

Hoyt Sullivan Playground / Central Street

Community Meeting No. 1

Monday, June 8, 2015

Location: Hoyt Sullivan Playground. 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Meeting Notes

Seating and tables were provided on the basketball court and meeting attendees included 25+ residents from the Hoyt Sullivan Neighborhood.

Attendees represented a cross-section of age groups including artists from the adjacent Mt. Vernon Street studios, and representatives of the Winter Hill Community School. Meeting announcements were issued on the city webpage, cable channel, City Facebook page, and the Portuguese and Spanish Community Facebook pages. Multilingual flyers were posted in neighborhood bodegas, convenience stores, and laundry mats, as well as all houses within a two block radius, and most telephone poles within 4 block radius. The meeting was well attended and residents were very supportive of the park renovation but the primary concern was security, as the park is noted as a hangout for drug distribution, low-level gang activity, and other undesirable after-hours uses. The second area of concern was the preservation of the park's trees.

Meeting Agenda:

Parks and Open Space Director Arn Franzen introduced the project, discussed the park history, and renovation schedule, and connections to other recreation resources including the future community path. The meeting was then opened to community questions and discussion.

Audience concerns and comments are listed below:

Good lighting and better visibility were frequently mentioned. Some parents mentioned witnessing various incidents of drugs getting distributed, and said lighting and better visibility in general with open sightlines from the street were needed.

Safe park access: Residents said Central Street traffic can be "really, really fast" in front of the park and requested traffic calming, and suggested wider sidewalk spaces and better sidewalks coming to the park from across the bridge and surrounding neighborhood.

Lighting: The park is often in shadow from the trees and gets dark in the late afternoon and early evening. People suggested more lighting in general, but also suggested good lights as a design feature of the new park, and mentioned Chuckie Harris Park as an example. Residents also asked that new lights be solar powered and LED.

Trees: Everyone appreciated the park for its trees and the character provided by the tree canopy, and they requested that all trees be saved unless they were unhealthy or could be considered a safety hazard. People noted that many trees were broken and needed proper pruning and several residents recalled when a very large limb fell on the play structure when children were nearby.

Plantings: Recognizing that there is significant shade in the park, residents requested appropriate plantings and suggested bulbs and flowers that would provide more natural color in the planting areas.

Safety surfacing: Some residents are unhappy with the existing wood chip safety surfaces at the play areas, and the sand under the swings, and asked for rubber "foam" safety surfacing. Other residents advocated for better use of those same elements as they preferred their natural qualities. Artificial turf was suggested as a surfacing element in some of the shady areas where grass does not do well. People also advocated for more groundcover and real grass where possible.

Art: Hoyt Sullivan Playground is across the street from the Mt Vernon Street Art studios and residents suggested that those local artists be hired to design features like walkways, fencing, surfaces, and other elements. Others suggested working with the Mt Vernon street artists, and the city arts council to coordinate use of the park for art shows and events.

Basketball/ Multi use space: People want to keep the basketball court, but discussed ideas that could make it into more of multi-use space. Suggestions included new multi-sport goals, better lighting, and new surface designs

Paint the basketball court: People suggested that the basketball court be repainted in an imaginative design that would lend it to better use as a plaza or theater space. People also suggested the paved basketball court and large raised tree planter in the center of the playground should have a strong design connection.

Central tree planter: People want to preserve and protect the large beech tree that dominates the park and suggested possible expansions of that space, or changes to the perimeter walls including stairs or a ramp that would provide better access to that raised area. People also suggested a deck or partial deck that could be used for seating or for use as a stage.

Play: The park is a popular destination for parents with toddlers and attendees asked for more play equipment for very young children.

Suggested play items suggested included play structures and features designed for younger children, a lower overhead hanging ladder for younger kids, a zip line, and small trampoline.

Parents also requested that children's play features explore alternative play elements that focused on learning activities.

Sand play in particular was discussed and residents asked for sand and stated that they were not aware of any local problems with animals using the existing sand as a letter box. Others agreed.

Attendees also advocated for more adventuresome and movable play features for older children and suggested the park at the Cambridge Common as an example of the type of features that should be explored.

Attendees also took an informal vote and everyone was in favor of having a path for children to run around the park perimeter, which could also be used for tricycle and bicycle riding and as a walking path for adult exercise.

Swings: Everyone likes the swings and some people requested 1-2 additional swings so that children would not have to fight for the ones there. Some residents also asked about larger saucer style swings, or other new swing styles.

Railroad elements: The park is located at the top of a slope overlooking the rail corridor the passing of trains is an attraction for kids and adults alike.

One of the ideas that received the most favorable response was that of incorporating a viewing platform from the park to watch the trains passing in the rail corridor below. Related ideas were to have a sign where train schedules could be posted, the provision of movable train toys, and if possible, having a bell that signaled when trains were approaching.

Slope improvements: The slope between the playground and rail corridor is overgrown. Scrub and litter removal is needed and the area is reported to be a homeless camp. Thinning of dead trees and shrubs is needed and some new plant materials should be incorporated. Cleaning and thinning of scrub growth will also allow for better views of the passing trains.

Adult Exercise: In addition to an exercise walkway, people liked the idea of other simple adult exercise features items like chin up bars and steps. They did not like the idea of exercise machines.

Water play: Many advocated for some sort of water play and various types of features were discussed, but generally people preferred smaller interactive items like water tables, small pools, and cooling mist sprays.

Plaza Seating Space: People want tables and chairs for seating, social gatherings, parties and special events, and appreciated that teens need a space to hang out, but requested that the seating plaza space be moved to the front where it is more visible from the street.

Other idea and requests included: A chalkboard for art and play, no smoking signs, café game tables, keeping the existing benches but replacing the slats, having a community bulletin board, reaching out to neighborhood daycares, and adding more color to the park.

Many asked that the renovation proceed thoughtfully so that the park did not lose its current character of a tree covered natural space. Everyone recognized the need to make repairs but some expressed fear that a major renovation would change the character of the local park that they love.