

Discussion of Leslie Shaw Park Potential Upgrades

Meeting at Jefferson Park Branch Library

January 10, 2013

(Next meeting: 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm February 21st at the Jefferson Park Library).

Meeting Organizer: Sandra Pruitt.

Attendees: Jewel Pruitt, Norman Gilmore, Carlton Stubbs, David Saffer, Nigel, Karen Hutchison, Debra Varnado, Bill Holden, Budd Murdock, William Hernandez, Gus Harris, Jr., Vanessa Van Wagner, Debra Varnado, Audrey Arlington, Tait Anderson, Georgianna Streeter, Ursula Herrmann.

Guest: Commissioner Valerie Lynne Shaw

City of Los Angeles: **Mike Shull** (Superintendent, Dept. of Rec and Parks), **Dana Valdez** (Community Program Director, Dept. of Rec and Parks), Albert Lord (Council District 10 Field Deputy).

Minutes taken by Norman Gilmore. **The following minutes are not a word-for-word transcript.** These minutes are just intended to provide a general sense of the ideas and discussion that occurred.

In the opinion of the writer, after the November 15th meeting and this meeting the consensus among attendees would include the following elements in the design brief for an upgraded Leslie Shaw Park.

1. Upgrade to a great new playground (including swings and possibly the Simon game installation)
2. Walking path around perimeter.
3. Several exercise equipment stations.
4. Low attractive fencing around playground to keep kids from running into street. Lower fence on Prescott Court side as well.
5. Several scattered picnic tables and BBQs. Some game tables as well.
6. Shade trees that provide some shade at tables and the playground on summer afternoons.
7. An event space, arranged so that the audience faces the brick building on the west. Picnic tables should be located so that accessing catering does not interrupt audience view of the stage location. (place tables closer to playground)
8. Landscaping, slopes and mounds placed as necessary to define the audience area for the event space and to make large turf areas unattractive for team sports such as soccer.
9. Good lighting (for both visual appeal and security).
10. A water fountain.

Mike Shull: We took a lot of notes at the November 15th meeting. I asked an architect to put an initial concept down.

(Copies of the drawing were passed out to all attendees.)

Features of the drawing:

1. Walking path around perimeter made with decomposed granite.
2. New much larger play area with cool castle playground.
3. New style merry-go-round. (Lawyer approved!)
4. Various trees. Some are palms and don't provide shade?
5. 8 picnic tables in northwest corner
6. Low fence along street side of park. (To keep kids from darting toward street.)

(There was a general consensus that everyone liked the walking path around the perimeter.)

We are still in the process of gathering input. The drawing shows an example playground, but it could still easily be changed.

One idea is to put a new monument sign up over the entrance, but we still want to understand the intent and importance of the original park name monument.

Changing the playground equipment can change the size of the fall area required.

Sandra Pruitt: The current drawing doesn't show the fitness equipment.

Mike: Going to add it in. The equipment can be spread out in different pods.

Five pieces of equipment are about \$20,000.

Norman Gilmore: Are those trees on the west side potentially blocking the view of the Black Seed mural to the west?

Gus Harris, Jr.: Where would a stage be placed?

Norman: Going back to Gus's question about a stage. Should the picnic tables be so far back? Where would be the best place to put a temporary stage?

There was a discussion about what the pros and cons of placing a stage (a) along the street edge (b) along the alley edge (c) along the west edge in front of the brick building with the Black Seed mural.

Various people:

If a stage was along the alley fence, then this would make the amplified sound face toward the street. The audience would face the alley, which doesn't look great.

If the stage was along the street, the audience would see cars going behind the speaker or band, which would be very distracting.

The third option would be to have the stage along the park's west edge, so an audience would face the brick building.

Maybe move the picnic tables more toward the center of the park with most of the trees shading the tables.

Then the picnic tables would be well positioned at the back of the audience for catering use during a performance event.

David Saffer: I see the short fence along the front. That's good. But is there a way to open up access to Prescott Court, the adjacent walk street between the park and the library? Prescott Court is a bit of a no man's land with high chain link fences on both sides.

Mike: The current fence between the park and Prescott Court doesn't serve a purpose. We can make it shorter.

Gus pointed out that the Prescott fence shouldn't be removed entirely since it keeps the children in.

Mike said that a low fence would be fine. It doesn't need to be 6 feet.

General agreement that a low fence along the front is a good idea.

William asked about whether there is a need to put in car barriers in front the playground.

Mike said that due to the grade, the playground is elevated about 18" higher than the street, so it will be fairly protected. There will probably be a short retaining between grade levels, so a vehicle would be blocked by that.

David asked about putting plantings in front of the small retaining wall to make it not a graffiti target.

(General agreement that this was a good idea.)

Mike: There will be some adjustments for making the park ADA compliant. It won't be too challenging, but there are some grades that require ramps.

David: The swings at Benny Potter Park are very popular and are heavily used.

Mike: Swing sets require a very large fall area.

Gus: We would like to see what it would look like with a swing configuration.

Norman: Can we get a link to the Simon game that was described last time?

Mike: We will send you a link to the interactive Simon game. The Simon game would take about a 15' diameter.

Vanessa Van Wagner: (Question to group) Would it be correct to say that the park is mainly used as a playground and mainly as a community performance space?

Audience: generally yes.

Mike: One problem with a performing space is that it makes enough room for team sports.

Various people: What about discouraging soccer? Soccer destroys the turf really fast, making it a dust bowl. Also, the park is small, and soccer is not compatible with sharing the park, with the flying ball and space needed. The existing park has some trees to discourage soccer, but still some games occur in the corner.

Norman: Just visited the new Grand Park downtown. They have performance spaces that use landscaping and berms to shape the space for an audience. A gently sloping lawn at the back makes a nice seating area. Also makes the space not flat and unobstructed, and therefore not usable for team sport running games.

Mike: The mounding idea could be very interesting as a way of preserving an open turf area and discouraging team sports at the same time.

Tait Anderson: What about soccer for 5 year olds?

Mike: There will be enough flat area for parents to play soccer with little kids. Adults playing soccer often wear cleats, which destroys the turf really fast. Some people use the park for teaching classes.

Various people: In the past have seen dog training classes in the park. It would be nice if the park enabled classes like Tai Chi.

Sandra: What about plaque with a nice bio for the park namesake?

Mike: That's very possible. There are some fairly robust solutions that are relatively graffiti proof for a plaque.

Mike: (question for Valerie Lynne Shaw) As the daughter of the park namesake, can you let me know if there any personal significance behind the current name monument? Would you be ok with us replacing the existing name monument?

Valerie Lynne Shaw: That (replacing) would be fine.

Mike: We will do one more iteration with the design and then put it on the shelf while we look for funds. Once a source of funds are identified, then there will be another round of design refinement.

I will come back with another rough design based on tonight's input. We will use the rendering for fundraising.

Albert: With the input of the community, the park expertise, the interest of Valerie Lynne Shaw, and the support of the Council President, this park is on track to be as good as it can be.

Mike: We are building 50 new parks for \$85 million. 20 parks will be finished by July 2013, mostly pocket parks but one 40 acre park in Sylmar.

Pocket parks at Buckingham and West and Normandie and Vermont are in progress.

Albert Lord: A water fountain is great. Will there be one?

Mike: Yes, but people will inevitably bathe with it.

Albert: Gotta have a water fountain.

Norman: Back to the question, what is right number of picnic tables? This drawing shows 8 tables grouped tightly in the far corner.

Should we spread the picnic tables apart so that different families can use them without feeling crowded? Bunching eight tables together makes it seem like they are for big family reunions.

If the picnic tables are spread out a bit in the middle of the park, there can be more trees near the tables for shade. As mentioned earlier, this also positions the tables to be behind an audience that is facing a stage on the west edge of the park, so the tables are conveniently located for catering the event.

Tait: Trees on the center of the park would also shade the play area in the late afternoon when shade is most needed.

Carlton Stubbs: The reason we requested a Gazebo at Benny Potter was because our Summer Day Camp with up to 40 or 50 kids in the sun. We also wanted to permit out the park for the community.

David: What about multi-purpose tables, like game tables for checkers and chess?

Mike: Easy option. Also, scattering picnic tables would allow more usage.

Albert: A lot of Caltrans and city workers eat lunch at the tables in Benny Potter Park. That helps keep the eye on the park and keep it in use during the week.

Tait: The new play structures at Benny Potter Park are a huge success.

Norman: Can the walking path have some curves on the corners, instead of right angle turns?

Mike: Sure, we will put in a radius on the turns. It is just showing right angles because we are trying to keep drafting costs as low as possible in this early phase.

Norman: Mike, can you recap your thoughts on the issues involved with community gardens in parks?

Mike: Community gardens have had some problems. Formerly, the city general fund paid for water and green waste pickup for community gardens, now it comes out of parks department budget. That adds up to \$45 million dollars annually. So Parks went back to look at what they were charging.

They used to charge \$10/year for a plot in community garden. There was a waiting list and a system. But then in some gardens, community members were building fences. But then someone got an attorney and pointed out the public land issue.

Los Angeles has an 800 plot garden in Sepulevda Basin. It costs \$190/plot/year to maintain for water and green waste pickup. So we raised the fees try and recover most, but not all costs.

However, if there is a non-profit that wants to run the community garden then the city does not charge much. For example, the Community Garden Council. In that case you pay your own water, your own power, and trash pickup.

All things considered, Recreation & Parks is out of the business of running community gardens, because we can't run it cheap.

People were not worrying about leaky hoses and pipes when the city paid for water. The city would prefer that a non-profit run it. The cost to the non-profit is about \$2/plot/year for inspection.

The Parks Department has a standard partnership agreement for non-profits that defines how non-profits can run community gardens in city parks.

Valerie Lynne Shaw suggested that a community garden be at another site. This site is too small. There are lots of complexities with running community gardens. The port of Los Angeles had a community garden, and in their experience, when you get too many gardeners, they start arguing.

Sandra: It sounds like Community Gardens involve too much for us to take on.

Mike: We used to be able to have 4 gardeners to work on 4 parks, but it's more like 4 gardeners to 8 parks now. So everything has to be designed for low maintenance.

Sandra: We definitely would like to see a swing set included in the next design draft.

End of meeting.

(Next meeting: February 21st).

"A healthier world begins with a playground"



Leslie Shaw Park



Colors shown are approximate, ask your representative for current color samples

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