



MEMORANDUM

TO: Don Craig, Planning Director, City of Key West
FROM: Paul Kissinger, Jeremy Belitz, EDSA
DATE: October 7, 2013
RE: Indigenous Park: Preliminary Conceptual Design Public Meeting

The City of Key West, in conjunction with EDSA presented the Preliminary Conceptual Design Alternatives during a public meeting on Thursday, October 3, 2013. The meeting was held at 6:00PM at the Monroe County Harvey Government Center.

Attendees

- **City of Key West** - Don Craig, Nicole Malo, Karen DeMaria
- **EDSA** - Paul Kissinger, Jeremy Belitz
- **Public attendees on record** - Diane Johnson, Ellen Westbrook, Theresa Phelan, Judy Martinez, Rick Harty, Robin Robinson, Beryn Harty, Teri Johnston, Gwen Filosa, Sue Sullivan, Emily Sorkin, Richard Hatch, Peggy Coontz, Esther P. Domian, Tom Sweets, Sarah Nguyen, Danielle Nguyen, Nancy Coward, Michael Behmke, Joey Garcia, Tom Coward, Mark Hedden, Steve Henson, Elizabeth Ignatto, Ross Pipkin, Evan Bell and Debra Brittin

Overview of Meeting

The meeting began with the City of Key West (Don Craig) introducing the purpose of the meeting and the EDSA team. Paul Kissinger of EDSA presented the Preliminary Conceptual Design Alternatives. After the presentation, there was a series of questions, comments and dialogue about the Preliminary Conceptual Design Alternatives. The following are our notes from the meeting:

- After the introduction by the City of Key West, EDSA presented project survey, aerial image, inventory/analysis, and preliminary conceptual plan drawings. As part of this introduction, EDSA also presented, as a starting point, the approved Higgs Beach Master Plan. EDSA mentioned that during our focus group meetings with the County, they indicated that programmatically, there are a lot of pressures for uses within Higgs Beach. If it was possible, when looking at the design of Indigenous Park, if some of the uses that were slated for Higgs Beach could be located on Indigenous Park, so as to provide more open space for informal play areas for children and children's sports activities, the County thought that this might be good.
- Both the City of Key West and EDSA indicated that for the overall benefit of the community, it would make sense to think of Indigenous Park as one of the three parks and recreation facilities for the surrounding community; that is Higgs Beach, Rest

Beach and Indigenous Park. While ownership is different, this is really not apparent to the public at large.

- EDSA presented each of the preliminary alternatives. These alternatives generally included the following:
 - Concept #1 – Relocate Atlantic to the alleyway on the north end of the site; relocate the Key West Wildlife Rescue Center; enhance Rest Beach; dog park on the west side; enhanced bocce ball; pickle ball courts.
 - Concept #2 – Remove Atlantic from east west circulation; enhance Rest Beach, relocate Key West Wildlife Rescue Center, parking on the NW corner, dog park on the east side.
 - Concept #3 – Maintain Atlantic circulation in ROW; pickle ball courts, dog park on east side; parking generally remains in its current location; enhanced bocce ball courts; Key West Wildlife Rescue Center remains at its current location.
- EDSA indicated that there were several overall themes in the preliminary concepts and asked the attendees to consider these themes:
 - Circulation
 - Relocation of Higgs Beach Program elements to Indigenous Park
 - Active Program elements
 - Parking
 - Relocation of the Key West Wildlife Rescue Center
- At the end of the presentation, EDSA presented an alternative plan for the relocation of the Key West Wildlife Rescue Center near the Key West Airport. On City land.

Meeting Notes

- There were some comments regarding the overall vehicular circulation. There were some comments that did not like the circulation being removed as there was a thought that the vehicular circulation would disperse into the neighborhood.
- There was comment that having the circulation travel along the alley on the north side of the park might be an acceptable solution.
 - EDSA did indicate that Key West is certainly a unique City and as an island it is different than most cities. We have found through conversations with the focus groups, circulation moves on island as needed and that with the residents, there may be a learning curve to roadway circulation, but due to the grid of the City streets, there is a tremendous amount of options to disperse traffic.
- Concept #1 was liked by an attendee as it slows traffic and keeps traffic from neighborhoods. Likes the idea of a larger Rest Beach
- A question was asked about why a passive park had been proposed. There was a reference to Millennium Park in Chicago; as an example of an active park with native flowers, restaurants, water features. Feels passive is boring and activity is needed. Dog park shuts out use of park by people and not good for birds
- There was a question regarding the low lying areas. EDSA clarified that the does not have designated wetlands. The low lying areas are wet, as it is being used to collect storm drainage from the neighborhood; and through this use, it renders large portions of the park unusable. City stated turtle pond is man made with a linear, not natural
- There was an appreciation for efforts and work done in the design of park, however, on option #1, the individual expressed a need for more buffer between dog park and bocce ball courts

- The inclusion of the dog park appeared to be a negative element to the park, based on comments from many individuals. The main reason for this appeared to be that the individuals were concerned about the conflict with the perceived native habitat at the park and dogs. Also, a belief from the attendees that the City or the County does not need any more flexible play areas for kids.
 - The City of Key West and EDSA, as well as a resident in attendance that there is a shortage of play areas within the County and City for soccer fields, football and lacrosse.
- An individual felt that the concepts are not wildlife oriented. There are very few natural areas or places to view nature and that the park should be kept natural. The concepts are completely different from what currently exist. The individual believes that the park should be kept natural as wildlife showcase; keep active areas at Higgs Beach. Parks are for nature not socializing. The park should focus on the maintaining the habitat for the migratory birds
- The group asked who the focus groups where and how it was advertised:
 - The City of Key West indicated that meetings where held with City staff, bocce ball group, Key West Wildlife Center, and the City and Consultant facilitated a public meeting. Meeting notices were sent out as well as individual door hangers were placed on residents doors that live within 300 feet of the park.
- An individual wanted the area protected for migratory birds, butterflies, and wildlife – would like City to bring in an expert to help with design
 - City of Key West stated that we have an expert team assembled for the project as well as utilizing City resources, such as Karen DiMaria, a member of the City of Key West team
- There was an indication that the “green” area at Higgs Beach is not used for sports
- On resident supported the dog park at any location
- There was a discussion about the relocation of the Key West Wildlife Rescue Center:
 - Staff from the Center indicated that they are not wildlife habitat experts, they are in the rescue business
 - City staff indicated that Indigenous Park does not have an acceptable or notable tree hammock.
 - Staff from the Center also indicated that the airport noise should not be an issue for the birds.
 - There was discussion with more activity in the park, there would be less likely occurrence for homeless in the park
 - Additionally, with the relocation of the Key West Wildlife Rescue Center near the airport, this may also have a positive impact on moving the wildlife population away from the airport.
- A resident indicated that they liked the idea of the active uses, such as bocce ball, dog park and idea of Higgs Beach Park and Indigenous Parking being considered one park. There was an expression of the City’s and County’s dire need for open space for kid’s sports; as it has declined over the last 10 years. Current projections include 720 kids in soccer, 450 in football, 250 in lacrosse. There was a concerned with Concept #2, with traffic being forced down Stevens Ave. vs. kid’s safety, feels concept one is the most workable
 - EDSA stated that a more thorough traffic analysis will be needed to study concepts related to any changes in vehicular circulation and Atlantic

- A resident indicated that this park is great for a wildlife park “as is”. It is very important for bird migration and a dog park would wipeout wildlife. There was a concern that we were “urbanizing the park”
 - Based on this comment, the City staff reviewed a brief history of the park. This history included:
 - The park was used in past as military house, drainage area, trash dump that will require an environmental study, most likely a phase 2 study. There has been a variety of uses, including a staging area for when cows were slaughtered on beach. There may be grave sites on the SW corner of the site, and that historically the park area was used as a dump. There is evidence of dumping, lots of glass bottles, as well as in-ground, storage area for city maintenance, non-native potted plants and trees have been placed in park
 - City stated that lack of attention to park is why it has become indigenous and relocating the Key West Wildlife Center to an area with a hammock and wetlands area makes sense
- No one that attending the meeting indicated that there was a need for pickle ball and feels that the park is better utilized for birds watching and migratory area. Bayview park has open space that is not utilized
- There was a question regarding the operating definition of the word Indigenous. The resident further indicated that the park should be a native park and that it should include conservation areas. There was a question as to why a dog park was included in the program. There was a question regarding the criteria or consideration for placing the dog park in Indigenous Park. There was also a question regarding the ultimate use of the park area, based on the deed restrictions. The City of Key West staff indicated that park area was transmitted to the state for open space and public realm improvements.
 - The City of Key West staff indicated that the consultant was directed, based on the results of the focus group meetings.
 - The City of Key West indicated that the deed’s stipulation was that the land area is to be used only for conservation and recreation. The Quick Claim Deed does not state the park to be only for conservation.
- There was a question regarding the timeframe for implementation and funding for project
 - City state that early next year a plan will go before city commission, project will be phased over years, funding is not currently in place
- Higgs Beach Master Plan is not funded for current improvements, Friends of Higgs Beach is a non-profit organization to assist with funding opportunities for park, meeting was posted on Friends of Higgs Beach Facebook page, shutting down Atlantic Blvd. is a bad idea and feels it is a traffic issue
- It will be a big deal to shut down Atlantic as it was at the County meeting
- Does not like closing down Atlantic Blvd.
- Does not want urbanization of park, if Key West Wildlife Center wants to move then it is fine with them
 - EDSA stated park is not being urbanized, majority of park is passive nature based

The city closed the meeting with the indication that the City of Key West will post the presentation on the web site. Additionally, while the City public meeting is closed, Planning staff indicated that if residents had more comments, then they should submit them to the city for consideration.

The above is our recollection of the meeting. If you find error and or omissions, please advise, and we can revise our meeting notes accordingly.