

Guiding Principles for Dix Park, and Concerns

December 6, 2018

Dear Mayor McFarlane and Members of the Raleigh City Council:

We write as longtime Dix Park advocates and leaders of Dix 306 and Friends of Dorothea Dix Park. For 15 years, we have worked shoulder to shoulder with city officials, the Dix Visionaries and thousands of citizens to realize our shared vision of a great urban park on Dix Hill. It is now within our grasp to make this vision a reality, starting with a master plan to guide our work over the coming decades.

This master plan, we believe, should be founded on six guiding principles:

- Respect the natural beauty of the land; preserve it from encroaching development and commercialization.
- Honor its legacy as a place of mental and physical wellness; we fully support the Wellness document developed by the Legacy Committee.
- Minimize car traffic in the park with the future goal of eliminating cars altogether; connect Dix Park to downtown Raleigh, Pullen Park, NCSU and the state Farmer's Market in ways that allow easy access to Dix on foot, bicycle, free shuttle, or public transit, including future modes.
- Dix should model environmental sustainability, including water reuse, energy self-sufficiency, and carbon-free transportation systems; it should showcase the production and use of food-producing plants.
- Dix must be a park for everyone; everything in Dix should be for use by all park visitors, and nothing should be for a select few.
- Finally, all decision-making about the park and the master plan must be transparent; citizens have a right to review and comment on all documents, studies and cost estimates produced in the planning process.

With these principles in mind, we are deeply concerned about elements of the draft master plan that seem to anticipate leasing (or selling) portions of Dix Park for private housing development and/or a private hotel that anchors a mall-like commercial center.

The plan seems to assume that dozens of buildings that were part of Dix Hospital must be retained and renovated at significant expense, or perhaps just mothballed, even though no park purpose has been identified for most of them. This expense is the reason that the plan swerves toward private and commercial development that would otherwise be unnecessary and is, in any event, undesirable. This is, unfortunately, a case of the tail wagging the dog.

Some of the hospital buildings can be renovated for park purposes, and such purposes should be broadly inclusive so that more people, not fewer, can enjoy

the park. Still, Dix should be a place of refuge, fresh air and fun that is in the city, not one that mimics the city or copies what already exists nearby. Let's collaborate, not compete, with our neighbors. Existing structures should not be retained solely for their revenue-generating potential, especially where they detract from the beauty of the landscape.

All that said, we are excited about the initial elements identified in the draft plan. The restoration of Rocky Branch greenway; memorializing the cemetery; new gateways from Western Boulevard and Lake Wheeler Road; a major playground along Lake Wheeler Road; the preservation and potential expansion of the Big Field, both north and south; taken together, these projects constitute an ambitious beginning that will require many years to execute.

As these first projects are underway, a new generation of park users will come to appreciate Dix for its spectacular landscape and the panorama of programs Raleigh is offering there. Meanwhile, decisions will be reached about the future of the Farmers Market, Spring Hill, the development of our Southern Gateway, and most important, about the calendar for relocating DHHS. At that point, but only at that point, Raleigh will be in a position to determine what should come next for Dix Park at mid-century.

We trust, when that time comes, that the park will be understood, not as a heavy burden, but rather as a wonderful public asset for our region and our state, one that helps Raleigh be a model American city.

We urge City Council to schedule public hearings in January on the future of Dix, and to accept public comment – which would be in addition to the comments collected by MVVA – prior to taking action on the draft plan.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Bill Padgett

Jay Spain

Anne S. Franklin

Bett Padgett

Ruth Bromer

Joseph Huberman

Will Hooker

Bob Geary

Larry Robinson

Mark Turner

Douglas Johnston

Franklin Haignere

Robyn Haignere

John Graeber

Anna Smith

Carolyn Guckert

Connie Crumpler

Talbot Troy

Kathy McKee

Carol Apperson

Julie Williams Dixon

Jody Stebben

Jeanne Moyer