

From: [Amy Veranth](#)
To: [Wheeler, Mayor](#); [Commissioner Rubio](#); [Commissioner Ryan Office](#); [Commissioner Hardesty](#); [Commissioner Mapps](#)
Cc: [Council Clerk – Testimony](#)
Subject: Master Plan for South Park Blocks
Date: Monday, May 31, 2021 3:03:00 PM

Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners —

Please reject the draft Master Plan for the South Park Blocks.

The South Park Blocks are a refuge of nature, providing an escape from the noise and bustle of the city. I live downtown and, when walking, I always detour through the Park Blocks. As soon as I enter, my breath slows and I relax. There is something about the deep green provided by the trees and plantings that acts as an antidote for stress. There is a feeling of being restored. (Do a Google-search for “the need for nature” and you’ll find scores of articles on the physical and mental benefits of exposure to the natural world, even how it can lower murder rates in our cities.)

The South Park Blocks now offer two parallel paths down the whole length of the blocks. Although you can see the other path as you walk, the two paths feel like separate nature walks. We do not need a wide central sidewalk that would take away greenery and replace it with more paving and a concentration pedestrians. If you want a “promenade,” you can go to the Waterfront and walk along the river, watching other people as you weave between pedestrians. But that is not what the South Park Blocks should be; these blocks should continue to be about nature (not hardscapes), meandering (not promenading), finding solace (not crowds) in the midst of the greenery.

The South Park Blocks provide calm, offering tranquility undisturbed by the activity of city-life that surrounds them. If you want to be among people or where there is planned activity, you can go to Director Park or Pioneer Courthouse Square. But that’s not what the South Park Blocks should be; these blocks should offer the opportunity for repose (not activity), solitude (not gatherings of people), quiet (not community events). Although large gathering places could be appropriate in the University District, the Cultural District should be a place for more reflection and relaxation.

We need a place downtown where people can feel like they are in a nature reserve. We need a sanctuary. The draft Master Plan is a vision of an urban park that claims to keep the tree canopy while making the park itself more “contemporary” by increasing the hardscape and putting in large seating areas. This would be a horrible mistake. The increased residential densities of the University and Cultural Districts only increase the importance of preserving the maximum amount of greenspace in the South Park Blocks as a refuge from sidewalks and city-life. To take away any amount of the natural landscape from the South Park Blocks is a disservice to downtown residents, as well as tourists who come to Portland to see an oasis of towering trees and quiet in the heart of a city.

Lastly, the Green Loop should not be part of the South Park Blocks Master Plan. Creating a multi-modal transportation space by shrinking the park’s area and removing trees and plantings is perverse. Although the Plan would separate the Green Loop by an understory of plants, those plantings would do nothing to preserve the tranquility of the park from the distraction and noise of bikes, scooters, joggers and skate-boarders streaming past. The South Park Blocks should remain a park, not be turned into a North-South route for multi-modal traffic.

The South Park Blocks are a unique and remarkable nature preserve in downtown Portland. They should not be transformed into something that is more about “contemporary urban” and less about a natural environment. Please reject any Master Plan for the South Park Blocks that would:

1. add more hardscape (pavers or sidewalk),
2. replace the two existing paths with a wide central promenade, or
3. include a multi-modal Green Loop or bike path.

Thank you.

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