



**Scoville Park
Focus Group Meeting # 6
Library Staff Focus Group
Oak Park Public Library, 834 Lake Street,
March 4, 2010, 2:00pm**

Participants:

Rory O'Neill, Oak Park Public Library
Debby Preiser, Oak Park Public Library
Jim Madigan, Oak Park Public Library
Heather McCammond-Watts, Oak Park Public Library
Leigh Gavin, Oak Park Public Library
Mark Jirik, Altamanu, Inc.
John Mac Manus, Altamanu, Inc.
Josephine Bellalta, Altamanu, Inc.

Introduction

Diane Stanke of the Park District thanked all attendees for coming and for their willingness to provide insight into Scoville Park. She delivered a brief overview of the parks' master planning process and spoke of several parks now completed and others currently in construction. Diane noted that Scoville is the seventeenth park of eighteen in the park district's master planning process. As part of the park planning process the focus groups meetings today and one tomorrow are primarily to aid Altamanu, the park planners, in understanding the complexities of Scoville Park and its context. The focus group meetings will be followed by community meetings that will also be held at the library. The first of these meetings will be held on Wednesday March 24th at 7pm. Altamanu Inc. was selected through an open and detailed public process. Diane encouraged the attendees to give freely of their ideas and opinions and then handed the presentation over to John Mac Manus of Altamanu.

John Mac Manus began with a brief history of Scoville Park and its relation to noted landscape architect, Jens Jensen. John also examined how the park functions today and went through several issues that had been brought up in the previous meetings. John opened the meeting up to comment and requested any opinions, concerns and ideas for Scoville Park.

General Comments

If you really want this park to be used more I'd like to know – will it have supervision? i.e. someone on site?

I don't think that's likely. It's an issue of manpower and then cost. It's the reality we have to deal with.

The hill is the most used part of the park. It's definitely more used than the play lot which could be updated.

The southeast plaza at Oak Park and Lake acts like a barrier into the park.

Is there any significance to the lone evergreen tree that sticks out like a sore thumb? It's the one that was used as the Christmas tree but no longer.

I don't think you can have Christmas trees in the park anymore.

The Park District adds lights to trees along Lake.

I thought they weren't allowing any more memorial trees to be planted in Scoville.

It may be on hold because of this planning process. They need to see what the community wants in the park.

It is the most popular park in Oak Park for memorial tree requests.

Maybe you could start a memorial brick program. We did an engraved brick program and raised \$50,000 for the library.

I think the chain link fence on the north side of the park is very ugly.

I think the tot lot is very well used.

What's happening with the building (comfort station)?

It's boarded up because kids kept breaking the windows.

It should be improved.

Incorporating Jensen/History into the Park

Many changes occurred in the park between the 1960s and the 1980s. Some of the paths were shifted and also straightened.

The plaza at the southeastern entry was added as was the outdoor reading room.

Some of Jensen's plantings, mostly small trees like hawthorns and even a plum or two remain.

There is a very old one in the NE corner.

Also some of the shrubs on the north side may be original.

And there is one oak that may even predate the Jensen plan.

The Peace Memorial, another important addition, was erected in the 1920s.

The park is dripping with history. It was suggested that we incorporate more historical markers and interpretive signage.

What I like in Jensen's plan is all of the crabapples. I would love to see more flowering trees and maybe flowering perennials – maybe more free-flowing gardens as well.

Don't crabapples get mold and stuff?

They do but there are new hybrids that are more resistant.

Carol Shields was Pulitzer Prize winner born in Oak Park. There's a plaque dedicated to her somewhere in the park.

Does the library have any need for signage in the park or would you like to see more educational signs? Maybe on Jensen, or on Hemingway, or on native plantings?

I like Lindberg Park and Austin Gardens. Both have signs and I really like the wildflower gardens.

This is such a historic area and you would never know it.

I think there should be a historical marker for Scoville and for Jensen.

I think it would be cool to have Jensen's original plan up and show the history of the park. I don't know if there's been any thought to adding more sculptures but this would be the park for it.

I would like to see a Hemingway bust – the Percy Julian one is so nice.

Paths & Circulation

If the path from the southeast corner was moved up towards the monument it would better accentuate the monument as a gathering space and increase the size of the hill which is so popular and the most used.

Does the Jensen path come closer to the entry of the library? (The historic Jensen Plan was reviewed)

Yes.

I like that better than the current layout.

None of the existing paths really work anymore.

I think people are interested in recreating the original Jensen path system and an area around the monument that could act as a gathering space.

I think the corner plaza at Oak Park Ave. and Lake St. is awful and needs to be redesigned.

One of the things I enjoy most about the park is the little kids sledding. If the path was moved towards the monument would the sledding hill become enlarged?

Yes it could be with a little regrading.

Monument

I would like to see this monument moved. It doesn't belong in a Jensen park, but that's my opinion.

I like the monument. I like that it draws people to the top of the hill.

I like the timber planters there.

I love those planting beds when they put them in but it's so labor intensive and requires a lot of maintenance. I think it's contradictory to the spirit of the park.

The flower beds limit the monument's use as a gathering space.

I sometimes eat by the monument when taking lunch. I'll sit on the timber ledges.

But proper benches would be nice

All of the peace vigils are done at the monument.

It's not necessarily my favorite monument but everyone in the community knows it and it does serve a unifying purpose.

It is going to stay so you may as well design something nice around it.

Tennis

I think those courts are rarely used. There are plenty of tennis courts in town. I realize there would be an outcry from some but you can't please everyone.

It would be an incredible space if they were gone.

The Park District has already taken out 5 courts across the village and these are centrally located.

The location of these courts is also historic. Jensen shows two courts on his original plan in the same location.

But you can't always side with the smaller but more vocal minority. At least maybe the courts could be changed to grass courts.

Maybe the tennis courts could be reduced to two in order to give more space to the northwest corner.

That is what Jensen had originally, just two courts.

I think that's a fair compromise.

Library Plaza (Vacated Grove Avenue)

I used to like having coffee out there in the morning.

Yes but the café does not overlook the plaza and they couldn't see what was happening out there.

It became an area for undesirables.

And the book drop-off was right there.

You have another one on the other side of Lake?

Yes in the lot. It gets used well

But you have to know it is there.

The skateboarders skate right by the street and the entrance into the library. It's very dangerous. They use the low curbs in front on a regular basis. They can't use the rough walls.

I think the plaza (in front of the library) has some issues. I think that the park should open up more to the library and the library should open up more to the park.

Both should be inviting.

I must admit, I've never liked the ledge (dwarf wall) and it's all angular.

And the ledge just stops. I think that in its current condition it needs to be extended all the way to the sidewalk leading into the park. People walk through the shrubs where the wall stops and walk into the park.

I haven't really noticed people walking through but I can imagine it.

Yes, you can see the trench out there.

They have to keep the plaza a certain width for fire trucks.

We have a snow-melt system under the plaza that saves us a lot of work. And I love it. You can't take out any of the concrete above it without ruining the system.

Could we expand the plaza in some areas or change its shape a little by adding without damaging the system?

Yes as long as you don't disturb the coils.

One coil is not working and a strip near the wall doesn't melt

The melt waters flow down the path (ramp) and collect and freeze in the corner.

If you wanted to change that it would be great.

I think the village vacating Grove changed our relationship with the park for the better.

I think the architecture reflects the park well. The 3rd floor really brings the park into the library.

When the copper cladding turns green it will be a wonderful back drop to the park.

The façade was pulled back so as not to block the views from the building (to the north).

The architect said that the shapes came from looking at the canopy of the trees.

He was very good and very patient and listened to the public.

What if we had the children's garden in front of the plaza and kept the grade by the evergreens a little higher and flatter to create a raised platform?

How would a stage in the corner affect the library?

I don't know. There could be some advantages; sound could be directed to the northeast.
I see it as an outdoor classroom or a place where kids could put on a talent show.
Should there be a separation between the library and the park?
No, I don't think so – not anymore. They should be better integrated.
Would you get any resistance from the Park District if the plaza was enlarged?
I wouldn't know.
We did want to add more bike racks inside the limits of the park because we couldn't drill into our concrete because of the snow-melt system.
We should get you (Altamanu) plans showing how the plaza was constructed and designed.
Will there be an issue of ownership if the plaza changes.
There could still be a demarcation of the property line if the plaza was expanded.
If the wall was taken down, which is a gathering space for the homeless and also for kids; would it eliminate some of the hanging out by the entrance?
We're open to making it a more open transition from library to park.
I'm not sure if I understand the logic of the plaza.
Were the concrete slabs poured in place?
Yes, they were poured in place.
I think the plaza is supposed to be the roof line. I think it was designed in plan.
The jagged edge feels unwelcoming.
The plaza sort of reflects the undulation of the building.
I don't know if the entry into the library was ever resolved. There's a lot going on there in a small space between the drive ramp and the entrance.

Southwest Corner of Park (Outdoor Reading Room)

The southwest corner of the park has a separate entry and it has several issues. It's hard to see in and out and as a result you have undesirables that come in and smoke and drink. Once those kinds of people are occupying the space no one else wants to use it.
There is a real issue with security in that area.
Is a water feature something you could use as an amenity? Maybe it pays tribute to the Jensen pond.
I love the part of Millennium Park with the faces spouting water and I think it's a great feature but I don't know if it would turn into a bathtub for the homeless at Scoville.
If you do the water feature, would you take out ours? I think it's in that in-between area.
No, I like ours. It's more audible than something to look at.
Maybe it could become a prairie garden so it isn't so shady.
There are a couple of issues there making it unsafe; there's a large change in grade, there's the low wall and also the mature evergreens block views.
The Jensen plan shows there was a pond there.
I think that space would be a great children's garden. I've been to the children's garden at MSU and it's great. We could add a storybook garden and it would be right at the library entrance.
And if it has something like a Peter Rabbit theme you won't have teenagers hanging out there.
I think the separate entrance there makes no sense. If it was removed the entry to the library and the park could be grander.
I think it could all be done well and be good for the library and the park.

Stage

I think it (a permanent stage) would be a bad idea. You run into problems like potential vandalism and I really like the grass.

I would try to keep the most grass because the kids really enjoy it.

We do use the current temporary stage. We've also plugged into the lights along the plaza to have temporary sound for story time in the park.

We have occasionally used the stage but not much.

The representatives of the library thanked the Park District and Altamanu Inc. for the opportunity to give input and hope to be involved in the community meetings

The following day a member of Altamanu Inc. interviewed the security guard at the library.

Are there significant security problems at the library?

There is a mix of problems.

The homeless are ok most of the time. But they get their checks on the 3rd of each month and between the 3rd and 5th some of them can get out of control. (drinking)

I warn them and tell them if they keep it up they will be banned from the library, but we don't do that often. They don't want to be kicked out. They like the restrooms and the heat.

The drug problem is most severe.

The pushers come into the library and cut out parts of a book and put in their stash and then put the book back in the stack. Then they tell the kids where it is.

It is hard to catch them. I know who they are, so I follow them and try to see them through the stacks, but it is hard because if they see you, they stop.

The men's toilets get blocked up with drug paraphernalia, needles and baggies sometimes.

Yes it is a real problem.

The kids use the corner out there to do drugs.

We can't see them from in here.

That is a real problem for us.

Then they come in here.

Most of the kids are good though.

It is the hard drugs that are the real problem.