



PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 06/10/2011

TO: City Council

FROM: Planning & Community Development Staff

SUBJECT: June 14, 2011 Agenda Item 8-A: Comments submitted on behalf of the Planning Commission from their June 8, 2011 Discussion on the Palisades Garden Walk and Town Square Design Development Plans

On June 8, 2011, the Planning Commission held a discussion on the design development plans for Palisades Garden Walk, which will be presented to the Council on June 14. The Planning Commission and individual Planning Commissioners have been very actively involved in the community participation process for this project, co-sponsoring two workshops with the Recreation and Parks Commission as the design evolved. At the June 8 discussion, the Commission heard testimony from five members of the public and contributed the following comments and suggestions, which staff now forwards to the Council on their behalf.

Palisades Garden Walk:

Overall Design

Commissioners expressed strong support for the overall design and the public process that produced it. They felt that it was fantastic, creative and even better than they anticipated, and stated that the process and the design team have created a design for a unique and memorable place. They were enthusiastic about the opportunities that staff has identified to utilize the soil being excavated from nearby projects to build the hills and contours of the design, and congratulated staff and the designers on a very exciting project.

Overlooks

There were some general concerns with the design of the Overlook structures, and concurrence that the concept needed further development to resolve issues of both design detail and safety. It was noted that as these have evolved they no longer represent the original "postcard" concept that was presented as a guiding principle earlier in the process. However, it was also noted that the design concept works well in the context of the proposed play structures.

Maintenance Shed

Commissioners were concerned with the design and interface of the maintenance shed. There were also comments regarding other “back of house” elements in the southwest corner of the park, such as the electrical transformer, alley and trash enclosures, that need to be further refined. The dialogue with adjacent property owners should continue in order to refine these edges.

Restrooms

Commissioners were impressed with the restroom design, which nicely folds this use into the park design in an unobtrusive way, and provides adequate light and ventilation.

Town Square: Overall Design

The Commissioners offered differing opinions on the current plan for Town Square. The Commission discussed at length the challenges of balancing the community’s desire for a sustainable, active community gathering space in front of City Hall with the historic evaluation and Certificate of Appropriateness criteria. This process is based on compatibility with the character-defining features of the property, including both the Landmark building and the grounds.

Some Commissioners noted that the Town Square design was developed through the community process, focusing on thematic connections with the park and City sustainability policies that generally encourage minimizing high water-using lawn areas and planting more shade trees. They commented that the revised plans approved by the Landmarks Commission have a reduced number of trees in front of City Hall and have retained a great deal of lawn area, and that more could be done to establish a stronger connection with the park across the street.

Other Commissioners expressed that City Hall is a wonderful structure and community landmark, and the historic context is an opportunity for the design process. One viewpoint embraced the big, wide-open nature of the front of City Hall and noted that preserving that openness may be a positive counter-balance to the very dense and active nature of the new park.

Responding to public testimony, Commissioners asked staff to consider either retaining the existing Juniper trees or relocating them to another location if that is feasible.

Overall, Commissioners expressed their desire that the designers would work with the Landmarks Commission to refine elements of the plan to integrate modern and historic features in a compatible manner and maximize the potential to achieve the community’s connectivity and sustainability objectives.