City of Pittsburgh

Art Commission

November 17, 2021 at 2:00 P.M., Meeting called to order by President Moss

In Attendance
Moss
Goulatia
Leach
Loftness
Parsakian
Quintanilla
Hornstein (DPW)
Lucas (DOMI)

Staff Present
Dash
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 October 2021. Goulatia motions to approve the minutes, seconded by Parsakian. All ayes, Loftness abstaining. Motion carries.

B. Items for Review

1. **Arsenal Park Phase 1 – Department of Public Works Conceptual Review**

   The presentation is given by Andrea Ketzel of DPW, Eric Brightman of Pashek MTR, and Howard Graves of Graves Design Group. The project is for the renovation of a portion of Arsenal Park including accessible entrances, play area, water play area, shelter, restroom, and stormwater/nature play elements.

   Goulatia asks what the purpose is of using a stone veneer instead of actual stone. Graves says it is cost driven. Moss asks if the stone veneer would be manufactured, not natural stone, and Graves says that is correct. Goulatia confirms that the stone veneer would be fabricated. Graves says yes.
Goulatia asks about the teepee-like structure. Brightman says there are climbing nets within it and it provides access to the slide. Goulatia asks what the diameter is. Brightman says about ten feet at the bottom.

Loftness asks if the chain link fences are all coming down. Ketzel says they are only keeping the fence along the back of the school property. Loftness says it looks like the pathways through the park are currently sand or crushed stone and asks if they are shifting them to pavement. Brightman says the existing paths are concrete or asphalt except for the play surfaces, and the pathways they are proposing are also asphalt. He says they have looked at porous pavement but cost and maintenance needs are high.

Loftness asks about the purpose of the wide spur on the 40th Street side. Brightman says it is used by the school. Loftness clarifies she is talking about the wide driveway. Ketzel says it is used by the community for events such as the Farmer’s Market.

Loftness says the lighting doesn’t look like it would meet night sky standards. Ketzel says the lighting will be modified to meet the City’s dark sky ordinance.

Loftness asks how the space under the solid roof will be used. Graves says that there will be tables and it can be used as a classroom. He says there will be a wall that can be used for a chalkboard or whiteboard. Ketzel says the community would like to be able to use it for events.

Moss asks about the path that connects to the school and if it will remain a part of the plan. Ketzel says they are waiting for guidance from Pittsburgh Public Schools and hope to implement in a future phase.

Moss asks if the current plan includes restoration work of the historic stone walls. Ketzel says yes. Brightman points out what area will be restored. Ketzel says Lawrenceville Historic Society has been involved in the planning.

Parsakian asks if the bathrooms will be gender neutral. Graves says yes. Moss notes there is only one bathroom. Graves confirms this. Parsakian asks if it will be gender neutral. Graves says yes.

Parsakian asks why an artist wasn’t included in the design process. Ketzel says they had anticipated more archaeological findings in the first phase and held off planning the art component until that study was complete. She says they did not find much in this phase of the project and so are planning to include that kind of historic interpretation in later phases.

Loftness says that they should celebrate stonework as an artistic activity and involve stone masons, and it would be great if the building was real stone instead of manufactured stone. moss says that the proportions of the trellis seem awkward, with the stone piers and bases not in harmony with the beams. He says that the height seems easy to climb on. Graves says that they would be climbable at probably any height. Loftness asks why not eliminate some stone piers and make it a wall. Graves says the design has evolved to be a more active space for students and it is challenging to do public work like this because the area will often be unmonitored. He says his team will evaluate these comments.

Leach asks if the area is clear of cannonballs. Ketzel says yes, they had a bomb squad accompanying the archaeological unit. Leach asks where performances happen in the park. Ketzel says this renovation is in the lower third of the park and the areas appropriate for performances are in the other areas of the park.

Leach asks if the colors of the playground will be what was presented. Ketzel says the colors shown were what was presented to the community, as they wanted natural materials that had a more industrial look. Leach says that the City standard benches are ugly in contrast to the proposed renovations. Ketzel mentions a custom bench swing that will be implemented and will be shown at the final review.

Moss summarizes the Commission’s primary points of discussion as: the type of pavement and stormwater, the lighting relative to night sky standards, the use of masonry and preference to real stone, and the pavilion design.
MOTION: Conceptual Approval

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

2. Saw Mill Run Salt Storage Facility – Department of Public Works
   Conceptual Review

The presentation is given by Felipe Palomo of DPW, Dana Klann of Civil & Environmental Consultants, and Ed Karl of Architectural Innovations. The project is for the demolition of the existing salt storage facility and adjacent building and construction of a new salt storage facility, along with landscaping and stormwater management features.

Loftness asks if there was an external review of the water management. Klann says they have more proposed green space than the existing facility, and they are also proposing two bio-retention facilities as well as salt-tolerant plants. He says they have also met twice with the City’s environmental planners. Loftness says it seems there should be more of a landscape buffer to deal with runoff for a salt storage facility.

Loftness says that Saw Mill Run Blvd should be more bucolic. She asks if they considered a translucent structure to look less heavy. Klann says that this is meant to be a 100-year structure as well as there being budget concerns. He says the massing is meant to minimize the bulk of the building as much as possible.

Quintanilla says that because of the size of the building they might want to make the building blend in to the surroundings as much as possible with more subtle or dark coloring. He asks if there has been thought for a cupola on the roof for ventilation. Klann says they have talked about dormers. He says they are open to exploring colors and darker colors may be better. Quintanilla asks if they can extend the roof a foot in each direction to give a shadow presence. Klann says the eaves and gutters are already extended but they can look into it. Quintanilla says that there should be some element to accentuate the large openings.

Leach asks if the building can be softened by putting greenery in front of it. She says she is concerned that they have divided the parking space up because the traffic on the street is very dangerous. Klann says they may be able to give more room for vehicles to maneuver. He says they are limited in the space between the building and road because of the right-of-way. Moss asks if the building can be narrower to add space between the building and the roadway. Klann says that this design gave the most functionality for the required storage and the inclusion of a comfort station as well as having green space and stormwater management. Palomo says they are open to suggestions on beautifying the area but this was the best footprint out of the many options they looked at.

Quintanilla asks if they thought of rotating the building to be parallel to the stream. Palomo says there isn’t much they can move. Klann says they looked at that option but the environmental planner had concerns of there being more salt runoff.

Moss mentions the side of the building as a space for art. Palomo says it is possible but they think it may be better at the entrance to the Seldom Seen Greenway. Moss says the building facing the roadway has high visibility.

Parsakian says that the wall facing Saw Mill Run Blvd could have glass panels to be lighter and add dimension. He says the design is uninspired.

Loftness says she is surprised that a utilitarian structure like this is expected to have a 100-year life. She says that shifting the building would lessen the amount of open façade that drivers would see. Palomo says that option was explored but it would situate the building into the floodway. Klann says there
is also an existing PennDOT sign that would be in the way. He says the doors face to the east because
the winds are predominantly from the west. Klann notes that there are a lot of factors that restrain what
they are able to do, and making the building smaller reduces storage and the capability of trucks to load
and queue. This design will also minimize the amount of salt that gets onto the roadway.

Leach asks if the building has to be in this location. Palomo says there aren't any other locations.
Leach says there are a lot of abandoned buildings on Saw Mill Run Blvd. Hornstein says that DPW
looked extensively at other possible sites and there is nothing in the geographic area that the City could
reasonably develop, so this is the City's only option. Leach asks if that is because of the size of the
building. Hornstein says the size as well as the geographic location based on what areas of the City the
operations support. Leach says that there are a lot of buildings near the Red White & Blue.

Quintanilla says the visual impact should be as muted as possible instead of trying to make it more
impactful and increasing the cost.

Goulatia asks if they can use the Percent For Art for landscaping. Moss says that it is a slippery slope
to discuss using the Percent For Art in that way. Goulatia says that a mural would not be able to be
enjoyed with the speed that the traffic is going.

**MOTION: Conceptual Approval**

MOVED BY: Quintanilla

**MOTION: Table**

MOVED BY: Goulatia
SECONDED BY: Loftness
IN FAVOR: Moss, Leach, Parsakian
OPPOSED: Quintanilla

3. **Art in Parks: Suphítsara Buttra-Coleman in Schenley Park – Department of City Planning**

   **Conceptual Review**

   Buttra-Coleman discusses the initial planning and development of a public art project in Schenley
   Park through the City's Art in Parks program.

   Loftness says the design is lovely and compelling and the bathroom wall would be the best location.
   She says she personally prefers the first sketch.

   Parsakian asks about community engagement and if that is part of her process. Buttra-Coleman says
   this is a new process for her. Parsakian asks if community engagement is a requirement for the artists.
   Minnaert says that the artists have three standard starting modes of community engagement, which are:
   a public meeting, a development activities meeting with the local RCO, and a page on the Engage PGH
   website. She notes that not all artists have received extensive feedback through these channels.

   Parsakian says he likes the bathroom location. Goulatia asks if Buttra-Coleman can engage with
   people directly at the park. She says that some of Buttra-Coleman's earlier images were more compelling
   and suggests she think of ideas for this project from her authentic artistic viewpoint.

   Quintanilla says the bathroom location is interesting. He asks if the birds are local species. Buttra-
   Coleman says yes. Quintanilla says it would be a good addition to the bathroom wall. Goulatia asks about
   the application of the materials. Buttra-Coleman says that the design will be cut out in smaller pieces that
   will be painted in her studio and applied to the wall. Loftness says it seems like she needs to test the
   materials to be sure they can withstand being installed outdoors.

   Moss asks if the works shown used the same installation process. Buttra-Coleman says the example
   images used wood, but she is discussing using aluminum and acrylic materials with the signage company
to be more permanent. Moss says doing a small mock-up would be beneficial.
Leach says she agrees with the location of the bathroom wall. She asks how big the piece is intended to be and why the subject is birds. Buttra-Coleman speaks of the birds as integral to the park and connecting the City to nature, as well as supporting conversations about the extinction of species. She says the minimum size would be 4’ by 8’ and says the bathroom wall is 14.5’ by 8’.

Goulatia asks if the sketches are initial ideas or the proposed design. Buttra-Coleman says they are initial designs for feedback. Goulatia agrees with the preference for the first sketch where the subject’s edges create the borders of the piece. She asks if it is a concern that balls from the sports field might hit this wall. Buttra-Coleman says the work is not very thick so people shouldn’t bump it and she will explore the materials with the company in regards to it denting from any impacts.

Leach asks if there is light at this location. Buttra-Coleman says she doesn’t think so.

Moss asks if it could be added to the eaves of the building. Loftness suggests that this may be used to create a teachable moment about birds and extinction, and that community discussions may be able to help craft that narrative. Moss says she might not have to limit herself to one surface of the wall but could occupy portions of other wall panels. Parsakian encourages Buttra-Coleman to visit the National Aviary for engagement.

Goulatia asks if the bike racks will have to stay in front of the wall. Minnaert says that has not been part of the discussion yet. Goulatia says her concern would be the bikes hitting the artwork. She says if the bike racks stay they might be able to be painted along with the artwork.

Lucas says that bike racks in parks are under DPW purview but those ones can probably be moved, although having them under the overhang of the building is probably best. She says she likes the idea of incorporating them into the art.

Leach mentions the condition of the wood on the building and asks who is in charge of that. Hornstein says DPW is, and they would coordinate on maintenance of that if it was desired.

Quintanilla asks if the artwork can be hung high on the wall to avoid being hit with bikes. Buttra-Coleman says yes, but the wall is only 8’ high. Quintanilla suggests the artwork wrap onto another section of the wall.

**MOTION: Conceptual Approval**

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

4. **Art in Parks: Ginger Brooks Takahashi in Schenley Park – Department of City Planning Conceptual Review**

Takahashi discusses the initial planning and development of a public art project in Schenley Park through the City’s Art in Parks program.

Parsakian compliments the project and says that the location is important so that the public can stumble across it, and it seems the Westinghouse site might be more accessible. Loftness agrees and says that doing this without electricity would require either a hand pump or using the slope of the topography. She says that the form of the piece needs to reflect the intentions of how it is meant to be interacted with. Takahashi says that she is in the early planning stages but envisions the seating to be integrated with the basin.

Leach asks if the water quality will be a concern. Takahashi says that she met with DPW and discussed the testing of the water and that there would need to be signage incorporated into the design.
Leach says it will be interesting if this beautiful piece uses water that isn’t safe to drink. Takahashi says she is interested in the signage exploring the background of that.

Goulatia compliments the project and says she is drawn to the Bartlett location. She asks if there are other locations that might work. Takahashi says these are the two sites that make sense with the topography and she hasn’t found other locations with springs yet. Goulatia notes that neither site is an entrance point (to correspond to hand-washing as an element of Japanese garden design). Takahashi says that she thinks the Bartlett site functions as an entrance to the woods.

Leach asks if its important that the spring is constant. Takahashi says no, and that she is interested in the possible variation of water flow. Quintanilla compares the project to a park in London with a Japanese Garden. He asks if the Bartlett site is near the playground. Takahashi says no. Quintanilla says that the contemplative atmosphere created by the piece would be very beautiful and there is an opportunity to create a ceremonial moment. Leach compares the project to Benjamin Franklin’s bathtub in Berkeley Springs.

Moss says the stone slab and how it is crafted is important, as well as how it touches the ground.

**MOTION: Conceptual Approval**

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

5. **Art in Parks: Hutabut LLC in Frick Park – Department of City Planning**  
   Conceptual Review

Matthew Geller of Hutabut LLC discusses the initial planning and development of a public art project in Frick Park through the City’s Art in Parks program.

Moss asks what the overall dimensions are. Geller says about 12 feet tall, with the canopy about 10 feet off the ground, and the canopy diameter is about 9 feet. The Commissioners asks about the rotation and how the seats pivot, and Geller explains. Loftness asks if the canopy is the same size as the seats, and Geller says it is the same.

Loftness says she likes how interactive his projects are, and says this one feels less dynamic, and the top shape feels less expressive. She says that it could be made more kinetic and more visually detailed. Geller says the canopy shape plays off of a merry-go-round. Parsakian says there is probably more history of Ferris wheels in Pittsburgh than merry-go-rounds, and asks how merry-go-rounds relate to Pittsburgh and this park. Geller says the backstory is less important to his work than how people interact with it and each other, and discusses the urban planning concept of triangulation. Parsakian asks if Geller sees it as a conversational experience. Geller says yes, it is about encouraging engagement in public spaces.

Quintanilla says he thinks this can be a fun and attractive piece, but it might be improved by more movement. He also suggests some lighting that could make it visible at night, possibly powered by solar panels. Geller says this is possible but the panels may need to be very large. Quintanilla says colored lights could be fun and add to the carousel concept. Geller mentions that there could be maintenance concerns. Parsakian says the parks are dawn to dusk, so the experience of the lighting may be lost.

Leach asks about the accessibility of the piece. Geller says that the proposed sites are near the path, and they could use a compact gravel surface around it that is accessible. Leach asks how someone in a wheelchair would access the piece. Geller says there would be enough room to pull a wheelchair up to the piece which would qualify as accessible.

Goulatiia says she was hoping for something with the playfulness of some of his previous pieces. She says this piece is less inviting. Geller says with this piece being in a natural environment he wanted it to
be more subtle. Goulatia says it is not about the colors, but that this piece seems less dynamic overall. Geller says he understands and says there are also budget concerns.

Moss says site B seems the most attractive and with easier access. Geller agrees.

Loftness says that the proposal seems minimalist and does not seem to speak to Frick Park or Pittsburgh. She says they love his previous work but this piece in this location does not yet seem completely resolved. She asks if there is possibly an iteration that is more site-specific and more kinetic.

**MOTION: Table**

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

6. **Art in Parks: OOA Designs in Emerald View Park – Department of City Planning Conceptual Review**

Alison Zapata and Ooren Cohen of OOA Designs discuss the initial planning and development of a public art project in Emerald View Park through the City's Art in Parks program. Moss asks them to move through the presentation quickly as previous reviews ran long.

Loftness says they have gone very in-depth with their intended materials and messaging. She says that she has trouble with the location being a vista, as she thinks the art is more intellectual and would be distracting from the vista. She says that the heart could reference the medical community. She says that it is intellectually rich but aesthetically jarring. Cohen says that the organic and raw style is a commemoration of the steel industry, and the actual piece would be more open andairy than the model is.

Leach says she understands the brutalist aspect of it as a reference to brutal industries. She says it is important to have it lit to show the various aspects of it.

Goulatia asks about their use of steel pipes and asks if freezing water could cause them to burst. She also asks if there are safety concerns to using rebar or glass with an unrefined edge. She says she loves the idea behind it but the image of the heart is too obvious in some ways. She says the heart seems like it could be sponsored by a hospital. Zapata says that the glass pieces are meant to be outside in all weather conditions and edges will be rounded, not sharp. She says they both have kids and are very concerned with safety. She says that any time they have an opening in metal there are minimum diameters that they maintain in order to be safe for kids. She says that they would create ways for water to filter through in order not to freeze and clog up the pipes.

Leach asks if they could combine the brutalist with a more delicate style. Zapata says its possible and that it is a combination of telling Pittsburgh’s history and taking into consideration the context of the park, as well as finding a location that is not hidden. Goulatia asks if they can use the heart motif less figuratively. Cohen says she thinks so, but they had been thinking more literally of a heart because looking down from the hill the City resembles a heart with the rivers and roads forming the arteries.

Moss says that the alternate location at the top of McArdle roadway seems more appropriate and agrees that the heart seems like too much of a reference to a medical theme. Moss says he isn’t a fan of it having a pulsating light that can be seen from a distance.

Leach says that she does not have a problem with it being lit up or with the location.

Goulatia says she also does not have a problem with the location or the light, but that the light should possibly not be pulsating. She says if it is done right it could be a spectacular piece. Leach says she agrees it could be less literal.
MOTION: Table

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

C. Correspondence

None.

D. Public Comment

None.

E. Director & Staff Report

Minnaert says that they conducted one Over-The-Counter review in the last month, which the Commission received a summary of via email.

Minnaert notes that Commissioner Loftness has joined them and they now have a full Commission. She says that at the December hearing they can set aside some time to introduce Commissioner Loftness as they did not have time today.

Leach asks if there is a way to have less applications so that applications coming later in the agenda do not have to rush. Moss says that they should not allow the earlier reviews to run as long and the Commission should be cognizant of the amount of comments they are making, although sometimes a lot of questions are necessary. Goulatia says that some presentations also have run long.

Minnaert says that from a staff perspective they are doing the following to make the reviews more efficient: working on the Over-The-Counter process to reduce the number of applications, suggesting a template for more concise presentations, and talking to applicants about being succinct. She says that they also need the Commissioners to be concise in their feedback for the reviews to go as efficiently as possible.

Leach asks if there is a standard for presentation length. Moss says they are asked to be ten minutes. Leach asks how many slides that is. Minnaert says that the range of projects makes a one-size-fits-all very challenging for applications but they are trying to streamline that as much as possible. Leach asks if there are any suggestions for what the Commissioners can do in this regard. Moss says that the Commissioners should provide reactions and opinions but should watch against directing the applicants’ decisions too far. Minnaert says that there are opportunities to streamline Commissioner feedback by reducing the number of comments that are not relevant to their decision, by not repeating questions that have already been answered, and by being poised to make motions.

Goulatia says that she was approached by the press about the lawsuit against the City regarding the Columbus statue, and specifically an email that was entered into the record. She says that she does not want to make comments to the press, and says that in the email in question she was referencing the exchange between former Commissioner Luckett and the City lawyer, which seemed confrontational.

Dash says he does not have any update on the legal proceedings. He says that if Commissioners are individually contacted for their opinions they can give their own personal opinion, or can forward the requests to staff to respond. If the request is for the Commission’s formal opinion, it would need to be put before the Commission for an official statement. Leach asks why the press is asking their opinions. Moss says that if the press is asking for the response of the Commission, it needs to go through the proper channels and any response should be delivered by him as the Commission President. Leach notes that
the meetings are publicly available on YouTube. Goulatia says this is what she told the press as she does not want her comments to be misinterpreted. Dash says that adhering to these guidelines is especially important as it pertains to issues that are a part of current legal proceedings.

F. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:38 P.M.