

Freedom Park Master Plan: Public Meeting #1, 9/17/2020 – Questions and Answers

Public Meeting Session #2 – 7:00PM

Question:

“I’m very interested in how Freedom Park can provide connectivity and serve itself as something a gateway to Candler Park, which has a lot of amenities. Are you coordinating with other greenspaces to get more of a symbiosis with other plans?”

Response from Master Plan Chair:

Yes, we are coordinating with and looking into all the adjacent greenspaces. With all the rigorous analysis SWA has been going through, we’ve been talking to a lot of these partners, so I’ll let them jump in and talk about those types of adjacencies.

Response from SWA:

All around this park there’s been a lot of work over the years, and it’s fundamental to our process to collect as much of this information and learn from it as much as we can and build these relationships, because what happens in Candler Park and Freedom Park can and should directly benefit each other’s objectives. We want to really leverage the hard work and the knowledge that’s preceded this effort and really build on that, rather than start from scratch.

Master Plan Chair:

This is the perfect kind of thing, if you think of any particular ways in which we can best connect with Candler Park, these are great pinpoints to put in the interactive map, so we can see those exact ideas.

SWA:

Every part of the master plan, there are points where you zoom in to solve small problems, like an intersection crossing, that sort of thing, and there are times when we zoom way out, and we think well beyond the boundaries of Freedom Park and how the park fits into some much larger opportunities. Even some that don’t currently exist. We’ve been drawing these big east-west corridor; there are opportunities, through the process of this master plan, uncover other opportunities that might relate to the surrounding communities or the city as a whole, as we put the efforts of Freedom Park in context of all the other initiatives around the city. You can’t think too big in these efforts, in our experience.

Question from David Hamilton, Freedom Park Conservancy Board:

“From your perspective, seeing the unique nature of the park that started out as a highway and is essentially a linear park, how will you begin to address the spread out, porous nature of a park that’s several miles long and not really defined like conventional parks are. What kind of challenges and opportunities does that present?”

Response from SWA:

We gave the example of the art gallery as an approach to thinking about the rich diversity and different story lines and history surrounding the context of the park – we’ve got stairs where houses used to be that were demolished for the freeway, we’ve got connections to the Martin Luther King Jr. center and the Carter Center and these cool neighborhoods.

The challenge for us is that there are so many stories to tell within this park. And it’s not like Piedmont Park, which has a lot of acreage within a limited boundary; Freedom Park has a lot of boundary with comparatively limited acreage. This starts to shape how you approach programming, especially linear programming, like trails that tell stories along the way or bring you to places within the park that are maybe defined by topography or specific boundaries. The park today is really about

movement. While there are great places to *be* within that park, we feel like programming isn't always about a place, it can be about the experience of movement within a place.

Another thing we're going to study is brand, and how brand can help you get your arms around a park that is very spread out. We think repetition of some branding element will be a big part of that, and sometimes that's signage, sometimes it's the way art is handled, it could even be the way the landscape is handled. Right now, with the landscape, one thing we've been struck by is how beautiful it is, but yet, it's not legible, and it's kind of all the same. What we want to do is to create continuity *and* variety. So, the brand can give us continuity and repetition and at the same time promote variety to create special magical moments that people talk about.

Also, to help with this kind of undifferentiated linear system, you can think of it as a system of loops. You can only walk or bike so far, physically, and it's such a long stretch of land. We can start breaking things up into sort of loop conditions, where you don't just think about looping inside the park, you incorporate some of the surrounding neighborhoods, restaurants, playgrounds, etc., like chain links, or loops interlocking with each other. This way, you can experience new and different loops when you come back to the park. So, variety is important, as well as maintaining the overall integrity of the park as a brand.

Question:

"Are there any good examples or precedents of other spread out, porous parks that you all feel have successfully dealt with similar challenges/have similar qualities that you might point out for our community to look at?"

Response from SWA:

One great thing about Freedom Park is that it's very unique. But there are some similar examples – like Boston's Emerald Necklace, the famous linear park system that was developed by Frederick Law Olmstead. It's a chain of greenspaces – any time you have a stretch of open space it creates a very egalitarian approach to land, and allows different communities to come in from different angles and share experiences.

The more recent examples are a bit more distilled, like the Beltline, which is certainly a linear park. Freedom Park is not *only* a linear park, however. It has linear components, but it also has pretty gracious, beautiful wide opened spaces that are reminiscent of places you'd find in Central Park or Hyde Park. We plan to look at a lot of different aspects of different types of parks, and take from them what has been successful.

Another example is Buffalo Bayou park in Houston – especially if you take out the bayou. There are a lot of similarities – it was a park before we redesigned it, it just didn't work as a whole, it sort of worked as a series of random spaces. We had to figure out a way to stitch it together. There are applicable examples of different solutions from different parks, and we're really focused on lessons learned from a variety of parks.

One of the challenges for Freedom Park is to define the points of arrival. It doesn't have to be the center – we have the Carter Center at the center of the park – but we also have large open space on the Candler Park side. So in terms of hierarchies, it's not always linear. In terms of arrival, it's not defined. Each surrounding neighborhood is an active stakeholder on each leg of the park, so it's important to identify which stretches of the park are more public and more regional. We've alluded to the east-west access/line as privileging that public direction and arrival from the broader region. We think that dealing with these hierarchies will help resolve some of the challenges from the park being so spread out and porous.

Question:

"This is a statement ... Once in a lifetime opportunity to think big!"

Response from Conservancy:

Wholeheartedly agreed! The conservancy agrees with that 100%, and so does SWA, so we're gonna think big.

Response from SWA:

In terms of the current pandemic, the relevance of green space like this park is really rising to the top of what's really important for the city spatially, and what's really important in terms of the environment and equitable access to green space.

In the context of a master plan – the beginning is the time when you really want to think big. There's an opportunity to throw everything on the table to start with, even if a lot of it won't stick. It's important to get inspired as a community, and one of the goals of this park is to inspire, and help think about how we raise money, sustain big ideas, leverage these larger connections, and make the park more relevant to more people and more communities for the city and the region.

Question:

"When you get further into public engagement, will you do anything specific to engage the perspective of children and youth/teens?"

Response from Sycamore):

We've got a photo sharing campaign in the works, which would be a great opportunity for youth and teens, and people who use the park with their children, to weigh in on their favorite places in the park and to take photos for Instagram (details coming soon!).

We've talked also about doing an idea wall – which will be a stationary location in the park for folks to scribble out ideas as they're using the spaces. And children will be more than welcome to our next meeting, which will be more interactive and possibly feature a room/forum/station for youth.

If you have youth groups in your communities or neighborhoods that are active, we would love to know how to connect with them as well, so please email us and let us know how to get in touch with them!

Also, kids can use the interactive mapping tool!

Response from SWA:

We're thinking about the really positive aspects of communities that have a lot of social interaction across age groups and demographics – it's never too early to start thinking about what these different groups need and want, but also how they can interrelate with each other.

Question:

"What time Oct. 15?"

Response:

The October 15 meeting will be held in two sessions which will cover the same material, one at 12:00 PM and another at 7:00 PM.