

FREEWAY PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Open House #2 Event Summary

MEETING DETAILS

Open House and Panel Discussion

Monday, Oct 28, 2019, 6:30 - 9 pm

Town Hall Seattle – Forum (1119 8th Ave, Seattle, WA 98101)

PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 100 members of the public

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EXPERT PANEL

Randy Gragg, Executive Director, Portland Parks Foundation

- This landscape needs to change to serve its original purpose as a connection over the freeway.
- Changes should preserve the high level of craftsmanship in the original park.
- The park should bring people together and confer dignity to everyone.

Alison Hirsch, Director of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism, USC School of Architecture

- Freeway Park was meant to be a counter point to the force of the freeway. Its connection to the freeway should be strengthened.
- It was meant to help the city connect with its waterfront, through a network of open spaces.
- The park should be activated through partnerships with other organizations in Seattle, to create learning opportunities that strengthen the story told about the park.

Charles Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, President and CEO of the Cultural Landscape Foundation

- Freeway Park is a work of art by a master and should be treated as such.
- The public's romance with the park has worn off, but it can be reawakened.
- Restoring the park's fountains to their original drama and appeal should be the first priority.

Kenny Helphand, FASLA, Professor Emeritus in Landscape Architecture, University of Oregon

- The park was designed with an acceptance of growth and change.
- Halprin measured success by how a landscape performs and responds to the way people use it.
- The sense of discovery in the park should be preserved and enhanced.
- People don't know about the park, but it is a local treasure and landmark. It should be the pride of the people of Seattle—it should be taught to school children.

Iain Robertson, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Washington

- Plantings in the park should be dynamic: youthful and changing. The landscape should be refreshed. This should be the first priority.
- Freeway Park is an inspiration for a new generation of bold parks and connection with nature. We should lid over the rest of the freeway.
- Anything that would decrease the noise in the park would be delightful, but it will take more than plants. The city is louder than it used to be.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How will improvements attract active, intergenerational park users? *Wayfinding, signage and lighting will increase the visibility and usability of the park to casual users and people who use the park to connect to other places. Having a functioning restroom will make the park more attractive and useable by all ages.*

How is the project team planning to address drug use in the park? How is the project team planning to engage park users currently experiencing homelessness? *The park has a needle box for used needles and we are working with the homeless community through Compass Housing. We have also contacted the YWCA as well as other groups around the park. Drug usage downtown is an ongoing issue that SPR is working to address with SPD and other partner departments.*

What partnership/synergy opportunities is the project team pursuing or recommending for future phases of work? *We are looking at all opportunities and will start to refine this as the project moves forward.*

How has public input and the expert panel affected the project team's thoughts on the appropriate nature and extent of improvements? *All the input we have received to date is being incorporated into the six areas of focus and will help guide the design. Overall, both the panelists and the general public are supportive of improvements at the park.*

What portion of the budget will go towards basic repairs as opposed to design improvements? *We will be prioritizing our budget based on the needs of the park. There isn't a specific percentage that is dedicated to improvements vs. repairs and we will try to maximize both.*

What steps will be taken to make the park safer, i.e. security presence? *Lighting, improved wayfinding and pruning of vegetation will make the park more visible, open and legible. We are also working with SPD on ways to make the park easier for them to patrol; and respond*

WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback was collected from attendees through questions submitted to the Expert Panel and comments written on a project survey.

Activation & Amenities

- Volunteer opportunities
- More interactive things for visitors to engage with (Balance beams? Pullup bars? Play structures to facilitate intergenerational play?)
- Continue to support and enable intergenerational play and exploration of the park
- Freeway Park sponsors some wonderful events. What kind of response do you get (participation)? Dances, picnics, games.
- To activate a park 7 days a week you need a draw. I propose a kiosk serving tea, coffee, pastries, etc. to be located by the restrooms with chairs and tables. Also add for night a laser sculpture pointed up as an iconic night draw.
- Will there be a small playground/swing sets? Dog park?
- More events—all seasons
- It badly needs restrooms—public ones at the Convention Center are desirable
- Many mention wanting to make Freeway Park more youthful, but there's not much in the park for youths to do. More features like exercise equipment, interactive boulder/log structures, skate park, etc. might give people a reason to go to the park.
- Please don't aim to make our beloved oasis in the city into a mini Seattle Center. From tranquil to vibrant—no thank you

Park Users

- Remove homeless and drug addicts.
- There needs to be an aggressive no tolerance of street people, camping, squatters, and substance abuse
- I work at a nearby shelter. I wasn't this to be a place where my guests, and everyone else, can exist in public in peace and without having to spend money. Parks and libraries are the only public space like this we have.
- What will be done about improving safety from the homeless occupying the park grounds?
- What will be done about drug usage and drug preparation within all boundaries of the park?
- The number of family units (with children) has plummeted in forty years—this is more of a geriatric community and young preppy newcomers than the child-orientated area of past—the newcomers will move away from the city as they start families—I encourage you to design the updated park based on modern demographic rather than trying to reconstruct a bygone era

Partnerships & Synergy

- I love the idea of forging partnerships with the art museum/arboretum/etc. to encourage expand its position as a "landmark" in our city

- What's your opinion on private funding/partnering with private land owners to create new space?
- I support putting a lid from Denny to Spring or more. It would be an important project to increase the usability and connection as well as reduce noise and add beauty to the area
- Encourage future growth and expansion of green, open space as thread to connect areas of Downtown (Park Blocks, PDX)
- I have contacted Mr. Graves email re: a feral cat project for park if grants are available.

Preferred Level of Change

- Go big and respect the spirit of Halprin
- Major changes are needed to invite more people to visit but retain the core design principles of the park.
- Please make as few large structural changes as possible
- Though I recognize the need to keep facilities up to date, I see no need for infrastructure development. I am a local living at Cambridge. The park needs to deal with maintenance.
- Can the experts on Halprin infer how Halprin would change the park...would he be as precious about preserving the park in its totality in light of its declining use and performance?

Restoration & Maintenance

- I like the idea of restoring the "mountain/meadow" and valley plantings. More distinction between zones would make moving through more interesting and adventurous
- I note a strong rodent presence in the park.
- Fountain renovation
- Maintain craft. Don't just use paint for flashy pops of color.

Safety

- What about safety?
- People won't use the park if they don't feel safe--money to have police around.
- I hear some senior area residents express safety concerns
- Need security presence

Entrances & Wayfinding

- I chose upper Seneca because it is such an impressionable part of the park for Seneca St. passersby. If you can draw people into that pathway in an inviting way, they may feel safe to explore upper lawns etc.
- I walked by this park for 6 years before I learned it existed
- Entrances/exits to/from Freeway Park may not be well exposed but the pathways are a useful route for pedestrians living in the area—to get from Union north of the park to south of the Convention Center there are pathway options—I am cautious about your planned restructuring of these exits and entrances

Views

- It's one of my favorites in the city, particularly because of the secluded and intimate feeling
- Keep the green—the trees—we don't come there to see the city but to take refuge from it!

Lighting

- Increased visibility, lighting,
- I also think the park should have lighting at night that looks like art and not flood lights

Other

- Is the goal to create a popular park or a Halprin memorial? You need to choose. [asked during panel discussion]
- Wouldn't the money be better spent housing the homeless? 10 million dollars could house 600-700 homeless for a year
- 6 million seems too little for improvements. Can a push for a larger budget be made?
- Seattle had a unique opportunity to create another one-of-a-kind park by using the space inside the old SR 99 tunnel beneath the city, but chose to fill it instead. What are your thoughts on this lost opportunity?