

## **City Council 5/12/25 Regular Meeting Item #10 Study Session Notes**

### **10. STUDY SESSION**

#### **a. Receive a Presentation and Provide Direction to Staff on the Design of the Pavilion, Restrooms, and Water Feature as Part of Improvements to the 700 Block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park.**

John Ware, Principal and Liam Lautze, Architectural Designer with Ware Associates, presented the Pavilion. Jim Garland from Fluidity Design Consultants presented the water feature design.

Staff and Consultant Team responded to Council's questions and comments.

#### **Water Fountain**

CM Dugan commended the staff and consultant team for their good work and expressed enthusiasm for the comprehensive Downtown Specific Plan. He noted that he had originally brought up the Trevi Fountain as inspiration and shared his appreciation for the proposed design. He remarked that the fountain is visually striking and approachable, while not being overly inviting for play, and its zero-depth design that prevents people from getting soaked.

CM Dugan invited the Consultant to speak to the commissioning process for the fountain—specifically, how the artist would be selected, whether the current design is final, and if it reflects the desired vision. Also encouraged exploring ways to involve the community more in the design process, noting that the original Trevi Fountain was the result of a contest and commission. He noted that he viewed this as an opportunity to engage the public and generate excitement around the project.

Jim Garland stated that their assumption was to produce the work themselves. He explained that the current process involves working with a fabricator to refine the design, but they are open to involving an artist or broader community participation, though it would affect the process and potentially increase costs.

CM Dugan suggested that, since the project is still in Phase 1B and without a firm timeline, there is an opportunity to engage the community in shaping the public art element. He noted that the Community Foundation has expressed interest in participating and that the local artist collective Art Bias may also be a valuable partner. CM Dugan encouraged exploring community involvement in the design process, rather than defaulting to an industrial production approach.

Jim Garland clarified that his use of the term "industrial" referred to a process with an artistic character, rather than something mechanical or machine-like.

VM Venkatesh referred to slide 30 and 40, and inquired about segment benches.

Jim Garland explained that the three segment benches are designed to work together to cradle the cascade feature without fully enclosing it, allowing the water to flow freely in all directions. He added that this segmented design aims to maximize seating opportunities while preserving the integrity of the water's movement.

VM Venkatesh shared her concern that dogs or children may go into the fountain via the opening.

Jim Garland explained that the fountain is not meant to be interactive.

CM Layton inquired about the distance between the fountain and the pavilion.

John Ware answered 20 feet to allow for emergency vehicle access, which is a critical design element, and allowing pedestrian access through the two sides is the other critical element.

CM Layton inquired about the distance from the fountain to the Bank of America Building.

John Ware stated that it is on the order of 10 feet.

CM Layton wanted clarification on the rocks proposed for the fountain.

Jim Garland explained there are two proposed rocks, one is the dark rock in the pool which provides a reflective foundation and the other is the lighter color rock in the sculpture. He noted that both are indigenous.

Mayor McDowell referred to slide 40 and expressed concern that young children might be able to climb into the water fountain and get wet. She emphasized that, as stated in the previous Council meeting, her clear preference was for a fountain that would not allow children to run into it.

Mayor McDowell commented that the fountain is very large with a dimension shy of 40 feet per Jim Garland.

## **Other**

CM Rak referenced slide 27, which shows the site plan, and inquired about how the design team plans to integrate tables and seating into the space.

Jim Stickely stated that the design allows for flexible use of the stage from two directions, with informal seating options like benches and seating walls throughout the park. For formal events, temporary seating would be brought in or attendees could bring their own chairs, a practice that has worked well in other communities.

CM Rak inquired how unfinished the ground covers would be for phase 1A and 1B.

Jim Stickley suggested that if Phase 1A only includes Harrington Park, a clean and simple boundary from building corner to corner could mark the transition to new paving. However,

he stated that if the pavilion is added to Phase 1A, it would be better to align the boundary with the existing diagonal pavement patterns to create a more natural and integrated look.

Mayor McDowell inquired about the location of the Blue Man statue.

Jim Stickely explained that the Blue Man statue is showing at one of the end plazas on 700 block, which means it would not be in phase 1A.

### **Bathrooms/ Drinking Fountain**

VM Venkatesh inquired if the bathrooms are ADA compliant.

John Ware confirmed they are.

Mayor McDowell inquired about the drinking fountain.

John Ware referred to slide 10 and explained that the water filling stations are outside the restroom located on both sides of the hand wash basin.

CM Dugan referred to slide 10. He gave a shout out to Parks and Recreation Commissioner (Alternate) Alexandra Seeber, who was the one to bring awareness, attention, and focus to the inclusion of a universal changing table. He inquired about the through put of the restrooms during events.

John Ware clarified that by code, they need to put a lavatory (wash basin) in the restroom and the two restrooms would not address peak demands.

CM Dugan asked if there is room for another bathroom.

John Ware stated to add another bathroom it will cost more and use more space.

CM Dugan referred to slide 8. He inquired if the bathroom could be 9 foot tall instead of 8.

John Ware noted that could be done and he added they could add a skylight.

CM Dugan welcomed the skylight suggestion and recommended making the bathroom height to 10 foot tall.

CM Dugan referred to slide 27. He inquired about the angling of the stage.

John Ware explained that the design addresses several key factors. First, and most critically, it accommodates an ADA-compliant ramp that must span a specific length to rise 18 inches without requiring handrails, which imposes certain spatial constraints. Second, the design incorporates organic forms that reflect and compliment the surrounding street layout, helping the structure blend more naturally into the environment. Third, the pavilion has been intentionally oriented toward the open space along Laurel Street, particularly in the area near the Bank of America plaza. This placement allows

performances to engage the public space more effectively while minimizing direct impact on the buildings across the street.

## **Pavilion**

CM Dugan expressed appreciation for the beautiful design, noting its strong iconic presence while maintaining an organic feel. He also valued the integration of hanging lights and speakers into the columns. However, he voiced a slight concern regarding the potential massing and bulk of the structure, which could cast dark shadows, and asked whether a more translucent design might help mitigate that issue.

John Ware clarified that the design team views the shadow cast by the pavilion as a benefit during the hot summer months. He noted that the pavilion's height is scaled to match the adjacent buildings but acknowledged that adjustments to the height could be made if necessary. Regarding translucency, he explained that it would be challenging to achieve a mass timber structure.

Lisa Porras shared that community feedback emphasized the desire for ample shade and noted that the pavilion is one element that could help achieve that goal.

CM Dugan pointed out that the rear entrance to the centennial plaza must be addressed soon as he did not see it in the packet.

Jim Stickely described the park entrance as an inviting space created through the combination of landscaping, signage, and building materials, rather than a formal gate or structure.

John Ware noted that the alley-facing side of the building includes a roll-up door for storage access. He suggested two options to enhance its appearance: one is to collaborate with local artists to paint a mural on the door; the other is to use cedar wood cladding, consistent with the pavilion design, to visually screen the door and protect it from rain.

VM Venkatesh inquired about the Alaskan Yellow Cedar.

John Ware explained that the Alaskan Yellow Cedar is a stronger wood and has better structural properties. He added that his firm has used the same wood in Berkeley for a pedestrian bridge. John Ware noted that when the wood ages naturally, it will turn into a grey tone. They could not use Redwood because it does not have the structural properties and could not use Douglas Fir which is great structurally but could rot when exposed to water.

CM Rak inquired about the Pavilion and bathroom's metal roof, specifically its ability to absorb noise - such as the sound of rain.

John Ware clarified that it depends on the slop of the roof but he does not think it is an issue.

CM Rak inquired how much of the acoustics are affected by the height.

John Ware stated he will talk to the acoustic consultant, Salter.

CM Layton inquired about the \$295K cost of civil work.

Lisa Porras clarified that the \$294K is for the area around the pavilion and any civil work within Harrington Park would be part of the \$4.25 million.

CM Layton agreed with CM Rak on obtaining acoustic advice from the consultant.

Mayor McDowell referred to slide 3 and inquired about the pavilion's location, noting that in previous renderings it was shown partially in Harrington Park and partially on Laurel Street, whereas the current rendering placed it entirely on Laurel Street.

Jim Stickely explained that the pavilion was shifted outward to improve pedestrian flow. Initially, the sidewalk area felt too narrow, so a setback of 10 to 15 feet from building corners was introduced to create a clearer, more spacious entry into Harrington Park.

Mayor McDowell shared that now her concern is overcrowding Laurel Street with the new Pavilion location.

### **Public Comment**

Andrew Bernette (In-person) residence of San Carlos expressed concern that the current plans may miss an opportunity to incorporate more natural elements into the city, which already lacks green coverage and street canopies. Given climate change and the urban heat island effect, he emphasized the benefits of using natural materials to help lower temperatures. He suggested the design should better align with the city's values, symbolized by the oak tree on the city seal, and perhaps offer a more whimsical, nature-integrated experience.

Andrew Bernette also questioned the practicality of designing a pavilion stage to be viewed from behind, asked how frequently it would be used for concerts, and suggested incorporating a flat, multi-use element—especially one usable by young children, as seen in Burton Park.

John Durkin (Zoom) asked the following questions:

- Asked what the construction fence will close off during Phase 1A.
- Asked whether pedestrians will be able to walk on both the east and west sidewalks during construction.
- Inquired if emergency vehicles will still have 20 feet of clearance to get through the 700 block.

- Asked how many trees will be removed in Harrington Park.
- Asked whether Phase 1A will be the first implementation of a curbless 700 block.
- If a curb is later added:
  - Will the 18-inch stage be lowered?
  - Will the curb affect Hometown Days parades, including vehicles and marching bands?
- Asked whether the fountain will be turned off during a future drought.
- Asked whether the fountain will operate 24 hours a day or on a timer.
- Inquired how construction vehicles will access the site daily and where they will park.
- Echoed Councilmember Dugan's question about why a local artist was not involved in the fountain design.
- Suggested that designs should show existing Laurel Street for better context of what the pavilion would look like in that location.
- Asked about the overall construction timeline:
- If the project starts in November, how will it impact Holiday 2025?
- Will Holiday 2026 also be affected?
- Mentioned the alley entrance currently has four parking spaces and asked whether they will be lost.
- Expressed concern that the right-angled surfaces in the design will attract skateboarders.
- Commented that aside from kids playing in the fountain, the area could also attract adults drinking beer and wine.

Lisa Porras and Consultant Team answered caller John Durkin's questions.

### **Final/ General Comments**

CM Layton emphasized that the specific plan is the broader vision of reimagining the downtown for the next generation. While acknowledging that not every issue can be resolved or every question answered within this plan, he expressed confidence that the project is successfully achieving its goal of creating a renewed and involving downtown. He concluded by commending the staff and design team for their efforts in moving this vision forward.

CM Layton expressed that there is no need to rush the process and that beginning with Harrington Park is a sensible and appropriate starting point.

CM Rak expressed a desire to better understand the dimensions and flow of the redesigned pavilion space, particularly how a 20-foot clearance—might function during events. He suggested it might be helpful for the Council to visit the site with a tape measure to get a clearer visual sense before making final decisions. While he understood

the reasoning behind moving the pavilion further from the park, he wanted to assess the spatial impact.

Regarding the fountain CM Rak acknowledged that no design can completely eliminate risk, as children could still access the water from surrounding benches. However, he felt the design had moved in a better direction compared to earlier concepts and were supportive with the possibility of minor tweaks.

CM Rak wondered if only one ADA-compliant restroom might suffice and whether redesigning the others to include more stalls, just toilets could improve throughput. He felt that the outside hand washing station would not get used often if there was a hand washing basin inside the restroom.

Overall, CM Rak voiced appreciation for the effort and thought that had gone into the project and recognized the complexity.

Jim Stickely noted that the Council Members comments were on target about the right issues.

VM Venkatesh expressed difficulty in visualizing the project from the current design plans and suggested marking out the layout with chalk on Laurel Street for better understanding. She generally supported the direction of the project but wanted to see more areas for sitting and is unsure what is going to happen to the pavilion when it is unused. VM Venkatesh also reiterated concerns about the fountain where children can run into it. She thanked staff for their hard work and the refinements made to the design.

Jim Stickley clarified that when there is no performance at the pavilion, there will be removable tables and chairs there for people to hang out.

CM Dugan shared that he preferred the pavilion positioned further out on Laurel Street. He suggested that, if space is a constraint, the fountain could potentially be shifted more to the left.

Jim Stickely explained that they are trying to make the fountain as part of the central plaza and not impinge on the dinner area.

CM Dugan agreed with CM Rak's suggestion to make one restroom ADA compliant and the other non-ADA compliant, containing only stall-style toilets without lavatories.

CM Dugan stated that he felt the consultant had done a good job refining the design. He shared that he does not believe the new design would attract children to splash and play in the fountain, as it is zero-depth. He also remarked that the water flowing down to the ground and wrapping over the edge is quite striking.

CM Dugan inquired if the \$8 million cost would include all the underground work and would the \$6.9 million give them 1A.

Jeff Maltbie, City Manager, explained that expanding Phase 1A beyond Harrington Park would create major drainage and utility challenges, requiring costly temporary infrastructure that would be removed later. Due to these complications and inefficiencies, he does not recommend extending Phase 1A further.

Lastly, CM Dugan reiterated that it would be beneficial to engage the public for input on the fountain and invited feedback from his fellow council members.

Mayor McDowell shared that she liked the idea of going to downtown and chalk out how big the fountain and pavilion would be. She stated that she does not support the fountain in its current form that allows children to walk straight into the water. Mayor McDowell expressed concern with the \$1 million fountain price tag.

Mayor McDowell expressed that she does not believe seeking public input on the fountain would be productive, as it would likely only delay the process. She noted that art is highly subjective, and if the council is struggling to reach a consensus, it would be even more difficult to do so with the broader public.

Mayor McDowell expressed that she is comfortable with the proposed plan for two restrooms. She noted that during large events like the Art and Wine Festival, there are typically plenty of port-a-potties provided for public use. She added that even if a few more restrooms were added in Harrington Park, they would not be sufficient to meet the demand during major events.

Mayor McDowell referred to Slide 27 and inquired about the pink dotted lines. Jim Stickely clarified that those are soil trenches and permeable pavers above them.

Mayor McDowell shared that she still has concerns about the two large structures but believes that a chalk visual would be helpful. She asked Staff whether a decision was needed that evening.

Jeff Maltbie noted that a decision would be needed that evening in order to meet the November deadline.

Jim Stickley suggested taking the Council's input from the evening to the design team, allowing them to make minor modifications to address concerns and continue the project as an ongoing design development.

Jim Garland emphasized their commitment to meeting the Council's expectations and expressed confidence in the stone and water design. While the fountain was not designed to be inviting children to enter, he acknowledged that young kids may still be drawn to it. He welcomed feedback and expressed willingness to refine the design, including adding benches and addressing safety concerns, to ensure Council satisfaction.



CM Rak commented that if the decision is limited to Phase 1A, the Council could make a decision that evening. If necessary, the Staff and Consultant team could present two restroom options at the June meeting for the Council to consider and select from.

Lisa Porras stated that if the design team need to flush out two restroom options, it would delay the schedule for a month.

CM Rak commented that he is fine with the current restroom design for Harrington Park.

CM Layton expressed appreciation for the unique and thoughtfully designed fountain, noting it avoids a generic feel and serves as a strong focal point. He acknowledged that children will likely interact with the fountain regardless of design. Regarding restrooms, he was hesitant to support adding another downtown due to questionable return on investment, especially since large events will still require portable toilets.

Lisa Porras reminded the Council that the new plaza design will also incorporate public restrooms.

CM Dugan stated that he is ready to approve phase 1A as it is presented with the stipulation of the skylights and 10-foot ceiling in the restrooms.

VM Venkatesh shared that she is also supportive of phase 1A with the exiting design and of adding more bathrooms in Wheeler Plaza.

Mayor McDowell asked if the consultant team could tape out the pavilion and water feature.

Lisa Porras stated that staff will notify the Council and City Manager once the chalk layout on the ground is ready.