

Great Streets Initiative- Public Presentation of Concept Plans
Summary of City Hall Park Comments
Received November to December 2016

This document summarizes over 400 comments received following the Great Streets presentation in November 2016, and focuses on City Hall Park. Many of these 400 comments were questions about the plans. To see a summary of the Main Street concept plan input, responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's), or a spreadsheet of all comments received to-date, please visit www.greatstreetsbtv.com

Ecology

- In general, residents agree that improving the health of the soil, grass and trees in the park is important and should be a focus of the park's redesign. There were also positive comments about the addition of the rain gardens to help with stormwater management.
- There was much discussion about the location of paths, and the tendency for people to make their own short-cuts. There were a range of suggestions about where the paths should be located, whether they are straight or curved, and how to make sure people stay on the paths rather than walking on the grass, such as by lining them with fences or planted material.
- While some residents advocated not to remove a single tree from the park, many acknowledged that there are trees in poor condition and that the soil needs to be remediated to allow them to grow. Many felt that we should save as many trees as possible during/post construction.
- Some residents feel that the park should become an arboretum showcasing rare trees in Burlington, and adding more flower gardens with visual interest in all seasons.
- Others shared that we need to carefully consider the needs of healthy trees and be careful not to over-program the park by creating too many places of single-purpose activity.

Accessibility

- There were a variety of opinions about public restrooms. Many advocated that there should be public restrooms in the park. However, others recognized that restrooms must be clean, safe, and well-maintained to be successful. Many agreed that a large, permanent restroom structure would be too large for City Hall park and shared examples of self-cleaning and stand-alone restroom facilities that are popular in other communities.
- There were a variety of opinions about the park's pathway locations. There is a group of residents that advocate for meandering pathways that lead to enclosed spaces in the park. However, many others were concerned that this would lead to people creating their own cut-through paths in the park. Many recognized that the park is both a destination and a pathway, and that people should be able to travel through the park with little obstruction. In particular, the path surfaces should be smooth and level, ADA tested, and elements should not be located to impede people with mobility challenges.
- Some felt that the park needs wider walkways to accommodate the level of activity in the park without damaging the lawn, while others felt that there was too much paving in the plan.
- Most agree that the park needs more benches and seating options. Some commented that they like the range of seating types proposed in the park including the moveable tables and chairs and the terraces. Some suggested that there should be some seating that is covered and usable in all weather conditions.
- While not all residents shared the experience, there were many comments that the physical layout or occasional perceived behavior in the park contributes to it feeling isolated and/or unsafe. Most agree that there should be more accountability for what happens in the park. Opinions differ on continued police presence in the park, a park attendant/caretaker, and/or more activities that bring people into the park. There were some suggestions to ban smoking, drugs, drinking, panhandling, glass, bikes, skateboards, segways, and dogs in the park.

- Several were concerned that the redesign of the park was intended to displace the City's homeless population, and indicated that there needs to be solutions to address the chronic homelessness in Burlington.
- Suggested additions to the park design: a drinking fountain, trash receptacles, more bike parking around the park, and more lighting for safety, ambiance and to highlight park features.
- A group of residents advocates for no hard edges in the park (only curves and soft edges) out of concern for those with mental health conditions.

Modern Civic Life

- There are many that support the concept plan for the park and recognize that it is a great improvement over the existing park's condition/amenities, and in some cases includes improvements over the 2012 plan. Many feel that as an urban gathering space in our downtown, the plan strikes a balance between active and passive uses, and takes into account many concerns and design challenges that the park's location presents.
- However, there is a group of citizens that feel that the park design should be a sanctuary away from the hustle and bustle of downtown; that it should incorporate an "Olmstead" park aesthetic with many Central Park type features, including a seat wall along all park edges, meandering pathways inside, lots of plantings, private/enclosed spaces, both traditional and splash pad fountains, game tables, children's play equipment, etc.
- There were a range of opinions regarding the park's fountain element. Supporters like the splash pad concept, feel that it is family friendly and allows the space to become flexible for other uses. Others would like to see an upright, more traditional fountain element in the park, though perhaps without a trough for water to collect in.
- There were a range of opinions on the central coffee pavilion and/or food vending in the park. Some were enthusiastic about food/drink vending as an amenity in the park to attract more people to the park. Others were concerned about introducing commercial activity (in addition to the farmer's market) in the park. Still others liked the idea of vending and offered suggested alternatives, including: temporary/moveable vending rather than a fixed/permanent structure, kiosk that can be used for pop up activities other than coffee. Generally, residents felt that seating and use of the park should not be tied to any one vendor's exclusive use of the park—that people should be welcome to use all parts of the park even if they do not choose to purchase food/beverages in the park. Others commented that vendors should be solicited through an RFP process.
- Generally, there was support for the plan's strategy to move farmer's market vendors to the edges of the park to protect the lawn inside the park. A few residents felt that there would still be impacts on the park if vendors are located along Park Lane. Some businesses spoke out that the number of prepared food vendors at the market has a significant negative impact on nearby businesses.
- Many liked the goal to have flexible spaces to be used for events and smaller performances in the park. Several commented that larger and/private ticketed events should not occur in this park.
- Some felt that the issues with the park are about deferred maintenance, and expressed that going forward, a high-level of maintenance will be required regardless of what gets built.
- Suggested additions to the park design: a fire feature, low-barrier traditional public bulletin boards, winter ice skating, public art (as sculpture, in the paving materials, etc), game tables, children's play equipment, climbing rocks, and free wifi.

Historic Preservation/Character

- There were differing opinions about the historic nature of the park and how this should be represented going forward. While only one comment said "do nothing," there was a range of opinions about how much the park's design should change when it is rebuilt.
- Some felt that the park should not be a "museum" that is seldom used, and that changing path alignments, reorganizing the paved areas, replanting trees, and rethinking what type of fountain in the park will not destroy the park's history. These residents felt that what is historic about the park is that it is a central gathering place in

Burlington. Others felt that there needs to be more respect for the straight, radiating pathways, and a focal point in the middle of the park. Still others felt that the existing fountain and current light fixtures and benches should be maintained.

Public Process

- Some residents felt that the month-long public comment period was too short, and that the NPA's were not appropriately engaged in the process.
- Some were concerned that local users and nearby residents were not engaged in the conversation about the park.
- There were some residents that preferred the Coalition for a Liveable City's alternative plan for the park, while others commented that there should not be presentations of alternative plans by other groups and that the design process should be iterative, but not disrupted by opposition.