

## Randolph Tot Lot Site Master Plan

### Focus Group Meeting # 1 Building Grounds, Security and Safety

Meeting held: Oak Park Park District  
218 Madison Street  
Oak Park, IL 60302

Date of Meeting: July 29, 2009, 9am

#### Attendees:

Neil Adams, Project Manager, PDOP  
Josephine Bellalta, Altamanu  
John Borland, Grounds Maintenance, PDOP  
Ron Calloway, Safety Coordinator, PDOP  
Tammy Grossman, Planning and Community Development, VOP  
Mark Jirik, Altamanu  
Gary Komar, Park District Citizen Committee  
Sandy Lentz, President of FOPCON & member of Park District Greening Advisory Committee  
Bill McKenna, Village Engineering, VOP  
James Solnes, local property owner  
Henrietta Yardley, Conservatory Manager, PDOP

#### Introduction & Overview

Diane Stanke opened the meeting at 9 AM thanking everyone for coming and giving a brief history of the Park District of Oak Park's master plan development process. She acknowledged the Randolph Tot Lot as a small but important piece of green space to Oak Park as Oak Park is underserved in terms of open space. In addition she informed the meeting of the recent acquisition by the Park District of the adjacent eastern lot on Randolph and Oak Park Avenue from the Village. This addition has doubled the potential size of the public space.

Diane informed the meeting that \$200,000 has been set aside for the first phase of construction for the Tot Lot project. Diane noted the following focus group meeting would be held at the Oak Park Arms and then introduced Josephine Bellalta of Altamanu who moderated the meeting.

Josephine Bellalta began by giving an overview of the relationship of the Randolph Tot Lot to the neighboring community. It is one of the smallest parks and located in an area with little public open space. Mills is the nearest park. Other parks are either north of the tracks, or south of Madison Ave., both of which act as community dividers. Brooks Jr. High has a field in the area with baseball and turf but it is not owned by the park district.

Now that the Park District has acquired the adjacent lot across the alley from the Tot Lot, the alley in between the two lots becomes an issue. It divides the two areas and if the two open spaces were joined, traffic on the alley could be a safety concern. The Tot Lot sits on a longer block that is mostly single family residential with some multi-family units. The recently acquired lot borders Oak Park Avenue which can have a significant amount of traffic in comparison to the more quiet residential streets of Grove Ave. and Randolph St.

The current Randolph Tot Lot has:

- a mound
- a drinking fountain
- a sand area
- 3 benches
- a picnic table
- a couple of older pieces of playground equipment
- and trees

Josephine already met with an arborist on site who stated that the large elm tree on site is infected with Dutch Elm Disease and will have to be removed. This is unfortunate since it provides most of the shade to the site. Another elm in the parkway along Oak Park Ave. will also have to be removed due to Dutch Elm Disease. There are no existing trees on the recently acquired western half of the site.

Access to the adjacent apartment building is on the building's north side facing the newly acquired lot. There is a 3' easement on the north side of the building for an access path. The design will have to incorporate new entries into this building. This newly acquired lot has to remain passive as part of the legal agreement and transfer and therefore the Tot Lot active uses cannot be expanded into the new lot as a result. There is also a power pole in the alley that has several power lines coming up from the ground. ComEd will need access to this pole.

The survey shows the existing Randolph Tot Lot as approximately 50' wide and 140' deep. The lot to the east is similar in size so approx. another 140' deep and 50' wide. The right turn lane off of Randolph onto Oak Park Ave. cuts into a part of the original site.

Josephine then opened up the meeting for comments.

## The Alley

The suggestion to close the alley and unite both parcels of public open space was discussed.

Bill McKenna stated, after a brief discussion with representatives of the Village Public Works Department and with the Director of Refuse Services, that vacating the alley could cause difficulties for garbage collection, as there are many multi-family units backing onto the alley. Also the volume of traffic along Washington could make maneuvering of the trucks problematic.

Would there be any other solutions aside from vacating that part of the alley? What about a speed table?

A gate in the alley could work but due to the private refuse companies that serve the multi-family residences it might be impractical. A speed table wouldn't be a problem if it had no adverse effects on drainage.

Veolia (a waste collections company) picks up from the adjacent apartment building three times a week.

Jim Solnes suggested holding the refuse companies accountable for using and closing the gate.

A speed table could be used in combination with the gate.

A gate would require the block's approval, correct?

Yes, it would also go in front of the Parking and Traffic Commission.

Could we build a bridge over the alley connecting the two lots?

Probably couldn't cap the alley due to the necessary fire truck clearance.

Maybe a cap over the alley could work with the right look.

Yes but there could be line of sight issues.

The dump trucks used to pick up the garbage at the adjacent apartment building early in the morning between 4-6 AM.

Traffic wouldn't be so bad at that time so maybe they could back down the alley from Washington Blvd. if it was vacated at the north end to connect the two parks.

The refuse companies might play hardball if we try to vacate the alley but ultimately we decide.

It's still possible to vacate the alley.

I think tying the two spaces together is favorable – could we make an L-shaped alley.

That's also possible but it would cut into the park space and the alley would have to be made wider at the turn.

Building at corner of Oak Park Ave. and Washington Blvd. has ground level parking – maybe that could be an access to the alley assuming the clearance is enough for a dump truck.

Would need an agreement between the building owner, refuse companies, village.

Back to the alley, on our discussion within public works and with refuse, I don't know. If the board had vacating the alley in mind; maybe they will.

If we put in the gate it could create a problematic drop-off area in that alley.

There probably wouldn't be as big a problem with drop-offs since it is a tot lot.

Could the gate be on the property line?

As long as there is enough space for access off the near garage.

I know the family living across from the apartment building – there is probably 10 -15 feet to work with before their garage.

## Utilities

Utilities, like a sewer main and a duct with ComEd and fiber optic lines, cut under the northeast corner of the site. There would be easement issues but not as long as there are not any permanent structures.

Bill will provide the utility and easement information upon an email from Altamanu

Could the power lines be moved?

Yes, but it would be costly.

One of the utility companies just did some work there 4-5 years ago.

Could we screen the utility boxes?

Yes, but typically you can't plant directly at the base – there is still a small easement.

Keep in mind that the more elements you put on the east side, with the utilities, that require digging, the more the price of project will skyrocket

ATT would probably say no to any concrete footing; you couldn't put a gazebo in their easement. Nicor could be getting rid of their gas main since they're phasing those out now.

ATT would be the main issue.

Bill will send Josephine the information he has on the utilities upon an email request.

If there was a rail or trolley line beneath the park there might be construction concerns.

I suggest checking with the historical society.

## Lighting

There are currently 4 light poles running along the middle of the new property on our electric and timer. Let me know when they are taken out if they are. (James Solnes)

The current lights are 5 to 6 feet tall.

Lighting is integral to security. With the adjacent apartment we need appropriate lighting. It should be subdued and shouldn't be intrusive to the apartment residents.

We should try to reduce light pollution with fixtures. Maybe we could use solar-powered low voltage down lights.

They wouldn't last. They get kicked, knocked around, stolen.

The lights could be higher to avoid vandalism. The windows start at about 10 to 12 feet up so the lighting could be below that.

The lights could be shielded from the south so the light doesn't go into the apartments.

That type of lighting is not typical of the Park District of Oak Park.

We need lighting next to any signage at the entrance. I like the idea of down lighting.

Could we document the current lumens?

Yes, with the light meter.

If we record it now and install new lighting and show complaining tenants that in the future we could quiet them down.

The tot lot is currently illuminated by street lights. There is no street light illuminating the east lot.

Safety will be taken into account.

## Safety

Corner at Oak Park Ave. an issue of safety. An access there makes sense but kids can be attracted to traffic and we want to keep them safe. Cars plow through that intersection on Randolph.

The entry gate should be offset from the sidewalk and corner.

Maybe we could make the access along Oak Park Ave. also an access from the apartment building to the south.

We can move the existing gates at the tot lot end.

Is there any concern with the electric boxes?

No, they should be closed.

I walked by and saw the lock left undone on one – could they be dangerous.

Could be hazardous with power if open for any period of time.

Are the residents of the apartment allowed to have dogs?

Yes

Could we provide signage making a no dogs allowed area.

It wouldn't matter. The existing tot lot is a no dogs allowed area and dogs are in there a lot.

## Memorial Trees

There is one memorial tree, a magnolia shrub, right off of the sidewalk by the tot lot along the Grove St. side.

## Suggested Park Programming/Uses

Currently the tot lot is heavily used.

Many young children and their parents frequent the tot lot often.

Outdated play equipment will be replaced.

Maybe a water feature.

Community vegetable gardens could be a possibility.

Maybe a water feature, benches, chess tables, and a buffer.

Maybe a picnic table or a gazebo could go on the eastern lot. It could be made intergenerational.

The site is also on Oak Park Ave. and could serve as a resting place to pedestrians going north.

A water feature could provide white noise and drown out the noise of traffic.

I'm a proponent of passive programming by the apartment building.

Where do the units of the apartment face?

The studios have living rooms and bedrooms along the north side with the exception of one.

Currently no fountains in the park district system. The splash pads are set on a 10 AM – 5 PM timer. Maybe we could incorporate an ornamental fountain.

We could put the fountain on a timer as well.

The noise of water might not please all the nearby residents. I have tenants complaining about the sounds of wind chimes.

Could we add a pond with lily pads?

No, there would be maintenance and safety issues. A coy pond could be more dangerous than a pool.

Vegetable gardens could have open plots available to the community – good location in vicinity to the apartment buildings nearby. PDOP would have to figure out to manage them.

What about shade?

The elm in the parkway would go and the shade from the apartment building wouldn't be an issue in the summer. Do you think there is a demand for vegetable gardens?

We could figure out the demand at community meetings. The gardens would need to be screened.

Raised beds could work; we could use a spigot and soaker hoses.

If there was a fire on the north side of the apartment building, firefighters would need direct access so there would have to be egress along Randolph.

But if there was a building in our lot, wouldn't they have to go through the front?

An access or gate could be placed along Randolph.

I think chess or checker boards would be a nice idea.

There used to be a train or trolley line through the site. It would run into Chicago.

That explains the jog in Randolph St.

Should we incorporate a theme into the park? The railroad idea could be one.

Kompan produces railroad-themed play equipment – we already have some in other parks.

Hemingway's family owned the apartment building in the 20s.

That's a good piece of history to know.

It is like two separate parks.

The paving in the alley could tie them together.

Maybe we could use a twin theme. A storybook twin theme could tie the two together and make the parks interrelated but also independent.

It makes sense to make it intergenerational. It would still be marrying the sites. There aren't a lot of sites like that in Oak Park. Senior services could have seniors teach the young how to play chess.

Are there any concerns about using sand on a park site?

Yes.

Already one person has emailed us about that. Kids like sand but it can become a litter box.

Does the park district have a policy on using sand in its playgrounds?

We're currently working on one.

Kids do love sand. Sand and water go so well with each other for them.

Yes, but the sand clogs up all of the splash pad and water feature drains.

### Fencing/Edging

Should we provide a fence between the apartment building and the park to create a border?

And do we provide gates from the apartments into the park?

Maybe we could put in a knee wall.

The residents probably wouldn't like a fence there.

Maybe plantings like a hedge or a ground cover could provide a buffer.

How do we change the perception that it is now public instead of private?

Shrubbery sounds like a good solution. I'm opposed to completely fencing in a park. They become dog runs.

If we use shrubbery, we have to be careful of creating voids and hidden places where nefarious activities could take place.

To create the perception that is now a public space we should put a new entrance and signage on Oak Park Ave.

We need to find a balance between keeping kids in, fencing the buildings off, and providing access from all directions.

Josephine closed the meeting noting the first public meeting August 5<sup>th</sup> at Pleasant Home, thanking everyone for coming, and asking everyone to stay in touch. The meeting adjourned at 10:25am.