

City Council Meeting February 10, 2025

10. STUDY SESSION

- b** Receive a Presentation and Provide Direction to Staff on the Design and Layout of Key Features for Improvements to the 700 Block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park (Phase 1 Downtown Implementation Component).

Lisa Porras, Planning Manager and Jim Stickley, Principal consultant at WRT presented the item.

Council Member (CM) Layton inquired about the intended purpose and vision for the small and medium size stage. He also asked about the spatial relationship between the stage and the water feature, questioning whether they might compete with each other during a music performance. Lastly, he inquired about the design concept and functionality of the alleyway.

CM Dugan expressed his preference for the pavilion to be medium or medium-plus in size, considering the nearby residents behind the Wheeler Plaza area. He questioned whether this location would serve as the primary gathering space and suggested making it the central focal point.

CM Dugan noted that the public may want seating options as events are happening on the pavilion. He also expressed his preference for the fountain to have an organic, flowing design that complements the overall aesthetic rather than a boxed-in structure.

CM Dugan agrees with CM Leighton that the alley entrance should be welcoming and pull people into the plaza. He also suggested beginning public communication about the plans for the Memorial Bricks and their future placement. Council Member Dugan reminded staff and the consultant team to keep in mind the existing newspaper boxes and the City's free papers, emphasizing their significant community benefit.

CM Rak expressed his appreciation for the idea of a gateway to the park from the alleyway. He agreed with CM Dugan's idea of making the water structure more fluid like. He also noted the importance of finding the right balance with the stage and music, considering there are residents all around, including along El Camino Real.

Mayor McDowell emphasized the need for a drinking fountain or water station. She also wanted to ensure that diaper-changing stations are included in the restrooms. Additionally, she expressed uncertainty about the inclusion of outdoor handwashing stations.

Mayor McDowell liked the idea of a bench in front of the water structure, as it serves a dual purpose—providing seating and acting as a barrier to prevent young children from

accessing the water directly. She suggested backless seating so people can face either the fountain or pavilion.

Mayor McDowell inquired about the status of the U.S. Bank driveway and expressed her appreciation for the natural elements incorporated into the overall design, especially the wood pavilion, which softens the features.

Mayor McDowell agreed with CM Dugan that if the City builds a medium-sized stage, it should be able to accommodate at least a medium-sized band. She noted that there may be some pushbacks from residents in Wheeler Plaza if bands perform in that area.

Mayor McDowell suggested bike parking in the alley behind Harrington Park.

Public Comment

Karen Molinari (in person) expressed gratitude for the project and enthusiasm for its impact. As a member of the Economic Development Advisory Commission, she is optimistic that it will increase foot traffic in downtown and benefit businesses along Laurel Street.

Caroline (in Zoom) supported the idea of sinks outside the bathrooms, noting they would reduce wait times and discourage their use for bathing. They suggested looking at a similar example in a park on 24th Street in San Francisco's Noe Valley for reference.

Council Members Final Comments

CM Dugan sought confirmation from City Attorney Greg Rubens that the City is not infringing on the US Bank easement due to the permanent closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street. He also proposed adding Tableau rock seating in the 700 block, similar to those in Chilton Park, as they would complement the fountain well.

CM Layton emphasized the importance of design details, particularly regarding outdoor handwashing stations, which could unintentionally encourage bathing. He also highlighted the need for thoughtful seating design to enhance events like Music in the Park and ensure the pavilion remains the focal point. He raised concerns about potential bottlenecks in the fountain areas and the impact of elevating the pavilion, including accessibility and unintended uses, such as protests. CM Leighton urged careful consideration of these elements to ensure a functional and welcoming downtown space.

CM Rak emphasized maintaining the promenade's accessibility, ensuring that while music and seating are important, they should not obstruct movement or business access. He preferred backless benches and highlighted that there should be a distinction between an urban plaza and a traditional park. While natural design elements are welcome, the space

should still function as a downtown promenade, balancing aesthetics with practicality in an urban setting.