

COMMENTS ON FRANKLIN PARK ACTION PLAN

Franklin Park Coalition Board of Directors - March 1, 2023

Key Strengths

- The FPC Board is pleased to review the Franklin Park Action Plan, which has numerous strengths.
- Development of the Action Plan included community engagement led by the Parks and Recreation Department and the Franklin Park Coalition. Further, the Plan specifies additional community engagement during planning stages for major projects to be carried out.
- The Action Plan has been endorsed by City leadership at the highest levels, including Mayor Wu.
- The Action Plan integrates ongoing maintenance needs, which are essential to the upkeep and preservation of the park, with exciting capital improvements.
- The Action Plan includes recommendations to more than double the existing maintenance staff at the park, which would be a major improvement given the current staffing of the park.
- The proposed capital improvements include long-discussed “big ticket” items including: restoration of the Overlook/Playhouse; transfer of the Bear Dens area to the City and activation of that space; exploration of changes to Circuit Drive to improve flow and safety in the park; and enhancement of Ellicottdale area as a magnet destination.
- The Plan includes a major investment in the ecological management of the park including dedicated personnel.
- The Action Plan includes many additional items that the FPC Board endorses including the addition of a nature play area to the park; creation of a pedestrian walkway with planted trees along the Playstead parking lot; and activation of woodland areas with plantings and path maintenance.
- The Action Plan contains a roadmap for governance and implementation of the Plan including guidance as to how City agencies, FPC, and ENC might work together. We look forward to working alongside the Parks Department to bring the Franklin Park Action Plan to fruition.
- **Alongside these strengths are some limitations, which we note below.**

Plan is not “accessible” to the general public

- The length of the plan and duplication of information has made it challenging to fully digest. The section on “Key Improvement Projects” (p. 63-69) is somewhat helpful in this regard, but (a) is not adequately signposted / set off from the rest of the report; and (b) does not contain enough information to stand alone as a summary. To facilitate broader engagement with the plan, we have summarized specific recommendations for each geographic area of the park, as well as items relevant to the whole park such as connections, woodlands and ecology, etc. It would be helpful to have additional recommendations added by BPRD readers that we may have missed. We recommend expansion of the section (p.63-69) to include these details and – perhaps – to move that section so that it follows immediately after the Executive Summary. It could also be released separately as an “Action Plan summary” (as an example see [FPC Action Plan Summary](#)).
- The history sections, the community input process and “what we heard” graphics, and other parts that are nice background, but not specifically related to the recommendations, draw focus away from the specific recommendations. These history and process details could *follow* rather than precede the Action Plan summary.

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Greater detail needed regarding Governance Model

- From conversations with the National Olmsted Park Association we have learned that a central park administrator or manager is critical to a successful park. We endorse this wholeheartedly! We would like the plan to clarify the qualifications for the position to ensure that the broad range of responsibilities are covered. This position is not exclusively a maintenance, permitting, community liaison, project manager, intra-agency coordinator, or contracts staffer – but all of these and more.
- An organizational chart with specific responsibilities is needed. For example, who first receives the request for the Stadium to be upgraded to support a professional women’s soccer team? Who works with the state to ensure the new Shattuck development is managed so as to lessen the impact on the park?
- FPC commits to discussion with ENC to clarify roles in the park and Action Plan implementation. To date, FPC has appreciated the work ENC has done in the park but seeks greater communication and coordination between our two organizations. As the Plan lays out, we believe the ENC can play a significant role in the areas of ecological management and fundraising.
- Carefully structure the governance groups, set out in pp. 414-15 of the Plan, so that they do not become roadblocks to Plan and project implementation. The proposed Memorandum of Understanding should also include representatives from State entities with jurisdiction over sections of the park, such as the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

Excellent new staffing recommendations, but lack of BPRD project management staff is a major gap

- We support the plan’s call for a FP Administrator
- We support the plan’s call for 4 additional maintenance staff, plus any additional staff needed to take over responsibilities from existing 4 maintenance for other parks currently maintained by existing Franklin Park maintenance staff
- We support the plan’s call for a Restoration Crew Foreman and a Natural Resources Crew to support the ecological maintenance of the park
- **The Plan should also include a recommendation for project management staff** within the Parks Department for contract procurement, community engagement, project management, design and implementation. Specifically, we recommend the addition of 2 project managers and 1 senior project manager. Without adequate project management staff, we fear that the capital improvement projects will face costly delays and or may not happen at all.
- **We request two additional full time park rangers** to split coverage and patrol/manage gates from 2-10pm every day and address recent safety concerns.
- The above operational costs should be included in the City's annual operating budget for parks.
- Commit to hiring from the surrounding Franklin Park communities and using minority owned businesses as contractors, to the extent permitted by law.

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Next Steps

- We recommend a "priority setting phase" to be conducted during Y1 to guide the future year's work with community engagement.
- We recommend a "budget / costing / fundraising" phase for the action plan, to be conducted during Y1 to guide future year's budgetary requests from the city and fundraising.
- We endorse "Gaining Early Wins" (p. 430) and "Early Action Plans" (p. 434).
- Minimize additional planning documents by consultants, where not related to specific projects that will lead to their implementation.
- Ecological Management should not wait on developing another plan or report. Synthesize and use existing reports on ecological management and tree inventories from FPC and ENC, together with Section 7 of FPAP to inform work of the Restoration Crew.
- Develop an overall maintenance plan to guide schedules and park locations for seasonal, routine maintenance work as summarized in "Needs and Types of Maintenance." (p. 426)

Other Recommendations in Action Plan

We are not prepared to comment in detail on the many other recommendations in the plan, but we want to at least submit these endorsements and/or objections.

- Keep granite blocks and bollards, except where removal is needed for a specific project or need – these barriers promote safety by deterring motorized vehicle entrance, including unwanted 4 wheel ATVs and motor scooters. Their preservation recognizes historic work in the 1980s to rescue the park from excessive penetration of crime and vehicles.
- Pause on White Stadium improvements to determine outcome of Women's Pro Soccer initiative.
- While there is a dedicated advocacy community for a dog park, ensure widespread support within the park community before moving forward. The Board reserves any endorsement until specific location, conceptual design and funding source are identified, and results are assessed from experience with new dog park at Flaherty Park at Cornwall and Brookside corner.
- Repairing cracks on the Shattuck tennis courts will not be beneficial; full renovation is needed and expansion has been sought by the Franklin Park Tennis Association, an important park constituency, for the last decade.
- Encourage the Zoo to improve its perimeter, especially the landscape immediately within fencing. Replace or beautify fencing per p. 198 of plan but the example from Chicago zoo is not appealing.
- Although the Board understands that some park users have asked for permanent bathrooms, the Board is deeply concerned about the risk of drug use and discarded syringes around and inside bathrooms, and secondarily questions whether the BPRD has the capacity to maintain and clean on a daily basis. To move forward on permanent bathrooms, the BPRD will have to address these concerns.

Exciting new ideas

- Natural play space in Long Crouch Woods (or in an area not currently served with play features, like the Wilderness picnic area or near the Shattuck Picnic Grove and Williams Street entrance area)

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- Tailgate opportunities by the Playstead and use of parking lots as park spaces; in addition add similar tailgate facilities by the Golf Clubhouse - benches, picnic tables, a horseshoe court.
- A more complete walking and bicycling path along the southern edge of the Playstead so that pedestrians can avoid the parking lot,
- New entrances along Seaver St and Blue Hill Ave to make the park more accessible to adjacent residential neighborhoods; upgrades to existing entrances to ensure appropriate ADA crosswalks with consideration of pedestrian and bicycle barriers.
- Increased shade throughout the park especially along walking paths – to create tree-lined promenades and more comfortable places to sit, walk, and picnic.
- Remove fences: at southern edge of the Stadium adjacent to Playstead; along Forest Hills St; reconsider barriers around the Zoo and the Shattuck Hospital campus.

Much-needed resources of note.

- Water features, especially splash pads at the park's playgrounds.
- New and restored park furniture – benches and picnic tables.
- Emergency Call Boxes
- Woodland trail improvements and directional signage to increase access.

Parking

As a regional park with large events and resources like the Zoo and the Golf Course, parking is perhaps the biggest management challenge, often cutting off community use and park access. A good parking and traffic impact study will be helpful for overall park management and specific projects. We were disappointed that the Plan did not address parking in a more comprehensive and creative way. Parking to get people to magnet destinations is not clearly articulated. A parking and traffic analysis will be especially important if White Stadium is renovated for use by Women's Pro Soccer.

What's Missing

- Food: 1) FPC has long advocated for the Clubhouse to be a destination restaurant. When there was a gap between food service vendors FPC invited both Darryl Settles and the owners of Merengue Restaurant to consider applying for the site. They were very interested but the current rules limited viability as they sought to do some capital improvements on the space and it would not have been cost effective for them. 2) FPC would also like to see seasonal weekend and evening food trucks in the park on a regular basis as a destination for park users. Possible locations could be the Circuit Drive parking lot or the Playstead parking areas - by the basketball courts or behind the Zoo.
- Plans for a playground or play features and a fitness station at the Shattuck Picnic Grove.
- Tiffany Moore, El Parquesito, and American Legion playgrounds – schedule for renovations and annual upkeep of play equipment.
- Management recommendation to include: Do not use public park areas for storage, dumping of organic material, snow removal piles, or construction staging.

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- Note and where possible address community concerns about the off-road motorbikes, loud late night parties, and Shattuck area drug use. These are the highest priority issues at this point in time. Acknowledgement about how the Action Plan can help with these problems will be useful.