

December 11th, 2020

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

9-10:15am

Online / Zoom Meeting

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES

- Nancy Colbert Puff, Deputy City Manager (NCP)
- Beth Margeson (BM)
- Councilor Petra Huda (PH)
- Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf (RLM)
- Genevieve Aichele (GA)
- Tom Watson (TW)
- Cassie Bethoney, RLA, W&S (CB)
- Savy Kep, Landscape Designer, W&S (SK)

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION AND COMMENTS

Following the regulations of the COVID-19 emergency response the requirement has been waived that a quorum be physically present. Remote attendees will introduce themselves and identify their location; votes will be counted by roll call.

HDC Public Meeting Review:

TW:

- The meeting kicked off with a review of Wednesday evening's Historic District Commission (HDC) meeting. Tom passed the conversation to Nancy to provide a summary.

NCP:

- In general, it went well given that we had a few challenges. Ted Touloukian could not show up at the last minute and we had a much more substantial presentation planned than there was time for. Cheri did a good job giving an overview of the project and the commission was generally supportive. The one suggestion that came out, mainly through public comment, was from Kerry Vautrot of the Portsmouth Advocates , who suggested that the work related to moving the Shaw adhere to the Secretary of Interior's '[Guidelines on Flood Adaptation for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#)', produced in November 2109. The suggestion was made to post that advice on the city's website, which has been done; it is located on the HDC page because it applies to any number of the historic structures in Portsmouth. The Commission felt strongly that we take that advice as we begin the design process and construction documentation for moving the structure. The Commission asked that we return to review elevations of the building in its new location. A combination of raising the grade and flood proofing the building is something they would like to understand better, which is completely appropriate. The one piece left unclear was that we will be reporting back to City Council because it is the Council that needs to amend the Prescott Park Master Plan in the couple of ways we have been discussing, which Councilor Trace raised at the meeting.

PH:

- Since the guidelines were Secretary of Interior guidelines were raised, have we looked into if we following them?
 - NCP: I took a quick read through them and I believe we will not have a problem complying. I think it is great advice for historic structures. You do have to be particularly careful when

you are trying to flood proof or move historic structures. Rather than whether we are required to follow the guidelines, we will want to follow them to ensure we rehabilitate the structure properly.

- If we look at it and it doesn't match, we are not going to have any changes midstream. We will have to do our due diligence before we move forward to the Council, by the recommendations of the HDC.
 - NCP: Yes, Weston & Sampson and Ted should look, but it would surprise me if Ted did not already know those standards. They are well known through the historic preservation field. There is nothing that comes to mind that he would be recommending that is inconsistent with those standards.
 - PH: I want to ensure these guidelines will not trigger another set of changes.
 - NCP: Before we are heading into final design, we are ensuring we have endorsement of the idea. Having City Council vote to change the Master Plan will then allow us to begin the final design phase. Final design starts a very detailed look at the means and methods by which we would be move this building; changes to make that happen will be inevitable. It could be that there are unknown conditions that will provide challenges. As far as we know right now, that is our plan, and we think it is doable.
 - PH: Thank you.

GA:

- Was there any concern about the removal of the other two buildings?
 - TW: There were not from my observation
 - CB: There were no comments

BM:

- My sense of the HDC was that they were coming into this cold, so there wasn't any comment about the Lean-to and the Garage. They did ask that the presentation would be confined to the Shaw because they reviewed the presentation in advance and asked Cheri to run through it quickly. It seems that they focused on the Shaw rather than the other two buildings as a result.
 - NCP: I completely agree.
 - TW: Joe mentioned that there is a proposed new building addition next to the Shaw and Regan commented on how she agreed than an addition is an opportunity to house contemporary needs in a space adjacent to the Shaw. Another person commented that the outline of the new building should not match the height of the Shaw, so it would not seem like an extension of the Shaw. You are correct that there were not any comments on the Lean-To and the Garage but there were comments about what we showed as a new structure next to the Shaw, so I believe they understood our intent.
 - BM: Regan talked about the massing; when you place a new building next to a historic building to incorporate the modern needs of society (ADA accessibility), it should be subordinate (i.e. smaller) than the actual historic structure. I am sure Ted knows these NPS recommendations and how best to incorporate modern elements into a new space rather than disrupting the existing historic building.

BM:

- I am a bit concerned that moving the Shaw up and over is down the line going to accommodate a permanent stage. I was concerned about the comments about the stage the Arts Festival proposed five years ago was very contemporary. Having that line of buildings along the railway, the impertinent structure, and the place for the stage connects to that. My concern is that we are moving the Shaw to make space for the permanent stage. I support the moving of the Shaw, but from those comments, that was my overall impression. I do not want to draw any conclusions because it was a shortened presentation and a work session. My concern during the Master Plan

was cleaning out the back-of-house area because it was very messy. I still do not like that aspect, but I am not in favor of building a permanent structure to satisfy needs that arise for three months out of the year. I am very concerned about building a wall in the middle of that park; the Master Plan intends is that the entire park would be integrated.

- TW: I think what we are trying to do as a committee is to put off the decision on the exact location of the stage, what it would look like, and whether it be a seasonal or permanent structure. If your concern was to have a permanent stage, I can see where you might believe that what we are promoting will lead to or facilitate that, but I do not believe it's a forgone conclusion. There is no reason why there could not be a seasonal stage in that location that could be placed in May and removed in September or October. I am not sure if everyone had a chance to review the proposed report recommendations, but we tried to put language in this draft that specifically says that that the permanent versus temporary stage is a decision for another day. Beth, I hear you do not have a problem with moving the Shaw itself. If it's not a historic preservation issue, is your concern in what will result in the next step?
- BM: I do think that moving the Shaw and raising it is important for its preservation. My concern is how moving it over will impact the future of the park. I did not know that we had draft recommendations to review - did I miss that?
- TW: It was sent out on Wednesday.
- BM: It is possible that there is an issue with my inbox. I unfortunately did not read the report; I am sorry.
- TW: Did everyone else get the materials?
- GA: I glanced through it. I wanted to say to Beth's comment that I think we were leaving the question of whether the stage be temporary or permanent for the future, but the idea of moving it was to make room for a stage, whether it is temporary or permanent is irrelevant. Where the stage is currently located only came to be out of how the park was developed historically. Today, its location closes off a whole section of the park. Moving it to the rail will open the park and allow much more walking space for people to pass through during a performance. To me, that's a vital move for the way that the park is used when there is a performance happening regardless of what the stage is or how long the stage is there. A friend of mine called me (knowing I was on the committee) to say she was in the park and saw a child playing on the current stage. The child fell and the mother said, "I do not know who owns this, but I am going to find out." Having it where it is in the middle and there in the winter is a problem. I think opening the performance lawn space allows for much better use of the park.
- CB: Going back to an earlier comment about the use of the building in other times of the year and not just for that addition between the stage and the Shaw, I believe Cheri was intimating that when we go back to HDC next that we could make clear all the potential programmatic uses of the building and the Shaw. She indicated civic use in that space for education. I would not preclude that public use can happen in a year-round way to make it not just a back-of-house space for three months out of the year. I believe also giving them a bit more to respond to in the next meeting about what this looks like, how it relates to the Shaw, what the interior space looks like could be helpful supporting information to present at the next meeting. Certainly, Ted is very aware of the preservation standards, so all of that thinking will go into the next presentation.
- NCP: One thing I do not want to emit saying is that part of the NPS standards, as well, will be to document the buildings that will be removed. The Lean-to was built in the early 1900s, I believe, and there are guidelines to document those structures, which we will have

to do before moving forward. I did not want to leave that out as part of the standards.

- TW: Other comments?

PH:

- One thing I would add is that this is only our Phase 1, and if we are going to go back to the HDC, we should have a pretty good drawing of what we intend to do and what we intend to attach to, and how it would affect the Shaw. If we are only going to do a small addition to add the electrical and elevators, I think that would be the time we will discuss that, and I think that would be in a later phase. A question I have for Cassie is, my understanding of what the HDC looks at is mostly exterior – do we have to go back with an interior design to be approved by them?
 - CB: I could have misspoken, forgive me if it's only exterior.
 - NCP: I think there will be general interest in how the building works on the interior and how it's used, but their review is limited in the exterior changes. It is not to say they will not be interested in hearing that, but I do want to underline your point that the addition is in a future phase, so we will not have that design. The next time we go back to the HDC we will just have a design for the Shaw and not an addition design yet because it is not part of this phase.
 - PH: Looking from a HDC perspective, are we going to have enough to say - here is what we propose and what we are thinking about? I know there are going to be questions about placing a permanent back on the Shaw to support the stage or what is going to be behind that that will affect the appearance of this historic building. I am trying to think ahead on how many times we must go back on the HDC on how much we can give them. It seemed like they were expecting a bit more.
 - TW: At the beginning of our presentation, one of the members asked what exactly are we here for? They are used to getting applications looking for work sessions or being asked to vote on a particular outcome. We were there giving them a concept, just to get their feel on how they thought about moving the Shaw. No one, at this point, is proposing we are altering the Shaw. The only proposal is to change its elevation. Anything beyond that is the next stage of this Committee or the next. Framing where we are the question would be: is there any reason why we would not recommend the Shaw be lifted and moved further back from the river primarily as a preservation move? That proposal altered our primary design components in that area of the park from the Master Plan. We have not decided where the stage is going to be and whether we are going to have the stage temporary or permanent. Do we need to change the Master Plan to move forward? Are these the things that we need to recommend to the Council to do that?

TW:

- I hoped, today, we could review these recommendations and adopt them to then present them to City Council. How do people feel about that?
 - BM: I apologize; I did not see them all the way at the end of the email. I still have my concerns about the moving of the Shaw and the long-term purpose. I understand that our position is advisory towards the Council. I do not think it is worth holding things up, but those are my concerns.
 - TW: Cheri, Nancy and I did incorporate the changes to the Master Plan into a report, beginning with background and how, in 2019, detailed studies of storm surges and stormwater patterns in the future will impact the proposed master plan for Prescott Park. Next is an account of the public engagement process. Based on all we have learned, we developed five recommendations and placed them in order to be prerequisites to each other.

TW:

- The 5 recommendations are, including estimated cost:
 - Upgrade and raise the Seawall
 - Incorporate stormwater infrastructure in Water Street as the lowest point in the park
 - Raise and relocate the Shaw for the various reasons we discussed
 - Relocate the Maintenance Facility to Four Tree Island
 - Renovate the entire electrical system to the park, simplifying it in the process
- Any other concerns about these recommendations?
 - PH: As I discussed before, I am concerned with putting half a million dollars into a maintenance facility. I believe that it should be on the City. I do not support that recommendation.
 - GA: It is not so much a concern, but do we have to recommend where the facility be located? You could state “move it to a centralized location, locations could be...” Do we have to report a specific location on the report?
 - BM: Petra, is your concern the funding of this?
 - PH: Yes, however, it is for DPW and I believe that it was a luxury to have their materials there; it did not cost anything at the time. Should we be thinking about this facility in a Prescott Park silo or as a resource for the DPW city-wide?
 - RLM: I understand that DPW has a separate bucket of money, but I will say that Prescott Park required much more maintenance than any other park in the city, especially in the Spring. Maybe we should bring in someone from DPW to a meeting and discuss it?
 - GA: The 2017 Master Plan says we would relocate the maintenance facility to Mechanic Street. Now that we are recommending updates to the Master Plan, is it our charge to decide the location? I understand that it is a DPW issue, but we are putting it under Prescott Park because it might be easier to raise the funds that way. Is the location our decision?
 - TW: My observation is that the original Master Plan says that a maintenance facility should be proximate to the Park since it requires more regular attention than other parks. I love the idea of going to DPW for a discussion. I think we should address it in the report, since we are suggesting moving the Shaw, and if the Master Plan committee decided where it should be, we should not take it out of the report and then leave it on DPW.
 - NCP: We have had Peter join us previously to discuss the maintenance facility location; he thought it would be more efficient to have it at Four Tree Island. To be clear, he also said that DPW will serve the city to whatever they decide. The level of maintenance for Prescott Park is very high. This phase of work is removing two structures that DPW uses to store their materials. If we are removing those buildings, they will need to relocate their equipment and materials elsewhere. If that means DPW figures out a way to operate in a different way, then that is what it will be. I think the answer is either having a facility nearby or not at all.

PH:

- Could we consider where including a maintenance facility makes most sense in terms of construction phases? Perhaps it needs to be moved into another phase and the money could be spent in better ways. Do we need to consider this in this Phase?
 - TW: My thought is, we simply say if we put this off, we are basically saying there will not be a maintenance facility close to the park. If we remove the two buildings, we run the risk that building a new maintenance facility will be put off for several years. I like the idea of trying to access funds from the DPW budget or the capital improvement, but I am afraid

that it will delay having a maintenance facility in place for the park.

- PH: Correct me if I am wrong, Nancy, but the Mechanic Street Station is in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) next year or the following year? I would question then, why we decided not to use the Mechanic Street Station?
- NCP: The Mechanic Street Station is a sewer pump station; the original Master Plan included using a small parcel of land adjacent to the Station. In the CIP, money is slated for the sewer pump station, not a maintenance facility. There is no CIP request outside the park that would cover the expense of the maintenance facility for Prescott Park.
- PH: Thank you.

TW:

- Are we ready to vote on this recommendation?
 - BM: I remain concerned about what the possible relocation of the Shaw could mean moving forward. I understand that this is an advisory board for the Council, so I am ready to vote on it.
 - GA: I am ready to vote, but I think we should emphasize the sentence "These tasks are interdependent but are necessary to be implemented sequentially". It is an important piece that needs to be highlighted.
 - PH: I would agree except for the maintenance facility, because during construction they would be needing to planting flowers where everything is dug up.
 - GA: Only the Phase 1 area of the park will be in construction. There are other parts of the park that will be open and require maintenance.
 - TW: Presumably by June 1st, the park will be open for the public and the Arts Festival will take place. All of the seawalls and such would be done during the fall and winter

TW

- I would like to have a unanimous report of the committee, I understand your concern, Petra. My goal, as a committee, is how are we going to get to a recommendation? The park needs to be adequately served, but by not creating a building somewhere, we run the risk of losing ease of maintenance. If it is solely about where the funding is coming from?
 - PH: I am going to support this report, however I will bring my opinion to the Council. I am only 1 of 9 voting on this.

TW:

- I volunteer Nancy and myself to work with you to figure this out so that we can spend resources that are necessary. I would rather have the City Council debate this now to figure out if we can have a facility in this area of the town.
- Any other questions before I ask we move and adopt the report recommendations?
- Cassie, can you have Ted look at the National Park Service guidelines and make sure that it would not prevent the Shaw from being moved and raised?
 - CB: Absolutely.
- Is there a motion to report the recommendations?
 - PH: I motion to report the recommendations, pending Cassie and Ted's report back on the NPS guidelines
 - BM: Seconded

Unanimous vote yes

TW:

- Cassie, have Ted send us an email confirming his understanding. If he has any questions, send them to Nancy or me.

NCP:

- We do have a Dec 21st agenda, but the beginning of the year could work.

TW:

- Petra, do you have a recommendation on when we should report to City Council?
 - PH: My only question being here as a counselor, how do we bring our recommendations forward?
 - TW: I would present it with Cheri, with support from this committee.
 - BM: There is no councilor today that was on the Council in 2017. The city is overwhelmed right now with work.
 - PH: Be brief and to the point; we have a lot to read. It is a strong topic amongst everyone.

TW:

- This is the third Prescott Park committee I have been on. Both in the public engagement phase and the HDC meeting, many people see this as a new process. People are saying this is a great idea and that we are all doing a great job.
- This may be our last BRC committee meeting, so I would like to thank you all for all your time.

BM

- Thanks, Tom and Nancy and you all, I know the city is very busy; Tom your service to the park and the city is recognized and appreciated deeply.

GA

- If there is something that you need us to do, being advocates, etc., please let us know.

RLM

- The only question I have is, Tom or Nancy, do you want to send us a talking point?

TW

- We'd be happy to send talking points but familiarize this recommendation document has most of the information in it. If you can attend the City Council meeting, we can introduce you and note to the Council that the Committee is attending in support of the project.

PH

- If anyone does want to speak, there is public comment. You get 3 minutes to speak your opinion and Council needs to listen.

NCP:

- When you are speaking with people, I think it's important to understand that this is Phase 1 of a larger process. Phase 1 can be summarized as focused on resilient preservation and making the park more sustainable, while respecting the historic integrity of the park.

Motion to Adjourn, seconded

All Approved

End of Notes: SK