

**SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE
SEATTLE BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS &
SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
February 24, 2003**

Board of Park Commissioners

Present:

Bruce Bentley, Chair
James Fearn, Jr.
Susan Golub
Sarah Neilson
Kathleen Warren

Excused:

O. Yale Lewis, Jr.
Kate Pflaumer

Library Board of Trustees

Present:

Linda Larson, President
Eric Liu
Greg Maffie

Background/History

Approximately 90 citizens attended the first-ever joint public meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners and Library Board of Trustees. This meeting, to discuss the site plan for the Northgate Library/Community Center/Park, was held from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Olympic View Elementary School, 504 NE 95th St.

Deborah L. Jacobs, City Librarian, and Ken Bounds, Superintendent of Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, introduced the members of their respective Boards, welcomed everyone, and gave a brief background of this joint project. Deborah and Ken explained that the meeting was called to share two site plans with, and to enlist help from, the community in selecting a site plan. Comments from the public were requested and will be helpful to "tweak" the site plan. Suggestions on the design will be folded into the next stage.

Also in attendance were David Traylor, member of the Citizen Implementation Review Panel (CIRP), a 15-member panel that provides citizen oversight of the Seattle Public Library's "Libraries for All" building program, and CIRP steward for the Northgate Branch; Ellen Judson, CIRP vice chair; and David Kunselman, Library capital projects manager for the Northgate project.

Alex Harris, Library Capital Program Director, and Erin Devoto, Parks and Recreation Planning and Development Director, were introduced. They described the meeting format and set a two-minute time limit per individual for questions/comments. Alex explained

that tonight's meeting is to discuss the site plan, not the design, of the new facilities and park. After the final site plan is selected, then the decision will be made as to whether the site plan architects will continue the project into the design phase.

Erin and Alex then introduced the consultants, Stan Lokting, consultant with ARC Architects, and Terry Reckord, landscape architect with MacLeod Reckord. Stan and Terry gave a detailed history of this project. In 1998 the Libraries for All was approved by the voters, in 1999 the Community Center Levy was approved, and in November 2002 the Pro Parks levy was approved. Funding for this new facility is from these three. Property has been purchased on the east side of Northgate Mall, across from the Bon Marche, on what is commonly known as "The Bon Tire Store" property. This property is bordered on the south by Thornton Creek, on the west by 5th Ave NE, and by other commercial properties on the north and east. Neighborhoods are nearby on the east and south sides.

There were a number of criteria to consider:

- Safe and secure buildings and park area
- Visible to 5th Ave NE
- Street embellishments
- "Soft" space requested by the Library
- Access from community center to park/open space, especially from the daycare and multipurpose room
- Connections to Thornton Creek
- Direct connections to the traffic light in front of the Bon Marche on 5th Ave NE

Terry said the following were also considerations in the site planning:

- On busy arterial
- Utilities to connect to are located on 5th Ave NE
- Northgate Mall is across the street
- Neighborhoods to the south and east
- Steep slope towards the south, with some fill
- Regulatory issues near a creek and zoning codes to follow
- Program elements: library, community center, open space, day care, drop off/pick up

Along with the criteria and considerations listed above, additional site considerations were taken into account to satisfy the needs of both a library and community center at the same facility (e.g., book drop-off bins, children drop-off/pick-up.) Ensuring that the park space is visible from 5th Ave NE was a high priority.

Two site plans were presented: Site A with 2.0 acres of park land and 67 parking spaces above ground at the north end of the site, and Site B with 2.9 acres of park land and 72 parking spaces underground. The total budget for the project is \$7 million, which is adequate for Site A. Site B would require an additional \$1.6 million.

Questions and Answers Session

A 30-minute question and answer session followed the presentation, with Erin and Alex serving as facilitators and answering questions. The architects also answered questions. Notes were taken from the audiences comments/questions/suggestions as follows:

Q. What's the narrow slot between the plaza and the community center?

A. It is an interior hallway that provides access to some of the spaces.

Q. A surface parking lot may be a tempting place to park for mall patrons. Have designers considered this?

A. Parks and the Library have not yet hired an architect(s) to design the project, but this will be considered as we begin the building design work.

Q. Do we have the money for scheme A right now? And we do not have the money for scheme B right now?

A. We do have the money for scheme A, but do not have the money for scheme B, which would cost an estimated additional \$1.6 million.

Q. Library staff members have said they want to protect the library from noise from 5th Ave NE, but in both plans the library is on the street.

A. Like a retail store, the library needs to be visible and easy to find. It will advertise its presence by being on the street edge. The north main reading room is the most sensitive area in the library to noise. It faces away from the street and toward the park. Parks and the Library also can build wall and window sections that can block out noise.

Q. How safe will the underground parking be, and how do patrons get in and out of it?

A. Since Parks and the Library are still in the site planning phase, it's a little too early to give specifics. If the project includes structured parking, it would be designed with safety in mind and have good lighting. We are very sensitive to safety needs of the facilities in this neighborhood. The entrance would be at the existing intersection on 5th Ave NE. Patrons would go down a spiral garage entrance and come out at approximately the same place as they went in. Entrance to the community center from the parking lot would be located on the lower level and be accessible by stairs and an elevator. The library would be located across the plaza.

Q. What is the total slope differential on the site? Also, I don't see any planning for drainage management.

A. The site slopes from northwest to southeast. There is a 20-foot vertical difference and another 20 feet of fill down to the street at 105th St. The total difference is about 40 feet. The Library and Parks have budgeted for onsite stormwater detention and treatment, likely through an underground vault that would hold rain and slowly release it into the stormwater system. Since the site is currently all asphalt and we intend to redevelop to add a park and landscaping, any reduction in asphalt would greatly reduce the impervious surface and improve the water quality.

Q. It appears that construction will occur all the way up to the street edge without street-side parking. I would like to see more of a promenade. The trees in these plans along the edge of the street do not provide much blockage. It would be dangerous for kids if they ran after items that strayed into traffic. Also, the library seems like it should be back in the space because it needs quiet with the community center as a buffer.

A. City zoning, which has defined Northgate as an urban center, requires building placement next to the sidewalk edge. This is part of the transformation from suburban to urban development. The Library and Parks are committed to creating a pleasing streetscape for pedestrians along 5th Ave NE, including adding 12-foot-wide sidewalks, street trees, benches, landscaping, and topography to act as a buffer between the park and the street. We seek to contribute to safe and inviting pedestrian connections between the park and other uses and open space in the area. We would make sure through design that park users are protected from the street. We anticipate providing a public plaza that provides a pleasant and safe connection to the improved pedestrian crossing connecting the Northgate Mall to the library and community center. The plaza also would provide a gateway to the park, which would then be linked to Park 6 and Thornton Creek. These improvements will enhance connections to residences, transit, shopping and future open space in the area.

Also, these plans do not preclude curbside parking. It may be of value to put short-term parking on the street. Any street-side parking would have to extend into the site, instead of out into traffic.

Q. Would there be any possibility of reducing the cost of scheme B by parking across the street at Northgate Mall? What percentage of people will be long-term parkers versus short-term parkers?

A. In determining the number of parking spaces, we'll start with what the code requires. Then we'll document how people get to the site and what other parking is available in the area. Currently there is no street parking in the area. Parks and the Library have great concerns about pedestrians crossing 5th Ave NE to get to the branch library, park, and community center. Large events at the facilities may necessitate using additional parking on special occasions. We will explore all options and the site will be well-served by transit.

Q. Has the beauty of the building been considered so we don't have another tin box like Target?

A. It is still too early in the design process to think about design specifics like that; however, we are committed to providing handsome civic buildings that invite public use and enjoyment.

Q. East-west traffic is really miserable through this area. Is there an opportunity for an overpass or a traffic blocker of some kind?

A. There will be street-frontage improvements, including 12-foot-wide sidewalks, street trees, benches, landscaping, and topography to act as a buffer between the park and the street, which will contribute to safe pedestrian connections. There are many ways to strengthen pedestrian uses while accommodating traffic and we will look into them.

Q. I have three concerns: 1) Drainage on the site is a problem and should be studied; 2) safety and crime prevention are important issues and have the potential to cause problems; 3) the parking listed in these drawings does not look adequate. I recommend an increase in parking stalls. Also we'll need to prevent mall patrons from parking in the lot.

A. 1) Right now, the site drains to 105th St to the southeast of the lot, and it goes into a concrete drainage pipe. When we redevelop the site we will add a lot more pervious surface with grass and trees. This will greatly reduce the amount of water coming off the site. The Library and Parks have studied natural elements such as exposed water elements and drainage swales. The slope of the site and the fact that it is on top of fill works against us. In addition to costing more, the swale approach also would use up valuable open space. The Library and Parks have budgeted for onsite stormwater detention and treatment, likely through an underground vault.

2) On the issue of safety, we have made the park visible from the street so it is easier to supervise. Our goal is to avoid recesses and unsafe entries. We will use landscaping to promote safety.

3) On the parking issue, we need to find a balance. We believe that 60 to 67 stalls will get us where we need to be.

Q. As far as library size, how does it compare to the Green Lake Branch? What will be the "greatest hits" at the community center?

A. The library will be 10,000 square feet, for comparison. The Green Lake Branch is currently 8,090 square feet, the Ballard Branch is 7,300 square feet, and the Lake City Branch is 9,000 square feet. The community center is planned to be 20,000 square feet. It is comparable to the new Meadowbrook Community Center. There will be a gym, arts and activities room, and kitchen.

Q. On scheme B, how would parking for the handicapped be accommodated?

A. Handicapped parking would be underground and adjacent to the elevator. The elevator would go up to a plaza that would connect to the library and community center.

Q. Budget is important, but underground parking is ideally the way we should go. We need a civic center that is more pedestrian-friendly, less automotive-friendly. How does the fact that the site is fill affect the project? We ought to use this chance to create water retention that celebrates Thornton Creek.

A. There is approximately 20 feet of fill in addition to the grade. There are many ways of addressing this. Geo-piles, a foundation system, is the least expensive way to provide the structure for the building. We tried to keep costs down while getting the best function. Surface parking accommodates the loading and unloading for both buildings better than any other scheme we looked at. The underground parking option is more constrained. For the drainage, we did consider swales, or a different way of dealing with stormwater, but they all take up valuable open space.

Q. Where could \$1.6 million for underground parking come from?

A. Neither the Library nor Parks is able to pay the estimated \$1.6 million for underground parking. Funding for the project comes from the Community Center Levy,

the Pro Parks Levy, and from the "Libraries for All" bond issue. We studied the underground parking issue, even though we don't have money for it, because it illustrates the trade-offs between parking and open space and allowed us to estimate the costs. Within available funding, Scheme A (surface parking) is what we can afford.

Q. Is there a possibility that Scheme A could be modified to provide more open space? Because the community center will have big, blank walls, what will we do to mitigate that for neighbors to the east? Is there anything else along 5th Ave NE, or just the park?

A. The community center will be located toward the southeast corner and will be partially sunken into the site. The perception to neighbors will be about a story to a story-and-a-half visually. In addition, it might be detailed with windows. We don't envision a fence along 5th Ave NE. We want the park to feel open and accessible. Issues of security can be dealt with in the design process. The park would be below the level of the sidewalk.

In addition, the following comments were made:

On scheme A, I was thinking you could draw a line right down the middle and flip it over to have the community center at the front. It would be better for noise and be a better buffer to have parking on the street. I oppose underground parking because of the safety and security issue. Twelve-foot sidewalks seem silly. I don't think you need even 8 feet of sidewalk to accommodate pedestrians.

Congratulations on showing us at least one plan that stays within the budget. We need these facilities. Whatever choices we make, please keep the entire project within the budget.

I am disappointed to hear that the Parks Department's preference is for Scheme A (surface parking). The park is too small. Do not dismiss acquiring additional funding out of hand.

Board Discussion

Board members gave brief comments. A short recap follows:

Library Board

Greg Maffie: on right path to get this library built; odds low of finding additional funds; proceed with Site Plan A with tonight's good comments/suggestions included; don't delay

Linda Larson: agrees with Greg; asked the rhetorical question of why a site plan was presented that isn't affordable, and answered that the library has learned a lot about parking over the past few years with its other library sites and believes the underground parking option should be examined didn't know it wasn't affordable until the site plan was completed; go with Site Plan A and tweak it to get more open space

Eric Liu: would like to see more tweaks to Site Plan A so it more resembles Site Plan B

Park Board of Commissioners

Susan Golub: go with Site Plan A; don't delay project

Sarah Neilson: agrees with Susan that a project over budget is ill advised but is not happy with the impervious surfaces in Site Plan A; asked what about a two-story design? (Stan answered that a two-story design to meet both facilities needs was studied, but was very difficult due to accessibility and noise; consequently, the designs were pared down to these two)

James Fearn: asked if Parks/Library has parking requirements (Alex answered that when the library levy was passed, there were no parking requirements. Since then, an ordinance with parking requirements has passed. Erin said Parks does traffic studies for each of its new facilities. Parking isn't designed for the peak period of use it is a delicate balance to have adequate parking when facilities are busy and not having too many empty stalls when the facility is less busy. Ken Bounds said parking at Northgate Mall will continue to be looked at as an option.)

Kathleen Warren: is the funding for an additional \$1.6 million definitely unavailable? Ken answered that the \$7 million is currently all the funds available. The site plans have been shown to Mayor Nickels and he will be kept apprised of public input and any tradeoffs.

What's Next?

The Library Board is a decision making board to the Library; the Board of Park Commissioners is an advisory board to the Parks and Recreation Department.

The Library Board will meet, discuss, and vote on a site plan at its February 25 meeting. Information will be shared with the two members absent from tonight's meeting. The Park Board of Commissioners will discuss the plans at its March 13 meeting.

The audience was encouraged to send written comments and forms were provided. Once a site plan is chosen, the next step is to hire an architect for the design. All efforts will be made to respond to citizen questions and concerns, while staying within the project's budget.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

APPROVED _____ DATE _____

Bruce Bentley, Chair