

June 12, 2020

Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Prescott Park Master Plan Implementation

9-11am

Online / Zoom Meeting

## Meeting Minutes

### ATTENDEES

- Nancy Colbert Puff, Deputy City Manager (NCP)
- Peter Rice, Director of Public Works (PR)
- Joe Almeida, Project Manager (JA)
- Beth Margeson (BM)
- Councilor Petra Huda (PH)
- Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf (RLM)
- Genevieve Aichele (GA)
- Alan Gordon (AG)
- Tom Watson (TW)
- Cheri Ruane, Vice President, W&S (CR)
- Ted Touloukian, President, Touloukian Touloukian, (TT)
- Boris Angelov, Designer, Touloukian Touloukian (BA)

### NOTE:

The recorded time of subjects discussed is referenced throughout by hours/minutes/seconds, e.g. (1h10m6s).

### SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE COMMENTS

- (0m52s) Because of the COVID-19 emergency the requirement has been waived that a quorum be physically present. Remote attendees will identify their location and votes will be counted by roll call.
- **(3m56s) Presentation (CR):**
  - Project Team
  - Project Recap
    - Schedule
    - Master Plan
  - Design Strategies
    - Stormwater & Climate Resilience Strategy
    - MEP (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing) Strategy
    - (18m27s) Buildings & Performance Stage (TT)
      - (27m22s) Note that presentation was previously given to city council about buildings options (CR)
  - (29m15s) Updated Phasing Plan (CR)
    - Phase 1 Recommendations on order 1-6
- **(32m24s) Comments:**
  - (33m52s) It makes sense to work on the resiliency phases right now because it is inundated with water today. Is the proposal to tear down the lean-to and garage? (BM)
    - (34m10s) Proposal is a strong word. We are more exploring our options. Both the garage, built in 1987, and lean-to require a good deal of work and are currently not serving the site well. (CR)
  - (34m50s) Thinking of NPS and the historic registry, will tearing down the lean-to and garage trigger any 106 permitting issues? If we are doing new construction or altering the existing

construction, do we need shoreline permits and, if so, what would be the likelihood of getting those? (BM)

- (35m31s) Getting permits would be part of our next step. We have been working with City Preservationist; we are not making these decisions blindly. We have been asking these questions and our understanding and belief is that the Master Plan helps to bolster and support some of these decisions (park first, resilient preservation). The case must be made and we need to explore it, but it is our understanding that the Lean-to and the Garage are negotiable in those conversations (CR).
- (36m07s) Moving the stage further to the river seems to be a positive for the neighborhood, and the axis is tipped so it goes straight out the way it is now. With engineering, will sound be contained?
  - (36m34s) We would have focused sound and light studies done. Technology has advanced from what is used now and there is much to be gained from using current technology on sound and light spillage. Positioning it in the site, graded in the way we are planning, will contain sound a little bit more. (CR)
- (37m22s) Is there any problem with having the stage between two buildings? Are you reducing access from the side of the stage? (BM)
  - To reduce the appurtenances (trailers, sheds, tents) that surround the stage now, it will be necessary to leverage adjacent buildings for dressing rooms and storage. They can be flexible spaces that are used for dressing rooms during the performance season and something different later. It was the idea that we could leverage the Shaw and another building to help reduce those extra support sheds and trailers to help reduce the stage's overall footprint in the park. The adjacencies to those buildings, either existing or new, is something we are vetting and has been reviewed by our performing arts subconsultants (CR)
  - (38m48s) To add, there is an advantage of the connection between a new addition and the stage, in the theme of 'exit stage left' for actors and support crew along with freeing up storage space and trailers that are visible within the park now. (TT)
- (39m15s) Where would the stage be? (TW)
  - (39m56s) (Looking at a slide) While we are still refining the location, the stage would be aligned on this 'rail', which we are fondly calling the line of buildings that line up against the historic rail that once ran to the water. We would shift the performance lawn so that the access with the stage is aligned. (CR)
- (40m54s) Looking at TT's renderings, the buildings seem closer to the river than the plan indicates. In terms of area the audience is projected to take up, would it cross over the central pathway that runs west to east and would it interfere with the ability to walk through the park, for those not attending a performance? We were insistent in this pathway loop and that the performance area would not interfere with circulation through the park. (TW)
  - 42m09s) Exactly right. Maintain circulation through the park, even during a performance, was a main design tenant of the 'park first' approach. Crowd control, as needed, would be limited to the main corridors, so that pathways (especially the swooping east/west corridor) will always be open. (CR)
- (42m45s) This may be contrary to Beth's observation of setting the stage further from the neighborhood, but if the Shaw stayed where it is now and we added two extensions toward the river, then TW is concerned that the audience would interfere with that swooping east/west path. (On slide 15) If we are reorienting the stage so it is abutting the buildings, the natural area of the audience will interfere with that path.
  - (43m20s) The stage lawn will be refined based the configuration of 'the rail' and the

- building and performance stage locations. It is a huge consideration because the Shaw is such an amazing piece of maritime architecture and we have had conversations internally about how it can be more civic facing and have a better connection to Marcy Street. Is sliding it closer to Marcy Street a good move? It may help to engage more of the public in the building and provides better service. We are very mindful of the potential overlap of audience on walkway and that is why we are considering different options for the configuration of the buildings. The lawn would be for the lawn and the stage to align in a more direct way. (CR)
- If we are heading in that direction, TW would advocate for moving the buildings closer to Marcy Street so that swooping east/west pathway stays open during performances. (TW)
  - (44m51s) New to the committee and it is the first time she is seeing the drawings. She is very impressed and likes the ideas. Confirming that when we got the resiliency data back, we had to rethink some of the design strategies. First concern is the sea level rise. PH would hate to make all these improvements and then have to redo everything because of sea level rise. That said, there seems to be an opportunity to combine the two lawns to double that civic space and shift the Shaw back so it's in the middle of that space and can be used as back of house space for the stage. (PH)
  - (46m31s) What is happening to the dock that is currently at the parking lot on State Street? Support for the docks and walking path. (PH)
    - (46m47s) The docks and access to the docks remain. We are reconfiguring the stairs and fence space so people can access the water. (CR)
  - (47m18s) PH likes the concept of a dock going out over the water and loves how people would be able to move freely there. Do we anticipate any issues with the public moving through the park during a performance? Having two spaces that are supposed to be available to the public and people standing docks watching concerts – has that been considered? Do we think it is a problem or not a problem? (PH)
    - (47m55s) We worked closely over the last couple of years with the Arts Festival specifically to discuss this point because there were a lot of conflicts that came up during the public engagement process. Folks wanted to be able to walk home at night after eating out at a restaurant and not have to pass through gates where people were asking for donations. A huge part of the design has been around how to ensure people did not feel like they needed to pass through the threshold of the performance / audience zone when walking through the park. We talked with the Arts Festival about the reality that it is an outdoor venue and some people will likely be hanging around the outskirts, listen, and not offer a donation. Although we are not designing for the Arts Festival, they are the current tenants and user of this stage. Ultimately, they understood and were okay with that because the ability for them to control the space that was being allocated is now actually double the audience space in the proposed plan. The stage is currently in the middle of that lawn panel, so they only have half the space to have a crowd. By sliding the stage back and opening up that entire lawn panel, they are more comfortable with the space allocated for audience in the proposed plan such that the walkways surrounding the lawn can be free for park users during a performance. It is a dialogue we have been having and will continue to have as the design goes on. (CR)
  - (49m42s) Could Four Tree Island be an earlier in the phasing plan rather than later? PH would like to focus on building out the stormwater and infrastructure as early as possible, so we don't have to worry about anything in the future. Get the main circulation routes built sooner than

later. (PH)

- (50m29s) Order of magnitude/economies of scale might come into play with the improvements. For example, if we are doing work on a pier at Prescott Park, it might be cost effective to do a pier on Four Tree Island at the same time with the same contractor. We phased it geographically, for now, but there is some economy of scale to be considered around the actual scope of work that we can incorporate into our thinking. Another example - if a contractor is paving pathways in the park, we can pave pathways on Four Tree Island at the same time to achieve accessibility and inclusion up front. It is a great comment that we will work keep in mind as we look at how this rolls out. (CR)
- (51m24s) Are we going to just raise the Sheafe? Is there anything else that could be more protective that we can incorporate? (PH)
  - (51m44s) The outer boardwalk will create a deck around the Sheafe that will be raised and help provide a more armored edge to further protect it. The Sheafe is located is at a vulnerable position but fortunately it was set at a higher position (almost four feet higher than the Shaw). The Sheafe has a feature called the hatch which is an area where part of the building projects out towards the water, and it would be an amazing opportunity to allow public access on that side of the building, to see the relationship between the water and the building and promote more educational opportunities. (CR)
  - (53m13s) How high are the proposed heights of the buildings to be lifted and in which phases? (PH)
  - (53m28s) There has not been a design elevation chosen yet. Currently the Sheafe is at 10 feet and the Shaw is at 6.2 feet. Based on projected future flood elevations, we are currently looking at the flood elevations at 12 feet. It has not been decided yet; this is just an estimate, but we are looking at the flood elevation and then would like to add a free board delta to take into consideration high winds, or waves, while also allowing a contingency. If the weather escalates more or the sea level rises more, it will be accommodated. As we look at these resilient strategies, it's to protect (to build walls, to raise grade), retreat (to raise the building or to move the buildings), and accommodate (which is strategically allowing the stormwater to come in). On protect, we are going to make sure that the sea walls will be built to accommodate more modular additions, so in the future, where we may have a new flood plain map, more structures can be added to the infrastructure to increase protection. We want to create an incrementally adjustable system. (CR)
- (56m08s) The hatch (in the Sheafe) is cool. Think about putting something underneath it for educational purposes, because kids would just love to drop something down. (PH)
- (56m28s) Could we investigate turning the two oval green spaces to increase civic participation? And to Peter Rice, how does this fit into his stormwater plan, and will it be on the same page with the City? (PH)
  - (57m58s) Clarifying that (PH) is asking whether we can use the stage at both sides. That is a thought and a big conversation we have had. We want to be mindful of noise and other concerns, but Ted is on it. (CR)
  - (57m42s) Maybe we do not use ovals but squares or octagons, just a thought. I understand there are other considerations, especially the noise and how that affects the neighborhood, but the space will rarely be used when there are not events or concerts. (PH)
  - (58m05s) These are just basic diagrams that are representing ideas of buildings and space. Once we design in the architecture, it will feel more connected to the landscape.

- (TT)
- (58m40s) It seems like there is a lot of flexibility on the location of the building. (PH)
  - (59m00s) It does really get into nuances, like Tom mention, such as how do the buildings center along the open space, so that the performance/audience space does not overflow on the pathways. What does it look like from the street? What does it present to the community? There are a lot of different narratives that are interesting once we take it into further design. (TT)
  - (59m38s) Back in 2016/2017 when we were thinking about reconnecting the park and the great opportunity of the Shaw, if it were almost on an abacus that we can slide, would allow Prescott Park to read as one continuous open space. This shift will improve how the park feels and functions. We have been working with Peter and his stormwater plan closely. He has been reviewing and discussing these plans and calculations with us; he has contributed, and the plan supports his stormwater vision. (CR)
- (1hr00m55s) If we are flooding and stormwater is coming into the river, but the river is rising, how does the stormwater get out and where does it go? (PH)
    - (1hr1m00s) That is part of the retention of the underground chambers at Liberty Lawn. They are going to hold a lot of water and, as the tide goes down, it will release water out into the river. The tide rises and falls regularly so we can calculate what the storage needs to be. There will be a below ground system at the Liberty Lawn and at the performance lawn; the grading will be able to handle more surface flow. We are going to direct the surface flow and protect the areas that we do not want to flood. It will retain water for a period and slowly drain into the river. There are going to be storms and high tides that have a big impact, but the park is going to be multitasking as much as possible to mitigate to its capacity. (CR)
  - (1hr2m19s) Is there another way we could reuse the water in the storage tanks, clean it, and irrigate this whole area? (PH)
    - (1hr2m32s) The filtration of stormwater runoff is tricky because of the particulates in it that typically clog irrigation. However, we have collected water off the roofs, put it in a system, and used that for irrigation. With this new building configuration, that kind of approach is possible.
    - (1hr3m00s) Taking the roof stormwater, collecting it in an underground system and combining it with a domestic system (as back up) could take over any demands needed in a drier season. (TT)
    - (1hr3m18s) It is in such close proximity to the new gardens that this is very possible. (CR)
  - (1hr3m30s) Will this increase the cost of this a lot, by storing it and using it for other considerations? (PH)
    - (1hr3m43s) There is cost in the infrastructure but the benefit that is gained, the reduction in maintenance, and the impacts of flooding far outweighs the initial capital investment. It also protects your resources by not being inundated by salt water/stormwater. (CR)
    - (1hr4m33s) Essentially, the question is: what is the life cycle assessment look like on this infrastructure? Certainly, there is some upfront capital expense is but if you are a long-term user like the City, how is that going to pay off over time? When you consider preservation, it does not separate itself from modernization and energy efficiency. You can preserve the buildings and consider the use with respect to electrical loads and renewable energy even. Perhaps the systems that we evaluate could have the ability to

- lower energy expenses for the City over time. (TT)
- (1hr5m30s) Will this mitigate the efforts they have to take to save Strawberry Banke? (PH)
    - It will absolutely help. Prescott Park is the lowest elevation, followed by Strawberry Banke. By accommodating the water, it alleviates some flooding at Strawberry Banke. We were looking at the Strawberry Banke parking lot and if they were looking to make stormwater improvements, the net gain from that would help significantly (CR)
  - (1hr6m23s) Thank you for refocusing us on the resiliency and the infrastructure. Anything that we do must survive. Thinking back on the process of community engagement, people really appreciated the chance to provide input. One of our recommendations from the advisory committee was to establish a process for communication and solicitation of input from the larger community. (AG)
    - (1hr8m6s) It is quite central because we need to communicate what is involved. We need to bring everyone back up to speed and get that feedback. (CR)
    - (1hr8m32s) We did not want just general community engagement, but very specifically integrating the local community into this process, which we do through this advisory committee to some extent. We were talking about creating some sort of structure to regularly interact with the local neighborhood and make sure that everyone is on board and to receive suggestions from the local community. AG saw that year 2023 is Portsmouth's 400-year anniversary and the possibility of getting some funding. It is not too early to think about integrating that into this process. (AG)
    - (1hr9m54s) This was a huge part of the conversation as we were ending the master plan. That is a great milestone to keep in mind. (CR)
  - (1hr10m30s) Could you talk more about the Formal Gardens? (RLM)
    - (1hr10m50s) The formal garden was built years ago over time in a bit of an ad hoc way. The entire drainage system is just dry well it does not connect to anything. The real identifying architecture that makes the formal garden special are the crab apple trees. However, they are reaching the end of their lives and they are susceptible to various diseases. No one wants to lose the formal garden, but the reality is that the infrastructure is not great; the pathways are settling, and the bricks are out of alignment. It also blocks views from the street into the park and to the water. What if we bought the trees now and stored them offsite so they could grow into their glory? Then we start to build the new formal gardens now along with the existing. That area of the park is underutilized; it is over shadowed by Norway maples and it is hard to grow grass. There is such a huge opportunity here for a vibrant part of the park. We could prune the Norway Maples, do some selective removal to get more sun into the garden, and plant the new crab apple trees to start the new formal garden. In the master plan, we placed it on an axis to frame views towards the water, which activates that side of the park and allows us to have the existing formal until the new formal is ready. It also allows us to create more sustainable fountains, improve accessibility, and connect it more to the park without totally exposing it. We want to maintain the quality but make it more accessible. (CR)
  - (1hr15m25s) The Formal Garden is iconic to the city, but when you look closely, it needs revitalization. There will be a challenge to convince the public. (JA)
  - (1hr16m13s) Do we have plans to plant those trees so is it going to happen? The deterioration of the formal gardens is part of the charm. (RLM)
    - (1hr16m42s) We do not want a pristine, slick, crisp place. We want to keep the rustic quality and we would like it to be more inclusive. It is a delicate balance that we will be cognizant of as we move into more detailed design. (CR)

- (1h17m34s) One of the things that was eye opening was that many people commenting on the trees coming to the end of their lives. That will help people understand more. I really like the idea of the Shaw building closer to Marcy Street. Comment: should we reconsider repositioning the stage to face more than one-way, staging things in a different but versatile way? Question: you used the phrase more than once “Making the Shaw more civic facing.” Are you talking about moving it closer to Marcy Street so that it is more viewable or are you talking about the USE? It would be great to have dressing rooms and storage spaces in the Shaw. What do you think about when you use the words ‘civic facing’? (GA)
  - (1hr20m40s) When you think about civic presence, it is not just about the views of the beautiful buildings, but the visibility of them from the park. When the stage moves to a different location for an event, the visibility of the buildings will be more prominent. And how it is used – the first floor is the most public space, but it is used for storage. What is the highest and best use for the space? Perhaps we expose the beams and let the beauty of the historic structure shine. How they are used is becoming an open experience for the public. There are all kinds of ideas and going back to the community process on this will be important. Adaptability is important; they do not have to be single use but rotating as needs occur. (TT)
- (1hr22m32s) This possibility of moving the Shaw is exciting. I am very happy about plans for the stormwater issues. The part of the park we are doing first is most vulnerable to stormwater, that is interesting. (BM)
- (1h23m33s) It sounds like most people are most interested in the scenario of the Shaw moving closer to Marcy Street, connecting the two sides of the park as best as we can, and paying attention to the pedestrian thoroughway. NCP suggests we go back to the committee to flush that out more fully. With the stage, we’ve asked W&S to do some work on the cost for the development of the stage. Once we have something that is more developed, it will be important to define what the future public process will be. (NCP)
- (1h24m44s) When we get to a point when we have at least three good schematics, I would like go to the public for input. (PH)
- (1h25m43s) I would like to get the committee together again shortly because we have to consider the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and what we expect to do. The Prescott Park Arts Festival (PPAF) is canceled for the season. Would the committee like to do things as quickly as possible? (NCP)
  - (1h26m6s) We have an unexpected window of opportunity with PPAF canceled for the season, so we should do it quickly. (BM)
- (1h26m20s) Will the stage be a permanent structure that is built to the Shaw complex or a temporary structure adjacent to the Shaw, but taken down every year? (TW)
  - (1h26m44s) That is a great question. We are looking into a cost benefit analysis of what it means to have a movable stage that is rented and managed by someone else, a movable stage that is purchased by the city but is put away in the off season or can be used elsewhere (and then brought back), and a permanent stage solution (upfront cost and the longer term costs). We have more architectural information now that we did not have previously, which has created the possibility for something really special that could fit into the maritime warehouse aesthetic. As we look at those options, we will be looking to the committee to offer opinions. (CR)
  - (1h28m01) On the idea of permanent vs temporary, there are different implications for both. For temporary, there is an invasive aspect of pulling something out and taking it back in. If we focus on the nuance of the relationship of this new piece to this historic building, the decision isn’t simple, but it may drive the planning decisions about how all

these parts work together. This is something we want to look at and present back to the Blue Ribbon Committee. Another element is the size of this new stage; the location is driven by programming and we want to dive into right fit for short term and long-term program – what is the right fit? We also want to consider the accessibility, egress, and infrastructure. The program interaction discussion with this group will help drive the cost analysis. (TT)

- (1hr29m37s) We need to elect a chair for this committee to review an agenda for the next meeting before it is scheduled. Tom is nominated and seconded as chair of the committee. Everyone is in favor. The next meeting set for Friday 6/19 in the morning. (NCP)
  - Meeting again soon is good for momentum. (CR)
  - Would like to meet early – 8am (BM)
  - Meeting minutes of this meeting (PH)
  - Most of the action items are for the consultant team. The agenda for the next meeting will be focused on a deeper look at the cost, architectural, and site implications of the stage. (CR)
  - Include a look at the implications of the Prescott Trust as well. (BM)
  - Team will meet internally to make some recommendations on next steps. (TT)

End of notes. AS/SK