

# JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum

## Summary Report

December 10, 2014

More than 200 people participated in a community forum the evening of Wednesday, December 10, 2014. The evening started with a series of welcome remarks and presentations featuring:

### *Overview and Welcoming Remarks:*

- Michael DiBeradinis, Deputy Mayor for Environmental and Community Resources and Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation
- Darrell Clarke, President of Philadelphia City Council

### *Project Background:*

- Mark Focht, First Deputy Commissioner, Parks and Recreation

### *Review of HR&A Work:*

- Kathryn Ott Lovell, Executive Director of the Fairmount Parks Commission

### *Presentation by PennPraxis – focus on best practices and engagement to-date:*

- Randall Mason, Executive Director, PennPraxis
- Bridget Kegan Barber, PennPraxis

### *Civic Engagement:*

Participants interviewed each other around one of five questions<sup>1</sup>. It's important to note that roughly 150 people participated in the public engagement portion of the evening, with some 65-70 participating until the end. The five questions:

1. One goal is for JFK Plaza/Love Park to be an important, iconic, internationally renowned, civic space. In what ways does it succeed in that role today?
2. Are there uses or programs that would make the Park more successful? That would enhance your use of the Park or that would enhance activity there?
3. Are there barriers that get in the way of you or others using the park? If so, what are they? How might we remove those barriers? If not, how might we make it even easier to use the Park?
4. The Park is a public space that is used by many diverse users for a broad variety of uses. How can we continue making it welcoming for all?
5. How would you describe the dynamics between the Park's users? Are there ways we might improve those dynamics?

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<sup>1</sup> Upon signing-in for the evening, each participant received a worksheet with one of the questions on it.

The general process was as follows:

*Step 1:* each person interviewed another person – preferably with a different question for 4-5 minutes, and was interviewed by that person for the same period of time.

*Step 2:* after the interviews, each person reflected on what he/she learned from the interviews – focusing on main themes

*Step 3:* participants met with others who had the same question and shared what they learned from the interviews. They did this first in groups of 4-5 people. They then met with all who had that question, in a facilitated conversation to uncover common themes, novel ideas, and other issues that emerged from their interviews and conversation.

Complete reports on each question from Step 3 of the work are attached.

But first, three general themes that emerge across all of the questions and discussions. These themes interact in important ways and are not listed in any particular order.

***Theme A: The importance of vista, views and sight lines***

Participants noted that one clear attraction of Love Park are the sight lines the current structure creates that draw the eye down the length of the Parkway to the Art Museum and beyond. That view, like the LOVE sculpture, is iconic and expansive. On the other hand, some participants suggested that the view in the other direction to City Hall and the City leaves something to be desired and might be improved. Another thing that might be improved is creating better sight lines for safety.

***Theme B: The importance of a “theme” for the Park***

While it’s called “Love Park,” that theme doesn’t permeate the Park. Yes, it’s there in the iconic sculpture, but some participants thought the new design might make that theme, or feeling, more central to the structure, activities and programming in the Park.

***Theme C: Welcoming diversity***

Participants noted that the Park – its location, and the nature and structure of the space make it accessible to the broad spectrum of diversity that is Philadelphia: cultural/ethnic, socio-economic and age. This diversity creates challenges and opportunities in designing the park so that it can provide or enable a range of activities and programs that appeal to that diversity.

# **JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum**

December 10, 2014 -- Main Branch of Public Library

MODERATOR: Brian Armstead

GROUP/QUESTION #1:

**One goal is for JFK Plaza/LOVE Park to be an important, iconic, internationally renowned, civic space. In what ways does it succeed in that role today?**

## **THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONVERSATION:**

### **Vistas & sight lines reinforce everything**

- Specifically, the sight lines were to the Parkway/Logan Circle/Art Museum and to City Hall
- The sight line to City Hall is the weaker view. It is disrupted by the traffic. Also, the view doesn't "frame" anything about City hall as well as the view frames subjects going the other way.
- Views are enhanced because it is such a central location.

### **It is a gateway to the city and the Parkway**

- For suburbanites, it is a gateway when they emerge from Suburban Station

### **The statue itself is iconic**

- The name of the statue fits in very well with "The City of Brotherly Love." It is a symbol of the city.
- It is internationally known.
- "Love" is a universal theme.
- There are many replicas of the statue around the world, but it is the best known.
- People from all over the world can be seen taking pictures at the statue.
- It's a tourist attraction. You have to get the photo!
- The placement of the statue and elevation of the statue allows people to take pictures that capture the incredible sight lines.

### **It is a space and a gathering place that creates diversity**

- Locals and tourists gather there and share the space
- People of various ethnicities share the space as well.
- It is truly a diverse space "unlike other parks in Philadelphia."

## **OTHER COMMENTS (GENERAL):**

- It is a shame that the skateboarders are not welcomed since the Tony hawk video game is one of the reasons it is such an iconic statue & plaza world-wide.
- Need better site lines AND physical connection to City Hall.
- The group observed that none of them had any conversations with anyone about the Visitor Center during any of their interviews. It struck them as significant that nobody

really thinks about it. They did NOT take that to mean it should go, just that it was not relevant for them. They observed that this could have been because they are locals and have no reason to go to a “visitors” center. But, they also thought it was because there was not much happening in that building anyway.

- Since it is centrally located and a natural gateway it could be convenient, logistically for tourists, visitors, residents and people working downtown.

ROUGH NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE GROUP: 10

# JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum

December 10, 2014 -- Main Branch of Public Library

MODERATOR: Ted Enoch

GROUP/QUESTION #2:

**Are the uses or programs that would make the Park more successful? That would enhance your use of the park or that would enhance the activity there?**

## THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONVERSATION:

### **How can creative uses/programs help to connect people and enhance/extend park use?**

- Many people tend to come to the park alone (walking through, eating a meal).
- Having more activities would invite users into new/extended uses of park, and help to connect Philadelphians. But it is essential that the park better brand or market activities and raise visibility and reliability for programs.
- Engage four senses: see, hear, touch and taste?
- Can we increase space for creative programs and workshops – perhaps through an amphitheater that can serve as a space for public programming?

### **All sorts of uses and programs would be welcome – goal is broad appeal:**

Activities can extend users experience. So often, users leave after their iconic photo shot. What can be done to keep them there longer?

- Kids programming
- Any number of cultural activities
- Performance spaces
- Farmers markets
- Environmental activities / education
- Concerts, drama
- Exercise / physical activities
- Movies

### **Amenities**

- Well-maintained public bathrooms would also offer “new uses” that would benefit the public.
- New lighting features would also extend park use for many users and would create opportunities for more evening activities.
- Food option offered later would also extend park use for many users.
- Public art

### **Existing Design Elements:**

- Can we figure out creative new uses for the “the saucer” so that it could be preserved?
- Think creatively about the water feature. Can it also be performance space?

**OTHER COMMENTS:**

Members of this group were highly motivated and cared a great deal about all of the questions that were raised during the night, including:

- Tensions between the homeless and other users
- Safety
- Preserving iconic design features

ROUGH NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE GROUP: 16

# JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum

December 10, 2014 -- Main Branch of Public Library

MODERATOR: Jeff Branch

GROUP /QUESTION: #3

**Are there barriers that get in the way of you or others using the Park? If so, what are they? How might we remove those barriers? If not, how might we make it even easier to use the Park?**

## **THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONVERSATION:**

### **Uncomfortable and Unwelcoming**

- Safety; lack of signage; difficult to access because of typography; lighting after 5pm
- Lack of availability of amenities; limited or no where to eat
- Visitors Center is not obvious
- Handicap access is a problem; grading challenges with sidewalks
- Potential positive opportunity: Dutch examples of providing reward/incentive plan for homeless population to help keep Park well-kept
- Need to design and create cafes that foster engagement at the Park
- More seating would help to make the park more welcoming and make it more welcoming to stay for a longer period of time.

### **Access and Views to Love Park**

- Sight lines are extremely poor; there has to be ways design it to ‘See the Park as you approach it’ and that promotes building the excitement as you visit it. Existing walls impede views into and through the park. Wider sidewalks along the edge of the park that allow for views into the park would be a great addition.
- Uneven levels mean people need to descend into canyon...should be leveled out.
- The park needs more entrances and exits
- Challenging traffic flows; Calm the traffic - need to address and enhance the area around Love Park (e.g. 15<sup>th</sup> and Arch – 16<sup>th</sup> JFK). With the current pedestrian crossing/traffic configuration, it is not appealing to even attempt to come into the park.
- Figure out ways to utilize parking spaces to encourage and benefit people visiting
- Safety; lack of signage; difficult to access because of typography; lighting after 5pm (see previous theme)
- Handicap access is a problem; grading challenges with sidewalks (see previous theme)
- Improved lighting at night is essential.

### **Love Themed Programming Enhancement Needed**

- What is the central theme of the park? Should you capitalize on the LOVE theme?
- Limited functionality of the Park – there is nothing keeping the people there.
- Lack of interest – a “now that we are here, now what” feeling.

- Enhance /broaden the image – as it is currently used, the park is appealing to youth or people rebelling
- Need to engage diverse usages
- Need to leverage the ‘international celebrity of the Park’ because of You Tube videos promoting it

ROUGH NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE GROUP: 13 people. An intergeneration group of males and females; 3 people of color (2 females and one male).

# JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum

December 10, 2014 -- Main Branch of Public Library

MODERATOR: Lisa Santer

GROUP/QUESTION: #4

**The Park is a public space that is used by many diverse users for a broad variety of uses. How can we continue making it welcoming for all?**

## **THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONVERSATION:**

### **Limiting restrictive programming and private functions**

- o Openness to multiple simultaneous uses
- o Openness at all times to spontaneous uses
- o Promoting active and passive uses (i.e. classes, music, yoga)
- o Continue to have many non-commercialized activities – like interesting attractions, sophisticated/grown-up urbane “stuff”, family oriented activities
- o Programming that engages a diversity of uses, users. Consider multi-lingual programming.

### **Flexibility**

- o Visitor center could be used for far more than a café – activate the space.
- o Does the neighborhood really need another food place?
- o The seating plan currently isolates people -- improve this with benches, tables
- o The design with multiple levels is constraining – improve the walkways and make them accessible for all.

### **Consider all the users—people who**

- o Routinely pass through
- o Come at specific times, like lunch, early morning, after work, weekends
- o Pass by on foot & in vehicles including buses
- o Are disabled

### **Consider as we pass through, what’s the feeling of the journey, the emotional context? Some words participants offered:**

- o Elegant
- o Overwhelming
- o Awe
- o Congenial
- o Constrained
- o Brotherly love
- o Unity
- o Contextual
- o Diverse
- o Vista
- o Portal to Fairmount Park
- o Hopeful
- o Future
- o Living art
- o Intimacy & privacy
- o Cross cultural
- o Familiarity

**Frames view of City Hall**

- o Water feature mirrors City Hall Tower & draws eye up (as does LOVE statue)
- o View both ways inspires

**Maintenance / Environment**

- o Importance of keeping it well maintained/clean, well-lit
- o Visible presence of authority
- o Minimize security issues by opening up the edges of the park and making it more accessible. It is essential to be able to see from end to end.
- o Importance of graphics and wayfinding – highlight entrances, include historical info, multi lingual
- o Value the hardscape as a place for civic activity but green space can also help to encourage more public engagement with the park.

ROUGH NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE GROUP: 12

# JFK Plaza/LOVE Park Community Engagement Forum

December 10, 2014 -- Main Branch of Public Library

MODERATORS: Jennifer Mahar and Erin Engelstad

GROUP/QUESTION #5:

**How would you describe the dynamics between the Park's users? Are there ways we might improve these dynamics?**

*Estimated group attendance: 15-18*

## **THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE CONVERSATION:**

### **Isolation/Separation of Groups**

Park is a transient space that has a lot of people moving through, not remaining in the space for longer periods. This has an impact on the fact that groups are separated and isolated. Also, since it is a diverse space, there is not a lot of interaction between groups.

- Groups are alienated in cloistered zones in the park and this does not allow for interaction.
- Different user groups can include (but not limited to): business people, tourists, homeless, skaters, passers-through/wayfarers.
- Transient space – people move through all day.
- Diversity – people of diverse groups interact with their own groups only.
- To improve – These groups need a common ground. Offer clustered seating to facilitate interaction.
- Acknowledge that there are individuals and groups using the space, and make spaces for each.
- Programming should appeal to different user groups, age groups
- Today there are many different people doing different things – not much interaction..  
The groups are not necessarily at odds but the dynamics are obvious

### **Safety**

- Difference between the perception and the reality
- Tension between user groups (those passing through vs. those who sit and stay)
- To improve - increase patrolling (rangers?), sightlines, and lighting.
- Cleaner, brighter, safer, more comfortable – people don't feel comfortable enough to stay very long.
- Re-grading would eliminate hiding spots by improving sightlines, eliminating blind spots.
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## Design Elements

- The high walls and fountain divide the area. Sight lines should be made clearer (shrink the fountain).
- People avoid the park at night – design for park use at night.
- Grades/levels divide people.
  - To improve - make the sightlines flatter, more flexible. Create better sidewalls all around the park. Offer easy, open pedestrian access on the 15<sup>th</sup> and Arch side of the park (where current parking garage entrance is a barrier). Design for nighttime use. Better sidewall design.
- More seating needed to make it more comfortable for people to stay.
- Need to create a variety of areas – e.g. eating tables, chairs, seating, lawn, walking path
- Improve and expand the Visitors' Center.
- Garage entrance creates a barrier.
- The list: more flowers, better trees, quieter fountain, lighter colors, fix pavers, more seating.
- Improve sidewalks and circulation around perimeter.
- Sections of the park are isolated/unused. Make all sections welcoming to pedestrians.
- Visitors Center could be greatly improved.
- Consider the needs of the family court.

## Programming

- More positive programming would improve dynamics between those who may not otherwise interact.
- The park is known for counterculture – carefully consider how to preserve that while still keeping positive elements
- Present LOVE sculpture in a dignified way

ROUGH NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE GROUP: 15-18