

Dorothea Dix Park

Master Plan Executive + Advisory Committees

Date: Wednesday, June 18, 2017
Time: 5:30pm – 8:00pm
Location: Dorothea Dix Park

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, June 28th, members of the Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC), the Master Plan Executive Committee (MPEC), the Dix Park City Staff, and the Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates (MVVA) design team met on-site to kick-off the planning process.

MVVA Principal, Matt Urbanski led the meeting. He opened by explaining that their goal in working with MPAC and MPEC is to get everyone meaningfully involved in the development of a master plan for Dorothea Dix Park.

When planning the park, MVVA will approach the design through the lens of six themes, all of which are focused supporting the park. The six themes are as follows:

1. The Park and The Region
2. The Park and Transportation
3. The Park and The Site
4. The Park and The Buildings
5. The Park and Its Partners
6. The Park and Its Programs

Throughout the master plan process, there will be four major meetings that focus on each of the themes. The first meeting will focus on the park, the region and transportation. The second will focus on the park and the site. The third will focus on the park, its buildings and its partners (as partners are important to determining what will occupy the buildings). The fourth will focus on the park and programming, determining what people will do at the park and what the best uses for each part of the land will be. Although each meeting will have a focus theme, all themes will be discussed throughout the planning process since they are all interconnected. MVVA explained that the park design is a very iterative process. It is about continually testing and refining ideas.

Kate Pearce explained that in addition to the MVVA schedule, there will be an extensive city-led public outreach strategy. This public engagement process will go beyond the typical public meetings that always draw the same crowds. The public engagement strategy has unique approaches for reaching a broad and diverse group of people.

Matt Urbanski reiterated how rare it is to have over 300 acres of park land so close to downtown. He suggested that most parks today are made from land “leftover,” the urban edges such as rail corridors, underpasses, etc. He then explained MVVA’s four goals for the master plan process:

1. Learn from other great parks
 - a. In the 19th century, parks were focused on being a pastoral landscape that could be an escape from the city within the city. Parks still hold that goal, but in the 21st century they have an added goal of creating urban excitement. They accept the city by connecting to its existing life.
2. Build a Framework that allows for growth
 - a. This element is critical for creating a park that will be relevant and successful 150 years from now. Olmstead and Vaux succeeded in their design of Central Park by creating a compelling yet incredibly simple design that allowed elements to be added overtime as the city grew and changed.
 - b. When Central Park was first built, it was not at all central to the city. The city grew up around it. Dix Park will have a similar effect in shaping the growth of Raleigh.
 - c. Part of the genius of Central Park is the circulation pattern that allowed for separation of modes of transit. Circulation is the engine of design. The MVVA team has begun assessing the existing circulation at Dix Park. Currently, the roads are set up for people to access the buildings on the site. There is no coherent loop that connects all parts of the site.
3. Work with existing landscape conditions
 - a. The site already offers beautiful topography. Dix Hill physically prevents one from being able to see the whole park, which is ideal. The lack of a direct sightline encourages exploration and discovery of the land.
 - b. The site offers a number of other beautiful elements, for example the old trees, that will be worked with.
 - c. MVVA used the example of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY. Olmstead and Vaux used many of the existing elements of the landscape as inspiration and for guidance in their design plans.
4. Invite everyone to participate and make a park for everyone
 - a. Urbanski challenged the committee members to think of what part of the site they would picture if someone said “Meet me at Dix Park.” The park will need destination structures that allow people to orient themselves. The site will also need powerful points of arrival that encourage people to enter the site and welcome them to the park. Urbanski shared images of entrances to parks around the world as well as notable structures within those parks.

Following the presentation, the committee members broke up into three groups to explore the site with MVVA’s design team. During the hour-long walk, the groups discussed visions for the park.