

Redesign of the Codman Square Park: CREATIVE DIALOG

Codman Square Park Site Walk & Roundtable Conversation Osman Akan, Destiny Palmer and Catherine Widgery, Landscape Architect Kyle Zick & Community

Second Church Parlor, 44 Moultrie Street, Dorchester
Wednesday, October 10, 2018

Present

A group of approx. 25 was present, including Codman Square Neighborhood Council (CSNC) leadership, neighbors, merchants, representatives from the Codman Square Health Center, Second Church including Pastor Victor Price, Boston Parks and Recreation Department, Browne Fund, Mayor's Office (sign-in PDF available)

Notes

PART 1: Codman Square Park welcome & site walk of the park, 360 Talbot Avenue

The finalist artists, the CSNC leadership and neighbors as well as project team members walked the park and talked about the neighborhood surrounding Codman Square Park as well as existing conditions and layout since the Centre Street terminus was changed and the park was created during the 1980s.

PART 2: Creative Dialog at Second Church Parlor, 44 Moultrie Street

Cynthia Loesch-Johnson welcomed everyone. She thanked the Second Church for hosting the meeting and the representatives of the City of Boston for joining the Codman Square Park redesign initiative, particularly the Browne Fund for making planning funds available. She summarized how the volunteers of the neighborhood are working tirelessly to further the neighborhood and the park and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

1. The Codman Square Park redesign project history (Cynthia Loesch-Johnson)

The park was established by the leadership of the CSNC when it arranged for a part of the high school now known as the Latin Academy Apartments parcel to be conveyed to the city to establish a new park. The CSNC also helped organize the Friends of the Codman Square Park, an active group that has been convening to improve the park that is made up of residents, merchants, City Departments (Parks, Mayor's Office,) and community organizations. This group met monthly and began visioning for the park which led to the involvement of the Browne Fund and Boston Arts Commission. The CSNC led numerous visioning sessions in 2017 to establish priorities and a wish list for the park—see JPG of boards in the photo album at www.urbancultureinstitute.org/codman-square-park

2. Mission and role of the E.I. Browne Trust Fund of the City of Boston (Chantal Charles)

The Browne Fund was created under a will from attorney Edward Ingersoll Browne in 1892. The testament of Mr. Browne indicated that a third of his estate would be used for the "adornment and benefit of Boston's public places." A City Ordinance established the process through which the Browne Fund distributes its income. Any proposal to the Browne Fund which includes a public art component must first be reviewed by the City's Art Commission. Applicants need approval of the property owner to develop a project.

See https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-12-2016/browne_fund_application.pdf

3. **Integral landscape architecture and public art design process and objectives for the evening (Christina Lanzl)**

Christina shared the process to date. An open public art call for entries resulted in 134 applications. Following the art selection committee's thorough review three artists from New England and New York City were invited to develop site-specific schematic proposals. Finalist artists Catherine Widgery, Destiny Palmer and Osman Akan were invited to work on integral art proposals in collaboration with Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture, the firm that was selected following an invitational review process with four local landscape architecture firms at the May 9 CSNC meeting.

See project summary at www.urbancultureinstitute.org/codman-square-park

4. **Boston Art Commission (BAC) process: join the upcoming CSNC meeting on Nov. 14, 6pm**

Cynthia shared that the BAC will be present at the upcoming Friends of the Codman Square Park meeting on Nov. 14 at 6pm to share process and answer questions. Christina explained that the RFP issued to the finalist artists adheres to and follows the BAC submission guidelines.

5. **Finalist artists brief introductions (Osman Akan, Destiny Palmer, Catherine Widgery)**

Osman Akan has been creating public art for 10 years including some major commissions. Materials need to be able to withstand the elements. He likes to work with stainless steel. Indoor works to date feature optical fibers, lighting design. www.osmanakan.com

Destiny Palmer is primarily a painter. Lived in Dorchester for 7 years and taught art at Boston Arts Academy. She now teaches at MassArt. She is excited that the greenspaces of the neighborhoods are getting more attention and looks forward to help nurture the Codman Square Park space. www.destinypalmer.com

Catherine Widgery has been creating public art for 30 years. She likes to transform places. Works may be freestanding. She likes the elements to respond to invisible elements, such as wind or light. The experience always changes. C. likes to get to the heart of what a place is and what matters to the community. Recently, she has been spending winters in Guatemala, where she has been inspired by the strong colors. www.widgery.com

6. **Site analysis and initial findings (Kyle Zick)**

The question is: Why should I come to the park? Findings based on Kyle's research to date are available in his Site Analysis, available online at

www.urbancultureinstitute.org/uploads/1/1/4/6/11465358/codman_sq_park_site_analysis_kzla_web.pdf

The park has great energy. The former road currently defines the space. It's loved and used but it could be more. At the farmers' market, the vendors are primarily on Washington St. because most of the foot traffic is there. That's the preference of the vendors. Here are some observations and responses by residents as recorded by Kyle during site visits:

- Trees are in good condition.
- Street furniture has been recorded as existing infrastructure.
- Ideal for farmers' market would be flat pavement without tree pits; approx. 15x25' w/ circulation.
- Shade is important.
- A rain garden has been requested, since there is a rain garden project underway.
- Need for a drinking fountain has been identified.

- Park should be family friendly.

7. **Creative Dialog roundtable among finalist artists, landscape architect and community**

Initial questions for discussion:

1. What are some of the current challenges for Codman Square Park, both spatial and otherwise?

2. What is your greatest wish for the redesigned Codman Square Park?

- Pedestrian movement through the Church property as an approach to the park has been active but liability issues are currently a concern.
- Does the community want a fence? It does keep people out. Might the fence that separates the church lot from the park be removed to expand the space? This question has not been discussed by the church community/administration. Pastor Victor Price joined the meeting and introduced himself to confirm that an active green space is important, also as an anchor. A concern is how the space would be managed. The CSNC will meet with Second Church to further flush out possibilities. Could sliding gates help control access?
- Could the trees be limbed up so that the canopy could be thinned and a bit higher?
- Can some of the historic homes in the immediate neighborhood, e.g. on Melville Avenue be visually integrated into the park? The church is also the key presence in the park and the square.
- The original shape of the square has been a 5-star with the Second Church at the center.

What kind of park lighting exists?

Cathy Baker-Eclipse of the Parks Dept. gave the following overview:

- Existing street lighting comes on at dusk and turns off in the morning.
- There is no dedicated lighting in the park now. It would have to be introduced.

Are there opportunities for solar lighting?

Church manager Alfonse is a solar expert who brought solar panels to the church.

Issues: The dense tree canopy may impede lighting.

Not a priority

- Benches already exist and are not favored as much vs. movable chairs? Issue: What about security?
- A community bulletin board is not a priority for this process as there are efforts for it already underway.
- Pet-friendly features.

Who is responsible for public art maintenance once it is installed?

- Capital improvement repairs of the public art piece would be the responsibility of the Browne Fund.
- Routine maintenance, however, is not within purview of the Browne Fund or the Parks Department. The community would be expected to take responsibility for maintenance.
- The Boston Art Commission does maintain a fund. Details need to be shared by the BAC.

What does the community want?

The community is open to great ideas that will make the park great.

Previous top priorities set at previous community visioning sessions can be considered but should not become limitations:

1. Tables and chairs for board games
2. Art features

3. Family friendly (rather than “Kids play area”, which is not a proper term due to traffic constraints. *Note:* An existing playground is located on Wainwright Street and Talbot Avenue.
The real question is: How can a level of *play* be introduced to the park?

Historic references and what kind of history is important?

Cynthia shared that the Codman Memorial in the park is key to the identity of the park. A second element complementing this one could be a concept for public art.

Some other historic facts of note:

- The Rose Kennedy lived on Welles Avenue.
- Paul Revere has ties to Codman Square.
- The Norfolk Street Cemetery is linked to Second Church

NOTE: The church has books and other printed materials in the office, including banners of the 1864 presidential election campaign, when Lincoln spoke at Second Church.

Integral Landscape Design and Public Art Development Process

Q: Is the artist expected to come up with a global approach? What is the process? How much interaction happens? Osman would prefer seeing some initial thoughts about the landscape before responding.

A: Kyle suggests individual working sessions as a useful approach. He will reach out to the finalists.

Conclusions and next steps

- The goal is to change the dynamics of the neighborhood through the park’s activation.
- The church is currently the key landmark with the vision for the park to have an equal impact.
- The expectation is that something unconventional is being introduced.
- Budget eventually needs to be clarified regarding public art vs. landscape design costs.
- The project may consist of several phases.
- CSNC will meet with Second Church to discuss concerns and potential solutions.
- Could Centre Street driving limitations potentially be further extended to include the current terminus into Talbot Street? Parks Dept. landscape architect Cathy Baker-Eclipse thinks that is a conversation worth pursuing and she’ll put CSNC in touch with the Transportation department.
- Landscape architect and artists will be in touch with each other to begin communications and will keep Christina in the loop.

Meeting Schedule

Nov. 14 CSNC meeting | 6-7pm meeting with Boston Art Commission

The Great Hall, 6 Norfolk Street, Dorchester

Artists are invited to attend. Osman and Cathy would be able to join via Skype. Destiny might be able to be there in person.

Thursday, December 12, 2018 | 6pm

Public Presentation of 3 Finalist Schematic Design Proposals

The Great Hall, 6 Norfolk Street, Dorchester

Tuesday, January 29, 2019 | 6-8pm

Presentation of revised, collaborative Codman Square Park Redesign

Proposal by the landscape architect and the artist

Black Box Theatre, 14 Epping Street, Dorchester