

April 16, 2021

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

10-11am

Online / Zoom Meeting

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES

- Beth Margeson (BM)
- Councilor Petra Huda (PH)
- Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf (RLM)
- Genevieve Aichele (GA)
- Tom Watson (TW)
- Peter Rice, City of Portsmouth (PR)
- Cheri Ruane, RLA, Weston & Sampson (CR)
- Cassie Bethoney, RLA, Weston & Sampson (CB)

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.

TW:	The future of the Blue-Ribbon Committee was discussed. City Council adopted recommended changes to the Master Plan, which was one of the main objectives of this group. The Blue-Ribbon Committee can continue providing support as a sounding board as the Phase 1 final design work progresses. Recommendations for adjustments to the master plan may be needed as the design progresses that the Blue-Ribbon Committee might need to weigh in on.
PR	Unlike a joint building committee, we are looking for the Blue-Ribbon Committee to have a continued role and weigh in as the design and engineering are tightened up. We would like to use the Blue-Ribbon Committee as a sounding board and outlet for the proposed improvements as they evolve. The 30% design deliverable represents enough study and documentation to support the framework of the design. We will make sure we keep the lines of communication open and see the Blue-Ribbon Committee as a conduit to the Council and the public.
RLM	Ensure that there is signage posted at the construction site as to what is happening at the park and where to find out more.
PR	That is a great idea. We will ensure signage is placed in three locations around the site.
TW	Graphics in the signage will be important to convey the improvement program.
GA	Include a QR code to the signage that links to the master plan’s page on the City’s website.
CR	As we progress through the design work, we want to keep the Blue-Ribbon Committee and the public informed. The Committee and the public will continue to be informed about what we learn.
PH	Updates on timing will be made through this committee and the Council. Gaining clarity on the timing will provide a sense of comfort to the Portsmouth community.
PR	We would like to report back to the Blue-Ribbon Committee at 30% design. At 90% design, the plans are more locked in and there is less room for adjustments, so a 30% check in will allow for more room for comment. There will be a public meeting for the bid and throughout, we will make sure the lines of communication are open to the public. We will make sure the city’s project website is updated as the project progresses.
PH	Would like to put dates on the project. Are we looking at fall for construction?

PR	First, what we need to do is get a design contract together with Weston & Sampson. Once we have that, we will have a better feel for the design schedule. The biggest challenge to timeline is the permitting process, which will likely include unanticipated delays. Permitting will depend on comments from state agencies and other City signoffs needed for the work to proceed. We will provide firm dates and post them online. It will take about two weeks to develop the scope and fee proposal. Contract signatures will take about a week. Likely, it will be about a month before the Phase 1 kicks off.
TW	Will keep in touch with PR on schedule and figure out the right time to reconnect with the Blue-Ribbon Committee. TW introduced the next agenda item – the Phase 1 construction scope.
CR	Shared screen and walked through the construction scope.
PR	On the tree plantings for the formal gardens, we plan to work with a nursery to select and start growing the trees so, when the time comes, we will have larger caliper trees to install.
CR	The grafting process is very technical and specific to each tree species, so getting the process started early will be key to the success of these trees.
BM	Highlighted that the seawall pricing differed between \$500,000 here and \$1.2 million in previous estimates.
CR	The estimates are very rough right now.
BC	Will there be above-ground storage tanks in the performance lawn?
CR	There will be no above-ground tanks. There will be a depression in the lawn that collects stormwater in a flood condition.
BM	Can you provide clarification on the foundation needed for the Shaw relocation?
CR	We are not expecting to use helical piles, but we will know more once geotechnical borings are completed. We are expecting that a spread footing might be the best approach, but helical piles may need to be considered depending on the findings from the geotechnical borings.
BM	With raising Water Street, parking for the Prescott Park Arts Festival (PPAF) need to be incorporated.
CR	Moving the stage from its current location will provide more area for parking. An important tenant of the master plan was to ensure there is a strong connection between Liberty Lawn and the Performance Lawn. We are ensuring that the PPAF has certain number of spaces.
PR	This is why it is important to check in at 30% to understand the implications of any findings.
BM	Why is shoreline permitting needed?
PR	It is triggered with any disturbance within a certain distance of the shoreline.
RLM	Is there a line item in the budget for doing the tree growing and grafting activities?
CR	Yes, it is short money.
RLM	What is the projected growth rate?
CR	The trees will be smaller and younger, growing in a contained root ball.
RLM	When will they be planted?
CR	Unsure of when at this point.
TW	They will be included in Phase 2, which will require a new budgeting cycle and is several years out.
GA	The comment that the third floor of the Shaw is PPAF's problem needs to be clarified. The City needs to give PPAF enough lead time to clear out their costumes and other items. Costume space is hard to find, so it will take a bit of time to find along space.
CR	Understood. The third floor space is currently overloaded and impacting the building's structure; it needs to be emptied.
TW	We will certainly coordinate with PPAF and give them an appropriate lead time. Are there any other questions?

BM	Where will maintenance be relocated?
PR	We are studying the reuse of the LaCava building. A structural engineer visited the building last week. An initial plan is to build a frame inside the building and jack it up with a slab. We plan to build an access door. The idea is to relocate operations concurrently with this first phase. We currently have \$2.325 million authorized for bonding and another \$1.875 million in this year's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Together, we have \$4.2 million available for this first phase of work. Based on rough estimates, improvements might be around \$3.6 million. The balance of the funds would be used to move the maintenance facility to the LaCava building, which we are hoping will be done as affordably as possible so as not to spend too much money on a temporary facility. The hope is to have funds left over.
TW	Purchase of trees will come out of the delta that Peter just described.
PH	Do you anticipate any efficiencies between any of these projects that connect directly with adjacent city projects (e.g. the seawall work down the street, stormwater pipe work)? Do you anticipate any delays? Where can we find efficiencies, in permitting for example?
PR	We typically try to co-permit if possible. Usually, the state looks at proximity, timing and connection between activities to permit projects in a single group. The timing is different on the seawall project and thus, not connected (it is already permitted and out for bid). There may some ability to permit the LaCava building retrofit with this work. We always look to leverage projects together and be as efficient as possible.
PH	Expressed concern about getting the work underway. The park is not an island. Fears we will make improvements and down the line, need to undo work for future improvements.
PR	We are undergoing this process to ensure that we limit or eliminate 'false work', as it is called. Sometimes, it is needed under emergency situations, but the hope is that we will be able to recoup the costs or use that work elsewhere.
PH	Has the evaluation of the sewer pipes running under Prescott Park to Peirce Island been done?
PR	There is no longer an underground storage tank proposed for the space below Liberty Lawn. There are no concerns with the existing sewer lines under the park; they are in good condition based on the videos we've seen.
TW	The park is isolated, apart from Marcy and Mechanic Street. Are there any projects upcoming on those two streets? Stormwater drain lines?
PR	This project is driving those types of utility improvement projects in the adjacent streets. We meet annually with the utility companies and they have not indicated that they are planning on making any improvements in the next year. The next big project is the bridge replacement, which is ten years out.
TW	If there are no other questions, we will open the meeting to public comment.
Rodney Rowland (RR)	Has resiliency planning been done with Strawberry Banke (SB) in mind? SB is investigating mitigation and protection of its buildings, but stormwater / flooding will need to be a joint effort by SB and the City. The area is essentially a bowl and SB cannot do it alone. Prescott Park is trying to accommodate the stormwater. We are concerned about the stormwater line that runs along the property, to which the City has an easement.
PR	The stormwater line was reviewed several years ago. The old RCP pipe in decent shape. This work at Prescott Park is not intended to impact SB. We are aware of the stormwater impacts to SB. We will not exacerbate stormwater, but a side benefit that there will be an improvement to flooding at SB.
RR	On signage, please include information about reasoning why these improvements are being installed. The resiliency upgrades are an important message to share with the public. There is already sign on Marcy Street about sea level rise.

TW	Are there any other comments?
PH	Going back to the thinking that 'Prescott Park is not an island,' has the team investigated the impacts on any of the neighbors, especially SB? They will be impacted more than Prescott Park. Provide an update to SB on the flooding impacts and what to expect with the improvements.
PR	We have coordinated with SB to date. We studied the flooding impacts to their property and confirmed that the proposed improvements to Prescott Park will not exacerbate issues at SB. We are cognizant that our improvements are not a complete solution (like a pump station is used in Louisiana), but these improvements together will make a significant improvement to the area.
PH	Please share the 30% progress drawings with neighbors.
PR	The City regularly coordinates with SB and there are many projects that are jointly done between City and SB.
CR	All the modelling that we have done has always included SB. The solution is an incremental build and is foundational work that will improve flooding issues for the entire area.
PR	Will include SB in design discussions. It may be helpful to do a joint study. PH, you are right that this is a big topic that needs to be addressed.
RR	SB would welcome that.
TW	Are there any other members of the public who would like to comment? Hearing none. Any other comments or questions from the committee?

Motion to Adjourn, seconded
All Approved

End of Notes: CB