

Summary of Public Meeting
Regarding the Chinatown/International District acquisition project
Expansion of Hing Hay Park
International District/Chinatown Community Center
Thursday, March 29, 2007

The meeting began at 6 pm, and was facilitated by Donald Harris, manager of Property and Acquisition Services for Seattle Parks and Recreation.

Approximately 40 citizens attended, including local residents, representatives of local organizations (Inter*Im, International District/Chinatown Development Authority, Seattle Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Area, the Night Market (WILD)), real estate developers and the media. In addition, City staff representing Parks, Department of Neighborhoods, and the Department of Planning and Development also attended.

Donald Harris started the meeting by deviating from the agenda and spoke immediately to the community's important topic: the relocation of the branch Post Office should the City purchase the site it occupies next to Hing Hay Park. He relayed to the audience that, in the course of the City's discussions with the United States Postal Service, it became clear that the International District Station performs two functions: retail walkup service and carrier annex distribution to trucks. If the two uses were separated, the retail service could still be provided close to the existing location, while the carrier function could be housed elsewhere. He stated that relocating the Post Office is "paramount in our minds" and that the City is committed to keeping walkup postal services in the neighborhood.

Mr. Harris then went on to provide background on the project, including:

- Residential growth in the Chinatown/International District
- Lack of adequate parks and open space to accommodate this growth
- Community concerns about public safety in existing parks
- Community success in securing funding to buy land for a new park through the Pro Parks Levy Opportunity Fund. The City has obtained a matching grant from the King County Conservation Futures Levy, so that approximately \$2 million is currently available for park acquisition. (Final costs will be determined through negotiation.)
- Parks consulted the Neighborhood Plan and other south downtown planning initiatives
- Parks staff looked throughout the Chinatown/International District, both east and west of Interstate 5
- Creation of a larger park to accommodate growth would be more useful than creation of another small park
- Last summer's Night Market showed there is enough demand for larger community events and festivals to use additional space at Hing Hay Park
- All these considerations led to Parks' recommendation to expand Hing Hay Park

Mr. Harris introduced Bill Blair, Parks Acquisition Planner, who described the main criteria that are used to evaluate properties for new neighborhood parks. These criteria include good sun exposure so new buildings will not shade the site, the presence of residents nearby so there will be “eyes on the park,” a site area of at least 10,000 square feet, and level or gently sloped sites to enhance use by people in wheelchairs. Parks also believes that nearby public improvements will improve the surroundings of Hing Hay Park and make it a more important destination. These include the new Chinatown Gates along South King Street, the Maynard Avenue Green Street Project, and the possible extension of the Waterfront Streetcar along King Street to First Hill and Capitol Hill. Parks considered all these reasons in making its recommendation to expand Hing Hay Park.

The floor was opened to comments and questions, which included:

- Bob Santos, former executive director of Inter*Im, expressed concerns about inappropriate uses of the existing public toilet, the owners’ unwillingness to sell, and suggested that the main issue at Hing Hay Park is “taking it back” by driving away the “street elements,” not enlarging it, which could double the existing problems
- Harris responded that the toilet is located in the alley right-of-way, not the park, and his understanding that local business organizations have prepared a letter to Mayor Nickels asking that the toilet contract be cancelled. He acknowledged that the owners are reluctant to sell and do not want to be perceived as contributing to the Post Office leaving the area, however they are working with Parks and have met with the Mayor’s staff.
- A citizen inquired about the possibility of placing a garage under the park. Harris responded by saying Parks does not go into the design process with preconceived notions. Underground parking does not always “pencil out,” but if the site is acquired, this idea will not be dismissed at the outset.
- A citizen asked whether the property could be used for a purpose other than a park, once acquired. Harris answered no.
- A citizen expressed a concern that illegal drug use in the International Children’s Park is encouraged by the enclosed space.
- There were questions about how the community provides input in the design process and how to transfer what works in other downtown parks to the ID. Harris responded that Parks will work with residents, community groups, and the police to come up with a design that discourages inappropriate uses. There are established principles – CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) - that will be utilized during the eventual design process.
- There were questions about development budget and timeline. Harris responded by saying there is currently no budget, but some Pro Parks Opportunity Fund has been identified for park planning and development. These kinds of projects warrant consideration in the City’s biannual budgeting process. The timeline for development is open-ended for now, because the Post Office can keep its current lease up to 2013.
- A citizen suggested that the INS Building could house a relocated branch Post Office.

- A citizen noted the homeless are people too and that community groups should talk to them, not around them.
- Tim Im of Inter*Im, suggested Parks co-locate retail Post Office services and parking with the expanded Hing Hay Park because these uses would help activate the park and provide eyes on the park.
- Chris Koh of CoHo Real Estate Group inquired about “drop-dead” dates and a backup plan. Harris responded that the Pro Parks Levy ends in 2008 and that King County will hold the grant money for the City for another year or two. At present, there is no backup site should this one fall through.
- Bob Santos suggested the INS Building is too far away from existing ID senior housing for elderly people to walk. The new Post Office location must be central to the senior population. He asked who is working the relocation process. Harris replied it is Parks and the Mayor’s office, who “will work it hard.”
- Marie Wong, Director of Public Affairs, Seattle University, suggested the INS Building may be problematic for the Post Office due to the cost of needed building upgrades and access for walk-up customers, who would have to cross Dearborn and Airport Way. She supported at the idea of co-locating the Post Office with the new park.
- Chris Koh noted there was no opposition to expanding Hing Hay Park in itself, IF the associated issues are addressed.
- A citizen asked about purchase price. Harris replied it will be determined through negotiation.
- Another citizen suggested co-locating a walk-in Post Office with a police station, saying this has been done in San Francisco.

Harris explained the next steps in this process:

- Parks will seek City Council approval for the purchase of the property.
- Parks will keep the community informed via calls/email/website