

**Eastern Market Metro Plaza Design Study
Minutes of the July 1, 2009 Community Meeting**

Tip Tipton, co-chair of the Task Force, introduced himself and David Perry (co-chair of the Task Force) and opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking everyone for coming. He told the audience that the design team retained by the Task Force would be presenting three distinct schemes for the redesign of the Eastern Market Metro Plaza. He mentioned that redesigning the plaza was not a new concept and that efforts for the betterment of the plaza had begun back in 2003 when Oehme van Sweden, the landscape architecture firm, had done a preliminary landscape plan for the plaza. He said that among the original goals for the redesign of the plaza were improving the connection between Eastern Market/7th Street and Barracks Row/8th Street and creating an aesthetically pleasing public space. He explained that, subsequent to the 2003 work, he had led the effort to transfer the plaza from the National Park Service to the DC government.

Mr. Tipton noted that, particularly in light of the proposed redevelopment of the Hine Jr. High School site, the Eastern Market Metro Plaza and its vicinity would be changing. He urged the audience members to look to the future and take the long view of what is best for the Capitol Hill community as they evaluate the three alternative design plans for the plaza.

David Perry then gave a brief summary of the October 1, 2008 community meeting and described the process that the design team, with the advice of the Task Force, had gone through to arrive at the three schemes that were being presented. He said that after tonight's presentation, there would be a 45-day comment period during which the community is encouraged to send any comments or questions to the Task Force's website. He also said that, if the community wishes more time, the comment period could be extended to 60 days. Mr. Perry recognized Ward 6 Council member Tommy Wells and said that Mr. Wells would like to say a few words at the end of the presentation. Mr. Perry then introduced Amy Weinstein, the leader of the design team.

Ms. Weinstein began the presentation by acknowledging the presence of Melissa Bird, the Ward 6 Planner (DC Office of Planning) and Jamie Henson, Ward 6 Transportation Planner (DC Dept. of Transportation). She then described the design team's three alternative schemes. Lou Slade, a principal with Gorove/Slade Traffic and Transportation Engineers, then explained the traffic issues and recommendations for each of the schemes. Lisa Delplace, from Oehme van Sweden Landscape Architects, presented landscape designs for each of the schemes.

(NB – All the presentation materials are available on the web at: capitolhilltownsquare.org)

After the presentations, the meeting was opened up for a question-and-answer session.

The following questions were raised / points were made:

- **An audience member questioned the assumption made in Mr. Slade's presentation that it would be desirable to reduce traffic speeds along Pennsylvania Avenue, and he questioned the feasibility of reducing the Avenue from three to two lanes of through traffic, given the volume of traffic.** The design team responded by saying that traffic calming would bring significant benefits to the community, such as enhancing pedestrian safety and creating a friendlier pedestrian and park environment. Gorove Slade's technical analysis shows that the three through lanes can be reduced to two

lanes without adversely effecting traffic throughput. Mr. Slade explained that the three conceptual roadbed designs prepared by his firm will be presented to DDOT. If any of the alternative design concepts move forward, he said, DDOT will carry out more detailed studies, will seek more input from the community, and will make the final determination of project feasibility.

- **A questioner asked whether a comparison of travel times along Pennsylvania Avenue had been made between 15th and 5th Street for each of the alternatives.** It was explained that travel times had been studied only through the study area (between 7th and 9th Streets), not specifically between 15th and 5th Streets.
- **An audience member applauded the overall goal of creating a more pleasurable and vibrant public space. However, he cautioned that the designs need to be successfully integrated with the proposals for the Hine site. He went on to say that he thought that since the developer for Hine has not yet been selected, the timing of the process was premature. He asked: can't this process wait until the developer for the Hine site has been chosen in order that the two proposals get conceptually planned together?** Tommy Wells responded that with respect to the Hine process, he already has suggested that the DC Office of Planning organize a community charrette as soon as the developer is selected to help the project be better planned with the community and its needs. He suggested that coordination between the Hine site and the Eastern Market Metro Plaza be undertaken as part of that charrette. Mr. Perry pointed out that the Hine project is far ahead of the Eastern Market Metro Plaza design study, and he added that the Hine site very likely will get redeveloped long before any changes are made to the plaza.
- **One audience member expressed the view that the current configuration makes Barracks Row/ 8th Street feel too disconnected from Market Row/7th Street and from the wider community as a whole. The existing space is too fractured and unwelcoming, he said. This person feels that something needs to be done as soon as possible to improve things and that the "Central Park" alternative, in his opinion, does this the best.**
- **An audience member asked whether construction times have been estimated for each alternative and how the traffic would be managed during the construction process.** The design team responded that estimates of construction times had not yet been done as the designs produced so far are too conceptual. The length of construction time for each alternative would differ. If funding for construction eventually is secured, there would be a two year period for design, community input, project approvals, and preparation of construction documents before actual construction could commence.
- **One person commented that the "Triptych" has the greatest visual impact, and asked if there are other more quantitative ways by which the different alternatives could be assessed and evaluated.** It was explained that some elements, such as number of parking spaces, can be quantified and compared. However, some of the differences between the three schemes are qualitative. The design team expressed an interest in hearing suggestions from the community about other aspects or factors that might lend themselves to quantitative analysis.
- **One person asked the following three questions:**
 - **Whether one of the design goals specified for the team was to create temporary market space in the plaza.**

The design team said that the design goals included the creation of flexible space in which such an activity potentially could occur. Each of the alternatives is intended to be flexible enough to work with or without temporary market space.

- **Whether a redesign of the Metro canopy is being considered.**
The design team considered this but conversations with WMATA indicated that even if WMATA were to approve a redesigned canopy, it would not contribute to the cost of the new canopy, nor would it bear the cost of maintaining the new canopy. Therefore, all three alternatives leave the canopy unchanged.
- **How the alternatives were addressing the problem of crime and the management of the homeless.**
The design team said that security design is incorporated into each of the three concepts. The design approach to the homeless issue is to design a public space that is attractive to all parts of the community so that no one population dominates the space.
- **Someone asked whether any studies have been done to predict how traffic might be diverted into the neighborhood in each of the plans. The comment was made that the best way to handle the through traffic is to keep it on Pennsylvania Avenue.** The design team explained that the alternatives were designed to strike a balance between the needs of through traffic and the community's desire to have a more attractive and functional public space. Gorove Slade's technical analysis shows that all three designs can be achieved while maintaining reasonably efficient and functional traffic patterns. The analysis of the three alternatives involves evaluation of the trade offs between these issues. A member of the team observed that making Pennsylvania Avenue more efficient for through traffic should not be the paramount goal. No one, he said, would suggest running a roadway right down the middle of either Lincoln Park or Stanton Park simply to allow automobile traffic to proceed more efficiently.
- **Someone asked whether health aspects have been considered.**
The design team responded that health aspects have not been studied.
- **An audience member made the following points: in the future, there will be far more traffic than there is today; since the 1850s, the space has always been used as a transportation hub; the other squares that exist in DC, such as Stanton Park or Lincoln Park, are not comparable as they do not have the same number of commuters.**
- **An audience member expressed surprise that in most of the comments made so far, the needs of the car seem to be considered more important than the needs of the residents.**
- **An audience member suggested that the "Triptych" is visually superior to the other two design concepts. As a long time resident of Capitol Hill, the speaker offered experience from New York City where at Columbus Circle, a similar proposal to reroute a straight street around a circle met with anxiety from the community fearing that it would inevitably create a bottleneck. In the end, the opposite occurred and the traffic was better organized. The speaker also feels that the "Central Park" alternative is more likely to divert traffic onto surrounding streets.**
- **Someone asked whether thought had been given to adding facilities such as smart bike, bike parking, and bike lanes, as well as other transit such as street cars.**

The team explained that there is a dedicated bike lane shown on Pennsylvania Avenue in all three alternatives, in keeping with DDOT's published Master Plan. The alternatives are also designed to be flexible enough to accommodate future transit needs such as street cars. [The design team forgot to mention that DDOT is currently planning to install smart bikes in the Metro Plaza within the year].

- **An audience member said she doesn't like to drive around Dupont Circle; neither does she like to go there because she doesn't want to be around homeless people. Why create something like that in Capitol Hill, she said.**
- **Someone asked whether the importance of Pennsylvania Avenue as an emergency evacuation route for the city had been considered in the design.**
The design team responded that, in case of an emergency evacuation, all lanes of Pennsylvania Avenue on both sides of the median strip would be operated as one-way out with traffic lights being sequenced accordingly. Possibly one of the lanes would remain as inbound for emergency vehicles only. All three alternatives would allow for this to happen. The design team has not yet met with the Dept. of Homeland Security.
- **One person raised three issues:**
 - **Clarify the location of bus stops, especially in the "Central Park" alternative, as it would be of great concern if bus stops were relocated to the north along 8th Street.**
The Design team responded that the locations of bus stops in the three alternatives will need to go through a review process with WMATA. No new bus stops are being proposed on 8th Street north of the Metro Plaza in any of the alternatives.
 - **Has any thought been given to providing amenities for dogs?**
The design team said that in all three alternatives, the space is being designed to be dog friendly but that no space is specifically set aside for this purpose.
 - **The "Central Park" alternative would seem to reduce traffic on 8th Street, which today is a very busy street.**
- **Clarification was sought as to which concept was rejected by NCPC and the Fine Arts Commission and why.**
The design team explained that there was an earlier scheme that the Task Force had considered that was rejected by the staffs of the two Federal agencies because of its lack of formality and symmetry. The staffs indicated that if that scheme had been taken forward, it was unlikely to be approved by either Federal agency.
- **An audience member wanted to know how the design team was chosen and whether it was through an RFP process. Furthermore, they wanted to better understand how the project was being funded.**
It was explained that the money came from a Federal appropriation of approximately \$2.5 million for improvements to the site. Approximately \$300,000 has been spent on the design studies and there is now approximately \$2 million left. Although formal cost estimating has not yet been undertaken, the remaining sum is far less than what will be required for construction of any of the three alternatives.
- **Someone asked how the 45 day comment period had been chosen?**
Mr. Perry said that 30 to 45 days is a typical public comment period in most similar kinds of studies. He was open to the idea of extending the comment period to 60 days if the community feels the need for more time.

- **One resident raised the following points:**
 - **That the “Triptych” seemed the most reasonable alternative although he cautioned that if the two through-lanes as shown had to become three lanes, it seemed that the landscape plan would no longer work, making the number of lanes a decisive issue for this alternative.**
 - **The consequences of the “Central Park” scheme on the residents of D Street North made it a non-starter for a number of reasons. First, the monetary compensation needed for those residents directly affected might be prohibitively high. Second, there would be legal challenges by the residents if such changes were seriously considered which might derail the process.**

- **Someone suggested that there was an opportunity to do more with the library, which in spite of being an important amenity on the square, is forgotten. Could it therefore be opened up or featured rather than have our back turned to it?**

Ms. Weinstein agreed that the library building is an important civic amenity and that it is a shame that it is largely in the background. She said that the design team had spoken to the librarian about the idea of incorporating library related activities into the area of the plaza directly across the street from the Library. It was also suggested that the two large evergreen magnolia trees in front of the building have the effect of masking its presence from the square. It was suggested that the trees could be pruned or replaced by a different type of tree.

- **Clarification was sought as to what problems the design team was seeking to fix, as this was still not clear. It was felt that this project was mostly driven by merchants who want better business connections. Wouldn't this be fixed by the re-development of the Hine site? The speaker also said that additional analysis of traffic patterns is necessary to properly assess the three alternatives.**

- **One person raised the following three points:**
 - **That it is rare for more than two travel lanes to be used along Pennsylvania Avenue because of cars turning and vehicles double parking. Would removing double-parking be detrimental to businesses?**
 - **South Carolina Avenue is very congested at the moment and wouldn't want to see a proposal that adds to this problem.**
 - **Expressed the view that parents like herself might never take their children to play in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue, as was being suggested in the “Triptych” alternative.**

- **One person said he uses and likes the space as it is today and stressed the importance of the site as a transportation hub. He said that 8th Street is one of the City's busiest bus routes and therefore that he would be worried about affecting bus routes or changing the location of bus stops.**

- **An audience member expressed support for the “Triptych” alternative and said that it is an innovative reinterpretation of the downtown DC circle. This person wants to better understand what the impact of the “Triptych” would be on residents.**

- **An audience member said that the “Triptych” alternative might add travel time to emergency vehicles. He also said that it seemed very dangerous for these**

vehicles to go straight through the park via the 8th Street “buses and emergency vehicles only” lane as they would under the “Central Park” alternative.

- **One person asked: how far would the neighbors on D Street North be from Pennsylvania Avenue in the “Triptych” alternative?**
Mr. Perry responded that there are 12 houses on this block. Under the “Triptych” alternative, the five houses on the eastern side of the block would be farther from Pennsylvania Avenue than they are today. The two houses in the middle of the block would be the same distance, and the five houses to the west would be closer to Pennsylvania Avenue than they are now. He said that the closest neighbor’s house would be 80 feet from Pennsylvania Avenue.
- **An audience member expressed the view that all the alternatives fail to provide a clear line of sight from the Metro entrance across the plaza, thereby making the area less safe. This person said that all the alternatives show trees and planting that would create shadows and blind spots.**
The design team responded that this issue, in fact, has been addressed in all three alternatives. Reference was made to the section drawings that illustrate how each alternative provides a clear line of sight. Lighting also would be carefully designed, in a later phase of the project, to avoid shadows.
- **Someone asked what would happen to the two driveways of houses on D Street North.**
The design team responded that in all three alternatives, the configuration of D Street North would remain as it is today, thereby leaving those driveways unchanged.
- **One audience member expressed the view that in the “Central Park” alternative, no consideration has been given to the southern portion of D Street. As owner of a retail store on that block, she said that the “Central Park” alternative would be detrimental to her business and her family’s investment. More activity from cars would be harmful to her store, she said, and she specifically chose her current location because it is away from the road.**
- **One person suggested that the study area be broadened as the proposed changes would not only impact the local community but also people throughout the city, as well as commuters from Maryland. Their needs are important too, she asserted.**
- **Someone remarked that the intent seems to be to slow down life on the site in order to make it more pleasant. This person thinks that maximizing efficiency is preferable so that everyone can get to where they want to as quickly and easily as possible. He said that there are plenty of other places on the Hill with parks that residents can enjoy and that serve that purpose better than Eastern Market Metro Plaza.**
- **An audience member pointed out that many children live on D St. North and said that the proposed alternatives will make it less safe for them. Local emergency vehicles, for instance, would need to go through “Central Park” making it unsafe. Furthermore, this person said that crossing into Stanton Park or Lincoln Park today is dangerous and this condition should not be replicated.**
- **The following comments were made by a member of the audience:**
 - **The “Central Park” alternative creates an island that forces people to cross Pennsylvania Avenue to reach the Metro. In the “Triptych” alternative, pedestrians coming from the northeast would need to cross Pennsylvania**

Avenue twice to reach the Metro. This person feels that this would not enhance pedestrian safety and that people would be reluctant to allow children to walk to the Metro unattended.

- **The alternatives ignore the impact on local vehicle traffic. In the Central Park alternative in particular, local traffic would be forced to join Pennsylvania Avenue. This person feels that removing the D Street spurs in the “As Is” alternative would have a similar effect.**
- **Someone suggested that the design team clarify how the alternatives address the goal of meeting L’Enfant’s vision.**
A member of the design team responded that L’Enfant’s plan does not show the streets in this open space because his plan only shows the private property lines. However, later plans, such as the McMillan Plan, do indicate a central park at this location.
- **An audience member stated that there seem to be too many outstanding questions that haven’t been fully studied, making it difficult to come to an informed decision about the three alternatives. Most critical among the unanswered questions, he asserted, is the lack of information about the relative costs of the alternatives.**
[Mr. Perry had said that cost estimating would be done after the public comment period so that funds aren’t wasted pricing an alternative or alternatives that won’t be moving forward.]
- **An audience member described the evening’s presentation as an hour and a half filibuster and expressed support for the improved “As Is” alternative.**
- **An audience member commented that the “Triptych” and “Central Park” would cut off the head of 8th Street and stop connectivity between the northern residential portion of 8th Street and Barracks Row.**