

**MEETING NOTES / 5 PAGES / SENT BY EMAIL**

Project: Children's Wharf Park  
Phase: Schematic Design

Meeting Date: 20 October 2016

Participants:

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Chris Donohue, MVVA  
Austin Blackmon, Chief of Environment, Energy and Open Space, City of Boston  
Members of the Community

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The following is a summary of discussions during the third Community Meeting that was held on October 20, 2016 at the Boston Children's Museum. This meeting reviewed the project schedule, goals, aspirations and initial site impressions from the design team and community members present. The design team presented an update to the conceptual plan for Children's Wharf that has been developed based on the feedback from the first and second Community Meetings.

*Item No. Issue*

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**1.00 Project Schedule**

- 1.1** The proposed project schedule was reviewed, with the hopes that the project will break ground in the Spring of 2017. The construction is expected to last approximately one year.

**2.00 Review of Project Goals & Design Approach**

- 2.1** The design team reviewed preliminary and underlining goals for the project and process. These goals include:
- Inclusive play
  - Mixed recreation
  - Improve Sleeper Street experience
  - Improve pedestrian circulation and safety
  - Enhance Harborwalk experience
  - Collaborative design process

**2.2** The design team represented an approach to Children’s Wharf, developed around the ideas and aspirations heard from the community during the first community meeting in February. The overall concept for the park was described as:

- Inclusive: safe, engaging, inviting, and accessible to children, parents, and all visitors
- Civic: a neighborhood park that celebrates the community, the city, and offers a welcoming landscape experience
- Natural: a robust experience of plants and other natural materials within an otherwise urban environment
- Urban: embrace city skyline views, cultural context of the site, and address a large number of users

### **3.00 Review of Existing Site Assets**

The design team reviewed existing assets and opportunities with the existing site conditions. The intent of the team is to take advantage of these existing assets and integrate their presence in the design of the park. These recorded assets include:

- City views across the harbor
- Adjacency to Fort Point Channel: the site’s position allows for a borrowed landscape experience of the entire Watersheet, nearby cultural institutions, and activity
- Adjacency to the Boston Children’s Museum: great potential for collaboration and extension of the BCM’s programming, education, and exploration
- Harborwalk: the public corridor potentially brings additional users to the park, connects it to the surrounding neighborhood, and permits passive engagement with the waterfront.
- Growing Seaport District and Fort Point Neighborhoods: as a neighborhood park, the design process should engage the community’s aspirations and foster a sense of ownership of the place once completed

### **4.00 Review of Existing Site Challenges**

The design team reviewed observed challenges with the existing site conditions, and confirmed an established partnership with the Boston Children’s Museum to build part of the park over the existing surface parking lot, addressing one of the Community’s most critical concerns for the site and the existing Sleeper Street experience.

These recorded challenges include:

- Small site – just over one acre
- Great potential for large numbers of visitors and activity
- A need to maintain safe and efficient area for large groups arriving at the park and adjacent Boston Children’s Museum(BCM) at the existing bus drop-off
- A desire to enhance the Sleeper Street experience, especially the relationship between the road, neighbors, and existing BCM parking and service lot
- Adjacent car traffic on Seaport Boulevard and Sleeper Street being a potential safety concern for a future playground

## **5.00 Design Concept**

The Design team presented an update to the original concept presentation from April 2016. The final concept plan is conceptually similar to the ideas previously presented, with added program elements and range of experience to address feedback provided by the community and various City agencies contributing to the design of Martin's Park:

### **5.1 Designing For Inclusion**

- The design team introduced a model for inclusive and accessible play for all that was used to evaluate and develop the design of the playground. Citing PlayCore's 5 Elements of Inclusive Play, the team has developed a diverse and complex plan for the playground that facilitates many different types of experiences, interests, and abilities.
- The color-coded overlay of the park design highlighted the diverse range of experiences throughout the park, helping the team to develop an inclusive and dynamic environment for all types of play.

### **5.2 A Neighborhood Park**

- The design enhances the existing Fort Point Harborwalk, adding stepped wood seating, shade trees, and accessible furniture.
- The playground is designed as a series of landscape rooms to provide a wide range of experience and opportunities for inclusive play. These rooms are framed by a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees, flowering shrubs, and groundcovers.
- A safely lit central path through the park allows for access to the Harborwalk without walking through the center of an active playground. The path will act as a public corridor lined with comfortable wood benches.

### **5.3 Range of Inclusive and Accessible Play in the North Playground**

- The North playground is centered around an iconic wooden play ship. The nautical theme ties into the adjacency to the harbor, and provides a range of opportunities for active and dramatic play.
- A water play garden provides a place to cool off, and opportunities for nature play and exploration – including the cooler seasons. Water play is a new addition to the park design inspired by community input from the previous presentation of the initial design concept in April 2016.
- The elevated path allows for access to different environments for play, but also creates a perched overlook facing the Fort Point Channel and the City of Boston skyline. A range of places to sit and explore along the elevated spine add to the range of experience in the small 1-acre park.

### **5.4 A Bridge Between Playgrounds**

- A bridge over the central path allows for park-goers to enjoy the park without entering the playground if so desired.
- A lighter, more transparent design for the bridge was presented, inspired by community feedback from the April 2016 presentation. The redesigned bridge uses materials similar to other local bridges and materials found within the playground.

### **5.5 A Range of Inclusive and Accessible Play in the South Playground**

- A vertical landscape of climbing stones, slides, and planting acts as the center of gravity for the south playground. An active slope of kids scrambling up and down with varying levels of challenge and accessibility provide a naturally inclusive play experience.
- A challenging rope climber in the southwest corner of the playground, circled by a low seat wall offers a social space for children and a physically challenging experience.
- A log climber at the highest point of the park plays off the densely planted frame and natural materials of the park and encourages both individual and group play.
- A nest swing also perched at the top of the playground offers great views back to the city, while also providing one of the fundamentals of play. The soft nest-like seat is great for children of all abilities and mobility aids, and can also be used by multiple children at once.

### **6.00 A Partnership with the Boston Children’s Museum**

The range of experience and opportunities for inclusive play are all made possible by a cooperative relationship between the Boston Children’s Museum and the future park. By allowing the park to climb up and over the current surface parking lot (soon to be capped over by a low roof), the Museum has allowed the park footprint to grow by about 20%, but more importantly, made many of the most iconic elements of the park possible, like the central valley, bridge, and Fort Point Channel overlooks.

- The design team introduced a schematic plan for the future structure – a low building which houses Museum staff parking, storage, and a room designated for Martin’s Park maintenance.
- In addition to covering the existing surface lot, the project will tidy up back of house operations at the Museum, greatly improving the Sleeper Street experience and entrance to the future park.
- A material palette of board-formed concrete and light, transparent steel mesh aims to improve the Sleeper Street experience, provide a safe environment for current museum operations, and allow the landscape to roll up and over the building in a natural-feeling mix of building and topography.

### **7.00 Community Input and Response to the Design Concept**

Reactions to the design concept were generally positive and well received by members of the community present. As the design concept is refined and finalized, aspects of the design will be studied in response to the community’s suggestions, outlined below:

- Bike Racks – it was suggested that the design team consider relocating the bike racks to a more visible location closer to the park entrance.
- Lighting – the need for safely lit paths through and around the park was reiterated. The design team agrees with this being a critical component to the park’s safety and will keep this concern at the forefront of the design detailing process.
- Climate Preparedness – members of the community asked if the park is designed to address or respond to future climate change and sea level rise. The design team

discussed the use of salt-tolerant plants, readily available materials and furnishings in case of future replacement needs. Austin Blackmon spoke to the City of Boston's ongoing studies of these issues and how the City is working to address the larger global issue of climate preparedness and resiliency for the City's waterfront and infrastructure.

- Art integration – It was asked whether or not public or commissioned art would be present in the future park. There are currently no plans to include art in the park, citing a lack of available space in what is a small site for the current range of program.

## **8.00 Next Steps**

The design team will be working toward final design and construction documents incorporating the feedback from the third community meeting and ongoing reviews of the park from various City agencies. The current anticipated start of construction is spring 2017.

These meeting notes are recorded as understood. Please contact Chris Donohue ([cdonohue@mrvainc.com](mailto:cdonohue@mrvainc.com)) with any comments or changes.

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