MoCA Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2012

President Deb Barker introduced the board to the attendees. Chip Nevins of Seattle Parks is in attendance to explain a proposal by the Parks department related to the Morgan Junction Park site.

Mr. Nevins introduced himself and explained that he works on new parks acquisitions. He began by talking about the history of the area, specifically the neighborhood plan that has open space goals, including the plan for the Green Crescent. Morgan Junction was part of the original group of neighborhood plans. Originally, the Morgan electricity substation was a candidate for new open space. City Light, however, did not want to sell the substation. The second plan was to create the Eddy Street / Beveridge Place pocket park by using land not used by the monorail project. This was developed in the mid-2000s.

The City looks at the amount of parks in different areas of Seattle. A new Seattle Parks levy enabled this ongoing project of improving park space in the Morgan Junction Urban Village. Parks found two sites that meet minimum criteria of size, good solar access, good pedestrian access. One site is the Short Stop drycleaner site. The other is on the northern edge of the urban village. The drycleaner site is advantaged by being central and by being adjacent to an existing park, which is too small in the opinion of many locals. Enhancement of this park may be accomplished by acquiring the drycleaner location. This would triple the size of the park. Acquiring the drycleaner property would also potentially reduce crime complaints. Community involvement can also help to cure the issue of crime. Budget problems mean that the City has money to acquire parks but not to develop them right now. When the budget improves, the park can be developed over time. Initially, this process is known as land banking. Interim solutions can involve community participation ideas. There are several examples of this around the city.

A neighbor asked if the city has money to demolition the building. The acquisition budget does include money to clean up the site, but a decision on this has not been made.

Another neighbor asked for clarification on the proposed location. The answer is north of Eddy Street.

The city is doing an environmental review of the property. There may be contamination from its past uses. The history indicates a past gas station and current drycleaner.

What are the criteria for making decisions in interim uses in the land banking process? The decision-making process includes consideration of tenants, the safety of the building, and perhaps other considerations. Mr. Nevins will follow up on this.

If the park is developed, would Eddy Street be vacated? The intent is to combine the properties into one park, but there are several ways of doing that. Ideally, there would not be a driveway or cul-de-sac in the middle of the park.

One purpose of this meeting is to hear from community members on this Parks proposal.

The City has no plans for the Eddy Ravine itself.

One neighbor expressed how she tries to use the currently small Morgan Junction Park. The Short Stop property is a menace because of the amount of drug dealing and drug use. Parks' instructions are to call 911 to report any incidents like this. The advantage of the current park being public property encourages a better police response.

Another neighbor complained that she might be expected to call and "police" the drunks herself, which worries her.

For the design process for the new park, will there be community input for an appropriate and safe design process? Yes, Parks would have the same public design process, including at least three public meetings, inviting ideas and input.

A neighbor complained about three characters who often defecate behind current park bushes. Parks and MoCA encouraged neighbors to call 911.

Parks has a map that it can share of the proposed property.

Short Stop's cabling (fencing) has improved some of the drug dealing.

The meeting continued with a tour of the property that Parks proposes purchasing. Morgan Junction community members could help to advocate for interim lease money going back to Parks to help fund the development. People discussed potential interim uses of the property, including movie nights on the building wall, video games on the building wall, planting trees to give them a head start in growth, an interim parking lot that could generate some amount of income, rummage sales, a pea patch, raised vegetable beds, or a dog run. Jefferson Park in Beacon Hill has great spaces now for kids. Authorization for interim uses can potentially be less bureaucratic than in the past. Mr. Nevins suggested examples of successful interim uses done without bureaucratic hurdles. Expedited plans could be facilitated through neighborhood grants. Lake City, Wedgwood, Greenwood, and Capital Hill have had recent experiences developing new parks. Matching funds can help with park designs.

Mr. Nevins explained that Parks has purchased other potentially contaminated sites before. Over the next month, Parks will continue to evaluate the condition of the property through further core soil samples. Environmental clean up costs still need to be determined.

Deb thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting, asking questions, and offering their ideas and comments. October 17th is the next MoCA meeting.