

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: July 15, 2010

Meeting No. 113

Project: Pierce's Park

Phase: Schematic

Location: Pier 5, Inner Harbor

PRESENTATION:

Laurie Schwartz, Executive Director of Waterfront Partnership, introduced the proposal to redesign an area of the Inner Harbor Pier 5 as a family-oriented park. This proposal is part of an effort to improve the connection between the Inner Harbor and Harbor East and is a collaboration with Family Alliance, a community group comprised of families who reside in downtown Baltimore. The new park will honor the memory of Pierce Flanagan and is being designed to incorporate his ideals. Mahan Rykiel, landscape architects, is designing the park.

Scott Rykiel of Mahan Rykiel, with lead designer Peng Gu, presented the project. Mr. Rykiel stated the five principles that are guiding the design: 1) Pierce in Nature – a tribute to Pierce Flanagan's life as a adventurer, risk-taker, sailor, skier, biker, and poet; 2) Families and Children – an interest in ensuring that the design is focused on these end-users; 3) Green Space and Shade – the inclusion of both open active areas and quiet more protected areas; 4) Sustainability – a commitment to the Clean Harbor Initiative, use of native plants, and full integration of sustainable materials; 5) Art – use of non-traditional forms for play equipment, such as a willow branches to create a tunnel, stone sculpture as a climbing toy. The resulting proposal is tripartite in design, composed of two large curvilinear forms and one smaller one as buffer. The play areas are separated by a series of walkways composed of recycled materials presenting an organic frame around and connecting the play areas. Focused pole lighting will be used. Fences are not included but low mounds will be used to establish boundaries at the walkways.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel appreciates the need for more play space for residents, the application of the five principles that are guiding the design, and the resulting artistry of the design; however, there was serious concern as to the potential success of integrating this type of park into the present use of the area and the current circulation patterns of the tourists and residents. The following specific comments were made:

- A. ***Fencing*** – The Panel is united on the need to avoid traditional fencing and is appreciative of the intention of using alternate approaches to securing play areas.
- B. ***Circulation*** – There is a need to channel crowds traveling from nearby activities/parking lot around and/or through the park. The role of the central walkway *vis a vis* the perimeter paths is not strong enough. A decision should be made as to how the path is supposed to work and the design strengthened to reflect that decision. The plan, design, and materials of the walkways should serve as way finding aids to guide the crowds and, thereby, protect the integrity of the play areas from passers-by. The connection between the two active parks needs to be addressed as part of this study.
- C. ***Integration of the New Park with the Setting*** – Although there was a difference of opinion as to whether the existing tree grid should be integrated into the park design *per se*, there is agreement as to the need to resolve the relationship between “new and old.” This includes addressing how the curvilinear design relates to the existing tree grid, the relationship of the park to the parking lot (and what could be done to remove or reduce the size of the lot), and whether the park’s grassy areas could be connected across to President Street.
- D. ***Handling the Area’s Existing Civic Role*** – The design is presently in an excellent direction in its efforts to meet the project’s five design principles; however, it must also address a sixth principle: maintaining the site’s existing civic role. The area is one that is presently used by tourists and residents alike in passing from one destination to another. The continuation of this use should be planned for, because, despite the insertion of a park, the need for the area as a route to other destinations remains and without careful planning, the present use will continue and do so in a manner that will interfere with the success of the new park. The park’s design needs to be strong enough to be able to both successfully change the understanding of the area’s “sense of place” into one of a park/play destination for resident families, **and** to continue to allow tourists and others to pass through or around it in their travels. The tourists should be able to understand where they are supposed to walk as they pass en route to another destination, have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the park, and to make their way through or around the park without compromising the experience of the park users. It is suggested that perhaps blending the two active play areas into one would provide a stronger statement, satisfy the users’ needs, and allow for a clearer design component. However, the point is more that the park needs to make sense in that specific location and, through a strong and clear design, guide the movement in a

way that is complementary to the park while functioning effectively for the greater area's users.

PANEL ACTION:

Schematic Approval Withheld

Attending:

Laurie Schwartz – Waterfront Partnership

Scott Rykiel, Peng Gu – Mahan Rykiel

Molly Moyer – GBC

Ed Gunts – The Sun

Jay Brodie, Paul Dombrowski, Irene Van Sant, Arlisa Anderson, Ben Stone – BDC

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel

Gary Cole, Jill Lemke, Anthony Cataldo, Bob Quilter - Planning