



Scoville Park Community Meeting #1

Location: Oak Park Public Library – Veteran’s Room

Date: March 24, 2010

Time: 7pm

Minutes of Meeting

Mr. Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District, made the introductions to the meeting.

Gary Balling welcomed the attendees and introduced Park District Commissioners, members of the Park District Citizen Committee and staff that were present. He provided a brief summary of the park planning process thus far noting that Scoville Park is the seventeenth of eighteen parks to go through the process. There have been six focus groups held already where the design team received initial input on the current conditions of the park and neighborhood from Village and Park District Staff and officials.

Mr. Balling then confirmed the schedule for the process as follows:

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| Community Meeting #1 | Wednesday, March 24 th , 2010 |
| Community Meeting #2 | Wednesday, April 21 st |
| Community Meeting #3 | Thursday, May 11 th |

A 4th meeting would be held if necessary.

There will be a questionnaire posted on the Park District website starting on March 25th at 5PM and residents can also contact the Park District through telephone, emails, and mail.

Website: <http://www.oakparkparks.com/>

Contact: Diane Stanke Email: dianes@oakparkparks.com

\$725,000 has been set aside for the first phase of the project but there may be other phases of work as this process is to produce a long term plan and coordinated vision for the park.

He then introduced the design team and handed the meeting over to John Mac Manus of Altamanu, Inc. Mr. Mac Manus presented a PowerPoint presentation and then requested comments.



The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed on line at Website: <http://www.oakparkparks.com>

Summary of the Presentation

Though the purpose of the meeting was to collect public input it was also desirable to give the attendees something to react too; therefore while giving a presentation on the park Mr. Mac Manus also informed the attendees of suggestions made at the Focus Group meetings.

Mr. Mac Manus provided brief summaries of; Scoville Park's many roles within the community, its geologic history and history prior to development, the surrounding urban context and its relationship to the park. He then addressed the history of the park.

History

There are many layers of history to the park and its surroundings. The Hemingway Museum is adjacent on Oak Park Ave.; Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple is on Lake St., and the birthplace of Oak Park, through the story of the Kettlestrings, the Scoville family, Jensen, memorials such as the Percy Julian sculpture etc. is firmly sited in Scoville Park.

Jens Jensen's Plan 1913

In 1913 the Scoville house located on top of the hill was demolished, the land was transferred to the Park District, and noted landscape architect Jens Jensen began his design for the park. Mr. Mac Manus went through the plan in some detail and spoke about Jensen's design philosophy and the changes in American attitudes towards their own landscape.

Though the park is on the National Register of Historic Places there are differences between the park today and the original plan. The Peace Memorial was dedicated in the 1920s. There was a pond in the southwest corner and a wading pool in the northwest corner where the tot lot is today. Several of the paths have changed often taking on a less sensuous quality. Jensen avoided placing entries at the corners of the park and today's entries and plazas at the SE and SW have been added over time. There is a heritage oak on site and a plum that is not noted on Jensen's plan but is of significant age. Some groupings of flowering trees may be original but the arborist who investigated the site was not of that opinion.

Mr. Mac Manus provided a brief summary of Jensen's background and its effect on his design philosophy. He was a conservationist, environmentalist, and designer of parks. The forest preserves are a legacy of his advocacy. He was a major proponent of preserving the native Illinois landscape and the use of native plantings.

Mr. Mac Manus presented an overlay of the 1913 Jensen plan superimposed over an aerial of the park today and continued to discuss some of Jensen's design. Jensen disliked the straight line and straight path and referred to it as "the tyranny of the straight line". Instead his path system had a very sinuous, organic feel which has since been straightened in several areas, particularly around the monument.



Jensen incorporated large expanses of shrubs and understory trees, especially around the perimeter of the park, which would be beautiful if reinstated into the park today but what would be the impact on the use of the park? Would this present a security concern and risk? Part of our task is to decide on how we might address Jensen's design and that maybe we could reinstate his design philosophy in the context of our times.

Virtual Walkthrough of the Park

Corner Plaza at Oak Park and Lake Street

Mr. Mac Manus continued his presentation with a walkthrough of the park in photographs starting at the corner of Lake St. and Oak Park Ave. The corner is probably the most important entry into the park. Is the present entry the one we would like? Is it a welcoming space? Moving into the park there's a strong desire line cutting across the meadow to the library. The meadow/hill gets a lot of use. There would have been a copse of Oaks and Maples where the monument is now.

Flower Beds

The adjacent flower beds are very popular and have a series of rotations of plants during the year. This work is labor intensive and expensive to maintain. Henrietta Yardley, who manages the conservatory and is responsible for the plantings, has asked that we consider something more sustainable with a mix of perennials and annuals versus annuals alone. (Henrietta also suggested placing flower displays at the entryways)

Peace Memorial

The paths have been straightened out around the monument to make it more symmetrical. It's been suggested in our focus groups that we bring back Jensen's paths here. It was also requested that the space around the memorial should be more inviting and that we should add more seating and could relate more openly to the meadow and hill. To the west, where Jensen had his larger garden there has been a suggestion to add a children's play area.

Stage

The existing temporary stage is of concern to the Park District. It is expensive and time consuming to erect. It has to be insured and when taken down has to be stored off-site. It will soon have to be replaced and therefore the possibility of a permanent platform, integrated into the park design has been suggested. The concept of a band shell was brought up more than once but this conjures up a large facility. The suggestion is for a small platform integrated into the park by grading and planting. The idea of moving the stage to the southwest corner of the park also came up but with mixed reactions.

SW Corner

What was once the 'Reading Room' came up in every focus group meeting. The mature evergreens, the changes in grade, and the layering of shrubs make it difficult to see into that space. It is sometimes used as a hangout and security concerns here have been raised at all meetings. It has a separate entry which is not often used.



Library Plaza

When the library plaza on vacated Grove Avenue was constructed the interaction between park and library was an issue. There is a degree of separation between the park and the library now. Should we integrate the library and park more? Should there be any separation? The configuration of the walls and plaza were discussed in detail.

Tennis Courts

The courts were also brought up at most meetings and there was debate whether they should remain or be removed. There was a suggested compromise to remove one court in order to create an enlarged space at the northeast corner of the park that is underutilized today.

Ontario Street

Ontario St., on the north edge of the park, cannot be closed due to the parking and access but as it is one way there is a possibility of bump outs (a traffic calming measure) being added to make crossing the street easier and safer. The sidewalk on the northern edge of the park was removed to allow for diagonal parking but people have created a desire line along the edge of the street. Further desire lines have been formed around the tot lot. The tot lot has been in place since 1987 and is probably due for a rehab. The comfort station adjacent to the tot lot provides some storage and two bathrooms.

Mr. Mac Manus then opened up the meeting to public comment, wishes, and concerns.

Public Comment on the Meadow/Hill:

Would you really want to improve the sledding here when there's the hill at Ridgeland?
It's more for little kids.

Yes, they are there sledding or rolling down the hill all the time.

I think expanding the meadow would be lovely.

Would you have to take out trees?

There is one tree at the top– it probably wouldn't have to be removed. We would push the path closer to the monument so the flower beds would be taken out or come back in a different form.

The space in the meadow – I would like to see it designated as a U-8 soccer field. The justification is that the business district was asking for the park to bring in more people with activities; they wanted an ice skating rink – I don't want that. But soccer is going to bring in more people to this park on a Saturday morning at 9 than anything and the goal posts could be taken out.

I would be against any athletic activity in this park.

I want to preserve as much green space as possible here.

Keep to the theme of the park being our village green.



Public Comment on the Monument:

The memorial is not well set up for memorial services. It would be good to enlarge that area for the purpose of memorials.
I think there could be more space.
I like the idea of a Peace Plaza and I think all of the memorials should be better connected.

Public Comment on the Flower Beds by the Monument:

The current beds take a lot of work.
Has there been any thought to using more prairie plants?
Yes, that was discussed even though there were no grasses in this particular Jensen plan. He became well known for using grasses in his later park designs.
Taking out the flower beds and the annuals would make the park less beautiful.
If we get rid of the flower beds we would be losing something completely lovely.
Maybe we could get more villagers to volunteer and pull weeds.
I love the flower beds. They are one of the best features of the park. They flower from March through October.

Public Comment on the 1913 Jensen Plan & Today:

Was all of this (planting) Jensen plan really there?
When I was young this park was like a Garden of Eden. There was a black iron fence that went around it and it was very lush. I think we need to figure a way in which we can maintain Jensen's vision and essence.
The original layout is 20th century and we're living in the 21st century. There is a more urban environment and a higher density of people around the park today. Soil compaction is always going to be a problem. I don't know if anyone can recall but before we put irrigation into the meadow it was just dirt. The plantings that Jensen used would be beautiful but also costly to maintain and a security concern. In the 1960s the Park District tore out almost every other bush in the parks to increase visibility and safety.
I like the idea of changing the paths around the memorial back to the original Jensen layout.

Public Comment on the Southwest Corner:

I think the kids like the idea that they're more secluded. They, at times, can be intimidating to others. A lot of the problems are perception and comfort issues. I think if you can bring more people into the park and this area specifically, a lot of the problems are going to go somewhere else. As to how to bring more people into that area – I'm not sure.
I would like it to be more visible at the southwest corner. The trees could be limbed up.



However this corner and the corner at Oak Park Ave. and Lake should have a consistency between them.

Public Comment on Security, Teenagers, Homeless:

The edge of the park along Lake St. hasn't presented an issue for the neighborhood beat officer. Teenagers are going to gather where they can gather and they will sit where they can sit. We have this inclination to clear out everything for the sake of visibility but there should be a compromise. I like the idea of engineering a way of bringing more people into Scoville Park.

How do you patrol the park?

The neighborhood beat officer typically starts around the high school when school gets out and then moves to the park afterwards. Most of the complaints will typically be about the area in front of the library.

How many arrests have been made in Scoville Park in the last three years?

The neighborhood beat officer did not have the numbers in front of him. The numbers aren't overwhelming. Some of the people who cause trouble are arrested elsewhere.

The library plaza generates one of the highest amounts of police calls which are primarily regarding rowdy behavior and noise.

The teenagers do take over that area. They are there when the homeless are not and vice versa. They (the teenagers) can be very rowdy.

The teenagers don't bother me as much as the homeless.

There are PADS sites in Oak Park but the service center is in Maywood.

There isn't a place for them to go and to be engaged so they go to the park and the library.

There is a homeless situation here – could we maybe designate a time to accommodate them in the park?

The public restrooms – there are a lot of problems going on in there. That really needs to be addressed.

I think there are issues in (all) the parks. The presence of the homeless, who can have a lot of addiction issues, and the fact that this park is more centralized, exacerbates it (the issues) here. But, I don't think the park is overrun by drug users.

I am in favor of reinstating the Oak Park Township Outreach Program. A couple of volunteers would go into the park each day and engage the youth in the parks. If we had something like that now it would get youths off of the sidewalk and into the park.

Public Comment on the Tot Lot & Play:

I think the Morton Arboretum has done an incredible job getting people involved in nature and play at the same time. The playgrounds interact with the gardens and the observation towers allow you to look into the landscape.



Yes, the Arboretum’s playground is wonderful but it’s also fenced in and controlled. A very different situation.

The tot lot is very well used. If you add a play area for older children I ask that you keep it separate but maintain visibility between the two.

I second that and I don’t think the existing tot lot really needs to be changed.

I agree. I don’t think it needs to be updated – it would be expensive.

It will wear out in time. If we do update the playground with new pieces we may not be able to fit in as many pieces due to today’s playground safety standards and fall zones.

I do think the tot lot needs some updating even if it’s just replacing what’s already there.

Personally, I would like to see more boulders, like those at Soldier Field, if you want to add a play area for older kids.

Public Comment on Tennis:

I like the thought of reducing the 3 tennis courts to 2 and making an enlarged space. I think the 3 current courts are a compromise. The surfacing is worn, the nets are often messed up, and the lights are incredibly dim, especially in the middle court. The courts are unusable after 7PM in the evenings.

The tennis courts get a ton of use. I would be opposed to taking one out.

Public Comment on Paths:

The park is losing all of this usable space in the northeast corner because the entry is further down Oak Park Ave. I would like to see that space get more use.

With A Day in Our Village I think that more pathways would make more room for booths. Presently many booths have to set up inside the paths and the park can become very muddy.

There needs to be a sidewalk on the north side of the park.

Public Comment on the Comfort Station:

The restrooms need to be improved.

There are issues of misuse and need for better maintenance.

Public Comment on Potential Signage:

I think that the continental divide is very important. I know there’s a sign there now but maybe there could be a statue or more signage. It’s a big deal that this was once the shoreline and I think more kids should know about it.

People ought to be encouraged to look at the different aspects of history; there’s the Hemingway Museum, Unity Temple, and old and new Oak Park. We should try to offer a narrative about us and the evolution of the Village. We should have interpretive signage at the main plazas.



On the Percy Julian statue; the man was very symbolic of our connection to nature. He worked with plants often. I think it would be important to see a larger gesture. This could be part of the park's overall story. The current statue just sits there.

The plaque on the Percy Julian statue is hard to read and doesn't give a lot of information.

I would also like to see the Percy Julian statue expanded. The statue could be in the flower beds among flowers with different colors as a message of diversity or by the children's play area as a message of growth.

The area west of the monument could be a garden with more statues of historical figures.

Public Comment on Library Plaza:

The no loitering signs in front of the library have helped.

There are not enough bike racks and they are placed far from the library entrance. There were many comments on how the plaza is really a go-through space and gets crowded with teenagers.

The library and park could be joined in a better way.

We have to take care not to damage the underground heating system for the concrete as it melts the snow and saves the maintenance staff a lot of work.

It could be a place for a floral display.

It is used as staging area for the events. Trucks pull up there.

Public Comment on a Potential Permanent Stage/Platform:

I hope that whatever goes into that stage area does not increase the amount of events or the amount of noise. There are a lot of neighbors in the area.

I live in the Oak Park Club and during concerts I can't use the parts of my condo that face out on to the park because it's so loud.

A permanent stage or a band shell would make it noisier.

I live at Chicago Ave. and the festivals bother me sometimes.

I don't think there should be a band shell. It disrupts the original plan and the meadow and it's only used 7-10 times a year.

We could still get a better portable stage.

A reminder it is a performance platform and not a band shell. This would be a small area.

Public Comment on Plaza at Oak Park Ave. & Lake St. (Southeast Corner):

The southeast entry is like an obstacle course.

In Jensen's plan there was no entry there. It was a grove of Plum trees instead.

Mr. Mac Manus asked if anyone would like to see it gone completely – no one raised their hand.

Mr. Mac Manus asked if anyone would like to see it renovated – a majority of people raised their hand.



The fountain is nice when it is working but it gets all that green algae.
(The fountain has not been working for many years and the water that collects is rain water)

I think the plaza could be updated.

The plaza gets a lot of use with people waiting for the bus.

Public Comment on South Edge of Park (along Lake St.):

The streetscape is horrendous – the sidewalk is unappealing and not inviting.

There used to be parkway trees along there.

It once was a carriageway.

There is a lot of debris at eye level along Lake St. The fruiting trees mess up the sidewalk and it makes it unattractive.

Misc. Public Comment:

This park is not bike friendly and neither is the library. There is a lack of bike racks and the bike racks that are there now are away from the entrances.

Trying to cross Oak Park Ave. at the northeast corner of the park is very dangerous because of the traffic and blocked views. You have to risk your life to cross.

(Cars speed up to get the green light at Lake Street).

Maintenance needs to be addressed in front of the library. There are cigarette butts in the waterfall, they need to power wash the concrete in front more often, and there is a lot of overgrowth where the library meets the park. There are still leaves along Grove Ave. from last fall. It's truly unsightly.

The library is always lit and so brightly too. It endangers the birds and costs a lot of energy. Not a sustainable approach.

The lighting needs to be consistent in and around the park.

As it got close to 9PM Mr. Mac Manus took the final comments and thanked the attendees and encouraged them to attend the next meeting.

Mr. Balling encouraged the attendees to tell other residents and to please come back themselves to the next meeting on Wednesday 21st at 7PM. He then thanked all the attendees.