**2021 Pedro Park Workgroup Summary of Meetings**

**Session 1 (May 20, 2021)**

Agenda:

 Introductions and establishing working agreements

 Introduction of background materials:

 Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan

 2018-2019 Design Advisory Committee

Discussion of Workgroup Goals:

* 1. Review Fitzgerald/Pedro Park Precinct Plan and past scenarios for context
	2. Develop options for Pedro Neighborhood place-making opportunities
	3. Advocate for park improvements while keeping future park expansion on the table
	4. Evaluate and support City efforts on Public Safety Annex Building’s reuse/redevelopment scenarios – financial feasibility, RFPs, etc.
	5. Consider Pedro Park options for the 2022-2023 City Budget and Community Budget Initiatives
	6. Recommendation for instituting an official Friends of Pedro Park Neighborhood Group.

Main take-a-ways:

1. The group is generally excited about this work moving forward.
2. People have a lot of questions about the park and its history.
3. There are questions about whether the conclusions made by the Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan are still relevant.
4. There are questions about what has changed about the downtown environment since the onset of the pandemic.
5. We are unclear about the city’s (i.e., the Mayor’s) priorities for the city and Downtown St. Paul.

**Session 2 (June 10, 2021)**

Covered history of past Pedro Park Efforts. Alice Messer (Dir. Parks & Rec) & Andy Hestness (Principal Project Manager, PED) answered questions from the city’s point of view. Kati Berg presented perspective from engaged neighborhood residents.

Main takeaways:

1. History of Pedro Park is long and complicated, involving strong emotions and neighbors feeling a sense of betrayal. City staff stressed that no one felt good after the last city-public engagement and controversy and lawsuit that ensued.
2. City’s intention with the PSA RFP was to understand if the building had value to be developed as office space. The city had long been criticized by the business community for lacking quality and desirable office space.
3. Tentative Developer Status is not the same thing as putting the property up for sale.
4. Residents were angry with the PSA RFP because it came as a surprise after previous considerations included tearing down the building and expanding the park.
5. The lawsuit was eventually dismissed.
6. The Ackerberg Group decided against development after determining the deal would not be profitable for them. AG expressed interest in developing the PSA as residential, but the city denied that request since the original RFP was intended to create office space.
7. Currently unknown is if the building has value as office space or any other use.
8. Understanding where the Mayor stands is key to moving forward as St. Paul has a “strong mayor” system (departmental directors are appointed by the mayor).
9. The group requested some updated demographics for the Fitzgerald Precinct from the 2020 census.

**Session 3 (June 17, 2021)**

Kady Dadlez, Senior City Planner, Department of Planning and Economic Development discussed the Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan. Discussion with Kady and Director Goodman about the viability and options for the PSA.

Main take-a-ways:

1. A precinct Plan is
2. Used to help evaluate & guide new development and zoning requests by utilizing the high-level principles within the plan.
3. Used To guide expenditures of public funds.
4. Used to justify grants and outside funding.
5. Adopted policy until a new plan supersedes it.
6. The Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan provides for:
* Diverse, mixed-use, human-scale, first floor uses
* Activity at street level to provide eyes on the street
* Preservation of historical buildings, & historic character of neighborhood; new development that is compatible with what is already in the area
* Pedestrian-friendly
* Connections to skyways, and other modes of moving such as cycling, transit and car use. (includes transit-oriented development)
* A central green space that is visible, safe, and well-maintained
* Strong identity and sense of place
* Spaces to gather and share information, whether those spaces are city owned (public) or businesses (private)
1. Current Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan remains relevant until a new plan is passed.
2. There’s no need to update the precinct plan as it is consistent with the 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The 2020 plan highlights affordable housing & businesses along transit lines.
3. The FPPP does not dictate the future of the PSA. Selling or demolishing the PSA is consistent with the plan.
4. The sale of the PSA is currently tied to development of the ¼ block park. The design for this park is 90% complete.
5. Next step for this group should be to create a matrix with different scenarios with different costs and different potential funding sources. Then, discuss with policy makers to see how they feel about those scenarios.
6. Director Goodman is asking that we go thru the drafting process of the RFP, ask for letters of interest (rather than pro forma renderings).
7. The group was asked to conduct community interviews with a set of questions designed to get community feedback on city-resident engagement and Pedro Park.

**Session 4 (July 17, 2021)**

Mary Norton, Landscape Architect, Parks & Rec reviewed the 2019 final concept design of the ¼ block Pedro Park.

Main take-a-ways:

1. Plan was conceived by a design advisory committee that included Parks & Rec, business people and downtown residents
2. Surveys of the community revealed these priorities:
	1. Need for open space
	2. Need relief from the sun – immediate and future shade
	3. Flexible space for events
	4. Water interaction
	5. Kid- and Family- and Dog-Friendly space
	6. Should be designed in such a way that future expansion is not precluded.
3. Much of the cost is for building up the grade and adding retaining walls on backside by alley.
4. $3.7 million was estimated costs: sale of the building would provide 35%, capital, 60% capital improvement funds. Alice thinks the current cost is approximately 3% more now.
5. Project was paused after the plan was presented to the community at an open house.
6. Once the Ackerberg Group dropped out there was not enough funding.
7. Nothing can move forward until the future of the PSA is determined. A “soft RFP” was suggested which doesn’t require detailed drawings.
8. As a group we need to identify and evaluate the feasibility of different options.

**Session 5 (July 29, 2021)**

Andy Hestness discussed how the RFP process works and what the RFP on the PSA looked like last time around. He talked about where he thought it went wrong and how he’d suggest it be structured if it were to be done again.

Main take-a-ways:

1. Some of the strong opposition to the RFP last time may have been due to the lack of understanding about what an RFP is (request for proposals) and isn’t (the actual sale of the building).
2. As the pandemic is causing a shift in the demand for office space in downtown, any RFP should be much more wide-open. We may rather describe what we don’t want, versus what we do want. The RFP should be a soft RFP that doesn’t require detailed drawing but rather solicits ideas for developments.
3. Launching a new RFP process would require buy-in from the community and city leaders. We should discuss further what community buy-in looks like. It was unclear what buy-in from city leaders consisted of.

Next Steps:

1. Develop a matrix of options/scenarios for Pedro Park.
2. Host a community meeting to get community feedback – or a series of focus groups or similar.
3. Rate or score each option attempting to order the preferred options as this committee and the community recommends.
4. Send recommendations to the Capitol River Council to vote or approve the recommendations.
5. Send approved recommendations to CM Noecker and Mayor.

This gives CM Noecker and the Mayor something to work from that came from a group who analyzed the Pedro Park situation deeply.