

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ADVISORY PANEL

MEETING MINUTES

Date: September 15, 2022

Meeting #67

Project: Druid Lake Vision Plan

Phase: Masterplan

Location: Druid Hill Park

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

Ren Southard with the Department of Planning began the presentation by providing context for the Vision Plan, outlining both private and public investments in the surrounding neighborhoods. These include three 21st Century Schools, the North Avenue Rising project, new Parkview Recreation Center, and Druid Park Lake Drive complete streets study.

Larissa Torres with the Capital Development Division of Recreation and Parks introduced the Vision Plan and the design team of Unknown Studio, Moffatt and Nichol, and Biohabitats.

Nick Glase of Unknown Studio introduced his team and the project, touching on the surrounding investments as well as recent investments in the park, as well as how the project came to be with need to install tanks by DPW. Mr. Glase centered the need to make sure the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods don't experience displacement due to the project. The team has worked closely with city and state agencies and completed public engagement that will continue throughout the project.

Claire Agre of Unknown Studio presented the evolution of the park starting with the location of historic creeks and springs, many of which continue to exist, as well as the historic architecture that continues to be found throughout the park. The park has been eroded at the edges due to both the Jones Falls Expressway and Druid Park Lake Drive among other alterations. Lastly, she touched on recent improvements including the Big Jump and the Druid Park Lake Drive study.

Ms. Agre re-emphasized the need to continually address equitable access and restorative justice through the design.

Four principles:

- Go Big - Deliver a Vision Worthy of the Nation's Great Public Parks

- Proactively welcome through community programming
- Reinvent the reservoir as an ecological, interconnected, recreational lake
- Deliver restorative justice for an accessible park

Community engagement consisted of providing three concepts to solicit community input about which features community members would like at the park, and utilized that to help create the plan.

Mr. Glase then presented the details of the plan that were driven by the community input including swimming, boating, event spaces, outdoor education, and a bio-habitat area. He touched on the ecological work being completed by Biohabitats that would include creating the stream that would feed the lake from the surrounding historic watershed.

The team asked the community which of the proposed elements should be prioritized and the promenade was the most critical. The team proposes the use of art installations which can be installed quickly, to create interest and excitement for the plan prior to the implementation of either phase. Phase 1 would focus on the western edge of the lake, with Phase 2 focusing on the eastern edge.

DISCUSSION:

The Panel thanked the team for their detailed and exciting presentation. The panel then began the discussion with clarifying questions before continuing with the general discussion and comments.

- *Can you share what is existing today, and what is new or planned?* The starting condition is what the condition will be once the tanks project is completed. Per the DPW plan, this includes the promenade that will go around the tanks, three proposed plazas around the tanks, a steep fenced off lake edge, and an amphitheater along the western lake edge. The design team is hoping to weave into this and blend the edges more than what is currently proposed. The proposed design will continue to have a promenade that will differ by incorporating a bridge over an island within the lake. Druid Park Lake Drive is also still in design, but DOT and BCRP are working together to address the street and its impact.
- *Can you also show how the lake is connected to the western gateway of the park and other entries to the park?* To the east the only entrance is at Wyman Park Drive, this location will continue to be accessible and the plan will include pathways from this entrance to the promenade, as well as a potential connection to Mount Royal Terrace at the southeast. We have not focused much on the western edge, though we are excited about the opportunity to connect the Jones Falls Trail with the Gwynns Fall Trail.
- *How many access points will there be to the park if the road improvements are not completed, since they are outside your control?* Without the road improvements access to the park will be provided at signalized intersections that are part of the DPW project, may only be two to the south.
- *Its great to see the robust proposed program, what is the engagement plan as the process continues?* Not currently doing public engagement during a very technical phase, but planning to

reach out again in the spring. Want to make the next round more fun and engaging, while still getting to all the residents within a ten minutes radius.

- *Are you developing a partnership matrix that could be utilized to expand the resources of the project?* I'd like to think that we are. The project has received state funding and hoping to utilize that to access local and federal dollars.
- *Baltimore is great for community activism, have you considered utilizing that energy and those leaders to help with this?*
- *Are you exploring ADA access to the waterfront and into the water?* Yes, there will be access to the waterfront itself and we are investigating options for access to the water for all abilities. Still early in the process, but definitely looking for universal accessibility.
- *Did you state that there is a strong desire to avoid displacement? What do you mean by that?* I will say that landscape architecture is not a benevolent discipline and during these types of interventions often the neighborhood changes, we want to make sure that doesn't happen here.
- *Aside from the community input you've had, it seems as if you've got a lot of program here. What's really driving this programming? Is there empirical evidence that shows what's proposed will meet the needs for planned usage?* For pathways we have really good data for the needs of the multi-modal paths. For the other elements such as the café and boathouse were looking at comparable precedents, but don't currently have a business or programming plan with BCRP.
- *How does the Big Jump tie into the project?* We would love to tie it into the park, but there's no easy way to do that. Will work to make robust crossings to get folks to the promenade, so that's what we've focused on. Potential for a ramp near the Moorish Tower.

Vision Plan:

- Baltimore's relationship with the water is so important to this project. The city is intrinsically connected to water as a port city, but access to the water is very limited – look but don't touch. That existing relationship makes the project here significant given the few opportunities to interact with water currently available in the city.
- More points of entry aren't necessarily better, really need to focus on quality over quantity.
- Need to make sure that there is an easy way to access the park more broadly, as that will be critical to the success of the plan.
- Nervous about the proposed use of multiple roundabouts at Druid Park Lake Drive as so many people don't know how to drive around them and can be dangerous to pedestrians. Consider alternative options, especially ones that will create primary access for pedestrians. Consider testing a proof of concept that will allow any idea to gain support.
- The rationale or strategy for the programming and location of the programming hasn't been presented. There needs to be a framework that shows the reasoning for each of the experiences presented. Extend the narrative outside the park to show how and why residents and visitors engage with the space and how/why the programming is located as presented.
- All of the programmatic elements have a huge potential. As to sequencing, love the islands and the promenade that goes over the bridge. Where do the islands actually rank? Are those adding

enough to the park to justify their place in the phasing? Look at the raw data through different lenses to better build a hierarchy of importance. If you don't have the islands or boathouse, does the plan still hold?

- The centralization of the equity of the plan is critical and as you stated should be central. Consider how you want this investment to create economic development without displacement. Addressing vacancy and creating density is needed in the surrounding area, which have historically been systemically under invested. Rather than creating a primary edge of where there will be properties with views, and properties without views? What if the occupiable spaces such as the café and boathouse are located along the southern edge to provide those views to all. Look to Port Covington and Westport where these conversations are also happening.
- Enjoyed the history that you provided, would love to see this integrated into the design. Is there a land acknowledgement of the native peoples? Utilize the historic design and those design legacies into the proposed design. Are there records of the enslaved populations of the plantation? Are there unmarked cemeteries, should this be more deeply investigated?
- The explanation for the name of the park as a connection to trees, is great, but in this area of the park it doesn't feel heavily forested. Would love to see the forest come back, would also love to see the return of a productive landscape perhaps in the form of orchards.
- As designed the areas where the tanks are underground are obvious on the landscape, can the tank areas be completed in a more organic form rather than what is currently shown?
- Conversely, is there a way to show the utility of the space and tanks and how this serves the city. Are there opportunities to incorporate educational programming here? Can a portion of the tanks be exposed and a unique feature to be able to appreciate them in an honest way.
- Similarly, the work being completed with the hydrology and the watershed is another opportunity for an educational opportunity.
- There are a number of k-12 schools as well as higher education in the vicinity that can be utilized for partnerships. Is this going to be a destination for crew teams or concrete boat teams that are used in engineering schools? Look deeper into the city to see how the lake can serve different stakeholders both near and far.
- At the Dam edge is there an opportunity to work with state highway or the correct administrative body to forest a portion of the space that isn't directly on the dam?
- Are there innovate ways to create the islands? Could unused material from another Baltimore project be used to create the island? Does that make it more feasible? Continue to look at partnerships in creative ways to help make the project and the critical elements of the project feasible.
- Balance is critical to the project. The team needs to figure out how to integrate the park into the community, while not overwhelming the community.
- As you've identified access is also critical. The access to the park needs to be more selective – where are the key points of entry from not only the south, but the west too? Evaluating this will allow you to organize how people will utilize the park. Once you enter into the park you're presented with the promenade, there needs to be a transition from the outside of the park to the circulation path. The cross section of the promenade needs to be evaluated.

- When you think of a park of this nature, the designers all stem from the historic picturesque style. Is this approach appropriate for contemporary life today? Are parks utilized in the same way? Is it more sporting event, vs. social event? The reason this is mentioned is the type of structures that you're planning for this space. They all seem to be more historic in style. Recommend you reconsider this and use more contemporary structures into the park elements.
- Recognize the site has a number of barriers; streets, highways, tanks, etc. Implore that you introduce more porosity and have portions of the park be more outward looking, toward to community. When you walk up against those hard lines there are often physical barriers – are there opportunities for another layer to the design that addresses these barriers in a slightly different way.
- Need a more balanced program, maybe not just one of everything, but rather include elements that are designed and others that are in their more natural state. Have these in a less manicured setting. This will help address the concern of displacement. If a space is too manicured it will be considered exclusive and may not be utilized by the existing community.

Next Steps:

Where possible address the comments of the panel in preparation for the upcoming CHAP hearing. Continue to consider these as the Vision Plan is formalized and returns for various design reviews.

Attending:

Larissa Torres – Recreation and Parks

Nick Glase, Claire Agre, Anna Dennis – Unknown Studio

Brett Long - Biohabitats

Gwen Lawrence, Andrew Forbes – Moffatt & Nichol

Angel St. Jean, Annis Long, Arlen Cullors, Brandon Brooks, David M., Derrick, Janea McClain, Rabbi Daniel Burg, Rolando, Rosemary Peternel, Sally Ruppert- Attendees

Ed Gunts - Media

Messr. Anthony, Mses. Bradly and Ilieva - UDAAP Panel

Tamara Woods, Ren Southard, Caitlin Audette, Matthew DeSantis, Chad Hayes, Lauren Schiszik - Planning

Graham Young, Matthew Henderickson - DOT