

Public Space Committee Meeting #2

January 14, 2020 Notes

- I. Welcome and brief introductions
- II. DDOT Public Realm Design Handbook
- III. DDOT Green Infrastructure and Low Impact Development Handbook
 - a. Raingardens (19th St)
- IV. Review of draft plaza and streetscape design
- V. Group feedback on draft design
- VI. Next steps for Dupont Plaza/Streetscape project
- VII. Next Public Space Committee Meeting

After welcoming Public Space Advisory Committee members and doing brief introductions, Colleen Hawkinson shared information on two DDOT handbooks that provide information on the materials that will be used for the project. Colleen noted that when these materials are incorporated, DDOT will manage and fund any future maintenance needs.

Public Realm Design Handbook

<https://comp.ddot.dc.gov/Documents/Public%20Realm%20Design%20Handbook.pdf>

Greening DC's Streets Handbook

<https://ddot.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddot/publication/attachments/2014-0418-DDOT-GI-GreeningDCStreets.pdf>

Otto Condon, from ZGF, began the discussion by reviewing draft designs for the 65% design completion of the Streetscape and Plaza as of January 2020.

PLAZA OVERVIEW AND DESIGN

- The plaza and service lanes will be all one level
- The deck will be made of steel which may allow for reducing the height of the trees and landscape planters by recessing some of the soil tubs within the structure.
- Plaza is approximately 56W X 210L
- The service lanes are approximately 12' wide
 - Plaza area and service lanes between Dupont Circle and Q Street sidewalks = 25,000 GSF (27,000 GSF – 2,000 SF Opening)
- The total gross square footage of the entire area (service lanes and plaza) is:
 - Plaza cap structure = +/- 11, 500 GSF, occupiable area @ 60% of space (40% plantings and furnishings) = 7000 SF
- The ventilation opening is 50' in diameter
- A 42' lip around the ventilation opening is needed to meet safety requirements. This lip will prevent people from getting close to the edge. Discussion from the meeting of incorporating public art is outlined below.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

- A rule of thumb is that for an area such as the plaza, people would use 10-15 square feet to be there comfortably
- Otto divided the plaza into thirds as a design starting point
 - 'Meeting area' at the southern end between the ventilation and the Circle.
 - 'Clear' section in the middle. This area would be open and would be able to house a portion of the farmers market, a stage, etc.
 - An area with trees to provide shade
- All areas would be able to accommodate people
- The market, at its highest use, has 60 vendors. This number fluctuates throughout the year. (Colleen confirmed the # of vendors with FRESHFARM.)
- If the plaza is designed in this 'thirds' fashion, it is estimated that X # of vendors for the market would be accommodated (tents are 10x10). With the addition of the service lanes and 'meeting area', it is estimated that about X # of tents would be accommodated.
- Otto cautioned against 'designing for max use'. He used the analogy of a parking lot that is designed for holiday shopping crowds, but is only fully occupied for a small portion of the year

Mike Gifford, RKK, jumped into the discussion to talk about Streetscape elements.

STREETSCAPE AND TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Safety is being prioritized for the 65% percent design for both Streetscape and Plaza
- The project will accommodate all modes
- The Connecticut Avenue service lanes will be designed to be a curbless street
 - A search on google images will provide numerous examples of curbless streets
- Vehicles and busses would still be able to access the Connecticut Avenue service lanes
 - DDOT is keeping WMATA updated on design progress
- The BID would be able to get a permit to close these lanes in the future to accommodate programming
- The protected bike lanes are 5' with a 3' foot buffer along Connecticut Avenue

QUESTIONS ASKED DURING MEETING

Can a grate be placed over the ventilation opening?

If the ventilation opening was to be grated over, it would have to double in size. Otto noted that grates are gender exclusive and not good design practice.

Traffic patterns

Connecticut Avenue service lanes

North and south bound travel service lanes will still be operational. They can be permitted for closure based on programming. Changing bus routes are already occurring per WMATA, so there will be about half the amount of busses on this portion of Connecticut Avenue.

Number of vehicle lanes between R and S Streets

Can the sidewalk be extended into the travel lane on Connecticut Avenue between R and S Streets? Currently, this will be the only segment of Connecticut Avenue with three vehicle lanes. The third vehicle lane is needed during peak to accommodate the queuing that goes to Florida Avenue.

Plaza

If the trees on the plaza were removed could we add more tents for the farmers market?

The plaza can be designed for almost anything. Trees were included based on earlier feedback, for sustainability purposes, and for comfort/shade on hot summer days.

Otto noted the danger in designing the plaza for maximum program use. (Shopping malls and parking) We're trying to find the sweet spot with this plaza. There can be any 'split' among the three different zones, including no trees on the plaza.

What times/days is the Plaza being designed for? Based on peak hours and different times of the week/day?

The Plaza should support and actively bring vibrancy to the neighborhood at all times. Programming will be for daytime, weekdays, and weekends. There should be some specific programming outlined by the BID and this group (farmers market, stage for performances, etc.), but it should also be designed in a way that is flexible and able to accommodate unplanned gathering, informal visits to eat lunch, and people casually chatting throughout the day.

Is this going to be a DDOT street? (Authority? Oversight request for its use?)

The BID will sign an MOU with a city agency for oversight maintenance and programming. Those conversations will begin in the near future.

Colleen has reached out to other BID's and/or their associated foundations to get a sense of their agreements with agencies as well as background on establishing a 501(c) 3 organization to be able to fundraise, apply for grants, have more flexibility.

Utilities – who owns that?

The BID has requested from DDOT that electrical hook-up be included in the specs for the streetlights in the streetscape project area as well as for the Plaza. The BID has also requested water hook-up be provided for the plaza, and that the water hook-up in the median be fixed so that it is usable.

Colleen will work with Pepco on an agreement for use of electricity, and DC Water for use of water.

What about storage?

The BID will need storage for movable elements such as tables, chairs, etc. that are used to enhance programming and spontaneous gatherings on the plaza.

Dupont Underground has space and would be a good option for storage. The BID will work with Dupont Underground to discuss.

There is existing space for an elevator on metro property that can access Dupont Underground. If the BID utilized Dupont Underground for storage, having an elevator to help in move the elements back and forth would be a huge benefit.

Form a group to work with WMATA on this item. Colleen has reached out to WMATA and requested their engineering plans.

There is general agreement that the BID does not want to take up space on plaza for storage.

Bike Lanes

Protected bike lanes on Connecticut Avenue will be 5ft wide with a 3ft buffer. The protected bike lane on Connecticut Avenue will connect to existing bike lanes on Columbia Road to the north and to the planned 20th/21st Street bike lane to the south.

Can someone study the 20th Street bike lane issue?

DDOT completed the Protected Bike Lane study. The full study and all materials can be found on the project website:

<https://www.dccycletrack.com/20th21st22ndstnw>

Can the sidewalks be extended to accommodate sidewalk cafes?

DDOT may be resistant to removing travel lanes. This would add cost and time to the project as it would require a redesign to accommodate new drainage. Total project construction costs would also increase. The team will look at carving out space for business seating and provide mockups. *The BID will request that DDOT evaluate wider sidewalks.*

Can we remove the median to provide more space?

This is complicated because the median is eligible for historic designation due to the of the historic uses of the trolley tunnels. The ventilation shaft below also makes it difficult and incredibly expensive. *The BID will request that DDOT evaluate removal of the median.*

What are options for trees? Can we coordinate with Casey Trees?

DDOT's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) has had negative experiences in the past with Casey Trees. One issue with the trees Casey Trees plants is that they plant young trees that take a number of years to grow before they develop a meaningful presence. UFA is already engaged in the project and has been reviewing plans.

Possibility of artwork

Recommendation to work with public art in order to work the opening into a feature. To incorporate a specific art piece into the design, the artwork would need to be formalized by Fall 2020. There's also the possibility of doing a standard protective piece that could be used as a support for any eventual artwork. *The BID will establish a working group to evaluate the options and apply for grant funding.*

ACTION ITEMS

FORMAL LETTER TO DDOT

The BID will prepare a formal letter to DDOT providing our official comments on the 65% design, as well as guidance. The letter will also include questions, which DDOT can then respond to.

KICK OFF WORKING GROUPS

Formation of a Public Art group: It was recommended that BID should look for public art funding to minimize and potentially create some utility (terraced seating?) for the required safety lip around the ventilation opening. A robust discussion took place and there was agreement that a group would be formed to:

- Search for public art funding opportunities (To date, Colleen has reached out to DC Commission of Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment of the Arts)
- Provide fiscal agency functions if 501 C3 classification is needed for grant application submissions
- Kim Bender and Aaron Denu offered to work with the BID on this aspect. Ruth Gresser may also be interested in participating. Anyone interested in or with ties to the Arts community is welcome and encourage to participate in the group.

Formation of a Plaza group: The need for a secure, clean, and dry area to store items that will be moved to and from the Plaza depending on events and programming is important for the success of the Plaza. Volunteers from the Public Space Advisory Committee will work to determine options for storage. This will include working with WMATA to evaluate opportunities on land within their purview to better access Dupont Underground.

The group will also evaluate the best organizational structure to oversee programming, maintenance and operational items.