

TO: Recreation and Parks Commission

FROM: City Staff

SUBJECT: Presentation, Discussion and Possible Action on the Schematic Design for the Buffer Park Project

INTRODUCTION

This report provides background on the schematic design for the Buffer Park Project. It is recommended that the Recreation and Parks Commission review and provide formal comments on the plans that have been developed to date, for consideration by the design team prior to transmission to City Council for its review and approval.

BACKGROUND

The Buffer Park site is a 2.35 acre property located on the north side of Exposition Boulevard between Stewart Street and Dorchester Avenue. The park site is located adjacent to the future Expo Maintenance Facility that is currently under construction. On January 24, 2012, following several community meetings to develop priorities for use of the site, Council indicated their support for the community's preferred use of the buffer site as open space/park space and directed staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for design services. Following a competitive RFP, on September 11, 2012 Council selected Mia Lehrer and Associates to provide complete design services for the 2.35-acre linear park.

NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN PROCESS

Following the selection of Mia Lehrer and Associates for the park design, three neighborhood workshops were held. Workshop #1, held on December 18, 2012 introduced the community to the design team and laid out the process for the development of the park. A presentation on the size of the Buffer Park as compared to other Santa Monica parks provided meaningful reference

points to understand the scale of the future park. A series of boards with images representing possible programs, sustainability features and landscape character sparked small group discussions and brainstorming of additional possibilities followed by community members voting on preferred programs sustainability features and landscape character for the park. Overall, residents expressed a desire for a park that serves the neighborhood, cares for ecology, offers a place for all to play and engage in physical activity, and celebrates local culture and history.

Workshop #2, held on March 6, 2013 focused on the scale and relationship of the program elements. Following a presentation by the design team on case studies of other linear parks, and the introduction of two preliminary conceptual designs, participants were invited to create their own “design of the park” with puzzle pieces. The exercise provided participants with a hands-on, visual experience to better understand the scale of the future park and how programmatic elements could fit on the site and the opportunity make recommendations for the size and location of elements and their relationship to each other. The two layouts developed by the participants informed the refined conceptual design presented at Workshop #3.

Held on May 11, 2013, Workshop #3 took place on the future site of the park in an “open house” format. The proposed plan with perspective and rendered views were laid out on tables to provide participants with an opportunity to study them and provide comments. Additionally, informational posters based on the plan were installed along Exposition Boulevard to identify approximately where each element of the park would be located and what it would look like. Having the workshop on site gave the neighbors and design team an opportunity to engage in conversations regarding how the proposed design layout would translate to a full scale park.

SCHEMATIC DESIGN

The proposed park schematic design has been informed by the preferences expressed by neighborhood community members during the public participation process. Because of the dimensions and linear shape of the site the design team chose to create a park that plays with the idea of continuity while exploring the concept of small garden *rooms* where users can experience specific landscape and program elements. Eight *rooms* within the park as further described below will focus on play, picnicking, contemplation, gathering, exercise and gardening.

- The Grove: In response to the community's desire to buffer traffic on Stewart Street, this room located at the corner of Stewart and Exposition is proposed as a grove. The ground is sculpted with landforms and will accommodate mature Ficus trees that are currently being stored off-site for future use in the park.
- The Watershed Garden: This area of the park is designed as a seasonal performance garden. Site storm water runoff will be collected and treated in this area through the change in topography. Planted with riparian grasses and shrubs the garden is designed to accommodate rain events during the rainy season and become a serene garden in the dry season. Large boulders will offer informal seating opportunities and Sycamores are proposed to shade visitors. A path through the center allows for circulation through the garden.
- The Bird Garden: A mixed forest is proposed in this room to support bird habitat. A series of bird towers designed as simple trellis structures will be planted with vines to provide additional areas for birds. The seven exercise stations will be located within this room along the path.
- The Meadow: This room in the park provides a sloped lawn for play and relaxation. Flowering trees will border the lawn on the northern and southern edges. A low retaining wall along Exposition Boulevard will provide seating. At the eastern end of the meadow large steps are proposed. The steps provide an opportunity for seating as well as an informal stage setting for programs.
- Community Pavilions: Centered on axis with Yorkshire Avenue the community plaza room is designed to offer flexible space for meeting, gathering and celebrating. It is the formal main entrance to the park and is intended to be the "community living room". Trellised pavilions with picnic tables are located in this space providing shaded gathering space for birthday parties and other group activities.
- Rock Garden: Adjacent to the community pavilions, the rock garden room is a play space for children. The design will be universally accessible incorporating play elements that focus on sensory experiences, movement and balance. Rubberized safety surfacing will be incorporated.
- Learning Garden: This room will focus on aspects of gardening. The concept is based upon exploring a new type of garden for the community. Three zones are contemplated to incorporate an orchard, a lab, and a demonstration garden. It is envisioned that a

partner organization would be engaged with the City and the community to oversee programming for the learning garden.

- The Forest: Entrance to the park from the eastern end of the site will occur through the Forest room. Ficus trees will shade the area with pathways and low planting from the region.

A .5 mile jogging/walking path circulates around the rooms providing another link and exercise opportunity for park patrons.

The park design will be discussed in detail by the design team in their presentation.

Next Steps

It is anticipated that the plans will be presented to the City Council in early 2014. Additionally a community process to select a formal name for this new park will be initiated in 2014. CIP budget refinements will be made to be incorporated into the 2014-15 CIP budget in preparation for bidding and a construction start in the spring of 2015 following completion of the Expo Maintenance Facility in February 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Recreation and Parks Commission review the Buffer Park concept design, take public comment, and provide formal comments for consideration by the design team and transmittal to City Council.

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Attachment: Power Point Presentation