



Mills Park Community Meeting #4

Location: Pleasant Home

Date: December 3, 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 Citizens Committee who were in attendance. Mr. Balling provide a synopsis of the previous focus group meetings through the community meeting process.

John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc. made a presentation with the following key points

John gives a synopsis of the overall consensus points from the previous meetings. Addressing the issue of reconciling the different landscapes and the three different primary zones of landscape in the park.

John explains the condition of four mature trees which pose a threat to users of the park.

- These trees are being removed because of their condition, not as a result of the master planning process.
- John shows photographs of each tree and explains the reason for their removal.

The presentation ended and the floor was given to the attendees who made the following comments.

Nancy Nimitz:

- Basically I was looking at all of the schemes. I've changed my mind, initially I would have liked to see nothing done to the park but I do like certain things. I do like the entrance on Marion; I think that's quite lovely. I like the entrance on Home Ave. as well. What I've discovered in enlarging the plan myself is that meadow area is very important not just to the apartment complex. I've been trying to discover who uses the park and walking through the park. People do have a tendency to have their dogs run around and play in an open area. I don't want to see a pathway through the meadow. I think a pathway around the house is necessary for ADA compliance and for everybody to use. The addition of this path will create the symmetry which is evident in the architectural



design of the house. It would allow someone to come from the southwest here all the way up to the northeast and experience the park. You visually experience the meadow space from the south side of the park. I think we are forgetting that people do like to walk on the grass and walk around in the open space without being on a destination path. I think by not having this path we really are giving something to everyone here. I think the meadow, children's labyrinth and pathways will give something for everyone. I have taken out the pavilion. I am speaking for myself and Nicolai Kushner, a benefactor of the foundation, who thinks if the pavilion were designed to be architecturally significant and match with the house that would be acceptable. If it looks like a tent I do not like it. If it were to match the house and look like it's always been there I would accept that. If it looks like a tent I don't think it fits. We question why it is needed, if you make an addition it will increase the number of events and create more wear and tear on the house which contradicts the need for the pavilion. We shouldn't accept it just because it is donated. I really hesitate to cut thru the historic fence up here; we do have openings on Pleasant Street. It really hurts me to see that something historic is being cut into without having a real necessity for it. If we didn't have the other proposed openings I could understand that, but people do use these entrances without having a problem

Marni Curtis

- I was concerned about there being an open recreation area; I have been coming here to do tai chi for 10 years. I don't see the necessity of the path around the meadow. I think it's really great that you can go all the way thru the park, but don't see the necessity for a path around the meadow.
- When the changes occur, will the park be closed off?
 - Gary Balling addresses this question saying, "We haven't gone into that type of planning yet at this point, there is always some inconvenience. "
- With all these proposed plants are there enough people in the park district to maintain these trees?
 - John McManus explains, "What we are trying to do is that the plantings that can be mowed (outside of the trees). I don't know if you've seen the group that does the mowing, they go through very fast. We just need to make sure people don't mow before the plants flower."

Marge Copple

- I strongly support the path all the way around the woodland, I think the more we can extend the experience of walking thru the path and around that, the better. I would support the path around the north side of pleasant home being ADA.



Victor Bargran

- I also support the pathway around the meadow. I really like the design as it is, I don't know what the meadow is going to look like, but I don't think it should just be Kentucky blue grass. It's not a play field. I'd like to see wildflowers and short grasses and have it actually be a meadow. As I mentioned in other meetings I would like to see some benches along the west side of the meadow so you can get a perspective of the complete park and the meadow. That's what the meadow is there for; why not enjoy it by sitting down at a bench and enjoying the complete perspective of the park.

Ricardo Viti

- I support Nancy and Marni. Its one thing to look at it in plan view and it looks nice, but if you go outside and imagine how it would look with the path, it would look a lot smaller. The space is not that much, and the path would make it look smaller. I support more open untouched areas. I like the ideas of the other entrances, but if we keep that area clean and the south east area clean as well it will look a lot more natural.

Ron Miller

- I'm just concerned the park might lose its' special flavor, it's a unique park and I don't know any other parks like this. I hope this would not destroy the simplicity of the park and become over developed as that seems the natural course of events in Oak Park.

Kathy Smith

- I support the path. Most people look out over streets, alley's etc. Most people don't look out over a park. I stood in that meadow and it is way far away from that building. This is a park for everyone to enjoy and to walk around the park, to sit on a bench, which is not a dirty word, to sit on a bench and enjoy watching your kid run around and whatever is what a park is for and it is far enough away from the apartment building. I can't fathom the idea that you don't want people close to you so the rest of us should suffer. This is the only green space in this neighborhood, lots of people sitting in apartment building with no yards. I think there should be benches there like the gentleman said; there is plenty of space for everyone to get what they need.

Kristin Vincent

- I'm not sure if we need that new gate on the north end. When we eventually landscape around the house we need to be careful because the landscaping has been removed due to hiding of kids drinking and smoking etc. The landscaping will have to take safety into consideration.
 - Josephine Bellalta addresses her concern, saying the proposed plantings would just be a skirt around the house.

Patrick Dolstrom

- I have 3 questions, the first is if you fence off that easement, would that give up that property and constitute abandonment. There are a lot of statements using the term ADA compliance; I don't know exactly what that is. What does that require you to do



here, if you left the park the way it is does that mean the few cement paths have to be brought up to compliance?

- Kara Gillespie says you have to make your slopes are 2% or less and your ramps have to be up to standard. Gary Balling says this requires you to take away barriers. There is ADA and universal accessibility which means giving everybody the equal opportunity to come into a park and if we have our druthers we'd like to go beyond the law and make this park available to all people. I think that is what we are attempting to do. Patrick says that isn't a legal requirement.
- Patrick also asks if the existing fence on Pleasant and Home is on the national historic register and what impact would cutting into the fence have on the funding?
 - Laura explains that the fence is both on a national historic register (national state and local levels). The fence, house, and front entry are all on the national historic landmark which is the highest designation for a historic site. We have been speaking with representatives for the national trust of historic preservation and the NPS to talk about that. The important element for this is creating access to the historic sites vs. keeping them strictly historic. We've been in talks with them. The entire park is historic, the entire site is historic.
- Patrick makes comment, the fence along Marion, is that not on the register because no one ever applied for it, or why did it not get on?
 - Laura replies that the fence along Pleasant and Home was nominated because it was designed by GW Maher and the architects prominence lead to the nomination. Not everything that is "old" would be on the register. It is the status of the design of the fence by the architect. Kathleen Cummings is a scholar and architectural historian and she wrote the nomination in 1996.

Jerry Reese

- I haven't been at all these meetings. How are you going to get a variation on this fence, who will allow you to do that?
 - Gary Balling answers, we have been working with Village of Oak Park historic preservation committee, and we'll be going thru all the steps we have to go through this process.
 - John McManus comments, I spent 5 years working on research and planning with the Chicago Park District, during that time we got 12 different facilities on the national register which every single one of those facilities was adapted for current uses. All of those acts on historic structures were approved by local, and then state, then the application was made to the federal agencies. All of them have been accepted. They are still on the register and there is full understanding that something that had a previous use that is now part of the public domain has to be treated in a different manor. People have been extremely reasonable in seeing that the design was in the right character and fitting with original design intention. Keeping with that design intent would be incredibly important. These are the first goes at the conceptual process, if we are to continue with it they would be done with other peoples input and not done lightly.



Edward Vincent Oak Park Journal

- During a number of previous meetings there had been from your staff the noting that the pavilion would be donated. When I investigated the donation sounded a lot like an unplaced bid because the pavilion was to be donated to a company and then be the sole provider of rental equipment chairs. Can you tell me if that would be an open bid process.
 - Gary Balling explains that the master plan, which we are creating, is making a place holder. Before this were to actually happen, the Pleasant Home Foundation will make a presentation to the park board, and in that process the entire contractual arrangement will be made to the park board . Gary says I will assure you that any contractual arrangement will go before our park board and the park district attorney to approve. So the legal method could preclude being bid out to their firm. Gary states, I do not have that information tonight and do not have specifics to provide you on that.

Gary Schwab

- I have a similar comment, I realized that it seems the park district is washing their hands and saying the Pleasant Home Foundation has to have more weddings and raise more money in order to keep the home open. I've been watching (as a board member of the historic society). Is there somewhere in the notion of raising money for the home?
- Primary goal of the pavilion is to take wear and tear off the home which is museum quality.
- My only comment is that the material from the pleasant home foundation is we need this pavilion and more parties in order to just keep open. I look at the amount they currently make with weddings and parties; there is no way to get enough money to fix the roof on the home.
 - Gary Balling says the primary benefit is to take wear and tear off of the facility itself so that it still has the fundraising capabilities. The park district is committed to Pleasant Home.

Laura Thompson

- I like the plan, being here at the house as both a volunteer and as a neighbor of the park for 9 years, I've always wondered why there weren't more pathways in the park and things to do or see. I like the idea of the play area and daisy meadow, all of the elements will keep this site vibrant and bring more people to the site to enjoy what we are now enjoying.

Mike Grandy

- He addresses the pruning process and the trees that must be removed due to rot and maturity. Another thing that needs to be pointed out is that in 1980 we began doing renovations of our parks and we cycled thru all the parks on a very low budget and we visited every park except Mills. This park hasn't changed since late 1950's early 1960's. It is really a pleasure to see some of these things coming thru in the presentation.



Kathryn McKee

- I also work with the Pleasant Home folks and am a neighbor. I love Mills Park; it is my favorite park in Oak Park. I support this plan very much. I am intrigued about the circular path concept. One of the things I like about Austin Gardens is being able to go around and around the park. I do miss that concept in Mills; I always pass through this park and would like to enjoy the park more. I like the idea of a wonderful circular walking exploration path. I really love the concepts of the labyrinth, and have walked quite a few and will watch that very carefully. You might want to see the Labyrinth at Sinsinawa Mound Center north of Galena built by the Dominican nuns built north of, it's very peaceful and small. I love the children discovery area; I think this is critical to enjoy nature in a passive way, sit on stumps, discover rocks and not have something that people tell them what to do. I do question the cutout on north/pleasant. I can't quite understand it yet but is willing to be open minded about that.

Dawn Morse

- Are these plants indigenous to this area and are they fairly drought resistant? Is irrigation required for these or are they drought resistant? My third comment is that there would be more hiding places with all this stuff.
 - John McManus replies that there are very few lower story plantings, there aren't large areas of shrub mass which would be the real spot that people could hide. John explains that these concerns were mentioned at earlier meetings. John also says he has watched people from Mills Tower trying to go thru this park etc and it's like a slow Ben Hur movie. I'd be glad to see people going thru this park easier.