April 28, 2021 at 2:00 P.M., Meeting called to order by President Moss

In Attendance
Moss
Goulatia (arrived during Director & Staff Report)
Leach
Parsakian
Quintanilla
Young
Hornstein (DPW)
Lucas (DOMI)

Staff Present
Minnaert
Cavalline

Agenda Items Covered in These Minutes

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A. Approval of Minutes

Roll call. Moss asks Commissioners to review and comment on minutes from March 2021. Parsakian motions to approve the minutes, seconded by Leach. All ayes. Motion carries.

B. Items for Review

1. DPW 4th Division Facility & Campus – Department of Public Works Conceptual Review

Calli Baker, Senior Project Manager, DPW, goes over the project, which is a proposed pedestrian walkway around a new maintenance facility to serve DPW’s 4th Division. She is joined by Dana Klann of Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. The project will include a Percent For Art component, which is proposed to be on or around the pedestrian walkway.

Leach notes that she lives across the street from this project. She asks if people will still be able to use the street which runs through the project area. Baker says no, that Matthews Avenue will not be accessible through the campus and they are working with DOMI to look into alternate traffic routes.

Leach says the current conditions are dangerous. She says that there are a lot of deer around nearby McKinley Park and asks if this will disrupt their pattern or was based on their path. Baker says no, that this layout was based on available space. Leach asks if the path will be flat or will follow the shape of the land. Baker says it will be flat or a very low slope to be as accessible as possible.
Leach asks what the community process was, as she did not know about the project. She asks if they sent out mailers. Baker says the City Council office spearheaded the meetings, but she is not sure if they sent out mailers. She says that is a good idea for the future.

Moss says he appreciates DPW bringing this project to Art Commission in its early stages. He indicates the route of the pedestrian path and asks if it could be changed so as not to create a blind spot for someone walking around the building. Baker says the path is not completely set yet. She says there is currently a large retaining wall at that corner, and they want to make the path a softer curve for visibility and safety. She notes there will also be lighting along the path.

Moss asks if the Art Commission will be reviewing the final design of the maintenance building. Baker says that she believes so and that they can show the Commission the building materials and choices, which the design team is trying to keep as minimal as possible in order to blend into the surroundings.

Quintanilla says that it seems that the location of the pathway moves the pedestrians off to the side. He says that it looks like an area that could end up being dangerous. He says that the placement looks like a reaction to what is there as opposed to thinking of the pedestrian and their connectivity.

Moss says that maybe the maintenance building can be designed so that it does not enclose the walkway so completely. He says that the lighting can also improve this situation.

Quintanilla suggests that it might be better to direct pedestrians north to Bausman Street.

Leach asks how tall the building will be. Baker says it will be partially one story, partially two. Leach asks if it would be possible to have the path go across the north of the building. Baker says this is where the DPW vehicles will be, and they want to keep pedestrians away from there for safety. Quintanilla says he appreciates this, but where the pedestrians are being routed is not ideal. Baker says they are limited to an extent due to the slope changes, as the project zone is basically in a valley. Quintanilla asks if they have thought of having the path lead the pedestrian north to Bausman Street. Baker says that this area is very steep and would not be able to be an accessible pathway. Quintanilla says that if it is accessible but unsafe, then no one will use it. Leach says that a lot of people who live nearby use Matthews Street to pass through this area.

Parsakian asks what the proposed width of the pathway would be. Klann says it is under development but will be 5-6 feet. Parsakian says he worries about the safety issue. He asks if the area behind the building would become a tunnel for the pedestrian path. Baker says that is what they would like to avoid. She says the slope changes quickly so they have to put up a retaining wall to make sure the width is large enough to be safe. She says they want to be sure to avoid an area that could be a place for criminal activity. Parsakian says it is an issue to put this area behind a building. He asks if they can put the building further north. Moss suggests moving it further east. Baker says that there are many utility lines running through this area and they need to avoid moving underground water lines. Klann says there are also gas and water lines under Matthews Avenue.

Parsakian asks about the elevation of the back of the building, and whether there are windows. Baker says there are windows and shows an elevation of the building in the presentation. She says that visibility is key, so it will not be a big blank wall facing the hillside. Parsakian asks if a protective tunnel could be part of the walkway. Moss says this sounds like it would be less safe. Baker says she would be concerned about hidden activities.

Leach asks if the building has to be square, or could the corners be rounded. Baker says they would lose interior space and this would decrease the functionality of the building. Parsakian asks if the building could be oriented differently. Baker says that due to the utility lines they are very limited as to where they could put the building on the site. Klann says they were originally looking at placing the building on the north side of the site, but that brought up issues related to disturbing the existing hillside. Leach asks if they could add additional space to the west side of the building. Klann says there may be a little space but there is existing topography to deal with. He says they may be able to change the path to remove the 90 degree angles. He points out in the renderings where the slope begins to get very steep.
Moss says that their objective is not to come up with a solution for the applicant but to give feedback, and hopefully the Commissioners’ concerns will be considered as the planning goes through further design decisions. He says that as far as the artwork is concerned, he is not sure they can direct them to a specific approach to it, but that artwork as part of this pedestrian experience seems appropriate. He says reaching out to the community regarding the artwork is also a good idea.

Parsakian says he could see sculptural lighting for the art component, such as was done on the Highland Avenue bridge. He says the ground could also be an opportunity.

Young says that as they had previously discussed, if they moved the path back from the rear of the building it could make an interesting pedestrian path. She says that as far as the artwork goes, the ground and the lighting would be options, as well as on the back wall of the building. She says that to promote safety and a warm feeling as opposed to the cold grey wall, something as simple as color blocking could make a difference to how the space is perceived. Moss says this could also discourage graffiti. Young says that utilizing color blocking or a gradient would take the opposite approach to not wanting it to be seen, since this will be an area of pedestrian traffic.

Hornstein confirms that the site has perimeter fencing on it. Hornstein says as the walkway is up against this, there could be an opportunity for art on the fencing. Klann says that the fencing could be designed to make the space more inviting. Baker says they would also not want anything that would hinder the visibility of seeing through the fencing. Hornstein notes that the lighting will be critical for public safety and that he loves the idea of adding color or texture to the back of this building as it would be kind of a hidden treasure. Moss says that when they come back for Final Review they can present the entire building design.

Parsakian asks if the pathway will be lit by the interior lighting from the windows when the building is in use. Baker says yes, and that the lighting can also be put on timers.

Leach asks if there will be a lot of dust or dirt along the walkway if they have an open fence. Baker says all of the dust or dirt from trucks would be kept to inside the building or on the north side. She says there will be a mezzanine level above the walkway with offices and that the lower level will include a vehicle washing area inside so that dirt brought on site is dealt with. Leach asks if it will function as a dumping site as it used to. Baker says that it will not be like it used to be and they are trying to minimize the dumping.

Quintanilla asks if the walkway could be elevated so it is not between the wall and the building. Klann says unfortunately this would not be feasible due to the existing topography. They want to utilize the existing flat areas within the site and not disturb the integrity of the hillside. He says that if there was elevation of the walkway, the access points to the site would have to have a lot of elaborate ramps. Quintanilla says that color on the building and lighting will fade and stop working over time, and this area will become a place where crime happens.

Leach asks if the elevation of the pathway could be attached to the building. Klann says he doesn’t know how it would be possible to attach it to the building or to create that level of increased and decreased elevation. He says you would have to carve it into the hillside like a hiking trail, which would be a more dangerous situation.

Baker asks if it would be helpful to have renderings and snapshots of that area for their next Art Commission review. Parsakian says it would be very helpful to have elevations.

Parsakian asks if the artist will be required to work with the community. Baker says that the artist could work with the community after they are selected, or there could be community engagement before the RFP for the artist is put out.

Young asks what neighborhoods were contacted for the community engagement so far. Baker says that she can’t speak to this as it was through the Council office. Young says that all of the surrounding neighborhoods use McKinley Park, so they should all be considered when doing community engagement. Leach asks how they can ensure that the RFP is equitable and diverse, as many times the same people apply to RFPs over and over. She asks if there is a way to limit it to artists in the hilltop communities.
Baker says this is something DPW will have to work with the Public Art Division on. Young suggests she work with Neighborhood Allies, which has a lot of artist connections. Leach says that RE360 converted the Duquesne Light truck building into artist studios and there are lots of artists located in that building.

Klann says the colors and materials in the renderings are still preliminary.

**MOTION: Conceptual Approval, with consideration given to the input of the Commission in future planning of the project.**

MOVED BY: Parsakian  
SECONDED BY: Leach  
IN FAVOR: All  
OPPOSED: None

C. **Correspondence**

Minnaert says that the Commissioners have been forwarded a letter requesting a loan of the Stephen Foster statue. She says that this letter has been forwarded to City Administration to determine whether there is an action to put in front of the Commission, which would come back at a later meeting.

D. **Public Comment**

None.

E. **Director & Staff Report**

Minnaert says that they are in the final stages of their call for artists for the Art in Parks project, for which they had a record 74 applicants. They also had a second RFP out for an Art in Parks project coordinator to work on documentation of the process. She says they convened a panel of seven individuals of diverse background and experience to review the applications. Once they finalize the artists they will move on to reviewing the applications for the coordinator, and they hope to include some of the artists in the coordinator selection.

Minnaert discusses the City of Pittsburgh collection assessment that they began last year. She says that they worked with a group of volunteers in the first phase of this project, and that this process has identified the need for both a knowledgeable and diverse advisory committee and a dedicated researcher. She says they are currently working on a plan for the second phase of this assessment.

Minnaert also gives an update on the Cantini Mosaic reconceptualization project. She gives a brief overview of the history of this project and says that the City is now working with E Holdings and key stakeholders on the reconceptualization to identify a location for the panels to be installed. She says they have a few more months of work on this phase of the project, and it will be coming to Art Commission at a later time with their findings and possible new locations.

Leach asks about the collection assessment and where that information will be able to be found. Minnaert says the entire inventory is on the website, and they will be keeping this information accessible to the public as well as being in PACD records. Moss confirms that this is accessible through the City website. Minnaert says yes, through the Department of City Planning portion of the pittsburghpa.gov website.

F. **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 2:58 P.M.