed from the site?
- What are your feelings regarding accessibility to the Mansion and grounds?
- Other?

Responses to individual questions, questions to the PDOP and the consultants, and general discussion related to the individual questions are as follows:

- Does the Cheney Mansion pay for itself? PDOP answered that it does not. [PDOP later indicated that the Cheney Mansion substantially covers its operating costs but capital costs come from PDOP].
- PDOP should lease or sell the site because, as a rental venue for private events, the site was redundant with the Pleasant Home. PDOP indicated that the scope of the Site Master Plan was to review the grounds and landscaping, and that questions regarding the ownership or disposition of the Cheney Mansion were outside the scope of the current project.
- The site should have a water feature, whether that meant restoring the existing water feature or developing a new one.
- The site appears to be private, and signage or other measures should be added to indicate that this is a PDOP public facility.
- There should be an historical marker at the entrance to denote the importance and the history of the site.
- The entrance to the site is not clear and needs to be denoted.
- The existing method of posting signs (cinch tying them to the fence) is not attractive and a permanent system or location for posting notices should be developed.
- Public art should be incorporated into the site. There was discussion about permanent art installations, temporary art exhibits, and the desirability of including or focusing on the work of local artists. It was noted that there is a Park District art advisory committee.
- The site should have maintenance and repair budgets to facilitate continued upkeep of the site.
- Numerous attendees felt that the greenhouse was of historical significance, added character to the site, had been used by Cheney Mansion to start and grow plants for the grounds and for the plant sale, and had also been used for community classes and botany classes from the Oak Park River Forest High School (OPRFHS). The same attendees would like to see these activities happen again, and felt that the greenhouse should be restored and that a "Friends of the Cheney Mansion Greenhouse" group should be set up to help with fundraising to pay for the restoration.
- Neighbors stated that the grounds and garden are well used and feel like an oasis.
- There should be more seating, including benches and movable chairs or benches.
- Cheney Mansion is a great venue for private events, and should continue to function in that manner. It was also noted that some of the "private" events are, for example,

- weddings of people who were born or raised or grew up in Oak Park, and that having such events at the Cheney Mansion reinforces their connections to the community.
- Driveway entrance from the alley used to have a gate, and that gate should be re-installed.
 - Screen fence along the east perimeter / alley has some warped boards that should be replaced.
 - Consider a living screen or hedge of trees and / or shrubs along the east perimeter / alley rather than a fence, in order to conserve forest resources.
 - Consider using sustainable materials on site.
 - Cyclone / chain-link fence near the greenhouse does not fit the site's character and should be replaced.
 - Additional exterior lighting should be considered.
 - Perimeter ornamental metal fence is attractive, helps to enclose the site, and is a benefit, especially to families or groups with small children, as the families or groups feel safer knowing that the children have limited egress points from the site.
 - Diversity of plants on the grounds is an asset; attendees liked the arboretum-like feel of the site.
 - Grounds are open to the public when the site or mansion has not been rented for a private function. It was noted that it is difficult for the public to know in advance whether or not the grounds will be open, and calling the Cheney Mansion to ask staff was not considered either a convenient or desirable solution to obtaining information about whether or not the grounds are open. Lack of information regarding whether or not the grounds are open discourages use of the site. A detailed listing of when the site will be open and closed to the public should be developed and posted on-site and / or online.
 - Most attendees felt that the temporary ramps to create an accessible entrance to the mansion were not an acceptable solution and should be replaced with a permanent solution. It was noted by one attendee that providing an accessible route to the front door / main entrance of the building would be problematic with respect to the architecture at the entrance, and that the entrance should be left as-is and not altered because of the negative impacts of changes to the historic entrance to the Mansion.
 - Consideration should also be given to an accessible route to and around the grounds.

5. Next Steps

Community Meeting #2 will be held on November 24th at 7:00 pm at the Cheney Mansion. The purpose of this meeting will be to review alternative schematic designs.

Community Meeting #3 will be held on December 15, 2009 at 7:00 pm at the Cheney Mansion. The purpose of this meeting will be to review a single schematic design based on comments from the previous meeting.

If necessary Community Meeting #4 will be held on January 12, 2010 at 7:00 pm at the Cheney Mansion if there are outstanding unresolved issues.

The attendees were encouraged to attend the future community meetings and to invite their friends and neighbors.

Cheney Mansion Site Master Plan
Meeting Minutes, Community Meeting 1, October 20, 2009
Prepared October 28, 2009
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Prepared by Ben Baker and Ted Wolff of WLA. The foregoing represents the writers' understanding of the matters discussed and the comments and directions given. Please contact Ben Baker (bbaker@wolflandscape.com) within three (3) calendar days from the date of the minutes with any corrections, additions, deletions, clarifications, or other changes.

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