Midtown Park Blocks

Ernest Bonner

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Director's Advisory Group:
Midtown Park Blocks

Upcoming Meetings Schedule, 2001:

All meetings to be held at the Bureau of Planning, in the 1900 SW Fourth Building, located at the intersection of SW 4th and Hall

1. Wednesday, April 4, 3:30 – 5:00 PM (3rd Floor, Conference Room 3a)
2. Thursday, April 19, 3:30 – 5:00 PM (4th Floor Conference Room 4a)
3. Wednesday, May 2, 3:30 – 5:00 PM (3rd Floor, Conference Room 3a)
4. Thursday, May 17, 3:30 – 5:00 PM (4th Floor Conference Room 4a)
- Clear statement about importance of downtown retail core.
- West End plan: need dense housing neighborhood.

- Acknowledge that the whole string of blocks from Salmon to Brunswick should be treated as one.

- We need more public investment in West End.
  (i.e., urban renewal/redevelopment).

- What role will Park Blocks Foundation play?

- Cultural institutions?
Director's Advisory Group:
Midtown Park Blocks

Contact Information:
(updated 4-2-2001)

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Review Dates

- Council: May 31, 2:00 pm, 7th Floor, 2500 A
- PD C: May 9, 3:00 pm
- Landmarks: May 14
- PD: May 3, 1:00-3:00
- Design: May 3, 3:00 pm, 2500 A

Study Report to Commissioners before hand - 2/1 presentation at menu.

1. Accept the report
2. Allow PD C: Park + proceed w/ design
3. Clear by most work
   Salmon to Bnside
   incl. Bnside access on Park
3. Request Cuban Team to go back: study ACE recommendations
   (Pls, PDC, Parks, PDC?)

row: mlanisation: Park Block 5 O'Bryant

- Week of Apr 28 for report publication of starting Report.
Questions & Updates:

1. Timing of ACE Report
2. Will the ACE Report deal with the Zell Block?
3. Has the Mayor, Gil or Francesconi met with Singers?
4. Timing for updated retail report by Keyser Marsten?
5. Calendar and schedule for updating & involving Board members and interested people?
6. Role of the Foundation through the city hearings process?
7. Press inquiries related to the ACE Report.
8. What role should we [Foundation] play with businesses & merchants?
9. New round of council member meetings?

✓ MOU
✓ Parks 2020 Strategic Plan

Gil's recommendations:

1. Present what the ACE Report offered;
2. Consider this work a priority;
3. Consider additional options and develop a process to develop the options
4. Develop detailed alternatives.

Should the Council take aggressive action on capturing more retail in downtown?

What happens with Block 5 & O’Bryant Square?
01/23/2001

Donald J. Stastny  FAIA, FAICP
StastnyBrun Architects, Inc.
813 SW Alder, Suite 200
Portland, OR  97205

Mr. Stastny:

Attached is the Park Blocks Foundation's answer to the Midtown Blocks Research questions, as requested.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Jim Westwood, President
1. What is the role of the Midtown Blocks as an integral, but unique, sector of downtown Portland?

- All recent land use plans place the Midtown Park Blocks at the intersection of two major elements in Downtown: the Park Blocks and the Retail Core.
- The original Downtown Plan (adopted December, 1972) set forth a specific goal that the North and South Park Blocks be ultimately united. As a first step toward that goal, it called for the City's investment in two of the Midtown Park Blocks (Park Block 1 and Block 86). It also established the retail core as an area of high priority and called for an array of development incentives and regulations to promote the general improvement and enhancement of retailing in this downtown area.
- The Central City Plan (adopted March, 1988) calls for a "continuous Park connection extending from Portland State University on the south to the Willamette River on the north." The Concept Plan called for the acquisition of Park Block 5 and proposed, again, the purchase of Block 86 as an extension of the existing Park Blocks. It also reiterated the importance of strengthening the retail core area in Downtown.
- In summary, Portland's downtown plans call for attention to the objective of achieving connection between the north and south park blocks, but they focus equally on the use of the area bordering the Midtown Park Blocks as a western anchor on the retail core.
- Successful development of this area can help us achieve two important goals in our downtown plan for the West End: an enhanced retail core and a continuous course of public Park Blocks from Portland State University to the Pearl District.

2. What should be the criteria for uses in the Midtown Blocks and the surrounding area to complement and connect the retail core, the South Park Blocks, the West End and the Pearl District?

- The opportunity for an increase in downtown retail sales has not been better in recent history. PDC's Keyser Marston report on downtown retail trade potential is instructive. If the population of the regional trade area grows as expected; if downtown employees and visitors increase as well; and if those elements of the retail market increase their incomes and retail expenditures as expected, then the potential retail sales for the downtown core could double by the year 2010.
- Converting potential sales into actual sales will require a major coordinated effort by the City and the downtown community. A dramatic location for this new retail activity will help. If this effort is successful, Portland could add 500,000 square feet of retail to its downtown by 2010.
- The area on the west edge of the current retail core, bordering the Midtown Park Blocks, is an excellent location (maybe our only choice) for an expansion of retailing activity in the Downtown—and as a counter-balance to Pioneer Place.
- To achieve this end, we recommend joint public and private investments in the following development concept: The Park Blocks can be the City's premier public space and an exciting amenity for a new retail center—a destination for residents
and visitors alike. Ringed with new restaurants and retail shops, bright and alive with culture and music, filled with people and embedded in Portland's retail core, the Midtown Park blocks will hum with a vitality that brings surrounding streets and neighborhoods alive.

3. Define the design features (and/or strategies) that could be used to link the Midtown Blocks to the North and South Park Blocks.

- The Park Blocks could provide a continuous public space from NW Glisan to SW Market. At points along and at the edge of the Park Blocks (from NW Glisan to SW Market) development in bordering areas and neighborhoods would define and be enhanced by the Park Blocks. This unbroken amenity could provide a magnet to draw people, jobs, housing and new investment to the City.
- The Midtown Park Blocks could be one of those points along the Park Blocks—a special place where pedestrians, shoppers and visitors mixed. The design of this marketplace could include retail, office, housing, cultural facilities and public open spaces in a highly active, intensively developed area. This could be the premier destination for all of Portland.
- Just over 150 years ago, Daniel Lownsdale designated a string of public park blocks on the western edge of the frontier town site of Portland. Today the Park Blocks Foundation is offering us another opportunity to fulfill that dream.
- A broad collection of civic leaders have come together with the goal of reclaiming the Midtown Park Blocks as a central marketplace of people, activity and business in Portland. This group is working with property owners to secure property necessary for the restoration of the blocks to public ownership. The dream is still alive.

Park Blocks Foundation

Jim Westwood, President                     Neil Goldschmidt
Tom Moyer                                   Brian Booth
Greg Chaille                                John Gray
George Passadore                            Arlene Schnitzer
                                               Bill Wessinger

The Park Blocks Foundation is an Oregon non-profit corporation administered in cooperation with The Oregon Community Foundation. Tax-deductible donations can be made to The Park Blocks Foundation Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation.

The Park Blocks Foundation; c/o Oregon Community Foundation; 111 SW Fifth Avenue; Suite 3600; Portland, OR 97205
Important Points Made by the Panel of Experts:

1. The issue is wider than the Midtown Park Blocks. It is wider than the area bordering on the Park Blocks. The real issue is the future role of the downtown in the region.

2. The potential for downtown retail is greater than the Keyser Marston report would indicate. With aggressive leadership from the City, Portland's share of the regional retail growth could easily be maintained over the next 2 decades.

3. The long-held Portland dream of connecting the North and South Park Blocks is an achievable and desirable long-range goal for the City, as the West End grows and changes in the next 50-100 years.

4. Purchase and development of the Zell block as open space is an important first step.

5. Keep the Park Blocks Foundation alive. They are a valuable partner with the City in this project.

Proposal:

1. The City purchases the Zell block (through an agreement between the City and the property owners); and begins steps to develop Park Blocks #4 and #5 as an urban plaza in the middle of a retail center bordered by SW Taylor, SW 10th Avenue, SW Alder and SW Broadway.

2. The City also purchases the space needed at the north end of the Midtown Park Blocks to assure an easy connection to the North Park Blocks.

3. The Park Blocks Foundation will proceed to secure ownership of all of the remaining properties in the Midtown Park Blocks.
Gil's advisory group had its first meeting today. I came away feeling good. Gil himself is anxious to get a broad general discussion of the role of the downtown in the region and the future of the park blocks under way. He set up this group to 'help him with the work that will be delegated to him when the experts leave town.' He expects that the ACE report to the City Council will not be ready for presentation for 2 or 3 weeks after the experts leave town. He knows that the City Council and the Mayor are going to want his judgment and recommendation on their findings and recommendations. He wants a representative group of people to help him with those recommendations. I am sure he wants to try to find common ground everywhere he can—before it goes to Council. He hopes he can do that with the advisory group. Many interests are represented: Colleen Miller of the Downtown Community Association; Joey Pope from Parks 2020; Bing Sheldon; Greg Goodman; Tim Grieve; Ernie Bonner. Also sitting around the table were Don Stastny; Abe Farkas and Les Prentice of PDC; Zari Santner of Parks; and Mark Raggett of Planning.

Four meetings of the group are scheduled—on Febr. 15 and 21; March 7 and 21. So we are not being asked to do any heavy lifting over the long haul.

I would say I got a lot of support from around the room to the idea that this is not just about the Midtown Park blocks. This is about downtown's role in the region. PDC representatives seemed to be particularly interested in that perspective, as was Colleen from the Neighborhood Association, Bing Sheldon and Gil Kelley.

A lot of issues were raised about open space and parks, including some about the homeless and the kids on skateboards, the usual fear of the establishment.

Don Stastny walked us through the schedule which, thanks to Tripp and Patricia, I already knew.

Tim Grieve said nothing. Greg Goodman was nervous about the cost, he wanted some comparison of park spaces in other cities, and he wanted to change the term Midtown Park Blocks to Midtown Blocks. He will undoubtedly be the leader of the downtown merchant cause.

All in all, I thought I felt some general receptivity to our case that the City Council needs to make some big decisions about the downtown in general before delving into the disagreements and conflicts surrounding optional designs of the blocks.
GENERAL PRINCIPLES, CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES USED BY PANEL OF EXPERTS

General Principles

Look for ways to:
- Enhance the Value of Downtown, over the Long Range;
- Spark a Variety of Substantial Residential Developments;
- Support and Enhance the Existing Diversity of Retail;
- Minimize Reliance on, and Impact of, the Automobile;
- Expand Open Space for Long Range City Growth; and
- Connect Surrounding Neighborhoods to the Commercial Business District.

Criteria and Guidelines

For appropriate locations, insist new buildings include some level of housing;
Promote underground parking;
Enhance North/South and East/West linkages;
Require active retail and restaurants at Ground Level;
Develop mixed neighborhood in the West End;
Widen and improve sidewalks;
Maintain convenient on-street parking; and
Implement and enforce design guidelines.
Note to Foundation Research Group:

Yesterday was the second meeting of Gil Kelley's Park Blocks Advisory Group. He has formed this group to assist him in producing a report to the City Council on the recommendations of the Panel of Experts, and a proposal of his own on what steps the City should take, if any, to follow up on the panel's proposals. A new member of the group, Richard Singer, showed up for the first time. (Guess why.)

Gil is obviously trying to see if there is any agreement on the broader 'vision' questions. After some considerable discussion Gil concluded that there was general agreement on the following:

... the City should strive to maintain the downtown retail core as the premiere shopping center of the region, and

... the City should promote the development of middle and high-income housing in the West End, with due attention to maintaining the 'affordable housing' resource that already exists.

Time ran out before we could discuss the open space elements of the vision, but that will be first on the agenda for our next meeting.

Some general thoughts of my own:

With the addition of Richard Singer to the group, there are now really two groups: one with reservations about any major acquisition and rehabilitation in the area [Singer, Abe Farkas (PDC), Les Prentice (PDC), Bing Sheldon, Tim Greve (Greve Jewelers), and Greg Goodman] and one which would be willing to look seriously at something like the Park Blocks Foundation proposal [Gil Kelley, Colleen Smith (Downtown Community Assn.), Don Stastny, Joey Pope and I.]

Abe Farkas agreed to look into the estimates of retail potential in the downtown made by Keyser Marston. Goodman and Greve do not agree that there is any significant potential at all. This will be a major element of Gil's presentation to the City Council. Is there a problem downtown? Erik Sten thinks not. Maybe Charlie agrees. We only have the PDC numbers and some off-hand comments from the panel of experts. I will make sure we get something more solid, if that is possible.

I need some feedback from the Foundation. I can sit on this Advisory Group and offer comment as I see fit, on whatever I think needs it. Or I can help the Foundation in some way they define. Does the Foundation need something from me on this, or should I just do my own thing? I can see already that this could lead to a lot of work over a long time, as we go from Gil Kelley proposal to Council, to longer term process set up by Council for decision a year from now. I think the Foundation could provide a real service to the future of Portland by continuing with their vision of buying the blocks as it is possible, but such an effort is costly, involved and time-consuming.
Gil Kelley Advisory Group on Park Blocks

We had our third meeting today. Gil reported a major delay in the process.

The Stastny report (on the results and recommendations of the Panel of Experts) will not be in draft form until the last week in March.

Kelley's report to the City Council, including his recommendations as to what to do next, if anything, is scheduled for April 18. This is supposedly the first time that the Mayor and all 4 Commissioners will be in town. And before that report goes to Council, they are planning to take it through the Planning Commission, the Development Commission, the Design Committee and the Landmarks Commission. If you do the math, you will note that the time between the report from the Panel and Gil's report to the City Council leaves virtually no wiggle room. I doubt, personally, that they will make that time schedule. Too tight. So expect even further delay before a decision by Council on anything. I got 5 bucks that Council will not dispose of this matter before June 1.

Gil started the meeting today with the idea of getting everybody's idea of what the panel of experts actually said. He only got as far as Stastny, as we drifted off on a range of topics.

Stastny said he thought the panel made 5 major points:
1. The City should "think bigger than the blocks." (We certainly agree with that.)
2. First, develop the existing blocks 1 and 5, consistent with the wider context: Salmon to Burnside, Broadway to 14th.
3. The City should take advantage of the amazing intersection of major regional transit lines in the West End.
4. There are 6 full blocks of rehab and redevelopment that should be pursued in the West End.
5. Housing. Housing. Housing. Not low-income, but so-called market-rate.

I am sure that we will find differing opinions about what the panel said when the rest of the Committee gets a chance.

Gil also explored whether there was any agreement on what, in general, the development program for the Park Blocks and surrounding area should be. I don't think this turned out to be a useful discussion as the major players on the other side, Dick Singer and Greg Goodman, were not at the meeting.

I gather from Gil's actions that he wants to go back to City Council not with a proposed process for getting agreement widely in the City on some development program, but with a proposed development program for the area. He is searching now for the kind of program that can gain maximum support from the stakeholders. He seemed to be leaning toward a short-term program of
Meeting of Gil Kelley Advisory Group on Park Blocks

We had our fourth meeting yesterday. Gil reported new dates in the process of sending a recommendation to City Council:

- March 21: Draft Stastny Report to Advisory Group
- April 5: Design Commission Review
- April 9: Landmarks Commission Review
- April 10: Planning Commission Review
- April 11: Development Commission Review
- April 18: City Council Decision

I don’t have any details as to time and place, but that should be easy to find. It would be a good idea if everybody picked a meeting or two, and showed up to see what the reaction is.

I also think we should plan a brief meeting over lunch just to see what everybody found out at the various reviews, and before Council takes the matter up.

I would suggest we meet on Thursday, April 12 at Jim Westwood’s place (26th floor) at noon for a chance to review what everybody heard at the various meetings, to prepare us a little for the City Council hearing on the 18th. If you can’t make it, please let us know what you heard at the meetings you attended by e-mail or phone. Thanks.

Back to the meeting. Gil’s agenda included a request for any ideas we had about the content of his report to the Council. Several points were made. Bing thought there should be an early decision by the Council on whether aggressive actions should be taken to capture more retail in the downtown. Zari needs some direction on the framework for her design of Park Blocks 5 and O’Bryant Park. Tim Greve thought owners and merchants in the area need to be helped in this time of failing retail sales and potential disruption. Everybody agreed that whatever is down should be done with dispatch, to avoid long months of planning and uncertainty.

A consensus developed that Gil should present what the panel offered the City, including the principles which provided the foundation for their recommendation. He should also propose that the Council consider this an important matter; that they support a process to develop options other than those presented by the panel of experts and come back to Council with relatively detailed alternative courses for the City to pursue.

Gil asked if we thought that other members should be added to the Advisory Group. Colleen Smith thought another citizen rep would be good. A small retailer was also considered. Next meeting March 21, 2001.
trading with Zell for block 4, and then redeveloping the Guild Theater block, the City’s parking structure block and Nordstrom’s to create a 4-block development around a 2-block park. So it looks to me like he is searching for an immediate development project with 2 park blocks at their center, all on the west end of the retail core.

The Advisory Committee discussed the need for some certainty for those making individual decisions in the area, consisting of a short-range, medium range and long range plan for the future.

Again, with only Tim Greve at the meeting, there was no chance to get feedback from Goodman and Singer.

Abe Farkas (PDC) did say that they would be talking to Keyser Marston about doing some work trying to firm up the potential for retail, if that was possible. He said the Advisory Group would get a chance to talk to Keyser.

We'll have another meeting in a week or two. Cheers. Ernie.
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