



MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 25, 2024
TO: Portland Design Commission
FROM: Ross Swanson and Lora Lillard, PP&R
SUBJECT: Darcelle XV Interim Plaza - briefing

On February 1, 2024, the Portland Design Commission will hold a briefing on the design of Darcelle XV Interim Plaza, formerly known as O'Bryant Square. In July 2023, the park was renamed "Darcelle XV Plaza" – after the late Darcelle XV, intended to reflect the City's commitment to fostering a more inclusive city.

The purpose of this briefing is to give an update of 1) the design, 2) public outreach efforts to activate Darcelle XV Plaza, and 3) a timeline for opening following the demolition of the parking garage and to hear feedback from the Commission.

BACKGROUND:

Closed and fenced for the last five years, the Darcelle XV site will be left "park ready" for an interim park design and park activation following the parking garage demolition. The funding mechanism to build a fully finished permanent park has not yet been identified.

PP&R has identified Downtown Portland Clean & Safe (C&S) as a community partner to be programming lead and provide enhanced security and cleaning for the park's interim phase (next 3-5 years). Programming for Darcelle XV Plaza will rotate to allow the "beta testing" of different events and activities and to engage the community. C&S will host regular programming and services at the site. Ideas proposed include lunchtime music, hosted games, artisan stalls, performances, temporary skate rink, global spring festivals, and Pride parade events.

1. Design

Administration

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Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) has hired NNA Landscape Architecture to design the interim plaza, in partnership with The Center for Public Interest Design (CPID) affiliated with Portland State University (PSU) and C&S.

The current interim plaza design includes the following features:

- Large, flat anchor space for revolving programming and events
- (2) Elevated Stages for performances (both formal and informal)
- Plaza with seating
- Dramatic gateway access points at corners
- Repurposed historic cast iron pillars as park gateways
- Overhead string lighting
- Sail shade structures
- Six-foot-high security fence with maximum visibility
- Dog off-leash area
- Opportunity locations for honoring LGBTQ+ community and history, possibly including a “Queer Heroes” or “Walk of Fame” feature

In addition, the Project Team is working closely with the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) to ensure that the design for Darcelle XV Plaza and adjacent Green Loop and Street Plaza along SW 9th Avenue will be complementary.

2. Public Outreach

Many of these features were elements born out of public engagement over the past several months.

- In 2022-2023, the Portland Park Foundation (PPF) and the CPID sponsored the “Back to Square One” public series of events that engaged more than 1,000 Portlanders to reimagine O’Bryant Square with an eye toward interim design ideas for active programming and recreation. Ideas centered around how the park can be a harbinger of positive change.
- In the fall 2023, following the renaming of Darcelle XV Plaza to honor Portland’s iconic drag queen, the CPID worked with Poison Waters on a series of interviews with allies, friends, and family of Darcelle XV to hear their ideas about how to honor their legacy in the new design.
- PP&R is working with community partner C&S to activate both Director Park and the Darcelle XV Plaza site. PP&R will sign a multiyear agreement in the coming months to ensure the two sites are busy with programming and events.

A second wave of public outreach – this time to preview the current design of the interim park – has begun. The project team has briefed the Downtown Neighborhood Association and the Oregon Queer History Collective (OQHC), with positive reception for the design. A public open house is scheduled for Sunday, February 4 at the Morgan

Building, across from the park. PP&R and C&S are working in collaboration with OQHC on walking tours of historic sites/ history of drag in Portland and with Poison Waters on a focused event with Darcelle's friends and family to complement the public open house event.

3. Timeline

The estimated timeline for opening is below.

- Spring/Summer 2024 – Parking garage demolition ends; Construction for Interim Plaza will begin.
- Spring/Summer 2025 – Darcelle XV Plaza opens

We are pleased to share the design for Darcelle XV Interim Plaza with the Design Commission and look forward to the discussion.

Attachments:

Darcelle XV Interim Plaza slide deck