Pedro Park Meeting 8-26-21

Present: Julie, Merritt, Gina, Jean, Jon, Chris, Judy, Katie, Emma, Peg

Future Meetings: Thursdays at 4:00 will continue to work for people. Nancy has occasional conflicts with meetings that occurs after her class ends.

Community Interview Readouts: Several people shared what they’ve learned in interviews.

* As a reminder, the purpose of these are to avoid “group think”, determine the common themes, recognize the diversity of voices that we’re hearing, gain new insights
* Only report what is relevant demographically, names not required.
* Anything we heard that was unexpected
* Describe the experience for you – was it difficult? Would you do something different?
* Julie will put this information into a working document.

Julie met with council member Noecker, and she guarantees that the mayor is not thinking about Pedro Park – it’s not on the top of his list of priorities. If we do get a plan and rationale, he might be more open.

Julie: Please continue to have these conversations and we’ll continue to have readouts as we go. We want to see themes and interesting ideas that come up.

**Development Options**

Our first meetings have been about information gathering and providing context. Julie summarized that info in a google doc. Feel free to add to the google doc.

Now we are pivoting towards identifying potential recommendations from this group for the future of Pedro Park. Next steps will be:

1. Come to consensus on 5-6 options for Pedro Park.
2. Get community feedback on these recommendations, maybe thru a meeting hosted by the Capitol River Council.
3. Propose recommendations to the Capitol River Council. CRC will provide feedback for further refinement or will vote to move these forward.
4. Recommendations will be sent to Rebecca Noecker.

An Options matrix provides way to identify/evaluate solutions. This is how that works:

1. Options identified
2. Criteria chosen for evaluating ideas
3. Options are scored/measured
4. Some options are eliminated
5. Group recommends highest scoring options

**Brainstorming based on the exercise we did beforehand:**

Chris:

When we consider that the building is in a historic district, perhaps its real value is putting 10 more stories on it. Expand the scope of the RFP for something other than offices. The city is not responsible for providing office space.

Chris argues for the whole block park. Suggests weighting criteria to support past engagement. Feasibility? Tremendous community buy-in, but it’s hardest politically. If we win politically, it will take a long time to implement and a high cost.

Chris wonders if the group can decide at some point, is the hardest ask worth fighting for or not? Or are we just trying to get something done as quickly as possible and sacrifice principles and feelings? This is a small group of people making recommendations. Without knowing what people want to fight for, it’s hard to know.

Merritt:

* What are our primary objectives and principles? That should guide us along with the feasibility analysis of what is most likely to happen. There are different physical scenarios for a half block. How does each scenario rate based on what we think are important things to achieve? Opened community space? Places for gathering? Separate is feasibility issues. This is what we want, 1,2,3,4 and 5 and why, how we came to those ideas and rank the scenarios. What are the top 5 things we want the space to achieve?

Jean:

* List of most important criteria: Existing plans available, city buy in, costs.
* Listening to people today, when we talk about community space an outdoor park has community space, but there is also a desire for community space within the building.
* Is the City open to a public/private partnership? If it’s sold, then we have no control over the building. No real option to be involved in it if it’s privately owned.
* What are the possibilities for a public/private partnership – this would be if the building stayed
* Develop the park and the PSA.

Gina:

* Community members want more green space, more trees, more plantings. Improve the existing green space and as the park expands…
* Would like to see the full-block park.
* Mission for the park – honoring immigrants who built Saint Paul. Have a statue that would represent each of the different immigrant populations and have a shoemaker to represent her Italian grandfather.
* Perhaps statues would agree with the artistic need.
* If annex building stays, agree with conversations of using for purposes that enhance community.

Katie:

* Public private partnership idea – thought of the Roseville library on Hamline Ave – a Dunn Brothers inside it. Retail space to generate revenue and foot traffic
* Lack of a community center that is City of St Paul run in this area. City of St. Paul runs rec centers. Arden Hills – teen space, library, other uses.
* Retaining the PSA for some sort of usage and what could make sense in that building, and continuing to have the park space used for the community
* Water structures are kind of annoying most of the year in MN

Julie:

* Noecker sent her an email chain from engaged residents who were chatting in the park.
* Community takes place in that park. It’s a desert – they want to plant trees around the perimeter and get funding from The Tree Trust. They did not want to lead the effort or start a Friends of Pedro Park.
* These folks feel ignored and dismissed by the city because Parks & Rec says the trees would be ripped out in later development.
* Low cost, easy to fund, and easy implementation.
* Doesn’t help accessibility.
* Can be done immediately, this group of people are threatening guerrilla gardening.
* Concerns about caring for trees.
* All of this engagement has happened, and all we did was plant trees?
* The group advocating for the trees didn’t have great concern about what happened in the past.

Peg:

* Fear that the park will be over-designed. And we simply need green. The more green we can get, the better, rather than trying to make the park all things for all people.
* There are financial consideration if we are ever to expand the park. The city owns the building and they do not have to acquire property to expand the park. Explore public contribution to expand the park. So, tear down the PSA.
* She advocates that if the PSA stays it should be used for community purposes. The City would own it and the city would have to run it.
* She doesn’t see anyone buying the PSA and making it an artist space. More likely to be residential.
* If not over-designed, then what should it be? Level it out, fill in and have green space.
* We have parks that are not apparent as parks – no green, just concrete plazas that look like private space.
* If the building comes down then a retaining wall is needed to level out the park.
* The art is an identifier for the neighborhood – could we keep that wall?
* Would hope to be able to purchase the other properties.
* Ackerberg believed the city does not really want to expand.
* Fear of putting out the RFP, because when there’s a cash cow, some negotiation ability evaporates – it’s so attractive to the city to take something off the books and get revenue.

Nancy –

Worries that the plan is over-designed, trying to have something for everyone.

* Priorities are green space, shade, can be achieved with the PSA or without.
* Really value the artistic affect.
* Reuse PSA as long as it isn’t a toxic property.
* We want to support and advocate for what people want

Emma:

* Support what the community is thinking and what is most feasible
* What is the long-term goal vs the short-term goal? Sounds like that is yet to be presented.
* Supports the plan developed by Parks & Rec and finding the funding for that
* Is it worth it to secure a full-block park and the long-term hurdles that would present? Or make incremental gains?
* If something were to happen to make quarter-block feasible, then would it be worth moving forward.

Julie: The RFP does give us some measure of control. Put the RFP into play, and we could have a say as to what is in the RFP. What if we had a “design challenge” with local colleges, etc. Not opposed to selling the PSA if we can influence what happens there and do something artistic. Support the development of the park in whatever way we can fund it. Agree that the plan seems over-built.

Jean: What is the feasibility of a public-private partnership for the PSA if we were to keep that building? That would give us the opportunity to say what happens with the space. It would be important to have a clear idea of what that public-private partnership would be. In Savage, the city partnered with Lifetime Fitness for a community center.

Emma: The city can put whatever they want in the RFP, and we don’t know how much of it is an exercise and how much is a dress rehearsal for what we would want in an RFP. Nicolle sounds open to having those conversations. If the RFP process begins again, what would be most important to consider?

Julie: We’re not coming up with one option, we’re coming up with a list of options, and keeping the PSA has to be one of those options. We don’t decide anything, we just recommend.

Jean: Then have one option be “Have an RFP open one.” And have an RFP with a public-private option.

Merritt: We don’t have to recommend a public-private partnership. We don’t have to figure out how, we just have to say what.

Julie: We haven’t talked about the criteria yet. Let’s identify the scenarios first. My idea for criteria includes:

Cost to implement. Existing plans. Implementation time. Community buy-in, revenue, past community engagement.

Peg: If the City wants to know what the community thinks, they can rely on the data from 2010 – it’s clear from the past what people wanted. Why revisit that?

Merritt: It’s too much to go through the process of once again asking what the community wants when they’ve felt ignored and disrespected in the past. We can say “Look at all the past time – engagement has been clear.”

Katie concurs that we don’t have to know how, just what.

Julie: It’s been clear what the community wants, and what the city wanted to do. Rebecca Noecker is aligned with what we’re trying to do and she’ll fight for what we recommend. Rebecca did ask how we’ll get feedback on these options.

Come up with our options, polish them, get a rationale, and then ask people what they think. Our community interviews are useful, so keep doing them.

Next Steps – Julie & Nancy will try to frame out the options. Talk about the criteria to rate options. What more do we still need to know?