

Dorothea Dix Park

Master Plan Executive Committee

Date: Wednesday, September 5
Time: 10:00am-3:00pm
Location: Annie Louise Wilkerson Nature Reserve, 5229 Awls Haven Dr, Raleigh, NC 27614

Meeting Agenda

10:00am: Overarching Park Principles
10:30am: Plan Review & Discussion
12:00pm: “A Day in the Life in the Park” Park Program Discussion
1:30pm: Park Phasing
3:00pm: Meeting Close

The Master Plan Executive Committee (MPEC) held a one-day retreat work session with the Dorothea Dix Park design team Michael Van Valkenburg Associates (MVVA) to review the latest park draft master plan. The MVVA team that day consisted of Michael Van Valkenburg, Matt Urbanski, and Adrienne Heflich.

MVVA’s Matt Urbanski and Michael Van Valkenburg began by presenting the three principles of the master plan: 1. Open Up! 2. Invite Resourcefulness 3. Celebrate Contrasts. Each principle is supported by bulleted details (See meeting handouts). These principles aim to make Dix Park a welcoming place for everyone and offer something to people of all ages and backgrounds. They also aim to leverage the best of the existing landscape, bring meaningful relevance to the complex layers of the site history, and balance the civic and natural experience. Van Valkenburg stated that every element on the Dix Park site will be seen as an opportunity not as a liability.

The draft master plan book is broken into four different chapters: The Land, The Framework, The Program, Implementation. Van Valkenburg explained, “You have to build to greatness one step at a time and the master plan is the foundation of that.” The goal is to make a plan that feels as though it “intrinsically belongs there,” according to Van Valkenburg. MVVA drew parallels between Dix Park and Central Park when it was first built. They noted that when Central Park was created it did not have dense edges or hierarchical spaces within the park. It now has strong, defined, navigable edges. Central Park now serves as an escape within the city while also being a civic gathering space.

MVVA presented a large-scale draft master plan site map of the park. Matt Urbanski then dove into more detailed description of the six landscapes proposed: The Creek, The Meadow, The Grove, The Downtown Gateway, The Ridge, & The Valley.

The Creek Landscape is proposed to be a key element within the park. Van Valkenburg stated that he plans for it to become a breathtaking example of a riparian landscape. MVVA’s proposal pulls the creek back from Western Boulevard, creates a berm to protect the area from traffic noise, restores the creek

bed, widens the floodplain, and creates better access to the creek via walking paths. MVVA worked with their subconsultant hydrologists, LimnoTech, to scientifically determine a new meandering creek geometry based on flow patterns of the creek. Urbanski explained this landscape will create a feeling of interiority and retreat.

MPEC members stated their concern that the location of the proposed soccer fields and the loud activity they will bring will disrupt this feeling of retreat by the creek. MPEC suggested the fields be moved further from the creek, but also noted there are some limitations to what can go on in the proposed field area since it was formerly a landfill. MPEC members also voiced concern that the fields are so close to the cemetery, which should be a peaceful commemorative space. Van Valkenburg assured MPEC that the cemetery will be properly honored and is further from the fields than it may appear on the large map. MPEC added that the proposed soccer fields should be multiuse sports fields—not just designated for soccer. The thought is that if the fields allow for all types of field sports, then more citizens will be able to enjoy the space. Lastly, MPEC noted that the Kirby building, which is slated to serve as a locker room/bathroom/mudroom is not close enough to the creek. There should be a building closer so that if kids play in the creek, they can easily wash off after.

The Grove Landscape is intended to be a very vegetated area of the park. MVVA proposes a small natural amphitheater area just down the hill from the chapel and a botanic garden to increase horticultural variety. A constructed steep will capture storm water runoff from the top of the hill and create moisture in the landscape that will help diversify the ecology.

The Lineberger building sits in the Grove Landscape and is proposed to have an outdoor pool, locker rooms, etc. MPEC pushed back on the pool idea, stating that the city already has pools at Pullen Park and one being built at John Chavis Memorial Park. Pools are also very expensive to build and maintain. That space could perhaps be better used as multicourt indoor/outdoor space. MVVA explained that this pool is a suggestion for the master plan, meaning that it could be twenty years or more until it is built. By that point, the city's population will have increased significantly and a large outdoor pool may be more needed. MVVA noted that the Brooklyn Bridge Park original master plan has a pool in it, but it is just now being built twenty-three years later.

The Meadow Landscape includes The Big Field and edges that touch the State Farmer's Market, Department of Agriculture property, and NC State's Spring Hill Property. The panhandle-shaped Department of Agriculture property creates a natural valley that would support a tiered pond system for filtering water leading into Walnut Creek. A big open event lawn would stretch from the Farmer's Market edge northward towards Pullen Park, like the sweeping lawn of Olmstead's famous Prospect Park. Mown grass would transition to a prairie of native piedmont plants then to woodland along the edges. The south edge of the big field has a proposed grotto/low lying waterbody. This element would add a dramatic element to the landscape. The accompanying handouts best explain this element and its relationship the Valley and amphitheater.

MPEC members discussed the ideal buildout of Spring Hill, noting that this is the purview of North Carolina State University. MVVA stated that they ideally envision apartments with courtyards to open them up to light and views in the park and prevent a monolithic edge. Apartments along the Spring Hill edge would help create "eyes on the park" to better support safety. MVVA proposed that offices and mixed used could still be on Spring Hill behind the apartments. Additionally, there would be a park scale road would clearly delineate between the park and the residences on Spring Hill.

The Downtown Gateway is the section of the park along Lake Wheeler Road. MVVA stated that the neighborhood scale connection needs to be stronger along Lake Wheeler Road. Shuttle and bus stops as well as widening the right of way between Grisom Street and Fuller Street is proposed. The design proposes that the athletic field along Lake Wheeler Road become a playground. The Buffalo and Brenner houses would be repurposed to support the playground uses (i.e. concessions, bathrooms, etc.)

MVVA spoke about buildings that could be used for housing. Some MPEC members strongly pushed back against residential buildings in the park. The argument was that we spent \$52M on the purchase for it to become a park. If part of that is used for residential, some MPEC members said that creates an equity issue. The design team stated they were recommending apartments only along the edge in order to create eyes on the park and to generate revenue for the rest of the park. MVVA and MPEC discussed the possibility of Lake Wheeler being a more activated on both sides of the street with commercial that would create urban energy. The determination of uses for the five historic buildings along the Lake Wheeler Road edge will be delayed. A small area impact study for the Fuller Heights neighborhood area will also launch on Monday, September 10th per the request of Councilwoman Crowder.

The Ridge Landscape simplifies the current maze of buildings into a strong framework for the civic side of the park. The goal is to make a very activated, lively space on this side of the park. MVVA explained proposed uses for the buildings including a rooftop garden on the original AJ Davis Hospital Building that would overlook downtown and the park. All programmatic proposals for the building can be seen in on the presentation boards.

The proposed loop that unites The Ridge is over 40 feet wide at some points to feel like a large front porch like area that can double as temporary roadway/drop of point for large events at the park. The loop connects into an Event Hub on the far west side. The garden-like parking spoke areas of the Event Hub could be spaces for tents during festivals or parking spaces on a normal day. This space could replace the role Fayetteville Street plays during festival season. The spokes also point outward allowing one to access all areas on the western side of the park. Between the spokes are long-leaf pine groves as well as some sports courts. MPEC pushed back about the scattered sports courts throughout the Ridge Landscape. They noted that a large covered sports court area may be better suited for the area.

The Valley Landscape has a new proposed trestle that bridges the urban and the natural environments in the park. The 16-foot elevated trestle would go over the proposed amphitheater and connect to the grotto area at the bottom of the meadow. It would allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross over it and look down to the amphitheater below. The amphitheater would allow seating for 5,000 and take advantage of the natural bowl shape of the valley. MPEC proposed that the capacity be expanded to 10,000. The boiler plant is proposed to be converted into a concessions area that would support the amphitheater and make that area less of a dead space between concerts.

There was a brief discussion about phasing for the project. MVVA stated that an infrastructure master plan needs to be done next. Priorities during the phasing include:

- Improve the perimeter spaces first; build from the edges in
- Plan for buildings and cultural anchors to occur in later phases, in order to reap greater value and understanding in being located in the park
- Pace construction to align with fundraising and administration capacity

- Pair building rehabilitation at the same time with landscape restoration to connect inside to outside experiences at the park
- Where possible, site new roads and paths at existing paved areas to protect mature trees

MPEC also discussed a want to make some small changes that make the current day to day of the park more enjoyable in the short term.