

## ART COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting Wednesday, September 24, 2014  
Beginning at 2:00 p.m.

**PRESENT OF THE COMMISSION:** Indovina, Lockett, Slavick

**PRESENT OF THE STAFF:** Morton Brown  
Ben Carlise  
Ray Gastil

### AGENDA ITEMS COVERED IN THESE MINUTES

ITEM	PAGE
1. <b>National Aviary Condor Court</b>	<b>1</b>

#### **A. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

June, July, and August minutes were up for approval. Slavick moved for the June minutes to be approved. Lockett seconded. The June minutes were approved. Slavick moved for the July minutes to be approved. Lockett seconded. The July minutes were approved. Slavick moved for the August minutes to be approved. Lockett seconded. The August minutes were approved.

#### **B. Correspondence**

Mr. Brown presented a letter from the Northside Leadership Conference in support of the National Aviary project. A letter from the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy on behalf of the Allegheny Conference was presented in support of the same project. The Parks Conservancy has been acting on the Allegheny Conference's behalf in the Northside parks. Mr. Brown also presented a letter from City of Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works which acts as support for the Aviary project, but also asked the Art Commission to consider several proposed design modifications.

#### **C. Items for Review**

##### **1. *National Aviary Condor Court (Conceptual and Final)*** *Cheryl Tracy, CEO, National Aviary and Joe Argabrite,*

Joe Argabrite, designer and constructor of the National Aviary Condor Court project, presented the drawings and diagrams for the Aviary. The backstory of the project grows out of the Andean Condor, which is an endangered species. The architecture and design moves are there to tell that story. There are two aviaries placed end to end, which will hold two pairs of condors. The other important element is the Conservation Station, acting as an observation tower, which will include explanatory material on the exhibit and a direct view of the aviaries. The plantings that is currently in place will be reused, as the plantings are young and in good condition. More greenery replicating plant life in Ecuador will also be planted.

The Conservation Station has been lowered, from what the renderings indicate, and the ramp to the the Station has been cut in half, from 24 feet to 12 feet.

The architecture is meant to be in concert with the current Aviary structure, but the landlocked nature of the site provides some limitations. The existing 8 foot perimeter fence will remain in place and a 3 foot piece will remain to provide a secondary barrier.

Slavick asked if the two pairs of condors have any crossover and if the new height of the enclosure will allow for flight. Argabrite confirmed that the condors do not actually like each other, so they will remain in separate environments. Kurt Hungen, director of animal collections at the Aviary, confirmed that the birds would be able to fly from good perches on the ground, however, they will not be able to swoop. This is due to the small footprint of the enclosure. There is no room to expand and just a matter of space.

Luckett asked for clarification of architectural design elements, as there are three distinct designs present. Argabrite confirmed that the designs work within the confines of the existing structure and the Conservation Station, will a major presence, is not meant to overwhelm the existing space. There was a push to not construct a typical aviary environment of telephone poles with mesh covering.

Luckett asked for explanation regarding the role of the Andes' culture in the architectural design—stating that the design of the structures did not represent Andean culture. Argabrite explained that the Conservation Station is based around a fire tower, but elsewhere the Andes are referenced through the stone and wooden constructions – simple and ephemeral elements. The buildings will not be overly stylized, but have the feeling of being windbeat and worn. The lush and soft Andean environment will be present. The director of conservation for the Aviary spends time in Ecuador and reports back on the experience. This experience is used to create a better environment for the birds.

Slavick noticed that three different styles of fencing were used in the design. Argabrite confirmed that this problem had been presented by the Department of Public Works. The rendering does not properly portray the design elements. The current fencing will be resued, so only two styles of fencing will be present. Part of the fencing is part of the public park, part of the fencing is the exhibits.

Indovina inquired why the Observation Station sits off of the ground. Argabrite explained that is part of the plan to transport the visitor, to give a richer experience. The Aviary is trying to tell a story, but also aware of their place in a public park. So the experience is being created modestly.

Cas Pellgrini, Department of Public Works, asked to present comments. Pelligrini finds that the design relies too heavily on telling a story and misses the mark on providing an adequate area for the condors to stretch out and fly.

Cheryl Tracy, Director of the National Aviary, asked to present. Tracy explained that the National Aviary is the only zoo in the nation that has a pair of breeding condors. The Aviary is an accredited zoo by the American Zoological Association (AZA) and meets AZA's highest standards. The new enclosure still exceeds the requirements of the AZA, and the need new space was designed a better experience for the condors.

Luckett asked the Aviary to spend more time thinking about the design, inquiring if the Aviary had thought about the “what ifs” of a bigger enclosure for the condors.

Tracy did not want there to be a misconception that the birds will not be getting a bad environment. Given the restrictions, she believes that the design accomplishes being a better space for the condors. The Aviary wants to bring the message of conservation to the public. The Aviary has always struggled with bringing the awareness of the conservation efforts to the public. This will be an important component of the project, and the current design plans allow for this action. Tracy confirmed that the birds are the number one concern of the Aviary. Without zoos participating in breeding programs, there might not be any condors in the wild. This exhibit would provide the space for that to happen.

Slavick asked for clarification of the distance between the public and the birds, in regards to the fencing barrier. Hungen responded that the distance between the public and the birds will remain the same, four feet, which is the AZA standard between animals and public.

The group discussed at length the natural flight patterns of the birds and the restrictions imposed on the birds through the design. The AZA standards were presented by the Aviary, as the enclosure more than meets the guidelines.

Given the questions posed at the meeting, the Commission agreed that they cannot in good faith approve the project as final and would like to recommend some changes as the Aviary moves forward with planning.

Indovina offered the suggestion of granting conceptual approval for the project, and if the Aviary comes back in a month after further thought. This act would make the commission more comfortable for future approval.

The Aviary requested a specific outline of what the Commission would like accomplished. The Aviary also relayed that the project is time sensitive and that the most pressing item is the holding building. The Aviary has already experienced resistance from the public on space restrictions and design.

Slavick moved to approve the holding building portion of the Andean Condor exhibit of the National Aviary for final approval. Luckett seconded, and the Commission moved to final approval of the holding building. The Commission decided to approve only this portion of the project, as it will remain constant as the Aviary further develops the remainder of the project.

The Aviary can secure permits from Zoning and Building and begin implementation of the Holding Building portion of the project only.

Conceptual approval was moved with the following design recommendations for the Aviary to explore:

- 1) Investigate ways to make the overall new exhibit recede—with emphasis on the observation building—into the Aviary building, visually through material and finishes
- 2) Attempt to soften the Aviary (“bird cage”) by matching its finish/color more closely to the extant main building of the Aviary proper, located directly behind the new structure.

- 3) Investigate increasing the height of the “bird cage” (but not a mandate to complete, given your restrictions)
- 4) Complete and submit a landscaping plan (cite species, placement, etc)
- 5) Provide material information for all pieces (can provide actual samples, cutsheets, photo examples, etc) that denotes color, texture, finish, etc.

**MOTION:**      **Final Approval (Holding Building); Conceptual Approval**  
 MOVED BY      Slavick      **SECONDED BY**      Lockett  
 IN FAVOR      All  
 OPPOSED      None

**CARRIED**

**D.      Director and Staff Reports**

Brown presented the Shadyside Bike Corral, which had been through Art Commission in January 2013. The City of Pittsburgh took ownership of the project; it will no longer be the Shadyside Action Coalition, who originated the project at that time. The only reason the project was held at that time, however, was upon the basis of Public Works’ disapproval of the candlestick bollards. Brown stated that since that time, the project has been taken over by Public Works at the request of the Mayor, the bollards have been replaced by breakaway candlesticks, and that if approved, this would be regarded as a new City standard for bike corrals. Brown stated that he was in favor of its approval, and asked the Commission their opinion, and also whether they would require this to be formally presented in hearing once again, even though it had already passed one hearing with no opposition from the public. The Commission agreed that the discussion at the meeting would be final approval for the Corral. The Corral may serve as the standard for City of Pittsburgh bike corrals.

**Meeting Adjourned**