

ART COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF December 9, 2009
BEGINNING AT 2:00 P.M.

PRESENT OF THE COMMISSION:

**Klavon, Cooper, Astorino, Haskell,
Serrao, Kaczorowski**

PRESENT OF THE STAFF:

Morton Brown

A. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Ms. Klavon asked for approval of minutes. The minutes for November 23, 2009 were not approved as there was not a sufficient number of Commission members present who attended the November hearing to ensure a quorum. **Action: Hold November minutes to be approved in January.**

B. Correspondence

Mr. Brown noted that the Allegheny Commons project submitted new construction documents, revised budgets, and new images for the project proposal at the hearing.

C. Items for Review

- a.** Allegheny Commons Northeast Common Restoration Project
 - o Alida Baker, Allegheny Commons Initiative, Project Director
 - o Nancy Lonnett-Roman, Pashek Associates

Ms. Klavon explained the project proposal process and asked the presenters to begin.

Mr. Brown explained that, with the additions of the new documents submitted, the Allegheny Commons representatives would like to present for Conceptual and Final Approval, rather than Conceptual Approval as noted in the application.

Alida Baker introduced herself as the staff person for the non-profit Allegheny Commons Initiative, which partners with the City of Pittsburgh on the restoration of the Allegheny Commons Park. Ms. Baker also introduced Ms. Lonnett-Roman as the landscape architect from Pashek Associates who is working on this particular project.

Ms. Baker noted that they will be presenting Phase II of the restoration of the Allegheny Commons, which is called the Northeast Common and Fountain Restoration Project. Ms. Baker also mentioned Phase I, called the East Common Pilot Project, and the Master Plan project and process from 2002.

Ms. Baker noted that the Initiative has evaluated all the elements from Phase I in the East Common for Phase II in the Northeast Common and that Ms. Lonnett-Roman will present the features and elements proposed for the Northeast Common.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman directed the Commission to elements outlined in red on the drawings provided as the Phase II elements. She mentioned that Phase II will run the length of the park from East Ohio Street along Cedar Avenue to North Avenue and the width of the park from Cedar to Federal along North Avenue, while the fountain is located in the park near the intersection of Cedar and North Avenues. Ms. Lonnett-Roman also pointed out the Phase I location and elements within the site map of the area.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman went on to say that the improvements for this phase will be similar to the pilot project, including rehabilitating the park to its historic character from the 1935 construction plan (shown in the Allegheny Commons Master Plan, which she distributed to Commission members). She mentioned specific improvements like walkways, a main bituminous path with bisecting paths, lighting indicative of the 1930s period, landscaping, signage, and the reconstruction of an existing fountain that was converted into an annual planting bed. She re-stated the goal to rehabilitate the park and the design elements to as closely as possible replicate the plan from 1935.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman noted that since there were no original construction documents from that time available, the Initiative referenced photographs, images, and the Allegheny Commons Master Plan created by Marion Pressley from 2002 as a guide for the redevelopment of the park.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that the first phase of implementation of the park restoration was the Pilot Project phase of the lower East Common, which had been thoroughly assessed to inform this next phase (Phase II). She mentioned that from this assessment, the Initiative gained a lot of knowledge that slightly modified the design approach.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated specific community coordination with the Farmer's Market and other groups to ensure that their needs were met. She noted that the first (lower) portion of the Northeast Common is heavily used by the Farmer's Market, the Pumpkin Fest, and other events, so the Initiative made sure to incorporate the needs of these events into the design plan.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that the fountain on the corner of Cedar and North Avenues will become the focal point of the park. She mentioned that the fountain had to be drawn from historic photographs and plan views to determine how large the fountain should be and which plants and paths should be included, since the original construction documents were not available.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman mentioned that Allegheny Commons Initiative had discussions with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy about the Mary Schenley Fountain restoration in Schenley Park/Plaza in order to gather information about how the Conservancy accomplished similar goals. She noted that Phil Gruszka of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy mentioned that there was stone used in the Riverview Park planting bed restoration that was likely from the original Allegheny Commons fountain.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that she and Ms. Baker visited Riverview Park and made measurements of the stone pieces in Riverview to determine an estimated diameter for the Allegheny Commons fountain as 40 to 50 feet. She mentioned that having access to the original stone allowed the Initiative to sketch the profile of the stone coping for the new fountain.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that they additionally had discussions with the Allegheny County Health Department and PWSA about the restoration of the fountain in order to be comfortable with logistics and public health associated with its use. She stated that the fountain would be a re-circulating system to reduce water waste and the amount of water jets replicates the jets of the 1935 era.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that other elements of the design include a light standard of the gaslight style light fixture replicates closely the original lights of the park. She directed the Commission to images of the light fixtures, drinking fountains, benches, railings, and images of the pilot project of Phase I signage that will also be used in the Phase II restoration.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that in addition to coordination with community groups, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and Public Works, they have had discussions with the City Forester about the trees to be removed and the new trees to be planted. She described this design as simple, yet aesthetic and functional.

Ms. Klavon asked the commission to voice their questions.

Mr. Serrao asked if the Farmer's Market would stay in its current location or would be moved.

Ms. Baker answered that the Market will remain in the general area, but heavy uses would be moved to Union Avenue.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman noted that the Initiative worked with this group to decide this change, and all agree to this slight change in the Farmer's Market.

Ms. Haskell asked where the stone for the fountain would come from.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the stone for the fountain would be new, but would replicate the old stone located in Riverview Park. She added that the original stone was damaged and not all available to be moved and used for the new fountain.

Mr. Cooper asked why the original fountain was removed.

Ms. Baker answered that the images of the fountain from the 1940s and 1950s showed it as weed-strewn. She concluded that the fountain was removed to rid the park of a “fifty-foot trash receptacle.”

Ms. Lonnett-Roman added that this fountain was one of many in the Allegheny Commons Park that had also been removed.

Mr. Astorino asked how many months the fountain would be in operation.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the fountain would be seasonal and drained for the winter.

Mr. Astorino asked if there was an existing plan for the fountain operation.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that by the Spring or Summer of 2010 the drawings should be finalized and the construction started.

Mr. Astorino asked what material would be used for the base of the fountain and what the fountain would look like when drained.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the fountain would most likely be a concrete basin with a water-proof finish to appear textured or toned-down from concrete, but the material had not yet been decided. She added that after consulting with Marion Pressley and information gleaned from the stone found in Riverview Park, the Initiative decided that the original fountain coping would have been stone, either sandstone or limestone. She mentioned that the fountain will have a standing pool of water when in operation, so the basin would not be visible during the operating months. She added that the Initiative is consulting with a fountain designer to help them decide what materials and finish would be best to use.

Mr. Astorino asked about the daily maintenance of the fountain and the plan for its up-keep.

Ms. Baker answered that Deputy Director Mike Gable of Public Works advised the Initiative to have a \$10,000 fund for an annual maintenance fund. She noted that the Initiative is relying on the expertise of Public Works to advise them on a maintenance plan.

Mr. Brown asked if there has been a maintenance agreement drafted with the City.

Ms. Baker nodded yes that they were working on a maintenance agreement with the City of Pittsburgh to maintain the fountain.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman added, to express the detail in their design, that the design of the fountain includes a dry re-circulating system in a remote buried vault housing the fountain equipment, including the control panel, the pump, the water treatment and filtration. She noted that this facility requires periodic maintenance such as removal of debris, inspection of the pump and filtration system, but requires considerably less maintenance than the alternative submersible system.

Ms. Klavon asked if the yellow walkways in the document were existing.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that they exist today, but are new. She added that these paths most closely replicate the 1935 park plan. She added that some paths in existence today were not a part of the 1935 plan—these will be removed and the entire pathway system will be placed back to the historic plan structure.

Ms. Klavon asked if some trees have been removed.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that yes, after a City survey, some trees were removed. She added that other removals were suggested for unhealthy trees after a walk-through evaluation. She mentioned that Friends of the Pittsburgh Urban Forest also did a walk-through analysis and provided recommendations of trees to remove, which were mostly those removed by the City.

Ms. Klavon asked if there will be new trees planted.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered yes, new trees will be planted. She directed the commission to drawings that showed the proposed trees. She noted that the goal of planting the proposed trees was to re-establish the tree-lined main path and tree-lined edge from the 1935 plan.

Ms. Klavon asked to hear more about the variety of trees to be planted and asked if the Initiative was filling the blanks between the existing trees.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that they will not create continuous rows of trees based on recommendations from the City Forester. She added that the creation of continuous rows of similar trees was the initial design plan and preference, however. She noted that the park already contains a variety of tree species in the park that probably existed in 1935 and that she attempted to repeat the nearby trees and do several of that kind in a row, however City Forestry requested that they change the design so as to not include a continuous monoculture.

Ms. Klavon noted that she disagrees with City Forestry's recommendation for non-continuous rows, especially since this park is a formal planting. She asked if it was possible to have continuous sections of the same kind of tree to compromise with City Forestry's suggestion.

Ms. Baker answered that in their original plan they had a third of the park in one species, another third of a different species.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman added that upon the review by City Forestry the original tree-planting plan was denied.

Ms. Klavon suggested that the Initiative have another conversation with City Forestry and possibly the Art Commission about the placement of trees.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman agreed that another conversation would be appropriate.

Mr. Astorino asked about City Forestry's rationale behind their recommendation.

Ms. Baker answered that City Forestry did not want to see a whole species of trees fail at one time, so diversifying the trees would help prevent a raft of trees with one disease.

Ms. Klavon noted that the current design of diversified trees will not replicate the look of the 1935 plan.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman mentioned that their original compromise attempt was to plant similar trees in sections, so they could re-visit this design and further discuss the matter.

Mr. Serrao added that the design should incorporate movement rather than sections of similar trees, so the main path zone could all be the same tree, the street side zone could all be the same, and so on.

Mr. Astorino mentioned that since there are existing trees of different species interspersed, one would never get a unified species planted formally without removing existing non-conforming species.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman stated that one plan would be to plant continuous like species and when and if one non-conforming species became diseased or failing in some way, it would be removed and replaced with a like species—in this way, over time, the formal planting plan would be realized.

Ms. Klavon asked if the bituminous path was always there.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the pilot project path was bituminous with a rolled-stone surface that helped with making it look aged, lined with a width of crushed limestone, as well as crushed limestone around the tree bases and the benches.

Ms. Klavon asked if this was an original 1935 feature.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that this feature was suggested to be original in the 2002 Master Plan.

Ms. Baker added that the path width and path edge were not original to the park, but it was widened to accommodate events that often happen in the park now without harming the lawn.

Ms. Klavon asked what the path material was in 1935.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman noted that the 1935 path was an exposed-aggregate bituminous path or a bituminous path that did not have the wear-in-course on it.

Ms. Klavon asked if they were thinking of a sustainable pervious product for the path or something similar to the pilot project.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the pilot project rolled-aggregate layer would not be done in the same way since it did not turn out as evenly dispersed as hoped.

Mr. Astorino asked if in the pilot project they had the stone dust-paving and added that he liked the crushed limestone edge because it kept the slenderness of the path while allowing accommodation of events.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered yes they had the stone dust-paving in the pilot project and that the widened edge would be a site for trampled grass, but the stone dust-paving is a solution to that.

Mr. Serrao asked if the pump was above grade because one of the drawings showed it above grade.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered no, the pump is stored in a vault below the ground and directed him to the image of the vault underground instead of the image of the electrical service that will be above ground.

Ms. Klavon asked if the original fountain basin was stone and if the proposed basin and coping will be concrete or stone.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that the Initiative is still deciding on the material for the basin and attempting to balance the cost with the look, however the coping will be stone.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman added that the fountain will have an impact on the intersection and paths will circle around the area with historic annual bedding plants.

Ms. Klavon stated that the details need to be worked out, but the restoration project is beautiful and a much needed improvement to the park. Ms. Klavon asked about the condition of the Norway Maples which seemed to be excluded in the new design.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered that many of the Norway Maples were in poor condition or were of an old age on the brink of decline, so were removed. She added an example of Norway Maples in decline after 10-15 years.

Ms. Klavon noted that a replacement program should be in place, but she did not agree with simply removing trees of old age unless they were diseased or failing in some way.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman mentioned that in the walk-through she removed any trees with cavities, poor shape, or V-trunks, but kept the largest shade trees in good condition.

Ms. Haskell asked if they were intending to begin construction this month, as the application implied.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman answered no, they would not begin construction this month.

Ms. Baker added that the project will commence this month (December), meaning they would begin the construction documents, but construction would not begin until the Spring of 2010.

Ms. Klavon noted that she believed that this project was at a conceptual stage, rather than final, with the idea that the discussion with City Forestry about the trees should take place before the Commission makes a final approval.

Ms. Baker stated that having an approval with conditions would be helpful in their discussion with City Forestry and to help with their application for Tree Vitalize trees as well. She added that the trees will not be finalized until the Fall, however they would like to start with the paths and lights as early in the year as possible.

Ms. Klavon noted that the Commission should see the project again after the materials for the paths and fountain were finalized.

Mr. Astorino asked who had the final say when it comes to the tree design, if City Forestry disagrees with the Art Commission.

Ms. Klavon stated that the Commission has a good relationship with City Forestry and that this issue should not come down to a purview conflict—hopefully the applicant can discuss with City Forestry and come up with a viable compromise. Ms. Klavon asked if this project had been approved by the Historic Review Commission.

Mr. Brown noted that the project has final approval from the Historic Review Commission at this point.

Ms. Klavon noted that the project would have to come back for final approval anyway as it still needs to produce final construction documents and typically those are brought back to the Art Commission for final approval.

Ms. Lonnett-Roman asked what the timing of the next meeting would be.

Ms. Klavon answered that whenever they project has construction documents they can present them to the Commission.

Mr. Brown answered that the Commission meets monthly, every fourth Wednesday.

Mr. Astorino added that there is both final approval and final acceptance within the Art Commission process. He added that the process works in this way so that the Commission can see what the group intends to construct and later verify that the project adhered to the plans and was built as proposed.

Ms. Klavon asked if the audience would like to speak on behalf of or opposed to the project.

Mr. Serrao moved to accept the Allegheny Commons Northeast Common Restoration Project for Conceptual Approval. As the project returns for final approval, the following items will need to be provided: Defined materials for fountain, path paving as well as a final tree planting plan as an outcome of a discussion with the City Forester outlining the suggestions provided by the Art Commission.

MOTION: To grant Conceptual Approval of the proposal as submitted.

MOVED: Serrao

SECONDED: Astorino

IN FAVOR: All

OPPOSED: None

CARRIED

Meeting Adjourned