

Date: June 28, 2021
To: Mayor Wheeler, Commissioner JoAnn Hardesty, Commissioner Mingus Mapps,
Commissioner Carmen Rubio, Commissioner Dan Ryan
Info: cctestimony@portlandoregon.gov
Subject: Draft South Park Blocks Master Plan, May 2021

I write as a Downtown resident living near the South Park Blocks (SPB) who is a frequent user of this magnificent park. I served on the Community Advisory Committee and have studied the draft Master Plan (MP) in depth. I finally have come to realize why the Bureau of Parks and Recreation (PP&R) and resident/citizen opponents are *talking past each other*.

PP&R reports that this is a “high level concept” plan. Perhaps much of the *language* in the MP might be considered conceptually “high level” and thus lacking enough details for implementation without a lot more public input. However, the maps and cross-cuts in the plan are definitely not “high level.” In fact, the level of specific details as to what is intended is the crux of the objections and why both sides have yet to find common ground (i.e., see pgs 50, 51, 109 for starters).

For example, p. 51 Blocks 7-12 shows the Tree Succession Plan (TSP): 1) map above shows the 6 blocks as they are today (with all 5 rows of existing tall, deciduous trees; 4 paths that provide safety, flexibility; and a 200’x124’ boundary dating from 1877) and 2) the map below shows what is being proposed, in great detail, down to both the number and types of trees, all of which are *new* trees, implying all existing trees are replaced when implementation occurs. Most of existing trees have at least another 100 years to live *if maintained properly*. The construction of large new concrete areas replacing grass/planters – including a very wide promenade replacing the two functional, safety/conflict-reducing, central, divided paths – cannot be accomplished without removing an entire row of trees, which is clearly shown in the maps. This is decidedly not a “high-level concept” plan. If the draft MP is approved as written, these detailed maps and cross-cuts become the approved architectural blue prints of what *will* happen. Clearly more discussion and analysis are necessary before approving these maps, especially in view of global warming.

Similar details about the Green Loop (GL) are included in the draft MP which suggest that 14 feet is removed from this important pedestrian park to accommodate bicycles. This appears to be a PP&R give-away of public park land to PBOT. Again, not a “high-level concept” plan. It is a plan, if approved as is, that would *give away* at least 17,000 square feet of a People’s pedestrian-priority Park, critical for residents’ need for respite found in such a green “Natural” park.

I strongly recommend **voting no on this plan and removing both the Green Loop (GL) and the Tree Succession Plan (TSP) from this MP**. Removal will allow each sub-plan its own planning process and an expanded outreach effort, so details can be aired more transparently than has happened to date (these details were buried in that they were very hard to read and to interpret by many people). City Council may want to consider ordering an environmental impact study prior to approving either the TSP or the GL. Lacking in the MP is a *tree maintenance plan* which is essential to pair with a TSP. Needed is a *tree conservation* plan to fight global warming, water run-off, and heat island impacts.

I believe removing both the GL and the TSP will produce better planning documents that can satisfy both Parks staff and the public, both of whom at this moment seem to be scarily divided over this MP. **We do not need more division these days**. I am hoping you might agree.

If this draft MP is approved as written without removing these two buried “plans within the plan,” I believe the public will remain angry for some time. This is a particularly beloved Portland Park. Such divisiveness is not what any of us needs right now, with so many other matters to tend to for a more equitable Portland and a vigorous Portland recovery.

Thank you for your careful attention and your hard work during these challenging times for us all.

Sincerely,

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