



Mills Park Site Plan Community Meeting #3

Location: Pleasant Home, 217 Home Avenue

Date: November 12, 2008

Time: 7pm

Minutes of Meeting

Mr. Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District of Oak Park, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. He spoke about the overall planning process for our parks and gave background on the work to date. He briefly reviewed the Mills Park planning process to date and then introduced the members of Altamanu Inc. and Terra Engineering who were to facilitate the meeting. Mr. Balling introduced Park District Staff and members of the Park District Citizen Committee who were in attendance. Mr. Balling provided a synopsis of the previous focus group meetings through the community meeting process.

John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc. made a presentation and the following are comments made by the attendees

Playgrounds

I love your ideas for the playground. I think they will enhance the park. I know the kids love the lions on the side of Pleasant Home and I love the labyrinth idea.

Perhaps we can replicate the Maher arch in a public bathroom facility which I feel would be good at this park.

This type of play area will enhance the park and be a great amenity for the neighborhood as the area continues to change.

I do not believe there is a need for a playground here. I feel the Randolph playground is under-utilized. If a play area is going to be put in Mills Park, I'd prefer it to be something like the boulders.

I'm concerned that scattering boulders around the park will create a tripping hazard.

I think a children's area will alleviate the problems with homeless people loitering in that area of the park. Those people will be less likely to hang around where children are playing (with parents paying attention).

If a children's area is implemented in the southwest corner of the park, I feel the fence will provide safety.

I'm a young mother, and feel I need to explain why I don't use the play area at Randolph Park. The tot area is filled with sand, and it is a lot of work to take your child there every



day due to the necessary clean up afterwards. The play equipment is for young children which they quickly outgrow. I love Field Park and go there often with my children, and would like to come to Mills Park and have an opportunity to meet my neighbors here. A lot of the couples who have moved to this area have not had their children yet, and would like to stay in this area when they do so. I think you will find a movement beginning where young people in the condos start having families. I like the concept of stones and a labyrinth in the park; they are features people of all ages can enjoy. Please add as few boulders etc. as possible.

Questionnaire

People asked about the questionnaires and where they can get them.

It is explained that questionnaires were brought up at every community meeting and that it can be accessed at www.oakparkparks.com. Diane Stanke, of the Park District, offered to mail paper copies to attendee's homes if needed.

Pavilion

I am involved in the Oak Park Festival Theater. We perform at the Pleasant Home, and a pavilion would greatly impact our group. Does the park board need to sign off on the Pavilion? What is the time line for the park improvements and the pavilion?

Mr. Gary Balling explained that the approval from the park board is required for the Master Plan and the proposal for the Pavilion. He also explained that the Master Plan would provide a space holder for the Pavilion and that there is no time line at the moment for approval or implementation.

As a neighbor and a volunteer for Pleasant Home, I know that most historic properties which are doing well at the moment do so because of the rentals they offer. I support the pavilion; it would be a source of revenue for the public properties and can keep the house open to the public.

Laura Thompson, from the Pleasant Home Foundation, explains what the proposed Pavilion structure would be. It is a solid frame structure with a fabric cover similar to Tie Veck Fabric. The entire building will be sealed, sound proofed and have fire code adherence and escape/exit doors etc. There will be two entrances from the building into the Pavilion.



I recently traveled to Germany and came across a park with a similar pavilion. I thought it was wonderful and this one could really cut down on the noise.

I support the pavilion. Pleasant Home is used for much more than parties, including community events and organizations for organizations that do not have space for meetings. This space will really serve the community and a number of nonprofit organizations.

I am so glad to hear that the Pavilion will be soundproofed. I am more open to the idea of it than I was before. What will the size of the Pavilion be?

Laura says it will be roughly the size of the space we are currently in.

Who will pay for this?

Laura explains that the structure will be donated by Classic Party Rentals. They will erect the facility at their own cost and will be given exclusivity for the events at the house and also carry the liability for the events, just like the caterers do currently.

Why don't people use the Oak Park Library or Cheney Mansion for their meetings?

If I were to be married here, would the ceremony still be able to be inside the house or would it be in the Pavilion?

Laura explains that a majority of the wedding ceremonies are held on the front porch, and they would still be allowed out there. The ceremonies will likely be in the facility. If the event is non-invasive and would not require chairs or table, it may be possible to have the ceremony inside the home.

The structure is not permanent and can be taken down. The contract however will need to be an extension of a number of years, at least 2-3. You cannot put the structure up for 3 months and then take it down.

Are toilets required in this temporary structure?

No, the ones in the home will continue to service the guests.

Who will pay the ComEd bills and what about pipes freezing?

I was originally against the idea of the pavilion, but I now foresee this enabling the foundation to raise more money. It will be an air conditioned space and highly attractive. It will also allow people to have dancing at their parties.

I am in favor of this and believe it will be compatible with the naturalistic design of the park and highly integrated into the house.

Pleasant Home was never intended to receive the heavy use that it gets. I think the Pavilion will help raise money and restore the property.

Schemes A, B, C, & C1 were presented and the following comments made



Why didn't you just widen the entryway on the North side of the park in order to minimize the concrete?

John McManus responds that the desire was to create symmetry in the openings. The north side path would also connect people in wheelchairs from Mills Tower and other areas of the park into Pleasant Home.

Will the paths be kept clear in the winter so they are handicapped accessible and people can walk their dogs through the park still?

Yes, the paths which are currently in the park do not lend themselves to that type of maintenance but concrete paths could be ploughed.

I have a friend in a wheel chair and I know that she hasn't been able to explore Mills Park with her service dog unaccompanied. I think she would really enjoy Scheme C. Will the meadow have wildflowers and native grasses within it? I would really enjoy that.

I would like a path along the western border of the meadow; I would enjoy viewing the park from that side.

John explains that Option C1 suggests a soft surface path around the meadow.

Some people are in favor of benches in that area of the park, but neighbors of the park in the apartment complex are not.

Benches will have to be sensitively placed within the park so that they do not impact the space negatively.

As a single female I do not feel safe being in the park at night, and would like to see closing hours posted in the park.

Fence

I believe having a fence around Mills Park makes it less safe.

What will be done with the fence along Marion and along the south end of the park?

I like the old fence along Marion and hope to see it saved or used in another part of the park.

Ms. Josephine Bellalta from Altamanu explains that there has been discussion at previous meetings suggesting we could take the southern fence out and replace it with a fence lower in height. Perhaps this fence can be used elsewhere in the park, but it will require further financial assistance.

The fence will not be thrown away.

Gary Balling then requested attendees who wished to comment in a formal manner to come forward one at a time. Each person was allowed 3 Minutes.



I prefer Scheme C. I want to see an ADA path around Pleasant Home connecting the East entrance around to the North driveway. What will happen to the easement/driveway space in the park? I'd like to suggest extending the fence on the West Marion proposed entryway in order to discourage children from going right into the street. I'd also like to see a small hedge around the back edge of that path. I'm concerned about the safety of the children in that area. I would also really like to see a space for the seniors living at Mills Tower. I don't really like the historic template and don't believe the prime value would be to restore it.

I want to speak in favor of C1, I think it has many qualities that are respectful of the general historic fabric. It creates a nice circulation which will bring people into the park and the addition of softer material path will give the park user a better perspective of the park.

I like Scheme C1.

I favor C1, but would like the labyrinth to be closer to the children's play area and not next to Mills Tower as it is shown. I don't like the path that comes from the north, but if it provides access to the park for people who are handicapped, I am in favor of it.

Many people say they like Scheme C1.

I like Scheme C1 and would like to see better lighting in the park.

I vote for Scheme C or Scheme C1

I like Scheme C1.

Basically I kind of like C but do not like the soft surface path which will go right outside my window. The meadow space is not very large, and if a path were up against my apartment building, I would feel very uncomfortable. I extend an open invitation to see the view from my apartment. (Nancy also provided photographs showing the view from her apartment into the park).

I've lived here all my life and enjoy driving by here and come in here on occasion and don't want to see it change, but what I'm hearing you trying to do tonight is do a very nice job. I'm no longer concerned with what you are doing. If I had to choose it would be C1.

I support C1.



Altamano

I prefer Plan C. I don't feel the extra path in C1 is really good for the experience of the park. People don't jog through Mills Park, they do Tai Chi. I'd like to know what is figured out regarding the fence. It sounds like you want to keep part of it and keep a different opening and place a contemporary iron fence on the southwest end. Enhance the lighting; there are a couple of dark spots.

I think that C1 respectfully takes into account everyone's needs and desires. Most people aren't lucky enough to look out a window into a park, and I understand the desire to keep that. I do however like the soft surface trail along the western edge of the meadow and would really enjoy walking around it with my son. Also, if it's a pie in the sky to do the fountain, could we plan for a pond in that space and then hope for a fountain in the future? Is a pond less expensive than a fountain?

In summation, John clarifies that the consensus is between C and C1. No one in attendance at Community Meeting 3 is in favor of A or B.