



Raleigh

MEMO

TO: Dix Park Master Plan Advisory Committee, Dix Park Master Plan Executive Committee

FROM: Kate Pearce, Planning Supervisor

DEPARTMENT: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources

DATE: January 22, 2019

SUBJECT: Dorothea Dix Park Master Plan Public Comment Period Summary & Response

### **Background**

On January 4th, 2019, the Dorothea Dix Park Draft Master Plan and accompanying FAQ was posted for public review and comment. The documents were shared online at [dixpark.org](http://dixpark.org), [raleighnc.gov](http://raleighnc.gov), via a newsletter to the park's 25,000+ subscribers, and through social media. On Neighborland, the project's online engagement platform, community members were encouraged to post feedback and respond directly to each other's comments. Staff also delivered printed copies to 27 community centers throughout the City.

The public comment period closed on January 18, 2019 at midnight. Over 700 comments were received through a variety of methods including online, over the phone, email and in-person meetings.

The two-week public comment period was the final opportunity for the public to review the latest draft of the Plan prior to the final draft being presented to Raleigh City Council. The two-week public comment period was part of a much larger 18-month planning and public engagement process. It has been the largest public process the City has ever led. Highlights of the process include four large community meetings (one more scheduled on February 6, 2019) totaling approximately 2,100 attendees, presentations at CAC meetings, feedback gathered at 176 events hosted at the park, nine conference presentations, eight booths at community festivals, 114 presentations to community groups, 138 walking tours, 23 driving tours, one college focused community meeting with 400 students from six local universities, staff-led mentorship on various class projects at local universities and schools, and summer camp design sessions with 1,900 youth ages 6-14.

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## Key Findings - Public Comment Period

A review and synthesis of the comments from the past two weeks has identified the following conclusions:

- While there has been significant public outreach and engagement, we realize the Master Plan is a lengthy and detailed document. An Executive Summary would be beneficial to help clearly and concisely articulate the vision and recommendations suggested in the Plan.
  - Staff is currently working to produce an Executive Summary.
- The proposals in the Master Plan create a conceptual framework for the future of the public discussion. Important details, like parking quantity, location and design, building reuse, funding mechanisms and public-private partnerships, will require further detailed study in future phases and be part of a public process that ultimately goes to the Raleigh City Council for review and approval.
  - Staff has drafted a Foreword on the purpose, intent and use of the Master Plan.
- Comments ranged in subject from a discussion of legacy and wellness to future funding and partnerships. The three topics most discussed in the comments were: parking, building use and private development within the park.
  - Staff has highlighted these items in the following sections of this memo and notes how the Master Plan has been updated to respond.

## Parking

*The Issue:* The two extremes of the parking discussion are that some people want no parking in the park while others suggest more parking is necessary.

*The Comments:* The following comments highlight the issue.

- *“I can't imagine giving up even 1 acre of park land to parking! Let's keep cars out of the park and maximize the green space. Let's instead have a huge parking facility off site with a shuttle to and from the park.”*
- *“Parking - is it really feasible to have to park off site? No real places to park. We are not a city where people rely on public transit to get places. We drive, like it or not. We must be realistic? All of your plans are based on proposed changes and we know how long that will take...!!! What about families with strollers, etc... lots of great family things, but would you want to park off site (and not sure where that will be as there are not many options around this park) and take 30 minutes to get to the park with little kids?”*

*The Master Plan Response:* The Master Plan suggests leaving the majority of the park car-free and prevents vehicular cut-throughs while also providing easy-to-access parking located near key destinations within the park. Proposed connections to and through the park prioritize the pedestrian and the bicyclist. However, the Master Plan also notes that currently our community relies heavily on cars to get to and from places. The size of Dix Park, combined with the desire to be a place that welcomes a diversity of users to a variety of spaces, requires parking. To not include parking within the park would exclude many users including people with disabilities, families with small children and visitors from across the city, region and state. As Raleigh grows

and transportation and transit options change the need for parking within the park could be reduced. This is one example of how the Master Plan suggests balancing the need for parking with the desire to leave most of the park car-free.

*Future Decisions:* The final decisions about the location, type and amount of parking will evolve as amenities and facilities are developed as part of phasing implementation plans. A robust and transparent community engagement process and City Council approval will be required in each phase of work.

## **Building Use**

*The Issue:* There is consensus on preserving some of the historic buildings within the park. The debate arises when discussing the quantity and future use of the preserved buildings. The two extremes of the building discussion are there should be no commercial or private uses, while the other suggests partnerships with the private sector are necessary to fund and sustain the park's future and contribute to the park's vitality.

*The Comments:* The following comments highlight the issue.

- *“I strongly endorse the preservation and adaptive reuse of the historic and practically adaptable structures on site. I strongly endorse utilizing the development community as partners to pay for the redevelopment and maintenance of the buildings selected for such use. The income is needed for park maintenance.”*
- *“I am completely opposed to allowing hotels or other commercial space within the confines of the park boundaries. This is the \*one\* opportunity that Raleigh has to preserve this large and spectacular tract of open space. We cannot waste this opportunity by giving in to forces trying to chip away at it with a little development here, and a little development there that will take it from 300 acres to 200 acres, and maybe even less.”*

*The Master Plan Response:* The Master Plan proposes the concept of preserving 30 historic structures and demolishing 55 structures without defining specific uses. The Master Plan does not determine the exact plan for preserving, adapting and demolishing buildings on the site. It provides criteria for decision-making, suggests a structure for building removals and presents a rationale for reinvesting in structures that support the life of the park. It explores several different opportunities or future use options but does not commit to what is most appropriate to the future of the park.

*Future Decisions:* The final decisions about the preservation, demolition and use of buildings will be determined in future phases. A robust and transparent community engagement process and City Council approval will be required in each phase of work.

## **Private Development**

*The Issue:* The two extremes of the private development discussion are there should be no private development in the park, while the other suggests partnerships with the private sector are necessary to fund and sustain the park's future and contribute to the park's vitality.

*The Comments:* The following comments highlight the issue.

- *“The master plan for Dix Park has a lot of good things in it, but there is much that should never see the light of day. I am referring to Private Development in the Park that doesn't serve the Park visitor. This place is an oasis for Raleigh, a respite from our city and capital that continues to grow. The downtown has multiple areas of concentrated bars, restaurants, shops, etc. We don't need a North Hills style plaza in the center of the Park. We need as much open space as possible. Lake Wheeler Road is supposed to be the Gateway to Dix Park. So why are those areas being reserved for future private development? Why is land right next to the future play area not being preserved?”*
- *“I've read the plan entirely and I'm in favor of the plan. I am also in favor of allowing leasing to private development in the areas specified by the plan. I know there are some people that hear 'private development' and immediately want to argue against it, however, if this park is going to reach its full potential and be the real crown jewel of this city, then that revenue will be vital to making that happen. Instead of arguing against private development, I think the discussion should be about the type of development and why it would be deemed necessary. I wonder if some people simply aren't grasping the amount of money it's going to take to make this park a true destination park (which is the whole reason Raleigh ponied up 60 million for it to begin with). If this park cannot sustain itself, then it will be the burden of the taxpayer and its future will be in the hands of whoever is voted into office. In that scenario the park's funds could be cut, the plans could be scaled back, and what was once a dream for a park that will finally set Raleigh apart, will turn into a never-ending fight over park funding and park use.*

*The Master Plan Response:* The first draft of the Master Plan proposed preserving and enhancing 292 acres of open space, preserving and reusing eight acres of historic buildings and reserving eight acres for future development. That breaks down to 95.0% open space, 2.5% preserved, 2.5% reserved for future use. The reservation of eight acres for future use/buildings was originally proposed in response to the following analysis by the consultant team:

- Park operations and maintenance costs, at full build out, are estimated between \$8M-\$10M annually. Note: This is just for the maintenance costs of outdoor spaces, not buildings.
- Public funding for parks maintenance and operations can be difficult to sustain because it competes with other municipal needs.
- Partnerships with the private sector that result in limited building development on park land is a national best practice and widely used by other cities around the country. In most cases, the land is leased, not sold, to business operators who work within a partnership agreement. For example, the City could work to establish Community Benefits Agreements to ensure that the private partner creates job opportunities for local workers, provides public services, or requires all first-floor uses must be open and accessible to the public. Whatever the agreement, it is always about supporting the mission of the park first.

- The consultant team took all of this into consideration and proposed as one of the funding options that the City consider ground leases through public-private partnerships on eight acres of park land.
- The estimated revenue generated from the ground leases would pay for the entire future Dix Park maintenance and operations costs.

Through the public input process, staff has realized that this is the most contentious piece of the Master Plan for Dorothea Dix Park. To address this, the plan has been revised to suggest that the eight acres in question along Lake Wheeler Road should be part of a “Future Study Area.”

*Future Decisions:* The final decisions about any potential private development in the park through public-private partnerships will be determined in future phases. A robust and transparent community engagement process and City Council approval will be required in each phase of work.

In addition, staff has made numerous general edits to the draft Master Plan including but not limited to the following:

- A foreword to explain what a master plan is and how the master plan proposes a vision and framework to guide the future development of Dorothea Dix Park
- An Acknowledgements section
- More information added to the Process section to highlight the community engagement process and the parallel studies that have influenced the Master Plan including the tree inventory, report from the Dix Park Legacy Committee, and results from the GPR survey of the cemetery
- Language inserted into the Process section to clarify the purpose of this Master Plan (i.e., “The Dorothea Dix Park Master Plan proposes a vision for the future of Dix Park and a series of recommendations to support the implementation of that vision. The vision in the Master Plan is a result of site analysis, an application of best practices and expertise from the consultant team and most importantly a synthesis of community feedback. The objectives of the Master Plan are to preserve opportunities, focus resources, achieve community consensus. The Master Plan is an early step in transforming the site into a beloved public park. There are a lot of details that need to be determined in the next phases of work including specific design plans for individual projects, funding, partnerships, etc. All of these decisions will be part of an inclusive public process that ultimately goes to Raleigh City Council for consideration.”
- Language inserted into the Framework section to suggest a stronger direct connection from Dix Park to the core of downtown, the Convention Center and Fayetteville Street corridor
- Edits to the graphic site plan and language inserted into the Gateway section to suggest that the Gateway as the main civic entrance into the park with iconic features including fountains, public art and play structures
- Edits to the graphic site plan and language inserted to refer to the areas previously known as “Areas Reserved for Future Buildings” along Lake Wheeler Road to “Future Study Areas”

- Edits and language inserted to the Framework section to clarify the role of buildings in the park and the Plan's suggestions regarding building reuse and demolition (i.e., "The Master Plan does not determine the exact plan for preserving, adapting and demolishing buildings on the site. It provides criteria for decision-making, suggests a structure for building removals that open up potential of the park, and presents a rationale for reinvesting in structures that support the life of the park." And "Future decisions regarding building reuse and renovation will be part of a public process that will ultimately require City Council approval.")
- Explanatory information added to clarify the types of uses envisioned in preserved, restored and reused historical buildings
- More local examples included in the Program section
- Clarification on the purpose of the park funding portion of the Implementation section (i.e., The Master Plan provides this toolbox of funding options, but it is up to the City to figure out which tools are most appropriate to use as the park develops over time. Park partnerships, like that with the Dix Park Conservancy, will be critical to success of the park."
- All mention of "revenue generation" struck except for in the park funding portion of the Implementation section
- Additional clarifying information added to the future studies portion of the Implementation section including the language, "Future studies and decisions will be part of a public process that ultimately will require City Council approval."
- Park Partnerships section removed and noted as a future study that is needed
- Numerous structural, graphic and grammatical edits

Meeting summaries from the public comment period are available online at [dixpark.org/database](http://dixpark.org/database). If at any point you need additional information, please let staff know and we will respond accordingly.

Best Regards,

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