



Oak Park Conservatory Community Meeting

Re: Review of the Master Plan from 2008 and Park Improvements
Location: Oak Park Conservatory
Date: October 4th, 2017
Time: 7:00 p.m.

Minutes of Meeting

Ms. Jan Arnold, Executive Director of the Park District (PD) made introductions and provided background on the funding for park improvements. These funds do not come out of tax payer's pockets but are from increased revenue. Ms. Arnold also explained how those funds are allocated and how each park has been improved in turn. The park improvements have been phased so that the PD can spread the improvements across the entire community.

There have been many park improvement projects in the area that have been completed recently. This includes Maple Park Phase 2 with new walking paths, a new meadow, playground and shelter that are all popular. The walking paths now form a complete circuit of the park. Ms. Arnold has seen many people using these paths even though they run in part parallel with Harlem Avenue. Euclid Square Park Phase 2 was also completed recently with redesigned and reconstructed tennis courts with Pickle Ball, a new very popular playground, additional mounds and planting. The field has also been improved and is now one of the best in the system. Ms. Arnold praised the work of FOPCON as well as Conservatory staff in particular Patti Staley, Director of Horticulture & Conservatory Operations.

Ms. Arnold introduced John Mac Manus of the landscape design firm Altamanu. Altamanu has worked on many of the park master plans and improvements projects including work on the Conservatory.

Mr. Mac Manus spoke about the importance of this institution. He then gave a presentation that re-examined the Master Plan from 2008 and described the improvements carried out. He then showed images from the design process for the setting and new entryway on Garfield; the Discovery Garden and the Bio-Swale on East Avenue. He then showed a list of the many improvements since 2010 and their costs. John then opened the meeting up for public comment.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed on line at Website: www.pdop.org



Comment (Notes only)

- Community members were very positive about the improvements.
- The cost of maintenance was discussed.
 - Chris Lindgren Superintendent of Buildings & Grounds described how John Seaton, former Director of the Conservatory, had to “baby sit” the furnace and boiler in winter to prevent their failure and the potential freezing of the plants. Chris recounted a story about how Mike Grandy, former Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, had searched everywhere in a desperate effort to find a generator when power was lost during a particularly cold snap. There is a backup generator today.
 - Ms. Arnold spoke about how there are many endangered species in the collection. The PD currently has a horticultural professor evaluating and cataloging the plants. This is being carried out so that in the event of a calamity and plants are lost, there will be an adequate description of the plants so that the PD can be reimbursed by insurance.
 - Ms. Arnold spoke of how the Elmhurst Park District had not carried out such a detailed process and had not been able to have their plants replaced.
- “Make the Conservatory more sustainable. Consider solar, wind and geothermal”.
 - Ms. Arnold stated that the PD has been looking into alternate energy sources. Geo thermal has been considered. Work is being carried out on the roof currently and the PD is considering installing solar panels. The water from the Discovery Garden is captured in a cistern and reused for watering plants. The PD installed the bioswale on East Avenue and hopefully other similar improvements can be made.
 - Patti Staley, Director of Horticulture & Conservatory Operations stated that they use captured rainwater from a “homemade system” to water particularly sensitive plants.
 - Ms. Arnold spoke about the use of a large cistern at Longfellow Park that stores water that is used for watering.
- “What is a bioswale”?



- John Mac Manus answered. Rainwater usually flows into storm drains and is treated at Stickney like sewage. This is very expensive and wasteful. Therefore we are encouraged by government agencies and environmentalists to find other ways of treating this rain water. A swale is a linear depression that directs surface runoff water. A bioswale is designed to concentrate or remove silt and pollution from water by holding the water, and letting plants and the soil clean the water as it percolates into the ground.
- “Many people do not know the Conservatory exists”. “We have to find ways of promoting it”.
- Please consider how to attract older kids. There seems to be lots for small kids to do but an entire generation of older kids needs to be introduced to the Conservatory.
- A resident stated that the room was not very conducive for parties, weddings or other rentals. The wall materials are harsh.
 - Ms. Arnold stated that the Conservatory was used for rentals and both the inside and outside were used.
 - Patti Staley stated that the Conservatory is popular but “we lose rentals because of capacity”. The capacity is for 50 people.
- The Conservatory is land locked and the need for space is paramount. The potential of vacating the western portion of the alley directly south of the Conservatory and the purchase of additional property was discussed.
 - Ms. Arnold stated that the PD had in the past requested permission to vacate part of the alley and had sent a letter to Craig Failor, Village Planner.
 - If the alley was vacated the PD would consider purchasing the property directly to the south of the Conservatory and expanding the Conservatory.
 - Ms. Arnold stated that the PD has discussed this possibility with the owner of the house and the PD would have first option on the house.
 - The PD worked with the Trust for Public Land to purchase two homes just south of Carrol Park. The Trust buys the property and then the PD pays them back overtime.
 - The PD would not purchase the property unless the alley could be vacated.
- What did the community think of this idea and how would they like to see the extra space used?
 - It is a wonderful idea
 - We should have more gardens
 - Yes gardens for contemplation
 - Gardens for seniors
 - Ms. Arnold stated that there were parks set aside for passive activities such as Austin Gardens where she has seen seniors enjoying Thai Chi and just sitting or



strolling through the natural area. Scoville Park is also passive and has plenty of benches for people to sit and read or contemplate the landscape. Mills Park is a wonderful passive park that is enjoyed by the senior residents of Mills Tower and the northern end of Maple is also a passive park.

- Patti Staley stated that some senior residents come to the Conservatory now to sit and read
- Patti suggested a community garden
- A resident stated that the expansion of the Conservatory and adding a garden would help rentals
- The function room could be expanded and open onto the new garden
- A resident said that the PD should not worry about removing a residence from the tax rolls and so many new condos are being added to the community
- Ms. Arnold stated that Oak Park is underserved by green space and that as the density of population increases more public land should be added.

Ms. Arnold thanked everyone for their input and attendance and closed the meeting. Ms. Arnold stated that Altamanu would work with PD staff to come up some concepts for the potential expansion of the Conservatory. Altamanu will meet with Patti and PD staff to discuss. Ms. Arnold then announced that there would be a presentation to the Park Board about this meeting and the potential of expansion in December.

End of Minutes

This is a general understanding of the comments made at the meeting.
Minutes prepared by John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc.