



**City of Portland, Oregon**  
**Bureau of Development Services**  
**Land Use Services**  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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## Briefing

# DISCUSSION MEMO

**Date:** September 20, 2021  
**To:** Historic Landmarks Commission & Design Commission  
**From:** Hillary Adam, Design / Historic Review Team  
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**Re:** Thompson Elk Fountain  
Briefing Memo – September 27, 2021

On September 27, 2021, representatives from City Bureaus, specifically Jeff Hawthorne, City Arts Manager at the Office of Management and Finance (OMF), will present information about the Thompson Elk Fountain, a well-known Local Landmark. The Thompson Elk Fountain has stood at the center of SW Main Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues since 1900 until the summer of 2020. Roland Hinton Perry sculpted the bronze Elk that stood atop the Barre Granite fountain designed by architect H.G. Wright. The fountain included four troughs for watering horses, which were used for transportation during that time; thus, the fountain provided refreshment for people and animals alike.

In the summer of 2020, ongoing protests in the vicinity of the fountain eventually resulted in catastrophic vandalism to the fountain itself. In August the Elk was removed by the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) for safekeeping; in September the fountain was disassembled and stored by the Portland Water Bureau (PWB) to prevent further damage. An inventory of the remaining pieces of the fountain were catalogued by the PWB (see attachments). Some pieces were damaged beyond repair, some were lost, but many remain.

In the interest of public discourse and utilizing the expertise of the City's historic Landmarks Commission, Bureau of Development Services staff requested this briefing by City officials as the Fountain, a historic landmark, is a significant part of the City's landscape and any proposed treatment to it such as alterations or relocation must go through the Historic Resource Review process. Multiple agencies are interested in the final outcome of the Elk Fountain as RACC manages maintenance of the elk sculpture, PWB has historically managed the public fountain, and the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) manages the right-of-way in which the fountain has been located for the past 120 years. BDS staff has spoken with the City Arts Manager and these other parties regarding process and possible outcomes.

Staff anticipates that following, this Briefing, OMF will secure a historic architect to develop possible plans for the treatment of the Elk Fountain. BDS staff hopes that OMF will pursue a Design Advice Request with the Historic Landmarks Commission to consider options. To date, a desire to reduce the width of the landmark has been expressed by PBOT to allow safer passage of busses and bicycles on the north side of the landmark. PWB has expressed concerns regarding the safety of pedestrians who may wish to travel to the center of the street to enjoy the fountain up close. Concerns have also been expressed about the future security of the landmark at its historic location which is located between

the public parks adjacent to Portland City Hall, the Multnomah County Justice Center, the Mark O. Hatfield US Courthouse, and the Edith Green-Wendell Wyatt Federal Building, all popular destinations for political protest.

Staff notes that the future approval criteria for any alterations or relocations would be the Central City Fundamental Design Guidelines and the Other approval criteria noted in 33.846.060.G (1-10). See attached matrix for the language of these criteria.

Staff encourages the Commission to consider the following in its discussion with agency representatives:

- **Background.** The Thompson Elk Fountain is a Local Landmark, its resource type noted as “Object” and its architectural style noted as “Fountain”. Therefore, the fountain is a critical component of this landmark’s historic significance, character, and features.
- **Features.** Special features and materials noted in the Historic Resource Inventory form are as follows: “Octagonal granite reservoir with four animal troughs. Bronze elk on central granite pedestal. Water spouts at pedestal in form of animal heads. Inscription: “Presented to the City of Portland by David P. Thompson, A.D. 1900.” The Inventory form notes that the fountain is designated as a Landmark.
- **Relocation.** Given the potential security issues in this location, is maintaining the fountain’s historic location a critical consideration? Should the fountain be located elsewhere? Alternative locations could include: the adjacent Chapman or Lownsdale Squares, or further west to the South Park Blocks. Staff notes that the recently adopted South Park Blocks Master Plan shows SW Madison Street to be vacated with the park blocks occupying this space and featuring a small programmable plaza at the center of the elongated park block with locations for art features midblock on either side, north and south. Ideally, the Elk Fountain, if moved, could be located in a way that its views to the nature beyond the City were not blocked by adjacent buildings (maintain clear views down a right-of-way or across a park). Staff encourages the Commission to brainstorm other possible locations if the relocation is deemed worthy of discussion. Relocation to a City Park requires Portland Parks and Recreation analysis and agreement.
- **Remaining in Place.** If relocation is not a worthy consideration, staff suggests that alternative could be identified that allow the fountain to remain in its historic location including: rerouting busses off of this path (very few pass here and all travel south or north by 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue) – requires Trimet analysis and agreement; separating the bus travel lane from the bicycle travel lane – requires PBOT analysis and agreement; vacating the street and developing the area around the fountain as a plaza – requires PBOT and Trimet analysis and agreement.
- **Fountain.** Given that the landmark resource is specifically noted as a fountain, staff believes that maintaining this function is important to maintaining the resource’s historic character and significance. Staff does not believe that reducing the fountain to a pedestal maintains this character or significance, essentially reducing the landmark by at least half of its cultural and aesthetic value. While many landmarks evolve over time, this resource is small in stature thus changes have a significant impact that substantially compromise the overall integrity of the landmark. Therefore, staff believes it is important to use as much original material as possible and rebuild the fountain to its original condition, including reconstruction of the four horse troughs which are an important aspect of the fountain’s significance. When considering the approval criteria, staff believes that complete restoration of the fountain is more important than reinstalling the Elk sculpture on a reduced base at the historic location.

Staff welcomes Commission comments on the bullets above and encourages the Commission to provide additional ideas not yet stated.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.