



Public Amenities Committee
Meeting Summary

Wed. Aug. 13, 2008 10:30 a.m. Conference Room 391

Members Present: Lehmann, Johnson, Madison
Members Absent: None
Other Council Present: Nevitt, Robb

Agenda: Introductions of Parks & Recreation Staff
 McNichols/Carnegie Building and Civic Center Park
 Compatible non-park use of the Fleming House at Platt Park

1. Parks & Recreation: Introduction of Staff Members

Scott Robson, Acting Manager of Parks & Recreation, introduced the following new staff members:

- Mark Tabor, Assistant Director of Parks Planning & Construction, is a long-time Denver resident and was a Lead Project Manager at the National Park Service's Denver Center. He will coordinate Bond Projects and work to improve continuity from master plans to implementation.
- Mark Bernstein, Downtown Area Planner, is returning to Denver Parks after serving Aurora Parks as Principal Landscape Architect. One of his last projects with Denver was design and construction of the Skatepark. He is taking over several of Helen Kuykendall's responsibilities, with a focus on Civic Center, Skyline, and the Platte Valley parks, but not City Park.

2. Update: McNichols/Carnegie Building and Civic Center Park

Scott Robson, Acting Manager, Parks & Recreation; Kevin Patterson, Manager, General Services; Jim McIntyre, Purchasing; Derek Brown, Facilities Planning & Maintenance; and Mark Bernstein, Downtown Area Parks Planner, briefed the Committee on the Request for Information (RFI) for the Carnegie/McNichols Building, issued on August 1.

This 28,000-square-foot building at the northwest corner of Civic Center Park, but not technical on park land, was one of hundreds of library buildings constructed across the county with funding from the Carnegie family. Completed in 1909, it housed the Denver Public Library until 1956 when its new building at Broadway and 14th Avenue was built. Since then, the building has been altered, especially the interior, to serve as City offices starting with the Water Department and now the Treasury Division of the Finance Department. In 1987, the building was designated a Denver landmark and a National Landmark. It was officially named the McNichols Building in 1999 in honor of the McNichols family, particularly Denver Mayor Bill McNichols; his father, Denver Auditor William McNichols; and his brother, Governor Steve McNichols.

Lately, there has been growing interest in restoring the historic building for more public purposes, partly as a catalyst to help activate Civic Center Park. The intent of the Request for Information (RFI) is to reach people nationally who might have innovative ideas about how to utilize the building. Over 100 people have logged onto the website to download the RFI, which includes a great deal of information on the history, various modification projects, a 1999 assessment, and current conditions of the building, as well as the Civic Center Master Plan and other relevant planning documents.

It is hoped there is interest on the part of some public or private entity to partner with the City and potentially the Civic Center Conservancy to redevelop and occupy the building with uses compatible with the vision for Civic Center as adopted in the 2005 Civic Center Master Plan. Responses are due by October 31. If there is interest, this process may lead to issuance of a more formal Request for Proposals or some other type of arrangement.

Restoration will have to comply with the Civic Center Design Guidelines, currently under development, and respect the basic interior and exterior architecture. Any final redevelopment plan and long-term lease agreement will need to be approved by City Council. At this time, there is no City funding available.

An obvious question is relocation of the 70 employees currently in the McNichols Building, and the Permit Center was mentioned. The Committee expressed concern about spending bond money on the Permit Center until its use is known. Mr. Brown said immediate stabilization of the building is needed.

Councilwoman Robb said we need a total 10-year facilities assessment, in view of the Justice Center, Permit Center, possible relocation of employees from McNichols, etc.

Councilwoman Lehmann said we need to discuss what "activation" of Civic Center means. Mr. Patterson said the McNichols Building should have uses that draw people who will then be drawn into the open space. Mr. Robson said the point of the RFI is to gather ideas about activation and positive activities, and the issue should not be defining the term.

Mr. Bernstein said that the Master Plan and Design Guidelines state that the parking lot south of the building must be eliminated, and the RFI contains that direction. One of the first Parks bond projects is the Broadway Terrace, and he is working with Public Works on closing the right-turn lane from Colfax onto Broadway to improve pedestrian circulation.

The RFI will be sent to Councilmembers present at the Committee meeting. All parties who register to download the RFI are able to contact each other. Two walkthroughs of the building are scheduled.

3. Parks & Recreation: James Fleming House at Platt Park

Committee Action

The Committee made some revisions to and then approved filing a bill allowing for compatible non-park (CNP) use of the landmark James Fleming House at 1510 S. Grant in Platt Park.

Summary of Discussion

Scott Robson, Acting Manager, Parks & Recreation, and Patrick Wheeler, Assistant City Attorney, presented the request for an ordinance to allow the James Fleming House at Platt Park to be used for

compatible non-park uses, under the provisions of DRMC 39-133. This structure was designated a Denver Landmark by Ordinance 654, Series of 1973. It was constructed by James Fleming, the only mayor of the City of South Denver, and was used as the town hall, library and jail until it was annexed into Denver in 1894. It continued to serve as a public library until 1913, and was then used by the South Side Women's Club into the 1950s. It has served as a recreation center, and more recently, a portion of the first floor is used at times for Platt Park Senior Center programming. The Park & Recreation Department has storage on the second floor.

Approval for compatible non-park (CNP) use is a rare request for official action of Council under Charter §2.4.7 and DRMC Chapter 39 Parks & Recreation, Article V. Use of Historic Structures located in Parks. The Charter section was approved by voters in 1993; Council adopted the ordinance language in 1994. The process has been used twice:

- In 1995, for the Washington Park Bathhouse (Volunteers for Outdoors Colorado); and
- In 1997, for Bible House and Carriage Building in City Park (no current tenant).

The intent is to preserve officially-designated landmark structures located in parks. These structures are often not suitable for park purposes, but only a few specific non-park uses are allowed in a park under Charter §2.4.5. The "compatible non-park use" process was created in an effort to occupy these landmark structures and get some help maintaining and preserving them, while ensuring that the new uses are compatible with the structures' locations in the parks.

In this specific case, The Park People expressed an interest in moving from its current location, the Eugene Field House at Washington Park, to the Fleming House, a larger venue. The organization's assessment of the building is that it needs between \$750,000 and \$1 million of work. The Park People will make significant renovations. As per the specified process, the proposal was presented to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board in April. The Board scheduled a public meeting and asked for ideas for CNP use to be presented in June. The Park People was the only respondent. The Board made a formal motion directing the Manager to pursue a CNP use, and he is today asking the Committee to approve filing an ordinance declaring the James Fleming House available for CNP use. The bill may contain conditions or limitations to limit impacts on the park. A formal usage agreement between the city and selected entity will have to be approved by council.

Mr. Wheeler and the Committee discussed the draft ordinance. The main points are summarized:

- The possibility of expanding beyond non-profit organizations resulted in language giving preference to non-profits.
- Provide for possibility of more than one user.
- More flexibility regarding use of the first and second floor rather than limiting the CNP use to the second floor and reserving the first floor for senior center programming.
- Give preference to proposals that address senior programming.
- Add requirement that renovation plans and the financing thereof be included in the proposal.
- After discussion, the Committee decided to retain the language requiring that the CNP use have as its mission "conservation, protection, enhancement or enjoyment of parks, open space, recreation, the environment, and/or natural resources and/or associated educational activities or services", but that language is moved to the section stating the considerations and/or conditions to be considered by the manager.