



Mills Park Community Meeting

Re: Review of the Master Plan from 2008 and Park Improvements

Location: May 3rd, 2017

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Minutes of Meeting

Ms. Jan Arnold, Executive Director of the Park District, made introductions and provided background on the funding for park improvements, how those funds are allocated and how each park has been improved in turn. Ms. Arnold also gave a short history of the master planning process for Mills Park and delineated the improvements that have been made in the park since 2008.

Ms. Arnold introduced Josephine Bellalta and John Mac Manus of Altamanu who worked on the Master Plan and all the Phases of design and construction.

Mr. Mac Manus gave a presentation that re-examined the Master Plan, described the process and described the improvements carried out. He then requested input from the community as to whether there were any additions or alterations to the Master Plan that should be considered. All phases and recommendations of the Master Plan were implemented in 2010-2011 with the exception of a proposed Pavilion that was to be attached to Pleasant Home. The proposal for this Pavilion "fell through" and was not carried out.

[The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed on line here.](#)

General

The reaction of the community to the work carried out in the park was positive and enthusiastically expressed. Many attendees praised the Park District for the improvements which have been a great success.

Public Comment (Notes only)

- A resident proposed that Mills Park be given an honorary designation as a "Seniors' Park" as it is next to Mills Tower a residence for senior living. It would be in the same vein as an honorary street designation and it would hopefully encourage others not to run over seniors with bikes and skate



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boards or have seniors run from dogs. He proposed that it could be the first honorary park in the nation and through marketing give acclaim to Oak Park.

- 10 years ago the park was dangerous, but now it feels safe day and night since the improvements. She loves the park and her wish is to sit in the park at night by herself. She added that recreation of the historic fountain would also be great—a sentiment that was seconded by another resident.
- The park was greatly improved by the plan. Some trees had been lost and were re-planted. There are new heritage oaks planted that were grown from acorns collected from pre-Euro-settlement trees that are still surviving in Oak Park.
- A resident was grateful that there is no ball playing or formal sports in the park. On warm days it is great to see people on blankets with friends, kids, etc.
- A resident was concerned that Mills Park might be the site for a proposed \$40 M Recreation Center and was not in favor of it. Sandy Lenz, Park Board Commissioner, said there would be no sports center in Mills Park
- Another resident expressed “happiness” about the park. It was pleasant. Always comes through the park, day and night. The Z shape seats are not comfortable though.
- A resident gave three comments:
 - 1) She had had great concern regarding the path, benches and lights prior to the improvements, but that the design team had heard her and not concentrated seating areas and main pathways near the adjacent apartments.
 - 2) However, the lighting is still a little intrusive; one flood shines straight into the building to the west of the park.
 - 3) A Proposal: Mills Park Apartment and Fountainhead owners would be willing to pay for half of the cost of restoring the leftover fence that came down from the west and south sides of the park during the 2011 improvements. They would like to see it installed along the east edge of their property that currently has chain link fence. They had heard the restoration and installation could cost around \$250,000 to \$300,000.
- A resident praised the use of the park for displaying sculpture and suggested a permanent sculpture garden. When the round wooden sculpture had been installed temporarily last year it was lovely



and it blended well in the park and was well used. The resident also mentioned the dog drinking fountain was broken. Staff suggested it may have been turned off for the winter months and was likely up and running by now.

- A resident really likes the three divisions or parts to the park: historic, natural and cultural as explained in the presentation. Would love to see more sculpture in the park. Jan Arnold mentioned that the Parks Foundation is fundraising to add more art in the parks.
- Two women who are mothers of young children said they appreciated that there was no formal playground. They were thankful for the exploration center (Discovery Area) and that they represented the desires of the “all natural crowd” in the locale.

Pavilion

- Laura Thompson, ex Director of the Pleasant Home Foundation, explained the reasoning behind the proposed addition of the Pavilion to Pleasant Home and the financial agreement that was to be in place between Pleasant Home/PDOP and the Pavilion installer. The project fell through during the recession. Ms. Thompson still believes it is a viable idea as it would protect Pleasant Home from the wear and tear of event use. It would also provide revenue generating opportunities as well as a much needed social gathering space.
- There were multiple comments on the Pavilion but the overall feeling from residents was that it was not an appropriate idea.
 - Currently there are big tents for weddings and functions that can go until midnight or 1 am on Saturday nights. The noise is so disturbing.
 - There was opposition to such events and that the Park District should add a cut -off time.
 - It was stated that the VOP noise ordinance states a cut-off time 10:30 pm for Pleasant Home and 11:00 pm for VOP.
 - A resident said that the police do not know the ordinance and attendees at these events can be drunk and belligerent.
- A resident stated how she was “blessed to live by the park” with the exception of the noise. She mentioned that the noise is less now that there is a 10 pm curfew but that there seems to be alcohol use in the park which generates noise near the building.
- A resident stated that the noise situation has been improving over the last year. Residents are very grateful for the Park District and when there is noise the resident has called the police.



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- Jan Arnold requested that residents continue to call the police when there are any issues and when noise becomes excessive.
- A historian who is on the Pleasant Home Foundation Board said there was a story to be told at the back of the home in the summer porch (on west side) and a story of the 2nd level of the house and porch. She was against any addition to the back of the house (i.e. pavilion) and in the event it did get added, to please hire a restoration architect to assist and to respect the building and grounds.
- John Mac Manus summed up the meeting stating that it was one of the most positive he had attended. Issues be addressed included:
 - Adjusting the light that shines directly into the adjacent apartment
 - Examination of the condition of the steps and metal work at the main entry to Pleasant Home
 - Adjusting the grading on the soft surface path where there is some erosion
 - Re-grading the soft surface path surface at the SE of the meadow
 - Consideration of sculpture for the park
 - Additions to the Discovery Area
 - And the potential of restoring the fence along the adjacent apartments

Jan Arnold thanked everyone for their input and attendance and closed the meeting. Ms. Arnold announced that there would be a presentation to the Park Board either in July or September.

End of Minutes

This is a general understanding of the comments made at the meeting.

Minutes prepared by Josephine Bellalta and John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc.

In Addition:

After the meeting a resident contacted the Park District and requested an ADA access through the fence just south of the main entrance to Pleasant Home and a curb cut at the SE entrance.

The fence is on the National Register of Historic Places. Creating entries into the park through the fence was highly controversial. There are now four ADA compliant access points into the park. It would be extremely difficult to get support for additional entryways and interruptions in the fence.

The Village controls the creation of curb-cuts. The PDOP could apply for a curb cut at the SE entrance however, this could imply a mid-block accessible crossing across Home Avenue which would be considered a safety hazard and is unlikely to gain permission.