

The Lake Johnson Center

Public Meeting #1

November 13, 2012

The Lake Johnson Park Waterfront Center

An introductory presentation was made by the City's Lake Johnson Center design team: Szostak Design (Roger Lynn Spears) and Stewart (George Stanziale). The presentation included a brief history of Lake Johnson Park's master planning process, an analysis of characteristics of the designated project site and a graphic annotation of desired program spaces and sizes. The following is a summary of participant questions, comments and suggestions offered during the open discussion session, organized by common categories.

1. Site Usage, Amenities and Access

1.1. Site Security and Wayfinding – It was noted that the access to the project site is inconspicuous and disorienting. It was recommended that improvements be made to make wayfinding simpler and access more inviting to the public.

1.2. Upgrades to Pauls Road/Stadium Drive – The original master plan for the Lake Johnson Center included a recommendation that Pauls Road be widened to permit fire apparatus access. In addition, the plan called for improvements to pedestrian circulation from Athens Drive and more prominent signage.

The City is presently discussing opportunities to partner with Wake County Public Schools to make further improvements to Pauls Road including whether to convert the drive into a dedicated public right-of-way.

1.3. Trail Connections to the Center – It was noted that there is an existing trail northwest of Lake Johnson Pool that connects into the Park's trail system. The landscape architect was asked to provide an illustration of trail connections for the next public meeting.

One participant noted the difficulty in crossing Avent Ferry at the Waterfront Center due to vehicular traffic and limited sightlines. He first suggested that the new center be located adjacent to the existing Waterfront facilities. Staff noted there is no further room available at the Waterfront Center, particularly for the additional required parking. The

participant alternatively suggested including a traffic light or other traffic calming measures at the Avent Ferry crossing.

1.4. Sanitary Sewer Connection – The shortest and most cost effective route for sewer service would connect to an existing main southeast of Lake Johnson Pool.

1.5. Parking – It was noted that there is a shortage of parking throughout the Park and several participants were concerned there were already too few spaces in the Lake Johnson Pool lot to permit a sharing of parking between the pool and the new Center. The architect noted that although the City of Raleigh zoning ordinance requires only 25 spaces for the Center, the Public Leadership Group had previously recommended as many as 40 spaces. Based on a count of existing spaces at Lake Johnson Pool (approximately 120) and the pool's typical requirements (approximately 78), there should nevertheless be ample parking for both uses.

It was also noted that Athens Drive HS students make unauthorized use of this lot during the months when school is in session. Staff acknowledged that greater policing of the parking lot is necessary to discourage unauthorized use.

1.6. Outdoor Play Areas – It was recommended that play areas for children be included in the 1,400 square foot program allocation for developed outdoor space. Discussion focused on creating playful outdoor learning environments for children as opposed to conventional playground equipment areas.

2. Building Use, Planning and Space Allocation

2.1. Facility Use – One participant questioned the types of user groups that might be expected to use the facilities, noting that a number of members of the Public Leadership Group preferred that the Center serve the needs of civic, governmental, educational and public service groups as opposed to corporate or business organizations. Staff responded that, while nature and environmental education events get priority on reservation, the city policy does not exclude any public citizen groups from booking the facility. There was also one comment regarding the design for AV set up in each of the divided meeting spaces.

2.2. Several participants asked whether there were other City of Raleigh Facilities comparable to the planned Lake Johnson Center. Marsh Creek is a recently completed community center with a similar divided flexible room. The Ann Gordon Center for Active Adults at Millbrook Exchange Park was offered as a close equivalent in terms of building size.

2.3. Anticipated Building Occupancy Load – Based on discussions with staff, an approximate average of 30-60 users would be expected at a typical weekly event. The peak occupancy, occurring only 6-8 times per year would be approximately 110-130.

2.4. Provision of Locker Rooms – As the Lake Johnson Center is not focused on active recreational activities, no showers or locker facilities are planned. As an alternative, one participant suggested joint use of the Lake Johnson Pool locker facilities. In response, another participant pointed out that the pool is a seasonal facility, so that even if joint use could be arranged with the Aquatics Department, it would only be available three months out of the year.

2.5. Kitchen – One participant endorsed a kitchen significantly larger than that provided at the Waterfront Center (approximately 100 SF), noting that the present kitchen is very cramped when more than a couple of patrons are using it.

2.6. Meeting Room Amenities – It was suggested that the addition of sinks in the meeting rooms' casework could permit the presentation of non-intensive laboratory instructional programming.

2.7. Storage – There was a general recommendation to increase the overall storage area for the facility, particularly in relation to each of the meeting spaces. The current allocation of approximately 120 SF may not be sufficient. One participant noted that Park volunteers need storage space for equipment used in Park enhancement activities. A representative of the Jaguar Club suggested that Athens Drive HS could use any utilitarian storage space that might become available should the final building design be elevated on columns. The architect noted that determination of uses of storage space other than that required for the Center would be a policy decision of the Parks and Recreation Department, based on best and highest use in the public interest.

2.7. Restrooms – It was suggested that restrooms be accessed from both interior and outside for park users and high school events. However, other participants noted that it may be difficult to maintain the restrooms with exterior access and keep them in good condition. This may not be preferred by the patrons who host events in the center.

3. Sustainability

Energy Conservation and Alternative Energy Sources Under Consideration – Given the dense canopy of conifers adjoining the primary site, there will be little opportunity for solar power applications. Neither wind power nor geo-thermal are presently being considered, however the building's systems will be designed and specified to a high-efficiency performance standard.

4. Additional Comments

4.1. Lake Johnson Center Operational Staffing – Provisions have been made for two office spaces and an information/check-in desk in anticipation of staffing. Specific hours of operation are to be determined, but could be comparable to Waterfront Center.

4.2. Aspirations – Several participants encouraged the design team to “think big,” and explore ideas above and beyond basic program requirements and functional relations. Suggestions included inclusion of fireplaces and the use of wood ceilings. One participant suggested focusing on more qualitative aspects of the building’s design. Another participant suggested literally drawing on the adjoining natural context of fauna – specifically Lady Slippers – in choosing names for individual meeting rooms. It was also suggested that future expansion of the facility needs to be taken into consideration.