

Highlights from HPRB McMillan Park Hearing on 27 September 2012

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To: ANC 5C <ANC5C-Commissioners@googlegroups.com>

Commissioners:

I've compiled the following summary notes for those unable to attend the Historic Preservation Review Board hearing on 27 September 2012. This was the second hearing on the Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) proposed master plan for McMillan Park to follow up on the initial hearing held on 12 July 2012. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) website will provide the full transcript text of the hearing.

Agenda-

1. Opening Remarks – Jair Lynch
2. Presentation of McMillan Park's Historic Resources – Emily Eig
3. VMP General Project Update – Matt Bell
4. VMP Park Planning Update – Warren Byrd
5. VMP Detailed Project Update – Matt Bell
6. HPRB Feedback – Board Members, Chair
7. VMP Closing Comments – Matt Bell, Warren Byrd

For background information, here's a link to the biography of each HPRB Member to help put their comments in context:

<http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/Historic+Preservation/About+HPO+&+HPRB/Who+We+Are/Historic+Preservation+Review+Board/Members>

Highlights of HPRB Feedback on VMP plan-

Maria Casarella:

- Why are “medical offices” included in the design goals, and how do they that relate to this landmark?
- How do the proposed design guidelines honor this particular landmark?
- The proposed design guidelines are “very generic”. HPRB has seen these same generic design guidelines used on several other projects.
- Reiterates her point from the 12 July hearing about functional reuse of the site for collecting water – it's a preservation issue particular to this case.
- She has thought deeply about this project for a couple of months since the 12 July hearing.
- VMP has lost a lot of specificity about what this landmark was in concept – an engineering marvel and a vast park.
- We need something exceptional, an urban campus with relationship to the landmark's immediate surroundings.
- We need to avoid trying to be everything to everyone. Many of the otherwise good urban principles that VMP has employed here take away from this landmark.
- VMP is proposing a big master plan with some preservation elements rather than preserving a historic landmark and integrating their plan into it.
- The weakest part of plan is south sector containing the “product-oriented row-housing”.
- The VMP plan looks like a “business as usual” suburban office park. We need to remedy this generic planning.
- It's ok for this to be a unique neighborhood.
- Relationships of the buildings to key elevations will best define character and preserve sense

of place.

- VMP has addressed most staff recommendations although they're missing the sense of rhythm created by the grid.
- Suggests using the ramps into the underground caverns as entrances to buildings etc.
- Through all their design evolutions and processes, VMP has lost the sense of place. The landmark's sense of place should be self-referential.
- This is an excellent design opportunity that doesn't have to be an extension of Bloomingdale.

Board Member (identify each via transcript):

- Asks for an update on how VMP is creating an "urban campus" per their 12 July comment.
- Asks Warren how involved they are in storm water management planning. Reminds VMP that the original intent of the site is to collect water underground.
- Recommends including a requirement that all built structures literally interpret and reference the vaulted underground architecture.

Steve Callcott (HPO Staff):

- Suggests that the Board should withhold comments until individual project presentations and focus on water planning issues for now.

Bob Sonderman:

- HPRB would never agree to this much demolition of a building.
- In the north section, VMP has a reference to a hospital. At the south, they have a reference to a rowhouse. The center section is ok.
- What about using the historic manhole covers?
- This is the only landmark to water purification that we have.

Andrew Aurbach:

- VMP has helped bring the community together.
- This is generally moving in the right direction.
- Likes the example parks that Warren presented from Barcelona ([Parc del Clot](#)) and Sydney ([Paddington Reservoir Gardens](#)); wants them to add more features like this to their design.

Rauzia Ally:

- Echoes Maria's concerns.
- Reiterates John Salatti's testimony from the 12 July hearing that the VMP plan proposes to make an extraordinary place very ordinary.
- Very generic design guidelines.
- Overarching themes lack any vision for preserving the sense of place.
- Need historic references throughout the design.

Joseph Eugene:

- A lot of what he wanted to see changed since the 12 July has occurred, e.g., extending the Olmsted Walk.
- What's missing is a marriage between their proposal and the established historical

guidelines.

- Need more integration with structures and the experience of the underground resources.
- The plan is lacking a successful relationship with the site's previous function.

Graham Davidson:

- This site has mystical geometry. He was very happy to hear so much testimony during the 12 July hearing that so many other people in the city love this site.
- VMP needs to reinforce the sense of place.
- Concerned about lowering some elevations by 15'.
- North section- concerned about development scale in entirety.
- Concerned that the proposed grocery store could look like the Ellicott Street Safeway. Recommends wrapping grocery store in housing or retail.
- Push all development back from the street to maintain the 170' elevation all the way around the perimeter, especially all along North Capitol.
- Make the plan particular to this unique place.

Nancy Metzger:

- Perplexed by the "Healing Garden" on Michigan Avenue. Why reference a hospital? Hospital patients will be flat on their backs and unable to see the garden.
- Buildings are really jammed up against historical structures in north service court. Look at acreage on the other side of the tall buildings and move it into north service court area. The tightness of the court prohibits experiencing the sense of place.
- Slide # 115 in the VMP presentation from the 12 July package is "horrifying".
- Museum space will be so important for education and interpretation. The site should inspire students from the surrounding universities etc. about Engineering and Public Health.
- VMP needs to take their plan a few more steps.
- She's struck over and over again that they're focusing on grid architecture. She appreciates being not too replicative but this site provides amazing opportunities for architecture; she knows many architects who would love to help.

Gretchen Pfaehler (Acting Chair):

- The historic resource documentation is very thorough.
- Wishes there was more historic focus on landscape rather than structure – it should be a celebration of Olmsted's landscape design.
- The "old fashioned way works best - preservation".
- Appreciates Byrd's example parks from Barcelona and Sydney.
- What about Philadelphia Waterworks and Chicago's parks as examples?
- Going in a good direction.
- Critical needs:
 - More appropriate design guidelines as referenced for specificity to this place
 - Make this a separate special place.
 - Use manholes etc. to tell the story of McMillan.
 - Focus on sustainability and water as our most scarce resource on the planet.
 - Need more continuity of the Olmsted Walk.
 - The center site is best – infuse this throughout. Make the site seem like one unified vast object - plinth / "aircraft carrier".
 - Subsurface treatment ideas are interesting and appropriate; skylights too. Need more continuous fusion throughout.

- HPRB wants to see revised design guidelines resulting from this hearing.

Please let me know if you want a copy of my detailed notes.

Thank you,

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