

**East and West Fairmount Park  
Community Vision  
Moderator Report**

**Date of Forum: 10/2/13**

**Location of Forum: Lloyd Hall**

**Moderator name: Josh Warner**

**Group Description**

Group 1 had 15 members – eight female and seven male. Ages were evenly distributed, and ranged from college students to retirees. The group was entirely Caucasian, as no people of color were present. Nearly all of the participants were active users of Fairmount Park, and there was a large contingent of dragon boat racers and several others involved in rowing/paddling organizations. Some participants were residents of adjacent neighborhoods, but the majority of Group 1 hailed from other parts of the city. All seemed to have deep stakes in the park, however, whether through adjacency, organized team activity, or regular personal use.

**Hopes/Fears**

Participants pounced on this “ice-breaker” to begin sharing their key aspirations and concerns for Fairmount Park.

The ice-breaker discussion yielded numerous hopes and only one fear. Many of the hopes expressed by participants related to “access.” River access and safety, dragon boat access, pedestrian access and traffic calming were all brought up as hopes, and additional points were raised relating to the infrastructure that would support increased access, such as building new community boat houses within five years. Other hopes expressed included preserving the historic beauty of the park, increasing park-goers’ understanding of the beauty and history, facilitating the process of working with the parks department to get permits, achieving dedicated funding streams, and mitigating the over-use and “chaos” that afflict the park during large events. The one fear mentioned in the ice-breaker had to do with combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and the damage they cause to the park.

**Part 1: Use in the park**

How people used the Park in the past, and how they use it now.

- Rowing
- Dragon Boat Paddling (immediately, the group started discussing the conflicts on/around the water because of the competition between rowing/paddling)
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Cycling
- Running/walking
- Driving
- Dance or Theater performances
- Fishing

- Picnicking
- Holiday tours of the Mansions
- Museums
- Rollerblading
- Viewing the Gardens
- Segways
- Various sports (emphasis here)
- Dog walking
- The carousel
- Cleaning up (park clean-ups)
- Exploring
- Concerts
- Reading

Other things people would like to do in the park

- A Beer Garden
  - But this brings issues of further commercialization/privatization of the park
  - Also, beer garden in the park was a historic use. Had existed in the past
- Jitney service – around the park or up/down major routes
- Would like to see the park uses more spread out
  - Alleviates the congestion that certain areas have
  - Redistribute the major events to different park locations for more even use
- Swimming in the River
  - Issues of safety, and infrastructure to support swimmers
- Cablecar from the Art Museum to the Zoo
- Easier and safer pedestrian crossings along Kelly Drive
- Experimental, temporary closings of Kelly Drive for recreation
- Access to Peters Island
- Respectful use of Lemon Hill by picnickers
  - Too much trash and disrespect of site currently
- Control the geese flocks
- Urban Nursery for young trees and perennials
  - Sales of plants to the public would make \$\$
- Divert traffic (or other methods of traffic leveling) from the east side to the west side (on weekends)
- “Daylight” the various streams in the park
  - Meaning exposing them, or restoring to a more natural state for viewing, recreation, aesthetics
- Having continuous bike trails to and through the park
- Fenced off dog parks
- Reclaim the East Park Canoe House
  - Restore and provide needed infrastructure for rowing/paddling teams

- Better lighting for West Fairmount Park, plus restored/improved restrooms
- Resurfaced bike & walking paths along West River Drive
- Native Plant restoration throughout the Park

#### Barriers:

- I-76
- Kelly Drive sized at 4 lanes
- Politics
- Parking – particularly street parking (lacking at times)
- Lack of signage (parking info, speed, directional, and walking routes)
- Parking enforcement is not done
- Police and Park Rangers provide inconsistent enforcement of the law
- Lack of Public Access to the River
  - Boat ramps in disrepair
  - “Schuylkill Navy” in full control of the river during Regattas
  - Public access should be improved along the whole river – look to points north of the congested rowing access areas
- Unequal/inequitable treatment for fees & permits needed for events in the park
  - Uniform fee schedule and permit requirements are not fair for individual artists or small non-profits, when compared to large Regatta organizers
- No restrooms on the west side of the park
- No working water fountains on the west side
- Lack of alternate transportation options to, in, around park
- Lack of Resources (money, services, volunteers, information)
- Safety and Security are a barrier (along with perception of safety)
- Historical Commission is a barrier
  - Limits the re-use and restoration options for the East Park Canoe House
- Water Quality (boating, swimming)
- There are constraints along the riverfront trail, due to private rights-of-way interrupting the trail
- Parochial attitude of the park sections and adjacent neighborhoods
  - Towards park use, resource (\$) use, volunteerism, and use of volunteers
    - For instance, volunteer groups only targeting one portion of the park, neglecting other parts
- There is much more maintenance and administration work to be done, now that the Commission has merged with Parks & Rec

#### **Part 2: Discussion of draft guidelines**

Group 1 jumped right into the guidelines. Some of the discussion was based on specific guidelines; however, the participants often brought up themes or issues that were broader in scope. The group was given a few minutes to look over the guidelines, and then the discussion began. Based on the ways in which the participants accessed and analyzed the guidelines, it seemed that many of them had experience with deliberations or presentations of this nature

before, such as what might be presented in typical planning meetings or public policy workshops.

- GENERAL discussion of the guidelines (not specific to any particular one)
  - There is no mention of funding (emphasized). Administrative tasks, costs, and personnel are not mentioned either
  - There is a big tension between reducing cars and traffic, but guidelines do not acknowledge those that commute through the park daily.
    - “The park funnels movement” for the city
  - The emphasis on increasing connectivity and access (that is written into several guidelines) is great
  - There is no mention in the guidelines of how to guide or decide on the development or improvement of infrastructure
  - Guidelines do not mention the need for major conversations to be had (and actions to be taken) regarding park funding and prioritization
    - [This might link to Guideline #4]
  - Public/Private partnerships are not mentioned in the guidelines
  - There is no mention of public input
    - How to be involved in the park
    - How to make park happenings and proposals/decisions more known
    - Ongoing dialogue
  - Some guidelines can be merged [but no one offered specific numbers, since we were out of time]
- *Comments re Guideline 1: “Start by improving how people enter and access the entire park.”*
  - Liked the emphasis on access and connectivity
- *Comments re Guideline 2: “Protect and enhance all that we already have in Fairmount Park, both natural and man-made.”*
  - There is little mention of the natural environment in un-programmed areas
  - Like that anything new or refurbished is sensitive to nature
    - However, there could be more language on sustainable building practices and architecture
    - And that this should be a pro-active stance, rather than reactive to proposals
- *Comments re Guideline 3: “Allow people to better enjoy the water.”*
  - This guideline should be more robust. Mention people “getting on the river”
  - The focus should be on the means of water enjoyment, not necessarily the ends. The ends are the activities on the water, the means are how to get them built or provide access
    - This should certainly involve outside groups as well
- *Comments re Guideline 5: “Improve Fairmount Park for all residents, starting with near neighbors.”*
  - The idea of “zones” or “districts” within the park – that parts of the park take on local qualities of the neighborhoods they border (This was seen as both a pro and a con of Guideline #5)

- Pros: parts of the park will be better used by adjacent neighbors
  - Cons: The neighborhood focus can be limiting to the needs of the whole city
    - Difficult to solve bigger/broader park issues (the “commons”)
    - Sometimes you need a global view to get things done
  - Should mention improvements for children, specifically
- *Comments re Guideline 6: “Make the park safer and more accessible for people walking and biking; reduce the emphasis on people driving.”*
  - Again, the guideline should reference children. How do kids get to the park? Is it the park’s responsibility to bring them in (busing?)
    - Park could connect to the School District and to parents to bring in more kids

Summary of discussion of the guidelines:

Group 1 offered a thorough critique of the guidelines, but did not necessarily go point by point. Much of the richest conversation was on the broader themes that could not be captured within one guideline. These themes, such as funding, partnerships, ongoing conversation, and continued public input were woven into the first part of the process (uses, barriers) as well. To offer this moderator’s editorial opinion, I think this group had much more experience with the “language of policy & planning,” and thus was able to process the guidelines and offer positive and negative critiques as well as missing points within such a short timeframe.

**Common Ground:**

- There was certainly common ground around access. Nearly every participant referenced access either directly or indirectly in the discussion of uses, barriers, and proposed guidelines.
- Water and boating related sports were another point of common ground. About half of the participants were rowers or paddlers, or had direct experience organizing teams or events related to these. For these participants (and other group members), “access” and “infrastructure” become almost synonymous in meaning. Getting to the water and also having the means to get on to the water with a boat were very important. But even so, the group admitted (as one of the very first discussion points) that conflicts among water uses/users are frequent.
- Funding and resources for the park at large were also common ground. Some of the participants were concerned about the merger and resultant budget/resource issues.
- Overuse and “chaos” in the park – especially related to traffic and major events was a common ground concern. There was some tentative common ground on redistributing, or at least easing, some of these sources of congestion.

**Minority reports:** None.

**East and West Fairmount Park  
Community Vision  
Moderator Report**

**Date of Forum: 10/2/13**

**Location of Forum: Lloyd Hall**

**Moderator name(s): Jeff Branch**

**Group Description**

The group consisted of 16 people (12 women and 4 men). Eight people identified as members of the rowing community (5 Dragon Boaters-trying to get access to the water). Five of the other eight people identified themselves as bikers, hikers, trail walkers. Three people identified themselves as present for the cultural aspects of the dialogue, raising consciousness of the historic houses and an estate manager, and to serve as advocates for young people. The group was from diverse neighborhoods in the city or the near surrounding Pennsylvania or NJ suburbs. Three African-American women were among the predominately white group. The group was 'focused' on making sure a sense of inclusion was present in the dialogue as they built on each others' points and also resonated with inclusion as central to any development work that may take place with the communities.

**Part 1: Use in the park**

How people used the Park in the past, and how they use it now.

- Rowing
- Running
- Education - Historical Resources, Awareness, Tutoring and Counseling, Outdoor Environmental Education
- Recreational cycling
- Athletic cycling at different speeds
- Commuting cycling
- Transportation; Access for driving - scenic and peaceful route
- History of the park during colonial times
- Social gatherings and meetings on Boathouse Row
- Steward of history and archives of the park
- Sculpture appreciation
- Special events like the regattas
- 5k runs
- Community Orchards in the Strawberry Mansion community
- Dragon boat paddling
- Recreational kayaking
- Sailing
- Canoe club
- Community clean up days

- Picnics, BBQs, social
- Animal exercise
- All the marathons and triathlons
- Walkathons
- Bike racings
- Reading and engaging with nature
- Artists use for their work
- Fishing

#### Other things people would like to do in the park

- Like to have a 'Community' Row Boathouse built
- Only access is with private boat houses; Temple University rows out of a tent
- Quiet zone for picnics; no radios; just hearing the sounds of nature
- What is already here be better cared for; better stewards of our current resources
- Enhanced dredging - difficult with launching
- Bathrooms on the West Side
- Lighting
- Need more parking lots
- There is a stark difference with the West side and the East Side; need more development on the West Side
- Reduce fees for parking; East side is not parking friendly with the fees - it is more commercial
- Have West River Drive closed during the Winter; extend hours; make all year round
- Create instructions for bike trails; guidelines and basics for safety
- Trails identified and extended; education purposes; create maps of trails and signage
- More cafes (i.e. at St. Joe's House)
- Dedicate more things available for young people; music
- More statues reflecting history of Philly before Columbus
- Kelly Drive boathouses need to reach out to their neighbors and engage them; educate about races
- Advertise the park to college campuses as a way of enhancing engagement
- Develop Activity Centers for the young people on the West Side (i.e. Lloyd Hall type)
- Recreation Centers could be anchors connecting the park
- Create a Welcome Center
- Identify things that are available to do (ie Water Works)
- Get more boats on the water on the West Side; Develop docks; where will funding coming from?; Access to the river and commitment to engage the West Side community

- Better bike trail on West Side; there is a distinct difference - why?

#### Barriers:

- Traffic; hard to cross and not safe
- Surreys have to go because of safety concerns and problems navigating; Need to consider the big picture
- Bike rental site unsightly and unsafe; prohibits expansion opportunities
- Bike safety because of traffic and lack of trails identified
- Need more space for biking trails
- Need to enhance the feeling of being 'safe'; more lighting along trails and adjacent streets
- Address environmental issues; water drainage; trees and Vegetation overrides; need to focus on maintenance (stewardship)
- Cumbersome getting to places; Needs better public transportation to East and West side park; minimize car usage; something like the PHLASH; Forbidden Drive could be a northern boundary for the coverage
- Expand system to provide access
- Bridges need repairs
- West River Drive have these odd metal structures that are a hazard for runners, bikers; need to paint them bright colors so they can be visible or just eliminate; not sure of their purpose
- Need stairs cleared on West River Drive to get on Strawberry Mansion Bridge; difficult to access; vegetation overgrown and difficult to access
- We need greater pedestrian and bike access; No real access- We are "playing chicken" with the traffic; West Park is harder to access the river from Strawberry Mansion; no way to get across the drives without putting your life in danger if walking or biking because of the traffic
- Money or funding for development is a barrier
- Need to identify the priorities with less money available
- It is difficult to justify the existence of the park because of the cost in these economic times; Where do we allocate resources?; Will it increase usage?
- Bureaucracy in the city is a huge barrier because of the nepotism
- Politics and social differences; the park is not representative of the city as a whole; perhaps it is when considering the underdevelopment of the West side
- Access is for only a small portion of the population; need more access for diverse business interests; access for the neighbors
- We need to go into the neighborhoods for communication and engagement
- For example: Neighbors feel the regatta is an intrusion; neighbors are impacted and angry; They should be 'invited' in.
- Drives closure has both positive and negative community impact; have to figure out a way to balance it; causes congestion and is a parking nightmare
- For example, model drives in some ways after Boston's river community where there is walking access
- Boston has well developed Community Boathouses; Walking paths and tours



- There are way too many rules and regulations that focus on keeping young people out; we need to find alternatives to keep the young people engaged and interested in the many benefits of the park.
- We need to pay attention to and understand the different needs of the various constituents (men, women, children, bikers, rowers, runners, etc.). Need to design with these diverse interests in mind
- Enhancing lighting and maps will increase likelihood of usage
- We need to engage in a 'big picture' process; different ways we can use the space; How can we 'build community?'; How can we create an environment that encourages usage?
- Vancouver is another example: they have open access
- Camden Cooper River Community Boathouse is a closer example of greater access along the connection with walking trails
- Lloyd Hall is a good example. Need this is the West Side to create open access multi-purpose facility; the Drives need to be friendly for the entire community

## **Part 2: Discussion of draft guidelines**

The participants described the guidelines as a summary of their thoughts and immediately focused on what they saw as supports and offered their ideas to add to strengthen. This group started with the intentional of including all the stakeholders in any development work that could be done. Even though there were a number of individual/group interests about enhancing the West Side for access to the water, the group identified engaging the community as critical. This was reinforced in their elaboration of the guidelines. What participants thought of the specific guidelines they discussed:

- *Comments re Guideline 1: "Start by improving how people enter and access the entire park."*
  - Strongly encouraged enhancing mapping and signage for trails
  - Suggested enhancement of transportation options be included
- *Comments re Guideline 2: "Protect and enhance all that we already have in Fairmount Park, both natural and man-made."*
  - Create more gardens in quiet areas as special reflection places (Ex: Florence, Italy excavated a new garden)
- *Comments re Guideline 3: "Allow people to better enjoy the water."*
  - Include "strongly" - Support the development of better drinking water. Revitalize the springs.
  - Emphasize development of the West side to match development on East side with community neighbors as active partners
  - Add stewardship of assorted canoe clubs
- *Comments re Guideline 4: "Help citizens better understand the park and all it has to offer."*
  - Educate others about outdoor sculpture
- *Comments re Guideline 5: "Improve Fairmount Park for all residents, starting with near neighbors."*
  - Supportive of enhancing the emphasis of serving the neighbors

- Make language more focused on existing neighbors as stakeholders
- Connected with more intentional urban planning....make the park an attraction and attractive to live near
- Create the sports or activities center
- Create jobs for the near neighbors
- Mark the park a tourist attraction with free access for Philly residents (ex: Tokyo created lots of parks to cater to different audiences (motor powered; hiking; catered to young people); teens took pride in 'their' park because of the sense of ownership
- *Comments re Guideline 6: "Make the park safer and more accessible for people walking and biking; reduce the emphasis on people driving."*
  - Add lower costs of parking to enable the enjoyment of the park
  - Start to do more intentional urban planning to accommodate the different users
  - Add infrastructure to West Side so we can have development
  - Remove bureaucracy; city politics

Summary of discussion of the guidelines: The guidelines discussion was pretty robust with the participants able to make strong connections to their previous dialogue. In many cases, they reiterated prior comments or added clarity or greater emphasis. The group tended to focus on the West side development as a key option. Many of the participants were from the dragon boat community.

### **Common Ground**

The major common ground threads from this group centered on the development of the West side as a priority, especially as it related to gaining access to the water. A resounding echo of "engaging or partnering with the community" was prevalent throughout the dialogue. Stewardship of what is already in place and commitment to develop to enhance usage and access of the West side also resounded with the group. A message of "engaging in intentional urban planning" that involves all the stakeholders was especially important to this group.

### **Minority Reports**

There were not any minority viewpoints expressed by this group.

**East and West Fairmount Park  
Community Vision  
Moderator Report**

**Date of Forum: October 2, 2013**

**Location of Forum: Lloyd Hall**

**Moderator name(s): Ted Enoch**

**Group Description**

Group 3 was comprised of 14 members and conducted a vigorous and lively discussion tonight about the future vision of Fairmount Park. The group of 10 men and 4 women, all of whom who appeared to be white, was an adult group, tending towards middle-age (but certainly with exceptions in either direction). The members came from many neighborhoods within Philadelphia and from its surrounding suburbs.

**Ice-Breaker**

When asked “Why did you come to this meeting tonight,” the group members responded accordingly:

- A younger man from East Falls said that *he lives in Fairmount Park*.
- The coach of the St. Joe’s Prep football team explained that his team and many other Philly school teams use the park for practice, and that he has been using the park for years.
- An older man in a wheel chair living in Huntington Valley said that his active history with the park goes back perhaps 40 years.
- Another older man told us that he has been running and rowing in the park since the 1960s.
- A man who lives in Graduate Hospital neighborhood and who is an urban planning student at Penn bikes, runs and plays ultimate Frisbee in the park.
- A man from Brewerytown uses Lemon Hill Park all the time, exercises in the park and meets people in the park.
- An older man who works with the Philadelphia Rowing organization is interested in getting more young people involved with the park and river, especially through rowing, and wants to be active in supporting those outreach efforts.
- A woman from Delaware County who is a member of the Philadelphia Women’s Dragon Boat team wants to see her team return to the Schuylkill River (they now practice on the Cooper River in Camden), also does charity runs and roller blades in the park.
- A younger man works for Parks and Rec, and he manages teams of people who provide maintenance throughout the park, and he is also a park user.
- A woman living in Society Hill has a history of working to support Philadelphia tourism, and is interested in seeing the park improve as an economic engine in the region. She is also a dragon boater.
- A woman from Delaware County, also a dragon boater, is interested in seeing more access for boaters, especially paddlers and rowers, on the river. She see first-hand every

weekend how the lack of river access leads to people parking on the grass fields as the cluster around the limited river docks.

- A woman from Brewerytown, also on the dragon boat team, participates in many sports throughout the park, goes to concerts, and just really uses the park often.
- A man from the Graduate Hospital neighborhood uses the Mann Center, bikes often through the park out of the city, and is interested in seeing the park get more bike friendly, with dedicated bike paths and other measures.
- A man from Washington Square West is a runner in the park. He also works for the Philadelphia Planning Commission, and is currently working on a project that covers part of East Fairmont Park.

### **Part 1: Use in the park**

How people used the Park in the past, and how they use it now.

- Dragon Boating
- Rowing
- Running
- Biking
- Concerts
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Softball
- Football
- Picnics
- Looking at art and sculptures
- Taking pictures
- Exploring
- Hiking
- Driving and watching things, like cricket players, or simply people watching
- Enjoy the fact that you can park in many places throughout the park, seemingly anywhere
- Music
- Drive through to other neighborhoods, commuting
- Engagements, Weddings, Engagement/Wedding Pictures (like at the Azalea Garden)
- Hangout by the museum
- Watch films
- Aids Walk
- Tour boats
- Just enjoy being near the water
- Swim
- Breakfast at the Centennial Cafe, or other locations
- Skateboarding
- Boathouse parties
- Hanging out and meeting friends
- Gatherings: Family, Romantic (we used to call it “watching the submarine races”)
- Horse stables and riding

- Tours of the mansions
- School teams practice and compete in the park
- Fishing
- Kayaking
- Paddle boating
- The city earns money from events, plus park users dine, use our hotels, the drink and shop here.
- Laurel Hill Cemetery, see the statues and monuments
- Frisbee (Disc) Golf
- The driving range
- Rock Climbing
- Bird Watching
- Horse shoes
- Badminton
- Geo Caching -- treasure hunts using clues, Geo coordinates and maps
- Plus it must be mentioned that certain people use the park for more covert, unwatched, illicit activities like using drugs and having “car dates” with prostitutes.

How people would like to use the park and what gets in the way of using the park in these ways:

- Would like to be able to kayak (and other paddling sports) more easily, with more access points to the river. More docks.
- A community boathouse would really help grow paddling and rowing sports in the region. It would really help with outreach.
- What about boating access on the Lower Schuylkill?
- More drinking fountains and bathrooms throughout the park, especially at Belmont Plateau where many school sports take place.
- More dedicated bike lanes and loops in the park
- More parking (I have a ticket right now from being at this event). Or more unlimited meter parking or more free parking. Two hour parking at a park is not a good unit of time. Many people use the park far longer than two hours.
- More crossing lights, stop lights, reflectors to help pedestrian and bike users, to protect them from cars.
- Speed limits (reduced) on Kelly Drive
- Like to see the historic stone stairwells maintained
- More access within the river through dredging. Many parts of river are unusable.
- The seawalls need to be fixed and maintained. The historic stone walls on the river.
- Love to see the park become even more of the city epicenter, like Chicago’s marina, with more commercial activity, restaurants, cafes.
- Cafe/food option near the Mann or in Parkside. Leverage Please Touch Museum to anchor a food option in that part of the park.
- Food carts or trucks could be an option.
- A wayfinding system to better know where the paths and trails go throughout the park.
- Better signs to guide you and to prevent you from getting lost (access and safety issue)

- Better lighting in the park, especially the trail along West River Drive, which is also very rough and in need of repair in places. This trail is dark and rough. Difficult for bikers and runners at night.
- Better marketing of the park
- Showcase and preserve the beautiful stonework and park architecture.
- Remove the graffiti from the bridges and tunnels
- Concentrate on sections or zones within the park. Much like Eakins Oval became a center this year, with activity and food and drink options. Highlight certain sections.
- More attention placed on crime, safety and security.
- Increased police/ranger presence. A dedicated park police who are concerned with the park as a whole, and who are not only looking at a small piece of the park, a fractured view of the system.
- Friendlier and more cooperative park commission staff.

#### Barriers:

- *For me, this is a place of work, I am a football coach for a team that practices here, August through November. I see how crime impacts our team and players. The kids' cars are broken into. I see used condoms in the parking lots, prostitution, drug use... And the police seem unconcerned. They seem more concerned whether or not one of my players' car tires is touching the lawn in the parking lot than the crime that surrounds us. I want to see crime, safety and security addressed.*
- Lack of police/security presence.
- Since it's a regional priority, our water source, can the state police be of assistance in monitoring the park?
- What about reviving the park police? Can they be revived?
- There is no uniform, total approach to the park safety and security systems.
- There are no facilities to support team sports, both scholastic and adult rec leagues.
- Traffic is very dangerous throughout the park.
- Lack of crossing spaces at Kelly Drive and by the Art Museum.
- Fast, dangerous traffic on Kelly Drive.
- Again, it is very dangerous for bikers in the park. I seem to see a bike accident, sometimes with ambulances involved, all the time in the park.
- Bikers are forced to share mixed-use paths and roads with cars and all sorts of foot/people traffic. This is going to lead to accidents.
- Working with the park commission has been a consistently horrible experience for me. We send in checks that have been lost. Staff has often been rude and ineffective. We have to hire our own services to mow and maintain the fields are adult leagues (and the school leagues) use. We had to bring in our own dirt for the baseball/softball fields...
- The overwhelming noise levels at concerts can be a problem for neighbors. Can we enforce the decibel level restrictions that are supposed to be in place?
- Accessibility issues for people with disabilities and mobility issues.
- Two-hour parking limits discourage people from using the park and cause park users pain and aggravation (tickets, extra trips back to the meter, taking away quality time from park activities).

- The city seems resistant to help. St. Joe's Prep offered private funding to improve a facility, and we were told "no."

## **Part 2: Discussion of draft guidelines**

During the second portion of our group conversation, we examined the draft guidelines for East and West Fairmont Park. Most felt that the guidelines more-or-less supported the current and future uses they wished to see in the park that had been discussed earlier in the conversation. However, as the conversation progressed, many felt that the language needed to be clarified, improved or more direct, as key issues and concerns seemed inadequately addressed. When asked what they specifically liked about the guidelines, the following points were made:

- That there is attention and intention to promote local use of local neighbors and communities. (#5)
- That there is intention to maintain the integrity of the park and reduce impacts on the park. (#2)
- The emphasis on the trails, to improve access for the trails and through the park. (#1 & #3)
- Interest in increasing water recreation activities. Hopeful that would lead to more access and docks on the river, which would also spread out parking more evenly throughout the park. (#3)
- The intention to improve understanding/information about the park, and the concept of realizing park "zones." This could really lead to increased ownership of the park. (#4)

This led to a lively debate about the concept of *park "ownership"* in a city's public space. Other terms like "responsibility" and "stewardship" were brought forward as a more ideal concept that could be fostered. One Art Museum neighborhood resident talked about how during the big concerts:

- *People park on my lawn. They urinate on my fence. That totally erodes the concept of local park ownership or responsibility.*
- *Another person talked about how Locals will leave town and take their money elsewhere. I get a hotel. I leave during these big events...*
- *And why does the trash cleanup take so long? Simple due diligence would help!*

An outcome of the *local vs. regional use of the park tension* was that people would love to see — *we need transparency* — how the revenues from the big concert events were being used to improve the park and benefit the neighborhoods that are adversely affected by the large events. It was also clear that these neighborhood folks feel that there is a lack of *accountability* to them, and their concerns are lost during the big events.

When asked what they would change about the guidelines, or what was missing, the following points were raised:

- Safety is not a clear priority here.
- Seems to be no attention to facility improvements.
- Seems to be no interest to develop more playing fields for kids.

The group got excited and interested in this point. They scanned all the park uses and noticed that so many uses of the park seem to be geared for adults, and that children and youth teams are an afterthought. Children use needs to be a priority.

- Water use. The river is already crowded. We can't have more activity without better and increased access and better management of the water itself. We could expand by going past the Falls Bridge and lower than the falls. But we can't just squeeze more use into the area we currently use.
- Needs to focus on increased public transportation throughout the park.



**East and West Fairmount Park  
Community Vision  
Moderator Report**

**Date of Forum:** October 2, 2013

**Location of Forum:** Lloyd Hall

**Moderator name(s):** Terrill Thompson

**Group Description**

Sixteen people from around the city participated in the group, half of whom lived near the park. Participants were all white and slightly more than 50% male. Most participants were middle-aged or older; one vocal participant was younger (Demographic are based on the observation of the facilitator. Participants were not asked to self-identify).

**Ice-Breaker**

Most participants were regular park users, and many came for specific reasons:

- Four participants came because of their connection to rowing or dragon boating, one of whom can't practice on the river anymore because of the river wall collapse
- Individuals came with specific concerns, including: cleaning up Girard and 33<sup>rd</sup>, business usage of the park, maintenance, working for parks and rec.
- Three participants came to learn information and give input more generally

**Part 1: Use in the park**

The group engaged in brainstorming well, yet never engaged in deep dialogue. Conversation was dominated by a few vocal participants and repeatedly returned to the same points. In comparison to other nights, the tone of this group carried more frustration and blame, although participants were respectful to each other.

How people used the park in the past and how they use it now

- Rowing
- Paddling
- Biking
- Hiking
- Tourism
- Walking
- Performance (dance, comedy sketches)
- Running
- Playground
- Zoo
- Fishing
- Disc golf
- Mann and Dell music
- Please Touch Museum

- Mansions
- Sports (football, soccer, baseball, softball, tennis, basketball)
- Swimming
- Dog walking
- Water Works
- Horticultural Center
- Being alone outside
- Bird watching
- Walking in woods
- Frisbee
- Picnic
- Golf, driving range
- Sit, relax and enjoy
- Horse riding
- Rollerblading
- Charity walks/runs
- Triathlons
- Marathons
- Restaurants/eat outside (Cosmic Café, Trolley Car)
- Weddings
- Holiday events
- Skateboarding
- Photography
- Art
- Cross-country (at Belmont Plateau)
- Centennial Lake and Concourse Lake
- As an environmental filter (for water, air, etc.)

Other things people would like to do in the park:

- Swimming in the river
- Beach front
- More river view
  - Remove the island in the river along Boathouse Row
- Public hall on the west side
- Diverse water sports (not just rowing)
- Zip line
- Mini golf
- Anything that gets people into the park
- Sculpture tour
- Adult playground (fun exercise)
- Restrooms (not port-a-potties; Australians do this well – they are simple, clean and beautiful)

- Open a seasonal café on Strawberry Mansion Bridge
  - Have a zip line to the west side
- Public boathouse rentals for wedding and conferences
  - Income source
  - Community Camden Boathouse does this

What gets in the way of current and desired uses:

- Safety
  - Lights
  - Police or volunteer town watch
  - Signs that say “stay to the right”
  - Security cameras
  - Car break-ins
- West side lacks infrastructure
  - Not enough people to feel safe
  - Needs to move people to west side to relieve congestion on east side
  - Add cafes and things for walkers (because boaters are on east side, walkers should be on west side)
- Better bike paths: more use on west side would increase safety
- Too much congestion in front of Boathouse Row
  - It is a hub with parking, bathrooms and mileage markers; need these same amenities other places
- Access
  - Walking in the Girard bridge area
  - Intersection at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Girard needs to be cleaned up; it is hard to cross
  - Public transportation; regional rail to Zoo, Mann and other locations
  - From Kelly Drive to Smith Playground
  - Pedestrian bridge at Locust Street and Schuylkill River banks (connect University City to the park)
  - Pedestrian bridge from Zoo to MLK Dr.
  - Trail under Spring Garden bridge isn’t wide enough
  - More and better sidewalks along road to Lemon Hill
  - Crosswalks need lights
  - Paint pedestrian crosswalks
  - Re-open Columbia railroad bridge as a pedestrian bridge; have a fence to protect boaters from things being thrown at them and to protect pedestrians from the railroad
- Slow down traffic on Kelly Dr., MLK and 33<sup>rd</sup>
  - Idea: City should take over the roads from PennDOT
- Parking: should be free and unlimited. It goes against what we are trying to do with a park to have parking be stressful.
- Administration
  - Redundancies
  - Hard to figure out permit process

- Needs to be streamlined
- Working in and around the park isn't business friendly; private sector could pay for reinvasions/maintenance
- Events restrict access to other areas
  - Part of the parking fee should go to the neighborhood for the inconvenience
- Major train lines go through the park carrying hazardous material that could spill
  - Should tax them heavily
  - Do they have excess rail property that they would let the park use?
- Trash and sanitation
  - Add more trashcans in and around the park (the trash ends up in the surrounding neighborhoods)
  - Get rid of bottles; promote refillable bottles and increase access to water via water fountains and bottle refill stations
- Gather and distribute statistics about the income the park brings to the city
- Way to access information
  - Easy to use website
  - Central place to access information
  - Calendar of events
  - Cell phone app that has information about: SEPTA, events, navigation, activity areas, historic houses, art
  - Signage that lists the website
  - Big sign with the seasonal detour dates (i.e. "expect detours from X date to Y date)
  - Historic signage (like along Forbidden Dr.)
  - Press, PR
- Bike rentals
  - Will renters know about the park and where to ride? What about locking the bike?
  - Should be in less congested location

## Part 2: Discussion of draft guidelines

What participants thought of the specific guidelines they discussed:

- *Comments re Guideline 1: "Start by improving how people enter and access the entire park."*
  - Like the last sentence: "This includes building on improvements made to the park over the course of its history . . ."
  - Like ". . . make sure the park is safe for all to use" – this is huge. How do we do it?
  - #1 is too generic; should be combined with #6
  - Don't like the focus on nearest neighbors because it is a regional park; on the other hand the nearest neighbors are mostly black than this is an all white group; there is a disconnect between neighbors and the park.
    - Need education for African-American neighbors and tourists

- *Comments re Guideline 2: “Protect and enhance all that we already have in Fairmount Park, both natural and man-made.”*
  - The mansions being managed by nonprofits is a good model
  - Public buildings need professional management
  - Knock down the canoe club
  - Where will funding come from?
  - Put more emphasis into “teach people about history of the park;” include uses of the land by Native Americans
- *Comments re Guideline 3: “Allow people to better enjoy the water.”*
  - River hasn’t been dredged in years, which is impacting water sports and the quality of water
  - The river is the heart of the project
  - Redirect revenue from the water department to the park
  - Like “Create new water recreation activities”
  - Add engagement of people upstream because it impacts us downstream
  - South River Corridor should be engaged in the project
- *Comments re Guideline 4: “Help citizens better understand the park and all it has to offer.”*
  - The park vs. the park system is confusing
  - Like “Create more welcoming entrances that encourage people to use the park.”
- *Comments re Guideline 6: “Make the park safer and more accessible for people walking and biking; reduce the emphasis on people driving.”*
  - Can’t take away driving; not everyone has the ability to access it via walking or bike

Summary of discussion of the guidelines: The group did not engage deeply with the guidelines. They expressed concern about the presentation of the guidelines and requested that they be made simpler and cleaner by removing redundancies and using bullet points. In general, the presentation was more concerning to the group than the content.

### **Common Ground**

One participant summed up the key ideas as: dredge the river, clean up the bank, increase sight and develop the west side. The group approved this summary. One participant added “and slow the traffic down.”

### **Minority Reports**

Disagreement emerged in the group about the relative importance of focusing on the park’s nearest neighbors. One participant suggested that this focus should be removed because the park is a regional resource. Another participant, who lives near the park, responded with “about 80% of my neighbors are black and we are an all white group.”

**East and West Fairmount Park  
Community Vision  
Moderator Report**

**Date of Forum: October 2, 2013**

**Location of Forum: Lloyd Hall**

**Moderator name(s): Germaine Ingram (Group 5)**

**Group Description**

There were 18 participants in this group. From visual observation, there were 2 African-American women, 6 white males, and 10 white women. From visual observation and self-description, the age range of the participants is estimated to be mid-20s to 70s. One participant is a park commissioner and representative of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society, another is a City employee charged with managing some park functions. There was a journalist, a city planner, a graduate student. Several participants are affiliated with organized coalitions that use the park for running/marathons, cycling, rowing, dragon boating, and a youth hostel. Some use the park every day or several times per week for specific recreational activities, while others use the park irregularly for general enjoyment, or professed a “civic interest” in the park.

The discussion was balanced between specific interests connected to particular types of uses and general interest in the park. One person expressed frustration about inability to get the City to address some concerns of runners/marathoners. Participants listened to one another and shared the floor. They responded to and built on one another’s comments. The overall energy was thoughtful and measured.

**Hopes/Fears**

*Hopes included:*

- Greater responsiveness to the concerns of runners
- Park continues to be multi-functional
- The Park is there for future generations
- Reconnect with forgotten places in the Park
- Reduce automobile traffic
- Progress in addressing interests of the cycling community continues
- River trail continues south
- Preserve the “jewels” of the Park
- Park remains and becomes more accessible to bikers, walkers, and drivers
- A better balance between cars and other uses
- A community boathouse: boathouse accessible to a broader community
- More connection between the river drives and the rest of the Park
- A dock for dragon boating

*Fears included:*

- Future of the Park is unknown/uncertain
- Future investment in the Park will be insufficient
- Excessive asphalt—overdevelopment
- Lack of investment in infrastructure and maintenance (One participant shared a photo of an old, disabled bridge in a remote part of the Park. Some of the other participants were familiar with the bridge.)
- Park becomes “over-planned”— the rustic quality and natural beauty of the Park is lost
- Park ceases to be source of diverse enjoyments
- Vehicles will overwhelm quiet enjoyment
- Park will become over-regulated and overcrowded
- Lose sense of safety
- City will commercialize the Park in order to generate revenue

**Part 1: Use in the park**

How people used the Park in the past, and how they use it now.

By this point in the discussion, participants had shared a lot about their uses of the Park: mostly a variety of recreational uses, including walking, cycling, running, marathons, rowing, dragon boating. Some are avid users, engaging in activities in the Park every day or at least three days per week. Everyone present identified herself/himself as a Park user. One person who moved to Philadelphia about 4 years ago said that the Park is one of the city’s prime attractions for her. Participants commented on how “wonderful” it is that there is such diversity in ways that the Park is used, from walking and picnicking to rugby, frisbee, cricket, and soccer. They talked about the uses that have been lost and the ones they would like to see, as well as the barriers.

What used to be:

- Used to be able to rent row boats
- Used to be able to walk from the Zoo over the Expressway to MLK Drive
- There used to be a Fairmount Park trolley that ran from Strawberry Mansion; it stopped operating in the 1950s

What they would like to do/see in the Park:

- River swimming
- A variety of water sports, e.g. wind surfing and small crafts, water sports should be available to the general public
- Improvement and expansion of the trail network — trails that can be used by runners, bikers, and walkers
- Improvement of picnic tables. “The picnic tables are beyond terrible.”
- Multiple points of access, including access to Forbidden Drive by car
- More information on the Park’s history, especially for young people

Barriers:

- Parking is a big problem for people who want to use the park. There isn't enough parking, and some of the parking options aren't safe. The parking time limits do not jibe with the time it takes for popular recreational activities. Efforts for the past two years by the running community to address parking problems have failed to get action by the City. (There was some questioning and debate over what entity has authority over parking in and around the Park.)
- Safety is a key concern: some parking areas aren't safe; lighting has improved, but it needs to get better; families sometimes engage in unsafe activities — don't recognize or respect the dangers. Bring back Fairmount Park Guards. The challenge is to balance safety with the ability of the public to use the Park without unnecessary barriers
- Physical barriers: Belmont Plateau is blocked off — you can't get access to the view; the visual barriers to MLK Drive — "I want to see the river flashing by"; crossing MLK, Montgomery, and Kelly Drives should be easier; the stretch around the Art Museum is very dangerous for bikers — "give bikers more of a cushion"; fill in the bumps and holes in the bike paths on MLK Drive.
- Automobile traffic: "It's good that the MLK Drive is closed to cars on weekends in summer." One participant proposed that it should be closed on weekends year-round from 7 am to 5 pm.
- You should not need a permit to use picnic tables
- There is no good map/rendering of the Park on-line. People are deterred from exploring the Park because they don't know enough about the terrain. A more informative website would also attract more Park users.

## **Part 2: Discussion of draft guidelines**

The group discussed the guidelines as a whole, rather than focusing on individual guidelines. There were questions about how the draft guidelines were created and what will happen with them next, i.e. what impact the public forums will have on the guidelines. There was a question about the impact of the Drive being a PA State highway and how does that impact discretion and responsibility for maintenance and planning. Critiques of the guidelines were:

- They are vague and general.
- They aren't ambitious enough.
- Safety must be a paramount concern.
- There is a strong bias in the guidelines toward the adjacent neighborhoods, but those neighborhoods can't sustain the entire Park. The guidelines need to leverage the interests and concerns of all user groups. The guidelines also need to address the interests of people who are not part of organized groups.
- MLK Drive should become a destination like Kelly Drive.
- The guidelines focus too much on structural concerns, and not enough on relationships. It was noted that there has never been a "Friends of the River Drive" even though people from all over use it regularly. There needs to be an investment of planning, funding and leadership to bridge and leverage the interests and energies of the variety of groups involved with the Park. Develop a vision and model for "stakeholding" in the Park. Stakeholders could:



- Help with clean-up and maintenance
- Improve safety by organizing town-watches
- Serve as representatives on bodies that give input to policies and planning
- Plan and organize activities and programs
- Build stronger connections between the Park and public/parochial schools----  
make the
  - Park a beneficiary of school-based volunteer efforts and beautification programs

### **Common Ground**

There was a lot of group investment in the idea of the Park as an important civic asset that should be widely accessible to the public. There was general appreciation of the array of activities that occur in the Park, and support for expanding those activities and making them accessible to a broad public. The two strongest messages regarding the guidelines were that (1) Safety must be a paramount concern, but needs to be balanced with accessibility; and (2) The guidelines need to address ways to embrace, coordinate, and leverage the interests and energies of the many groups that are involved with the Park as well as those of people who have no group affiliation. Attention to relational issues and opportunities is generally lacking in the guidelines.