

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 01/24/2024)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: McKinley Park Community Grove Improvements	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy staff Environmental Planning & Design consultant staff Beltzhoover Consensus Group members Knoxville Community Council member(s) St. Paul AME Church Area residents DCP Staff Office of Rep Abney
Parcel Number(s): 34-D-20	
ZDR Application Number: BDA-2025-06420	
Meeting Location: St. Paul AME Church, 400 Orchard Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15210	
Date: October 16, 2025	
Meeting Start Time: 6pm	
Applicant: Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (project manager), Environmental Planning & Design (EPD) (consultant team)	Approx. Number of Attendees: 19
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Public Art & Civic Design Commission for improvements in a City park in the public realm	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

Applicant shared a slide deck with information on the project location within the city (orienting the audience) and the Community Grove's location within McKinley Park. Identified the trail connection to the site through existing conditions photos and showed other existing conditions photos. Showed existing conditions photos of the central project area, on-going restoration efforts, the chain link backstop and posts of the old baseball field, boardwalk and seating area, stair connection area, and erosion issues.

Applicant provided a timeline of Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy investment in McKinley Park, including from 2011 to the present and the prior work on a shelter house with parking and lighting, the 2016 completion of the McKinley Park Master Plan, Earth Month celebrations from 2022-2025 in McKinley Park, Chicken Hill Green Infrastructure from 2021-2023, and the McKinley Park Community Grove Project from 2024 to the present.

Applicant noted that trail work will be happening in McKinley and people should be aware of "trail closed" signs.

Applicant shared a visual excerpt from the McKinley Park Master Plan; explained that the original goal at that time was to have it be community gathering space, and that this project has decided to right-size that approach. Shared background about McKinley Park being oldest park in city, and community in the earlier past creating the ball field to play due to not being welcome in the lower part of the park. Applicant voiced desire to honor community history there. Shared project background about the Community Grove and prior work with neighborhood residents and stakeholders

and shared site photos. Noted there is lots of nature and tree cover in the space and how one is able to be present in nature in it.

Applicant shared detailed project history timeline from 2024-2025 relative to the Community Grove, including a March 2024 site walk with the community, an initial project survey, a Community Meeting #1 in June 2024, noting the basic approach of making the area usable lawn space and not sloped soggy space, and having small shelter area, also preserving backstop as part of community history and opportunity for future community art space. Applicant presentation noted there was a feedback survey on conceptual design options, a Community Meeting #2 in October 2024 that shared updated design concepts and incorporated feedback survey comments. Since October 2024, the project team hired Environmental Planning and Design as the firm doing the design and making the project construction-ready. Applicant presented slides on the project having a Community Meeting #3 that shared an updated preferred design option, and then there was work on further site analysis and inventory, schematic plan development working off the community-chosen preferred plan, 30% construction documents, 60% construction documents, and plan refinement and design visualization, bringing us to the present moment with the DAM and Public Art & Civic Design Commission (PACD). Project already submitted for Preliminary Review with PACD. Project hopes to have a hearing on Nov. 19, 2025 with PACD, but there is a chance it may be in January 2026.

Applicant acknowledged that things changed some during final refinement of plans. Applicant presented an overview of the project goals to (1) enhance recreational space for active and passive activities through active lawn space, a shelter for small gatherings, an education space, improvements to an existing seating area, and improved trail connectivity to the rest of the park; (2) improve mobility, accessibility, and inner-park connectivity through the implementation of new trail connections and stairs to navigate steeper slopes; (3) adjust drainage patterns to reduce erosion, trail washout, and over-saturated soils, further tying into previous green infrastructure projects addressing stormwater; (4) reinforce ecological restoration areas by protecting and expanding upon designated areas while increasing opportunity for engagement and potential for learning about their importance.

Applicant noted that they did a site visit on a rainy day which gave them a good chance to see where water was pooling and puddling etc. Noted the new proposed connection between Haberman Ave upper pavilion and trail, and also the walkway connection proposed from a trail down to the Grove site, using crushed aggregate.

Applicant showed a visual of the site plan with detailed information identifying existing and newly proposed site elements/amenities. Described the various amenities while referencing the visual of the site plan. These amenities include the walkway, seat wall, shelter, lawn, existing trail connection, new stair connection, existing chain link backstop, education space, lower seating, seat wall, boulders, new stair connection, and improved drainage patterns.

Applicant showed a rendering of the lawn improvements identifying improved drainage and defined edges. Explained that the reason that there is a winding shape to the trail is to make it an easier grade for people to travel down.

Applicant showed a rendering of a new shelter, identifying the shelter, seat wall, and picnic tables and providing detail about these. Noted it showed the view when looking at the backstop from the shelter. Seat wall to be about 18 inches tall.

Applicant showed a rendering of the educational space along the lower seat wall, identifying backstop posts, boulders, expanded restoration, seat wall, and learning space, and providing details on each. Identified how fence fabric is in poor condition but opportunity to work with Shiftworks (art-focused non-profit organization), which has some funding to work with artists in neighborhoods and have several artists from this neighborhood in their network, and they could help fund a community art process. In early conversation on how that would work, but the tentative plan is for when

the project is wrapping up design and doing construction, to work with the community on what the art piece will be, seeing the backstop area as a canvass. Also, this approach will allow the project to move forward from a permitting perspective. The plan too is to have flowers and plants that don't need too much maintenance and upkeep, such as certain perennial flowers. The goal is to frame the backstop in one's view when looking down to the valley. All the seat walls are proposed to match those already on site.

Applicant showed a rendering of the Lower Seating at Outdoor Classroom and identified the upgraded seating that would be new benches crafted from fallen trees.

Applicant showed photos of the materials to be used on the site, including trail surface aggregate for walkways, concrete for gathering spaces, reclaimed log benches (take trees from different parts of city that have fallen, smooth out and make into seating), polygon wood shade structure (hexagon, with steel), sandstone block wall (showed an existing wall, and would build new ones to match existing walls on site), and wood box stops (proven stair method in Pittsburgh parks, that are existing, and would replicate).

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
Why did the ball field go away?	It just stopped being maintained. It was never a regulation field. Nature took it back.
The stones on the walkway and steps...is it slippery? I'm thinking about weather.	You're thinking about the gravel -- It shouldn't be slippery. We use larger pieces of stone with dusty smaller pieces of stone to mix together and compact so it should not be slippery. We reviewed some images of erosion along the trails earlier. We'll direct rainwater off the trails and into other little valleys/swales to move into the plants and restoration area and soak up the rain. Two larger swales will come down and meet in that restoration area and will be lined with river rock. Earth is already doing that and we're going to reinforce that and make it so water does that and ensure water does not go into lawn (<i>showed visual</i>).
What about lighting?	Currently there are no plans for lighting in this plan.
To have something down there and I remember this is something we talked about in past...it's almost impossible to have anything down there safe that doesn't have any light. Not sure kind of light, maybe solar, but has to be some kind of lighting. Otherwise it's not a safe space.	We can talk to City if the idea is solar lighting and see what they've done. It is cost prohibitive to get electrical line down here – it would cost more than the rest of all the work we're trying to do. Lights are good for safety but also can encourage more use if they are on.
Maybe have sensor lighting.	

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The space will be used anyway though.	
People are down there now.	That's a challenge, since the area is not visible from the street, and if a police officer can't see people down there from the street. We can see if there are any solutions from the City that don't require dedicated electrical service. It's a challenge for the City in other parks. Happy to bring it up and see if we can accommodate safety, since we also don't want to signal that it's for use at that late hour.
What do they do in other parks?	The lights turn off, with the exception of pathway lighting at Allegheny Commons or Mellon Park, but that's for people using it to cut through the park. But courts and fields are lit up to a certain point like 11pm and then those lights do not turn on anymore. There is a safety consideration too.
The lights don't need to be on 24/7, that's not the request, but maybe if the park closes at 5pm on one month, or at 9pm on another month, for example. But it will never be closed for some people.	Could there be lighting not of whole area but maybe backlighting or something of that sort....don't know what City will say but maybe a compromise for some elements?
What does it look like in terms of sunlight down there? Even during day? Is there enough sunlight if went with solar-powered lighting? I know solar lighting doesn't last all night, from my experience with my own yard. There are little solar disc lights that can be utilized to help light it, and those are relatively inexpensive.	The slope is facing south, and from photos and site visits we can see that it does get bright there. Also there is light in the winter.
Also you could have a solar collector in one spot and then wiring from that to the other light spots.	These are great suggestions and we can do our homework and talk to the City.
The classroom space – is it not covered?	There are big limbs in that area. With the proposed shelter structure, if it has just rained, Voices Against Violence could do its programming under the shelter. That wouldn't be in the same space, but it's a compromise. Technically, the proposed shelter area is reachable by a trail that is considered ADA accessible for trail standards. One could continue to reach the backstop but then cannot get down to the existing lower seating outdoor classroom by ADA accessible trail. Having the shelter where we are proposing gives the opportunity to use this location where it is accessible – it enhances the site and gives more opportunity.

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Are there local builders and craftsmen that you can use as part of this project?	The challenge is since this is funded through local parks tax dollars, we have to do a publicly open process for the contracting and we can't do a targeted selection. City and also Parks Conservancy have specific city contractor goals for women-, veteran- owned businesses, disadvantaged business enterprises, and small businesses, and more, where there has to be a good faith effort by the contractor to reach out to such businesses and fill out a spreadsheet. And if they don't do it, we can completely throw their bid out. There is local workforce opportunity that way.
Who has to do that?	Any general contractor submitting a bid is required to do that good faith effort.
For entire project, is there a minimum requirement for MWBE based on grants and the City? This would start with general contractors and also go down further.	Yes, contractor is required to at least solicit other contractors as a good faith effort. <i>[Detailed a few of the exact percentages]</i> . There are percentages to meet as part of the requirements in the bid process. Contractors involved have to be qualified and have a bonding company to back up on insurance and if don't meet those, then not considered a responsive bid and thrown out.
So it hasn't gone to bid yet?	No, we are on track to hopefully bid in early 2026
We've had the same conversation since the project was presented at the start. And if this project will result in upcoming prospective jobs, why are we not putting out that these are the requirements people should be planning for in 18 months, so that people can prepare their work staffs so companies can get minority employees and train them and use these jobs as a proactive opportunity? What type of training is needed? This has been a 7-9 year conversation and it was the exact same thing that was said long ago. But what is happening? I understand, but if local small contractors in the community knew to be prepared 18 months in advance, that would be great, but I don't see workshops for that.	I understand. We could reach out to the chambers of commerce and let them know that it's a project that will hit the street and we send notice to their members. But because it's public money there are bid laws to avoid giving a certain contractor an edge.
I hear you, but need to know what should do to get bigger money. If we know companies that are smaller and want to get bigger piece of pie, they can come to forum and go	

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through process of being designated as MWBE/DBE or whatever acronym fits. The process can be arduous.	
That's why we needed to start 8 or 9 years ago so have plenty of time for certifications and info sessions.	
These are the info sessions. The guys who are contractors then should be keyed in through these project presentations to know what to find out to be able to do. Because there are certain minimal things that one has to have. Are there any Requests For Proposals (RFPs) that you'll put out?	We are required to run notices in the Post-Gazette at least twice by the City. But the Parks Conservancy also puts notice in the Courier too as better outreach even if it's not required. Put in week before and then also sometime week after the bid period opens. We will check too with City Procurement office on if we can notify chambers of commerce early /asap. As long as we are not running afoul of bid laws, we'll pursue it. That can help firms staff up or know what to look for. The issue is when get protests when some people get an early inside look that others are not getting. If we're able to be above board with the City on the rules, we're happy to spread the word.
When you put in Post-Gazette and the Courier, do you put the platform it's on?	We provide a brief description of the project bid dates and a link for where to download project documents and look at the bid package in more detail.
Do you notify the Beltzhoover Consensus Group prior to information coming out to the Post-Gazette or Courier? Then BCG can help disseminate it out to the community on all our platforms so they know to be looking at the Courier or Post-Gazette.	Yeah, as far as bid laws, I don't think there is any harm in saying early that as of X date, details will be available. And also there is info about this project on the Engage page and the notes from this DAM will be put on the website. I know the Beltzhoover Consensus Group has had the major project of the Elementary School [<i>renovation to affordable senior housing</i>]. If you have examples of projects going well in this way, we're happy to talk with anyone involved with those to learn. We're strapped by working with the City and the constraints of using local Parks Tax dollars. We'd be happy to have a discussion with Hilltop Alliance too. For example with Chicken Hill, we carved out the work scope for [<i>specific contractor company</i>]. We want to learn from this and are also trying to be thoughtful of how to include local business opportunities in this. And that's how we want to do the art project. We need help and guidance.
With the Beltzhoover Elementary School housing project, there was a meeting at the library or Brashear association, and we invited people who wanted to be sub-contractors. Mystic Construction was there and we emailed people who responded to the RFP and we were adamant about	

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making sure the people were meeting minority/non-white participation and they talked to us about that, and then we also were trying to get local people to participate in that as well. They held a meeting to get local people to come but not a lot of people did come.	
To add to that, Trek Development came but that was at Beltzhoover Consensus Group's request. Everything starts in the community. We disseminate everything we have and put on every platform out there, which comes from City, County, etc. At all our community forums we share all information, so it's out there. Can lead a horse to water but cannot make them drink.	Bring us into the fold where you feel that we're missing. Our project manager went out and delivered door hangers for this. We're open to feedback.
For people trying to figure out contracting stuff – I ask them, why is everyone here 25-40 and white males. I'm told that they're unionized and they are the only welders or brick layers contracted through the City with union affiliation. That's the excuse from [entity] and others who I stop and ask who are working in our neighborhood but don't look like the people who live in the neighborhood.	For this project, the contractors are not required to be union, but are required to pay prevailing wage, which most unions pay. If this was a non-prevailing wage job....[further brief elaboration]...
Are we limited...[additional element shared, did not hear]...?	Pay rate is level, so no requirement to do union or non-union. Since we're paying a fair wage.
Are there any contractors that are minority owned or owned by people from marginalized backgrounds, or individuals who are women, who are non-white -- any contractors utilized on those previous projects that you were doing that we could invite to come and work on this? Who won the bid before? Was it in these marginalized communities – anyone who is familiar with your vision and work?	We've had one contractor we worked with previously who is WBD, and a contractor whose vendor is a MBE or DBE. There's not a big pool, which is a challenge.
But maybe utilize someone that you know from the past. And problematic if only using one or two, since there are more. And we can expand search through social media. Want people doing work to look like us.	If there's anyone you know in the community and trades that we can reach out to, that would be helpful. We only see who bids on our projects but we don't know who looks at our RFP and doesn't submit a bid.
And you don't know color of applicant either.	
There's a person who does diversity vendor work for Pitt and would have a list.	
Does your church have a list of vendors affiliated with the community?	
[Church rep:] I do not.	

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And when we did the top part and trails, we had a couple people from the community who did bids. And a certain amount could be used by community. But their bid came up high because they were a smaller firm, and since not a big company, came out as 3 or 4 times more than money set aside, and that is what happened in that case as well.	That's the challenge if a contractor is small. The benefit here in this case is the cost is closer to \$400,000 which is smaller than the \$1 Million of most park projects. And since they need to be able to float money to pay folks month to month it's tough for a small firm when it's a big project, but when the project is smaller, we might be able to get it to become more competitive.
	[consultant]: When the project goes out to bid, is the Parks Conservancy able to then send it out to broadcast it to the list of organizations among the community network?
Yes, we can send the Post-Gazette and Courier links out and have Beltzhoover Consensus Group help disseminate. And maybe Knoxville Community Council could help.	
Do you also coordinate with other organizations like the Kingsley Association? <i>[question asked by a community member to Beltzhoover Consensus Group (BCG) board members]</i>	
<i>[BCG member:]</i> No, we don't.	
The Kingsley Association definitely would have a list.	
<i>[Named the University of Pittsburgh Diversity Supplier.]</i> We can ask if they have a list of marginalized businesses.	
That would be great.	
The bioswales you plan to have at the bottom of Chicken Hill...will those be like the bioswales along Michigan now or are you talking about something smaller? What are the round green things? I was wondering how many bioswales in one place. We didn't use to have a problem with soggy field before they did the steps. So what we have along Michigan -- those are two bioswales as well? What will the flow of water be like there?	The round things shown on the visual are trees. <i>[Clarified on slide deck visual the location of the bioswales and where the project would direct water]</i> Yes. It will not be covered, we will have some check dams to reduce water speed so doesn't rip through the space, and then there will be side slopes as naturalized wet meadow

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That was my question – natural bioswale or manmade?	style. What's along Michigan is very designed and looks manmade. We want this to look natural. Intention is to have it look natural. If there's a weed in it, one wouldn't notice since it's natural.
What are you doing with the area on the upper right side of the visual site plan?	Not touching, just getting water to redirect back to the stream it goes to.
Foot bridge stays?	Yes, with connection to it
Barbecue grill?	Not proposing it now. There is one up on top of chicken hill. There was one conversation in the past about adding one.
Could we add BBQ grill at the shelter? It is a very small grill – it fits only about 3 hot dogs.	We can look at that, it's not very expensive.
For art, can we see a presentation about it before it's done?	Yes, the goal is to have an artist talk to the community before starting that art work.
Can we push you towards a certain artist?	Maybe, we are still sorting out details.
Out of consistency, it should be the same person who did the basketball court.	We want it to be intentional. We want them to pull their inspiration from you as the community and not simply present their ideas to you.
We have a neighborhood full of artists.	With Shiftworks, we are wanting to work with artists from the neighborhood. This presents a great opportunity to get them working with the community.
I think the project proposal looks really great, I think it will look nice when it's all done.	Thanks.
There was a nice story on the news about how Parks Conservancy puts up deer fences around new trees coming in. I've seen how the deer eat all my hostas and flowers.	
The deer eat my lilies. They ate all the leaves and then get up to bulbs.	
They even eat marigolds.	

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
What are we doing to encourage nature education for critters, deer, raccoons, etc. For example, explaining what to do and what not to do when one sees a skunk, etc...Any educational elements to put in classroom?	There is. We have an education department within the Parks Conservancy that specializes in education. If there is a community desire to see more of that, I'd be happy to talk to them and brainstorm ways to encourage more learning about those spaces that we're designing and what the restoration space is becoming and the animals etc. There also is an opportunity to work with the Park Rangers of the City.
They come to senior citizen facilities with the birds.	
<i>[Clarification between community members that the question is not about trying to attract raccoons, but rather education about what squirrels eat, for example].</i> We have coyotes now too. Lots of people need to know distinction between coyotes and dogs. And we have foxes too. And opossums.	
	Is educational signage something you'd like to see?
Yes, we'd like to see that. And it could be similar to the national parks that tell people to take out what you bring in.	Ok. That's a short-term thing we can implement now. We have three lakes, and for example at Lake Elizabeth in Allegheny Commons we put up signs about not feeding the geese based on local advocacy and City sign shop put it up and the Parks Rangers are fabulous about that. I'll bring to BCG Forum in November more information about this.
	<i>[Shared the multiple points of contact for the community to reach out to in case of further project questions and concerns]</i>
Is there a timeline for the project?	The timeline right now is wrapping up 60% construction documents...The next step will be to go through PACDC.
Will any of this work be done by City and DPW? Thank you.	No.
We've had issues in the past with the City not following the plans given to them.	
Is the timeline written down?	It's in our heads largely, it's fluid. We are in the permitting process, and do not have control of the schedule and are at the mercy of the permitting agency to shepherd us through or face any roadblocks. If it goes the way we think

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	it'll go, as we think permitting will go ok, we hope to bid in January or February / early spring, and start construction late spring/early summer and wrap up by summer.
Do you have funding needs?	This project is funded, so as long as bids come in where we think they will, we should be good. We're still on budget with our consultant EPD's work. We are still looking good.
Did you create the budget pre-tariff, before all the stuff that's causing inflation, recognizing it may balloon?	It's almost like covid, where everything is up and down. As best practice, we take the budget and take 20% of that and have as contingency. So they're designing for whatever 80% of the overall budget is. We build in wiggle room in case of the bidding coming in high, and in case of change orders etc.
	We also would like to share a quick update on the trails project. We have a professional trail builder, and they are going to mobilize and be on site some time next month. They got hung up. They're staying away from the retaining wall area with acid mine drainage. If there is money left over from trails work, will flip to other side of Bausman and see about connecting trails up to Bon Air. There are lots of tree issues blown down.
Yes, there are trees blown down. Lots of erosion and trees hanging by a thread. Can you guys send us something?	 Yes, we've drafted it, just haven't hit send since don't know exactly when will start it.
I saw a woman at the playground today teaching kids to ride bikes. She is new to the neighborhood and very outdoorsy and spends lots of time at McKinley Park with her children and walks and lives on Chalfont and I'm sure once she gets wind of Michigan and the pavilion they will be there. We want to be sure that people are aware of that.	We'll also have little yard signs to notify people.
There may be people who are more curious than their own good so we want to ensure safety.	

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Or if something is in written in advance and can notify that the project is coming, we could post that so they're aware – about the trail closing, about deer park management, etc....there is a lot going on. Although deer seem to still be around and not getting caught since I'm seeing so many.	
	Thank you to BCG for hosting the meeting. We are at our final step before permitting. We are grateful to DCP. This is the fastest project – doing in 2 years. Thank you to the Pastor for hosting us, and thank you for the food at this gathering. We have a long list of follow-ups, including the education signage, reaching out to community leader(s), and we will be at the November 2025 Community Forum.
Please go look at Frick and all the perks they have there. We here are in the same city and we deserve what they have.	I agree.

Other Notes

Community feedback centered most heavily around bidding and hiring practices that would benefit minority- women- and disadvantaged business enterprises with diverse workforces through the project, safety and opportunities for adding solar lighting to the project area in the park, adding educational signage, and various clarifying questions about the project scope and outcomes, and the future art-focused project phase.
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Planner completing report: T.S.