

ART COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF October 28, 2009
BEGINNING AT 2:00 P.M.

PRESENT OF THE COMMISSION: Klavon, Indovina, Cooper, Astorino,
Haskell, Serrao, Kaczorowski

PRESENT OF THE STAFF: Morton Brown, Noor Ismail

A. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Ms. Klavon asked for approval of minutes. The minutes for September 30, 2009 were approved by Joe Serrao and seconded by Doug Cooper.

B. Correspondence

Mr. Brown noted no correspondence.

C. Items for Review

a. Point Park University Streetscape and Public space enhancements

- o Elmer Burger, Point Park University architect and planner
- o Felix Cardella, TKA architect
- o Todd Brant, GAI Consultants Inc.

Ms. Klavon stated that she, Mr. Serrao and Mr. Astorino must recuse themselves from discussing or reviewing the Point Park University project as they were involved in its design and development. Ms. Klavon went on to say that Art Commission Bylaws state that Commissioners who recuse themselves must also leave the room for the duration of the discussion. However, since this project was submitted as Courtesy Review, Mr. Brown and Ms. Ismail did not believe that those Commissioners would need to leave the room during discussion of the project. Ms. Klavon explained this to the Commission and the applicant and asked if all agreed to this course. All agreed.

Elmer Burger, University Architect of Point Park University introduced himself and began the presentation of the University Village Master Plan by outlining the project in two parts (1) the streetscape and (2) the public space enhancement. Mr. Burger stated that for the streetscape improvements, funds were granted to the project through the Smart Transportation Program. He went on to say that the contracts for the streetscape improvements would be administered by the University and the finished work of the streetscape would be turned over to The City of Pittsburgh. Mr. Burger stated that the project site is located between Fort Pitt Blvd to Wood and 3rd street. It will also expand from 3rd and Wood to Wood and Forbes to coincide with the City's plans on Forbes. For the second part of the project—the public space enhancement—the University would renovate a portion of its land near 100 Wood St. where there was once a gas station into a public plaza and convert the adjacent building into classrooms and parking garage. The project is set to break ground at the beginning of next year. Mr. Burger then asked the design teams to present the project.

Felix Cardella of TKA Architects introduced himself and presented the new designs for the plaza space. Mr. Cardella stated that the goal of the project was to create an outdoor space that's a positive addition to the University and the City based on the principals of William White. Mr. Cardella went on to say that some of the break out points of the project were of creating a special place, understanding the history of the site, access points at perimeter of the park, street crossing, a water feature, and creating an experience of both day and night features.

Mr. Cardella noted the project area and shadow studies that show buildings that circle the site, and noted that of those buildings almost 100% of them are owned by Point Park. He went on to note some of the pedestrian connections that included the main intersection and building entrances. Mr. Cardella then noted the functions of the project: outdoor space, café, student housing and the space in between. He went on to

note that the edges of the plaza are defined by a perimeter wall that will exist where the walls of an old building used to be. He stated that there is also a tree canopy at the leading edge to take advantage of sun light, a two level arcade where the upper level will be private for students. Mr. Cardella went on to note park furniture that will include tables, chairs, bike racks, trash receptacles and lighting. Park trees are being considered in types of Honey Locust, Birch, Salcova, Frontier Elm (street), climbing vine and ground cover. Lighting considered includes paving lights (draw in), stair tower illumination and lower level lighting. The project will utilize City standard granite curb, Euro cobble for park floor, exposed aggregate for sidewalk (City standard) and granite accent for banding are proposed for the floor and paving elements.

Mr. Cardella then introduced Todd Brant of GAI Consultants who would present the street corridor design.

Mr. Todd Brant introduced himself and began by describing the project from a streetscape perspective. The scope of work includes repaving, reconstruction of sidewalks, reconstruction of handicap ramps, and relocating utilities where needed.

Mr. Brant noted that utility vaults are being evaluated to determine which will be abandoned or filled in or remain. A top view of the project site shows where vaults are located, the rhythm of street trees and pattern of side-walk which will be mostly exposed aggregate with granite accent curb. He went on to state that handicap ramps must now be perpendicular instead of in the center radius to achieve full ADA compliance. Granite bands will include name of street as per City standard. Mr. Brant concluded by noting new traffic signals at 3rd and Wood and the Blvd of the Allies intersections.

Mr. Cardella then reviewed the architecture for the two level arcade, the glass stair tower, the lower level café and water feature. He then displayed a night view scene that included a digital screen which would show scenes of performances and other University activities and events.

Mr. Cardella concludes opening the discussion for questions.

Jane Haskell asked if there are new provisions for parking in the area?

Mr. Cardella stated that there are no new provisions for parking determined by the makeup of the student population and existing city garages in the area.

Mr. Burger stated that there are 3,900 students at the University and over 1,000 of which live in dorms over the campus. He stated that 85 spots would be taken up in lieu of the new construction.

Ms. Haskell asked if a theater going to be in that area?

Mr. Burger stated that when they bring the playhouse it will be in the area of Smithfield and Wood, Fourth and Forbes, and it is proposed to have underground parking at the site and student housing because students live by the theater in Oakland.

Ms. Haskell stated that the theatres in the Cultural District have quite a bit of parking that encourages persons from out of town to attend. She went on to state that the University should consider that in the new plans for the playhouse.

Rob Indovina asked what the primary use for the Frontier Builder was to be--either now or in the future?

Mr. Burger stated that the first floor will be for the café, the rest are administration floors--currently floors 2 thru 5--and with the expected growth need the building will be filled.

Mr. Cooper stated that he applauded the expansion of the University grounds as it leads the Downtown area to a future that's sustainable--ultimately improving the life of Downtown.

Mr. Indovina stated that he believed that the University has done a nice job of enhancing the cornering.

Ms. Haskell stated that it looks very inviting.

Mr. Indovina asked the audience for comments and questions.

Mr. Brown asked to clarify the content of the lighted display. He mentioned that the applicant at one time had talked about it as being artwork or a display of events within the University, but wanted to know if they had determined its actual use and format.

Mr. Cardella stated that originally, they had expected it to be a projected image, but this could only be seen at night, and the quality would be reduced. Now, the plan is to have a digital screen similar to the one at CAPA that would display events that would occur inside the University—some informational content, and some video of performances and student work.

Mr. Indovina asked if there were any further comments or questions. Hearing none, he then asked that since this is Courtesy Review, would there be any action to be taken. All agreed that no action was to be taken.

MOTION: Courtesy Review. NO action taken

MOVED:

SECONDED:

IN FAVOR:

OPPOSED:

b. Shade Tree Commission Tree Pit Guards

- o Lisa Ceoffe, City Urban Forester, Tree Vitalize Coordinator, and Shade Tree Commission member.
- o Tom Olivo, City of Pittsburgh Landscape Architect / Public Works

Lisa Ceoffe introduced herself and stated that she will speak on behalf of Shade Tree Commission to introduce and seek approval for two styles of a new City standard tree pit guard. Ms. Ceoffe stated that in Spring 2008, communities came forward wanting to plant trees in their neighborhoods. She stated that there were several issues raised in her discussions with community members including cars illegally parked on sidewalks, communities wanting tree guards just for aesthetics, bikes leaning against trees, and many other matters. The Shade Tree Commission then instructed Ms. Ceoffe to research other cities' solutions for tree mitigation issues. Ms. Ceoffe noted that she had researched Providence, Chicago, Baltimore and many other cities to determine a solution. The best solution found was to install tree pit guards of the type presented at this hearing. The initial design for the tree pit guards was presented to City of Pittsburgh Legal and Public Works departments to determine and overcome any hazards or potential liabilities. She went on to say that the design presented at this hearing has been approved by the aforementioned entities, and is meant to provide a standard that could be offered to any community that wishes to add tree guards in its area.

Ms. Ceoffe then introduced Tom Olivo, City of Pittsburgh Landscape Architect with the Department of Public Works to present the design for the tree pit guards.

Mr. Olivo introduced himself and stated that he had worked with Lisa on the tree guard research. He went on to say that by discussing tripping hazards and other liabilities with City Law Department and Public Works, the design presented will be a guard that is 18-21 inches tall. The 21 inch guard is not too tall as to look imposing and not too short to become a tripping hazard. He went on to note that there are two tree guard types being presented: Type (A) picket and Type (B) looped guard. It will be up to the community as to which of the two types it prefers—this decision could be based on the context of the existing adjacent architecture, or other environmental factors. Mr. Olivo went on to note that it is currently being discussed that the tree pit guard be three sided in certain areas or four sided in others. The three sided version would allow the street side of the guard to be open, so as to disallow the potential for car doors to hit them.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that the other concern was that in residential applications, community members were concerned that cars would park up on the curb near the pit and that the tree guard would then be better if it were four sided—to disallow this parking practice.

Ms. Klavon asked who fabricated the sample presented.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that she went to a local fabricator and asked to just put something together based on the designs to see how hard it would be to manufacture and to help ascertain the cost.

Ms. Klavon asked if Ms. Ceoffe was required by City ordinance to have three manufacturers bid for the contract of tree pit guard fabrication.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that once the designs are approved they will put out a set of specifications for bid, but they are hoping to get it done locally.

Ms. Haskell asked if the existing tree pits are all a consistent size or will they be modified.

Mr. Olivo stated that there are many different sizes of existing tree pits in the City currently, but the plan is to only install the new guards on pits that are 3 by 10 feet.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that the new City tree pit standard dimension is a 30 sq/ft area which means that some are 3 by 10 feet and some are 5 by 6 feet. She went on to say that from now on, when any new tree is planted, it will only be planted in the new pit size standard. She clarified that this new standard pit size is a minimum size that could be larger if the sidewalk in an area was exceptionally wide—such as those in East Liberty.

Mr. Indovina asked to clarify that the Commission will review the designs today, but there are no concrete plans for placement at this time.

Ms. Ceoffe affirmed. However, she mentioned that Squirrel Hill and Lawrenceville have noted interest in these pits and guards.

Mr. Olivo asked Ms. Ceoffe to clarify the question of would the City ever consider putting a guard around a pit that's not 3 by 10?

Ms. Ceoffe stated that when a new tree is planted, they have been enlarging the pit to a 3 x 10 or 5 x 6 foot dimension. She stated that she would not encourage a pit guard on a smaller pit size, but would encourage pits to be widened where appropriate.

Ms. Haskell asked if the width of the sidewalk will be maintained for pedestrian traffic.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that the width would have to be maintained for ADA access and that the City wouldn't even consider putting in a tree guard that wasn't compliant with ADA parameters.

Mr. Indovina asked what happens in the balance of the pit area.

Mr. Olivio stated that it would either be mulch or plants.

Ms. Ceoffe stated that the plants would be something that will be low maintenance.

Mr. Indovina stated that in New York City, they have these types of plantings in tree pits and that it looks beautiful.

Mr. Cooper asked how the pit guard will relate to the ground--Is that the way it would appear – would the base plate be several inches off the ground or right down flush to the ground?

Mr. Olivio stated that the base plate would be even with the ground as noted in the elevation drawings within the Commission's packet.

Ms. Klavon asked what color the guards would be.

Mr. Olivo stated that they would be black.

Mr. Serrao stated asked why two options would be given to communities. He went on to say that if you give someone a cheaper option you'll get a lot of Type (A), and very little Type (B). He went on to say that if you make the three sided pit guard, it will allow for the curb parking problem and the door hitting problem---Just remove the entire fourth side (street side) completely and uniformly on all guards.

Ms. Klavon stated that most communities have a grass verge that would offer some distance between a door and the guard.

Mr. Kaczerowski asked the cost of the pit guards.

Ms. Ceoffe answered that one tree pit guard would be around \$1,500, and that any community who wished to purchase one, would have to do so at its own expense.

Ms. Klavon asked for any other comments or questions of the Commission or audience.

MOTION: To grant Final Approval of the Tree Pit Guard Designs Type (A) and Type (B) as submitted.

MOVED: Joe Serrao

SECONDED: Rob Indovina

IN FAVOR: All

OPPOSED: None

CARRIED

Director and Staff Report

Morton Brown began by welcoming Acting Director of Public Works Rob Kaczorowski to the Commission as ex-officio member. The Commissioners echoed the welcome. Mr. Brown then began reporting on the status of Art Commission structural review. He stated that he has two Commissioners left to interview about needs and desires of amendments to policies and procedures of the Commission before finalizing plans to amend those polices.

He went on to say that he should be able to interview the two remaining Commissioners and bring a list of recommended amendments to the Commission at its next hearing. He outlined the process for amendments to City Code as follows: A draft of all Code and bylaw changes would be presented to the Commission for review and adjustments would be made. After the Art Commission has approved drafts, these documents would be sent to the City Law Department for final scrutiny from a legal perspective. Once the Law Department has approved, these amendments would come to the Art Commission for its official final approval before going to City Council for adoption.

Mr. Brown pointed out some obvious amendments to Code as follows:

The Director of City Planning currently is not mentioned in City Code as having any connection to the Art Commission however, the Director has traditionally sat in on Art Commission Hearings as a non-voting ex-officio type member. Mr. Brown stated (and the Commission agreed) that in City Code currently, the Director of Public Works is listed as an ex-officio member of the Art Commission, and that Code needs to be amended to allow the Director of City Planning an official ex-officio place on the Art Commission.

Mr. Brown noted the 60 day rule: timeline of decision needs to be amended to clarify the Art Commission review process and at which points in that process are decisions made. He went on to say that he has been

working on a draft of this already with the Law Department, and that once it is fine tuned will be a very welcome change that will protect both the applicant and the Commission from confusion and delays.

Mr. Brown noted that the Art Commission also needs to shore up its understanding of purview, citing streetscape elements as being a constant source of confusion and consternation for the Commission. Recently, the Law Department stated that the Art Commission only has purview over “ornamental items of permanent and fixed character” which implies above-grade structures on City land but does not include non man-made items such as trees, nor does it include at-grade items such as sidewalks, curbs, etc.

Mr. Brown acknowledged that Lisa Ceoffe, City Urban Forester was still in the audience and stated that he and Lisa had discussed whether the Art Commission should review tree placement and that he believed that the consensus was that this would be a good idea. He asked Ms. Ceoffe to speak about this.

Ms. Ceoffe affirmed, but qualified by stating that in some cases where a tree plan is part of a larger development, that it would especially behoove the Art Commission and the City to have a review by the Commission for the tree plan in context to the overall project.

Ms. Klavon stated that she fully agreed that this is needed.

Director Ismail stated that we would have to explore this and make sure that there would not be a duplication of reviews in respect to the Shade Tree Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning, etc.

Ms. Klavon stated that perhaps there were small streetscape renovations that did not need Art Commission review, but in the case of larger projects where streetscape elements such as trees, landscaping, street furniture and others were prevalent, the Commission should review the entire project holistically so that at least someone on the review process ensured a visual cohesiveness to the project’s elements and its relationship to its context.

Ms. Klavon went on to say that often the details of streetscape and other elements of projects get missed under City reviews through Zoning, Public Works, etc.

Mr. Serrao stated that he has been involved in projects large and small in Pittsburgh for many years and that he has always seen that even small details of these projects are always caught and reviewed by the current review processes mentioned earlier and that he does not believe there is a gap in review, but perhaps if the Art Commission review could be inserted in a holistic way that would not duplicate effort this would be appropriate.

Ms. Ismail stated that as City Planning Director, it is her task to streamline all review processes by the various commissions and staff under her supervision, and to reduce duplicative processes. She went on to say that the new web-based permitting system that is in development will address much of the streamlining and transparency of all City review and approval processes and that whatever is worked out with Art Commission purview of streetscape should work to aid in streamlining, not add to duplication.

Mr. Brown stated that the new web-based permitting structure will encompass Art Commission applications, and will flush all of the aforementioned issues out to the surface. He stated these issues would come out now or later in any case, but by working on these issues now the Commission would stand a better chance of having careful consideration applied to them.

Ms. Klavon stated that she agrees that there should be a streamlining process, but that the aesthetic streetscape review has been a missing component to City approvals.

Mr. Cooper stated that he would to address the question of staff review of banners. He went on to say he would very much prefer that staff review all banners. He stated that there are many details of banners to consider in review such as concentration, proximity, offensive content, and aesthetics, but all of these

details could be handled by the Public Art Manager and that perhaps this could alleviate a lot of time and trouble in hearings currently taken up by applicant presentation and discussion.

Mr. Serrao stated that he agreed, and thought perhaps that the Public Art Manager could always bring any controversial or problematic banner applications to the Commission if need be.

Mr. Brown agreed that this could be done in theory, but the real problem with staff review is that City Code states that all applicants to the Art Commission must be reviewed in a public hearing and that this includes banner applicants.

Mr. Cooper stated that temporary banners are not required to come before the Art Commission (that they are approved by Public Works alone), but “long term” banners are approved by the Commission before being approved by Public Works. He argued that no banner is “permanent and fixed” due to the impermanent material of the banners themselves. He asked if Public Works should or could just review all banners.

Mr. Kaczorowski stated that he was unaware of a differentiation of short term or long term banners.

Mr. Brown stated that there is a definition of short and long term banners on the City’s website, and that short term could be as little as one day event banners, but long term was considered 1 to 2 years. He went on to say that even the best made banners would only last about 2 years (and stay nice-looking), but what most communities do is that they print more banners than they need and replace those that get faded or torn. In this way, banners could effectively be as permanent as anything else.

Mr. Indovina stated that he would not mind if staff or the Art Commission reviewed banners, but he would argue that banner aesthetics, placement, proximity, etc. should be reviewed by a qualified person or entity.

Mr. Kaczorowski stated that Public Works never places a “rubber stamp” on banner applicants. Rather, the placement, installation, size, and content is reviewed—at least to ensure that no corporate logos are present.

Ms. Haskell stated that someone—either the Commission or the Public Art Manager—needs to review and critique the banners aesthetically however the Commission should figure out a way to streamline banner applications so that the review of an ever increasing amount of banner applications does not become the primary purpose of the Commission.

Mr. Kaczorowski stated Public Works reviews dozens of short term event banners on a regular basis and that the temporary banner is the most prevalent type. At least, in this way, the Commission is only reviewing a portion of the overall banner applications that come to the City.

Ms. Klavon asked to revisit the discussion of the Art Commission—or any one Commission—having review over an entire development project that would include streetscape, right of way, aesthetics, etc. She went on to maintain that this is a gap that needs to be plugged: There is no single entity that would put the entire development under a holistic review that would encompass all elements—streetscape often slips through or is only reviewed by Public Works for conformance, not for aesthetics or contextual based integration.

Mr. Kaczorowski stated Public Works reviews right of way plans for all development projects that come through City Planning and that he does not believe that anything slips through undetected. He went on to say that aesthetic review of these plans should occur in Planning.

Ms. Haskell stated that her main concern is that the Art Commission’s role is to check and raise the level of the overall aesthetic nature of a project and that if streetscape escapes the Art Commission review, then there is a gap in the process that could result in misaligned development.

Commission members debated the issue then asked that this be investigated as part of purview clarification.

Meeting Adjourned