



## Back to Square One

### *Reimagining O'Bryant Square*

A **Community Vision** based on:

- 6 Webinars
- 400 Survey Respondents
- 56 Community Stakeholders
- 2 Public Workshops
- 20 Conceptual Design Proposals
- 14-member Safety, Maintenance, & Management Group



Center for  
Public Interest  
Design



Portland Parks  
Foundation



PORTLAND PARKS  
& RECREATION  
Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

# Participation

## PROJECT TEAM

Center for Public Interest Design, PSU  
Portland Parks Foundation  
Portland Parks & Recreation

## HARVARD UNIVERSITY LOEB FELLOWS

Christopher Calott, FAIA, Chair of Real Estate/Development, UC Berkeley  
Susan Chin, FAIA, founding director, Design Trust for Public Spaces, NYC  
Roger Cummings, Co-founder/Chief Culture Producer, Juxtaposition Arts, Minneapolis  
Damon Rich, Partner at Hector, urban planning and civic arts, MacArthur Fellow  
Jennifer Siegal, Office of Mobile Design, LA

## COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPANTS

Ty Barker, Unico Properties  
Claire Barrera, Brown Girl Rise  
Howie Bierbaum, Eastside Jewish Center  
Vernon Brandon, downtown resident  
Margaret Burke, Converge 45 Arts  
Kristin Calhoun, RACC  
Kevin Cavanaugh, Guerilla Development  
Julie Coates, Pittock Block  
Ardis DeFreece, Pacific Northwest College of Art  
Becky Emmert, Portland Art Museum  
Subashini Ganesan, Portland Creative Laureate Emeritus  
Lindsay Gay, Pioneer Courthouse Square  
Drew Grabane, Central City Concern  
Janie Gullickson, Mental Health Association of Oregon  
Andrew Haight, OMSI

Alicia Hammock, Portland Parks & Rec  
Sophie May Hook, artist and consultant/advocate for houseless  
Chris Harder, Portland Winter Light Festival  
Keith Jones, Friends of the Green Loop  
Gordon Karpen, downtown resident  
Kristan Kennedy, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art  
Tom Kilbane, Urban Renaissance Group  
Dong Kounphachansy, Prime Tap House  
David Laubenthal, OMSI  
Steven Lein, Under U 4 Men  
Bryan Loewen, Pittock Block  
Brandt Maina, independent artist  
Angela Matson, downtown resident  
Mack McFarland, RACC  
Sydney Mead, Portland Business Alliance  
Grant Miller, The Curiosity Paradox Access Arts  
Jim Mark, Melvin Mark Properties  
Ed McNamara, retired developer  
Jessica Meza-Torres, Literary Arts  
Andre Middleton, Friends of Noise  
Lauren Noecker, NBP Capital  
Kokoo Olszewski, Arts for Learning Northwest  
Brian Owendoff, BPM (Ritz Carlton)  
Jonathan Paradox, The Curiosity Paradox Access Arts  
Stephanie Parrish, Portland Art Museum  
Stacy Pat, downtown resident  
Art Pearce, PBOT  
Tessa Peterson, Woodlark Hotel  
Reginald (Carlos) Petry, Central City Concern  
Greg Raisman, PBOT  
Kim Riggs, Ace Hotel  
Steve Roselli, Schnitzer Properties  
Blake Shell, Oregon Contemporary  
Kelsey Snook, independent artist  
Xavier Stickler, Downtown Neighborhood Association

Amanda Stubits, Choctaw, community organizer, artist  
Sean Suib, New Avenues for Youth  
Kate Sullivan, Portland Flea  
Mike Thelin, founder, Feast PDX  
Andrea Tichy, Portland Opera  
LaJune Thorson, downtown resident

## SAFETY, MAINTENANCE, AND MANAGEMENT FOCUS GROUP

Alexandra Appleton, Multnomah County Behavioral Health Resource Center  
Donald Athey, Portland Parks & Rec  
Troy Doss, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability  
Nick Falbo, PBOT  
Karen Guillen-Chapman, Office of City Commissioner Dan Ryan  
Christa Jones, Multnomah County Behavioral Health Resource Center  
Susan Keil, retired City of Portland  
Christine Leon, Portland Public Environment Management Office  
Amy Nagy, Prosper Portland  
Kia Selley, development consultant  
Earl Straley, Portland Parks & Rec  
Jennifer Trimm, Portland Parks & Rec  
Mark Wells, Downtown Clean & Safe  
Eric Zimmerman, Office of Mayor Ted Wheeler

## DESIGN CHARRETTE TEAMS

AfroVillage  
Architects Without Borders  
BikeLoud  
BORA Architecture & Interiors  
BRIC Architecture  
Carleton Hart Architecture  
Communitecture  
GBD Architects  
Hennebery Eddy Architects  
PLACE  
Salazar Architect  
SERA Architects  
Urban Strategies  
ZGF

## FUNDERS

Portland Parks & Recreation  
Loeb Fellowship Alumni Association  
North Star Civic Foundation  
Metro  
Multnomah County  
Portland Business Alliance/Portland Clean & Safe  
Travel Portland  
ZGF  
Schlesinger Family Foundation  
Project^  
Henneberry Eddy Architects  
GBD Architects

## MAJOR IN-KIND SUPPORT

Metropolitan Group  
NBP Capital  
Urban Renaissance Group

# Back to Square One: Reimagining O’Bryant Square

## Introduction

Closed and fenced for the last five years, O’Bryant Square has been a blight in the heart of downtown Portland’s West End, a rapidly evolving, socially complex neighborhood. The square sits at the heart of the city’s densest hotel and local shopping district, but it also is directly adjacent to a cluster of social services. Slated for demolition but with no current funding mechanism to build a fully finished future park, the square will be left “park ready” in the fall of 2023.

A collaboration of the Center for Public Interest Design (CPID) at Portland State University, the Portland Parks Foundation (PPF), Portland Parks & Recreation, and alumni of the Loeb Fellowship of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design developed a month-long series of public engagements to reimagine O’Bryant Square, with an eye toward how urban public space can best serve a new era of downtown Portland.

Inspired by some of the most innovative practices in cities worldwide, the collaborative saw an opportunity to rethink how this significant site can become a vital expression of Portland’s many communities. The overall goals were threefold:

- understand the community’s hopes for this renewed downtown plaza
- envision simple, fast-track “draft” design and programming to bring O’Bryant Square to life immediately after demolition
- foster this interim use into an urban laboratory allowing what works (and doesn’t) to shape the future permanent design when funding to build a new park is identified.

Called *Back to Square One: Reimagining O’Bryant Square*, the initiative references the site’s label—“Park Block One”—on original city planning documents.

## Outreach

Back to Square One meaningfully engaged more than 1,000 Portlanders around their ideas on how O’Bryant Square can become a harbinger of positive change:

- 6 interactive webinars, attended by over 500 viewers, pairing the Loeb Fellows with local counterparts in the fields of community design, social services, mental health and public space, urban youth, real estate, and pop-up architecture
- a public survey with nearly 400 responses
- 8 key stakeholder groups from the following categories: Arts &

- Culture; Property Owners, Downtown Youth, Retail/Food/Hospitality; Social Service Providers; Safety/Management/Maintenance; Behavioral Health Resource Center clients; and Downtown Resident
- 2 community open houses with opportunities for idea generation and feedback
- [Oregon Live](#), [Portland Tribune](#), [KGW](#), [KOIN](#), and [OPB](#) offered extensive coverage of Reimagining O’Bryant Square

Finally, the CPID convened a charrette—a design brainstorm—with 17 local design professional teams who developed concept designs distilled from the community’s feedback and ideas. All the teams were intimately familiar with O’Bryant Square, the development goals associated with Portland’s Comprehensive Plan, and best practices for contemporary public space. The design boards from this charrette can be found at [THIS LINK](#).

Make no mistake, realizing a safe, lively urban park welcoming to all will have challenges, some specific to Portland, but most symptoms of larger forces faced by many large American downtowns. Nevertheless, powerful, optimistic historic, and contemporary themes emerged. We found strong alignments even between the most disparate stakeholder groups, with Behavioral Health Resource Center clients’ feedback closely mirroring that

of neighboring property owners. Design and improvements will be important, both in the short and long terms. But strong management and activation—by and for Portland’s many communities—will be key to its success, as a plaza and puzzle piece to a revitalized downtown. The groups that participated in this process are eager and ready, as soon as the demolition fences come down, to bring O’Bryant to life.

# Key Recommendations

## Coordinate maintenance, safety, and programming

- **Single management entity:** There needs to be a designated organization or tight coalition overseeing or coordinating the maintenance, safety and activation of O'Bryant Square and any adjacent street plazas during the interim period (perhaps years long) between "park-ready" demolition and future development. Identifying this organization and providing city financial support for the effort is critical.
- **Overlapping activations:** Park activations should overlap to maintain consistent usage: short-term programming hosted by local organizations (from hours-long to several days), seasonal activities (2-4 months), and, ultimately, longer-term activations that requires more substantial infrastructure and support hosted by Portland Parks and Recreation.
- **Community Involvement and wisdom:** A wide range of arts and culture organizations, large and small, expressed enthusiasm for programming the square. Their activities can provide invaluable insight into how a future permanent park might be designed.

## Setting the Stage

- **Light:** The single most important ingredient to the square's success at night will be light, preferably with an innovative, creative, changing design that both provides safety and security but also creates an attraction visitors will seek out.
- **Power and water:** The square must provide access to both multiple locations and have on-site or neighboring access to bathrooms.
- **Storage:** Space on or near the park to store amenities like chairs, tables, canopies and other equipment commonly used in activation efforts will be crucial in eliminating barriers for organization participation.
- **Permitting:** Make it simple, cheap, and fast to lower barriers to community-based programming. An umbrella insurance policy should be investigated. After five years of closure, decades of problems, and a challenging urban context, the square needs to be prioritized to eliminate all obstacles for participation such as administration time, permission delays, cost, and liability requirements.
- **Gather commitments:** Collect and compile specific commitments, needs, timelines, and concerns from organizations and surrounding property owners.

## Creating Neighborhood Synergies

The square's future success will depend heavily upon coordination with existing and emerging revitalization efforts in the area.

- **Coordinate street plazas:** Synergies between PBOT's planned street plazas on SW Ninth and Harvey Milk and the park will be critical to ensuring complementary site usages. In the short term, for instance, either of these street plazas might be better suited to host recreation activities requested by the community that require hard surfaces such as skateboarding, pickleball, and food carts, while the park may host complementary utilities and amenities.
- **Connect the dots:** The PBOT street plazas can directly link the square to Powell's Books, Travel Gay Portland, Shake Shack, and a possible storefront by Travel Portland, creating a district hub for visitors.
- **Involve the neighbors:** Blank walls and a lack of "eyes on the street" due to adjacent buildings being filled with peopleless telnet services poses a problem for safety and activation. As much as possible, the owners/operators of these buildings should be invited to collaborate in the square's transformation. Efforts might include: developing creative storefront design, lighting, and programming; hosting temporary art installations or projections on their facades; providing auxiliary space for equipment to support activations.

- **Improve the parking lot:** Directly to the square's north, the parking lot operated by the BHRC can add value to the square if programmed or developed, even partially. Think temporary retail or services or additional housing. Investigations into the site's potential should acknowledge that the lot currently serves BHRC staff who would struggle with the costs and proximity of downtown parking.

## Inclusion

The square should be welcoming to people from a range of backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.

- **Acknowledge the Queer legacy:** This site holds particular significance for many in the LGBTQ+ community due to its location within Portland's historic "Pink Triangle," proximity to Travel Gay Portland, and history as a site of Gay Pride events. Many stakeholders hoped to have this legacy acknowledged by conscious, thoughtful inclusion and celebration of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Involve the houseless:** Client groups from the BHRC, Pear, and New Avenues for Youth, and others strongly advocated for opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to contribute to the park, such as tending gardens, making public art, and hosting meals. Directly involve a trusted organization such as Street Roots (mentioned by the stakeholders) who already serve as important

ambassadors between housed and unhoused.

- **Make space safe for teenage girls:** Research shows that public space is radically underserving this demographic in terms of infrastructure, programming, and safety. A space that successfully makes teenage girls feel welcome, safe, and engaged is likely a good indicator that it is inclusive for many.
- **Support universal access:** In the interim and longterm, support universal access to the park. Virtual access to art and culture events at the park should be explored.

## Portland Policy Changes

The square offers a valuable opportunity to pilot programs that might better serve our evolving downtown.

- **Make the square clean and safe:** It is crucial to prioritize maintenance and security of the park, especially in the early weeks, to immediately establish confidence in the plaza as the public becomes reacquainted with for the first time in over five years.
- **Allow food trucks and push carts:** The square's history as lunch spot for the Alder Street Food Cart Pod and the new, all-local vendors of the Ritz Carlton's soon-to-open food hall offer a key opportunity for ongoing and evening activity. Connecting to the nearby Ankeny

Food Cart Pod will be crucial to the success of both spaces. But challenges water delivery, waste water removal, trash collection, and security can be much more easily addressed with a wider range of mobile vending options. (Photos from O'Bryant Square' opening day show a sandwich vendor with a push cart on site!).

- **Provide more tools for managing welcoming space:** Everyone should feel invited to the square. Representatives of the safety/management/maintenance focus group advocated for policy changes that allow for better management of camping downtown and the ability to ban purveyors of repeated disruptive behavior in parks.
- **Increase communication and reduce barriers to collaboration:** Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland Clean & Safe, Downtown Mall Management, PPR, PBOT, PEMO, Travel Portland, and Prosper Portland, are all critical puzzle pieces to the successful revival of downtown. Yet, communication is fractured. Policies often don't align and collaboration is poor. A working group of empowered decision makers from these entities is not just crucial to the square's success but to all of downtown.

## Challenges

- **Coordination:** Curation of programming for all downtown public spaces will be essential so that one park doesn't compete with others as in O'Bryant's early history with the opening of Pioneer Courthouse Square.
- **Lighting:** While there is a desire to keep the trees on site, it is increasingly likely that few, if any, will survive demotion. The ability to light trees and other vertical elements would be one of the fastest and most inexpensive ways to create safer and more inviting spaces at night. Feature poles to host lights, or light strings outlining features or draping from neighboring buildings should be considered as an alternative to tree lighting.
- **Money:** Significant arts and placemaking grants from Metro, the National Endowment for the Arts, and local and national foundations are on a longer timeline, unaligned with the impending need to begin activating the park following demolition. Short term funding for programming will remain a significant challenge. With neighboring property owners hurting from leasing challenges and angry over the square's five years of closure, significant public funding will be required to create a safe, welcoming, lively space that reflects the community will.

## Key Considerations for Demolition of the Current Park

- "Park Ready" should include more than one strategy for ground cover (grass, crushed granite, berms, etc.) in order to accommodate a wider range of potential uses.
- The slope of the site poses potential challenges for temporary activations for those activities that require a flat slope. Creating at least one area with 1% slope or less, while not exceeding 5% slope in any other area for reasons of accessibility would be worth considering. The size of this area may be determined by specific programming that is identified and/or standard dimensions for recreation courts.

## Possible Design Concepts for the Park

Seventeen design teams submitted a total of 20 proposals for a future park based on early stakeholder and community feedback that they were provided. Despite having only 24 hours to put a vision to these ideas, many of the teams: have previously worked on city-funded concepts for O'Bryant; are intimately familiar with the site; deeply understand Portland's Comprehensive Plan's development goals; and are experienced in best practices for contemporary public space. These proposals offer a wealth of insight. Our intentions were not to produce a "winning design," but to tap

Portland's talented design community to explore possibilities for the site.

Each design has its own merits and specificity, but several key design strategies emerged across projects.

- **Creating a diagonal connection:** Several teams proposed channeling the future Green Loop between the corners of SW Washington St. & SW 9th St. and SW Harvey Milk St. & SW Park Ave. This axis connects the Loop between the Ritz Carlton's festival street, Ankeny Square food cart pod, and Park Blocks to the north. If this approach is pursued, consider the impacts (PSU's Urban Plaza's bifurcation by the streetcar, for instance) and whether this connection should be an axis (perceived in the mind) or a pathway (experienced by foot/vehicle). Programming will be affected.
- **Street murals:** Paint is fast acting. It can divide the space into designated areas and hold memory (such as the forms of the original park fountain or native planting patterns). It can also be a way of trying out ideas. And it can change.
- **Street furniture:** Cleverly designed chairs, benches, tables, and play structures—set or moveable—can serve as an iconic placemaking element.
- **Pink Triangle:** Acknowledging O'Bryant's relation to the LGBTQ+ community through color and geometry could create identity and constituency for the square.

- **Lighting:** An illuminated square is key to safety, but string and tree lights can create a festive atmosphere - both within the park and marking the Green Loop between the Ankeny Food Cart Pod and the Ritz Carlton's festival street.
- **Gardens:** Planting beds, permanent or temporary delineate space and can involve community in their stewardship.
- **Water:** A more ecologically-based water feature could recall the park's original fountain and position the square as the latest in Portland's long history of innovative urban fountains, from the Portland Open Space Sequence to Tanner Springs Park.
- **Art:** Creating clear opportunities for public artwork, temporary or permanent, within the park, possibly large scale to serve as a placemaking and wayfinding device.
- **Micro-enterprise:** Many stakeholders hoped to see markets and carts beyond food carts both in and on the periphery of the park.
- **Service Hub:** The square or adjacent spaces can be a distribution point for basic resources and amenities to serve all park goers, including people experiencing homelessness.
- **Shelter:** Offer some protection from the elements.

See all of the designs [HERE!](#)



The design proposals from the charrette have remained on display in a storefront adjacent to O'Bryant Square.



# Recommendations: Assets & Values

The following recommendations are by no means comprehensive but represent key values that were heard repeatedly and must be considered for any future development on the O'Bryant Square site. By leveraging the historic memory of the site and responding to community desires for the park, the likelihood of success will be much greater. Additionally, park elements that embrace these values will be able to build upon the growing coalition of individuals and organizations interested in hosting activations and contributing to the park's revitalization.

- Foster a **sense of belonging** for all visitors
- Provide ample public **seating and spaces** to eat lunch from nearby food carts / food hall
- Incorporate ample soft and festive **lighting** to promote usage and **safety** at night
- Emphasize and integrate the park with the **Green Loop**
- Prioritize **native plants** on site
- Hold space to recognize and honor the site's significance to the **LGBTQ+ community**
- Recognize the site's significance to Portland **youth culture**
- Provide space and opportunity to use the park as a **testing ground** for new ideas and uses of public space downtown by Portlanders to inform long term planning

## Site Strategies

In order to accomplish these goals, a site strategy for the park is recommended that organizes the site into 3 distinct but intersecting areas with complementary programming and uses.

- 1) A small **plaza** on the SW corner of the park that allows for both informal gathering and ongoing activations brought forth by community partners. This plaza should aspire to integrate into the future street plaza on SW 9th Ave. and have a symbiotic relationship with adjacent businesses.
- 2) A **lawn** that negotiates the site's slope and creates opportunities for unprescribed play. Concentrating the slope of the site in this area allows for a greater diversity of activities in the park's other spaces, which often require flatter ground surfaces.
- 3) An **anchor space** dedicated to ongoing activity or recreation that attracts park visitors.

The ways in which these spaces can be integrated will help to fully animate the park. A strong edge where the plaza meets the lawn can provide a short wall ideal for seating. The slope of the lawn can provide a natural viewing area for people-watching and activities taking place in the anchor space. The anchor space is enlivened by complementary programming and informal activity on the lawn and plaza.

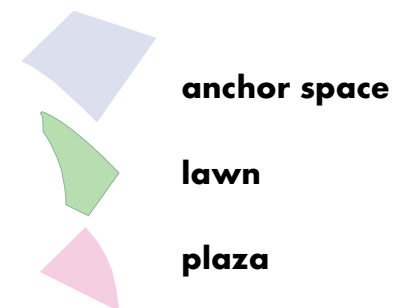
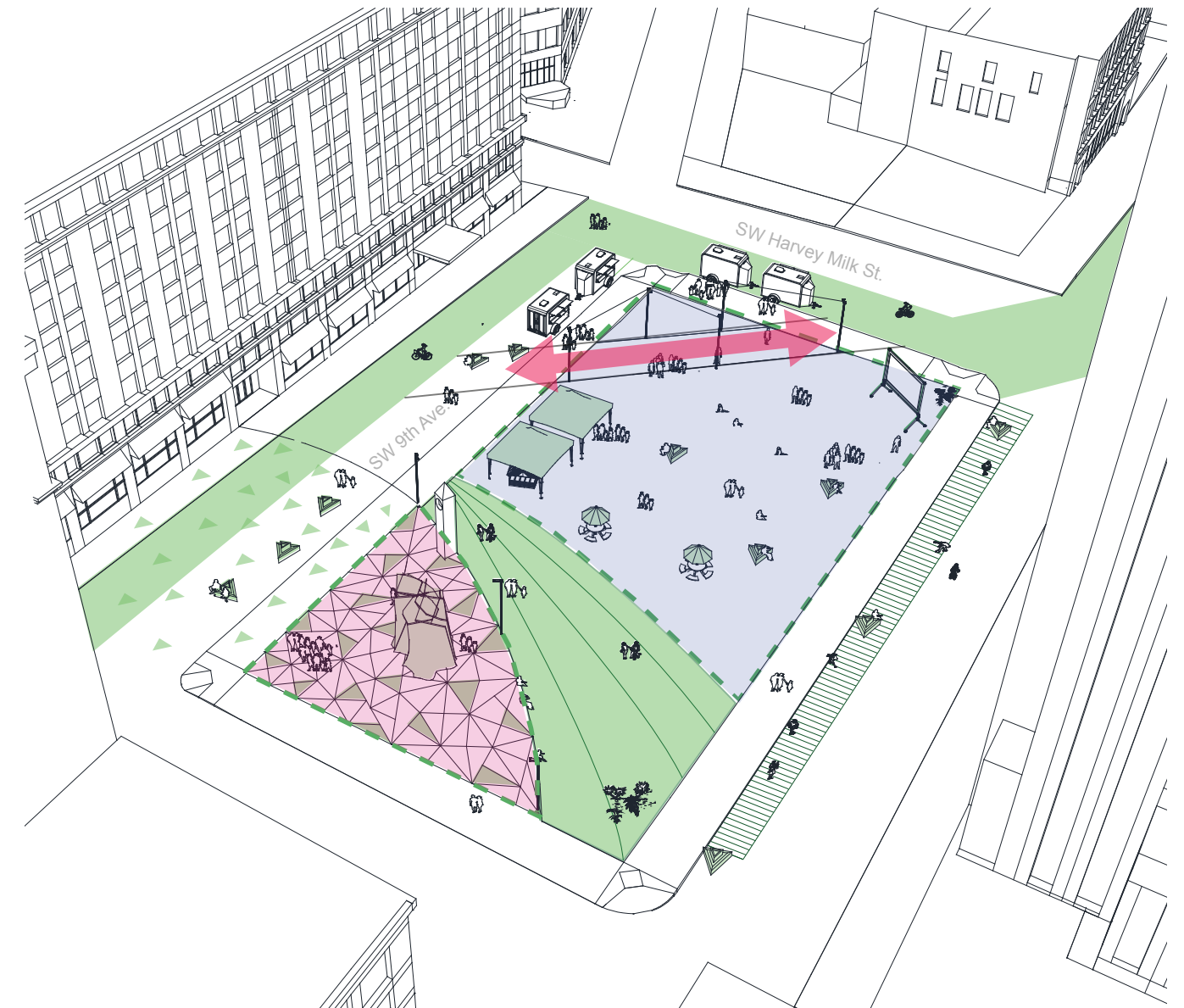


Diagram of site strategy comprised of three primary sections with complementary uses.

**Emphasize and integrate the park with the Green Loop.**

A pathway connecting SW 9th Ave. and SW Harvey Milk St. bring people into the park, promotes connection with the Green Loop, and provides space to host food trucks/carts.

**Hold space to recognize and honor the site's significance to the LGBTQ+ community.**

Here the upper plaza incorporates triangular pavers in honor of Portland's Pink Triangle, which continues as painted pattern on the 9th Ave Street Plaza.

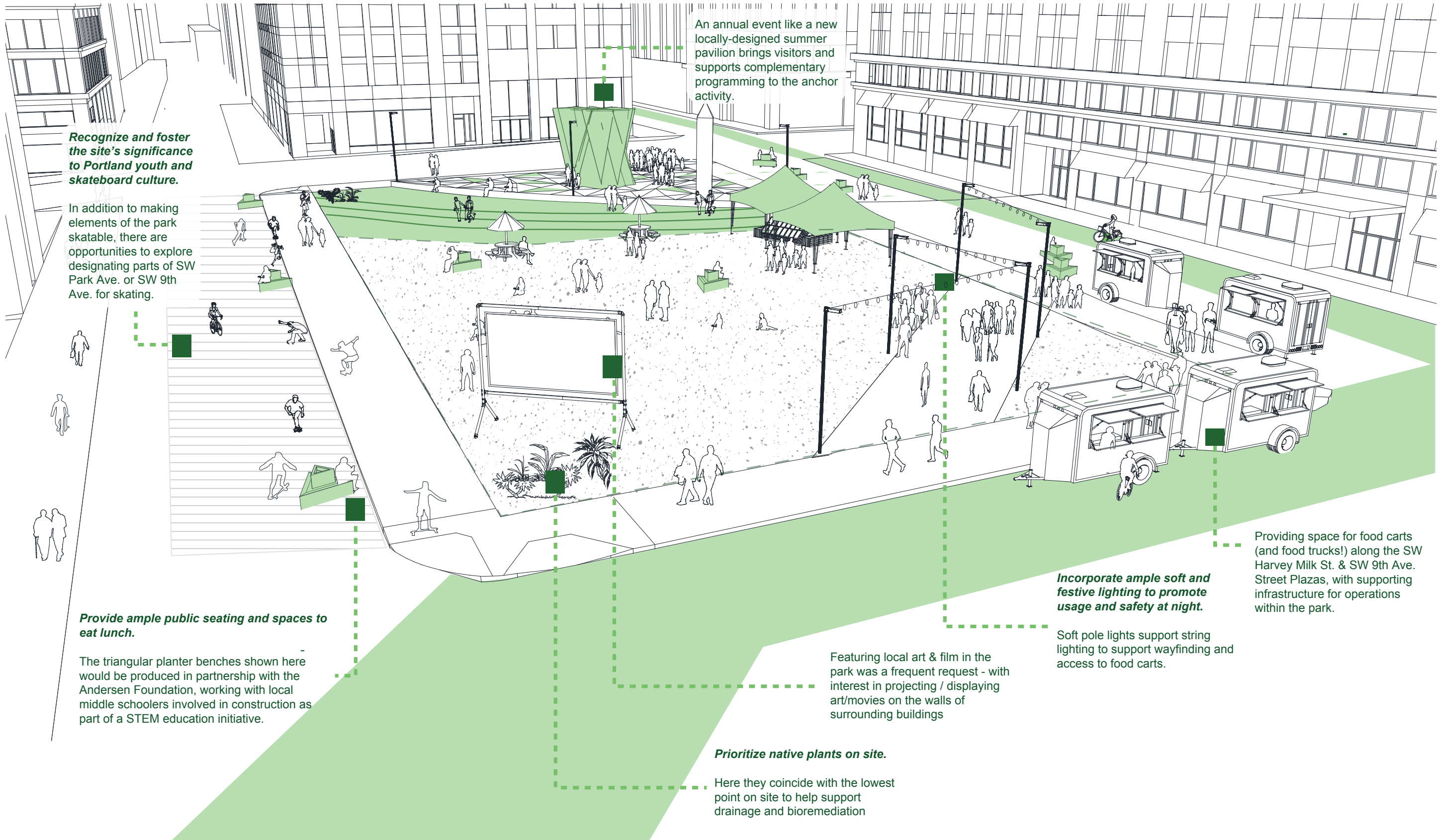
**Provide space and opportunity to use the park as a testing ground for new ideas and uses of public space downtown by Portlanders to inform long term planning.**

The elevated plaza at the SW corner of the site provides ongoing programming with community input.

Large area for an anchor activity. Examples that emerged in stakeholder outreach include an ice rink, skate/bike pump track, skate park/plaza, dog park, performance stage, beer garden, carousel, and pickleball.

A sloping lawn negotiates the site's topography (allowing flatter areas on the rest of the site), and creates a space for viewing performances, play, or dogs.





**Recognize and foster the site's significance to Portland youth and skateboard culture.**

In addition to making elements of the park skatable, there are opportunities to explore designating parts of SW Park Ave. or SW 9th Ave. for skating.

An annual event like a new locally-designed summer pavilion brings visitors and supports complementary programming to the anchor activity.

**Provide ample public seating and spaces to eat lunch.**

The triangular planter benches shown here would be produced in partnership with the Andersen Foundation, working with local middle schoolers involved in construction as part of a STEM education initiative.

**Prioritize native plants on site.**

Here they coincide with the lowest point on site to help support drainage and bioremediation

**Incorporate ample soft and festive lighting to promote usage and safety at night.**

Soft pole lights support string lighting to support wayfinding and access to food carts.

Providing space for food carts (and food trucks!) along the SW Harvey Milk St. & SW 9th Ave. Street Plazas, with supporting infrastructure for operations within the park.

Featuring local art & film in the park was a frequent request - with interest in projecting / displaying art/movies on the walls of surrounding buildings

# Anchor Programming

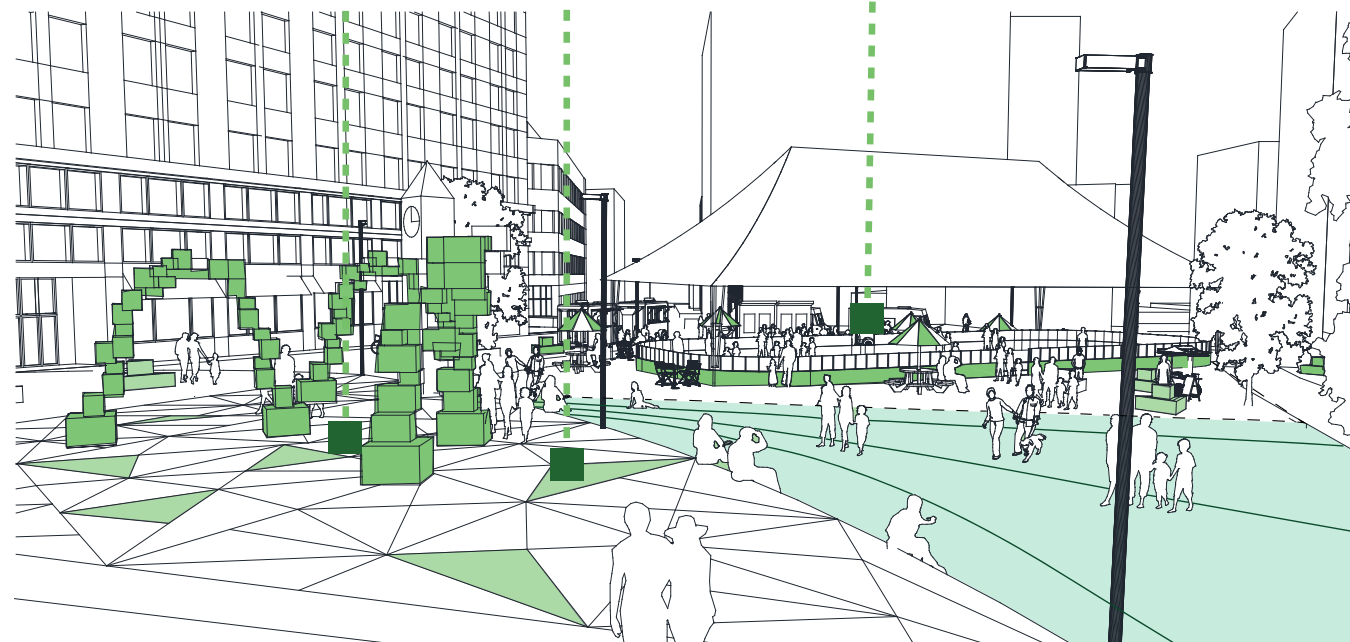
The Back to Square One initiative led to no shortage of ideas for the park, but several stood out for their potential impact, partnerships, enthusiasm behind the concept, feasibility, or frequency of times the idea was proposed (list below). While site elements are listed in the Assets & Values section above, it is clear that the success of the site will require ongoing stewardship from an organization or anchor tenant hosting/supporting ongoing programming (site activity). This anchor activity will benefit from complementary programming on other parts of the site that can introduce new visitors to the park.

- Dog Park
- Food Cart Pod
- Ice Skating Rink
- Skate Park / Plaza
- Concert / Stage
- Beer Garden
- Petting Zoo
- Pump Track (Skate/Bike)
- Pickleball
- Futsal Court
- Community Gardens
- Night/Seasonal Markets

The plaza and lawn can host complementary programming, as well as space for people to watch activities in the anchor space

While the ice rink (in this scenario) responds to seasonal conditions, activities in adjacent spaces should be programmed to support symbiotic use to cover all times of day and year.

Programming like an ice rink brings something new to downtown while aiming to overcome the challenge of keeping the park active during winter months



Food trucks are not currently allowed to operate in downtown Portland, but there is motivation to pilot the use of them in O'Bryant Square in recognition of the fact that they require far less infrastructure and fewer services than food carts.

Advocates for activities like pump tracks at O'Bryant Square point to their ability to promote recreation with minimal management or oversight. Additionally, their ability to be moved in the future and their connection to local skate and bike culture are seen as positives.

Park stewardship will be essential for the success of O'Bryant Square. A mix of managed and self-managed activities will provide opportunities for ongoing park use. Combined with episodic programming from partner organizations that continually test potential new uses of the site, this mixed strategy has the best chances for success in the short-term, while informing the preferred usage in the long term when the site receives permanent park infrastructure.

# Engagement & Outcomes

Insight into community engagement tools & feedback



## Major Themes



Visitors to a Back to Square One open house gather around engagement tools & discuss ideas

# Engagement Tools

The CPID and partners created a wide range of engagement strategies to support a community visioning around O’Bryant Square. This outreach included a public survey with over 300 responses, two community open houses with opportunities for idea generation and feedback, 6 webinars about the park with Q & A and chat features, and a charrette with local design professionals. Additionally, the group convened and met with 8 key stakeholder groups from the following categories: Arts & Culture, Property Owners, Downtown Youth, Retail / Food / Hospitality, Service Providers, Safety / Management / Maintenance, Behavioral Health Resource Center Clients, and Downtown Residents. Concentrated outreach took place between March 7-11, coinciding with the visitation of the following five Loeb Fellows offering expertise in public placemaking & processes.

- Christopher Calott, Berkeley Robert and Millicent Lalanne Chair of Real Estate Development, UC Berkeley.
- Susan Chin, NYC design consultant, former director of Design Trust for Public Spaces.
- Roger Cummings, Chief Culture Producer & Co-founder, Juxtaposition Arts based in Minneapolis.
- Damon Rich, Newark based designer, urban planner, and partner at Hector.
- Jennifer Siegal, founder of Office of Mobile Design, Los Angeles.

The Loeb Fellows worked with PPF and the CPID to facilitate discussions, frame design prompts, and synthesize stakeholder feedback over the course of these five days. An empty storefront directly off of O’Bryant Square was utilized as a headquarters for the convening teams and hosted two public open houses, design teams participating in the design charrette, an exhibition of design proposals, and a public conversation about the future of O’Bryant Square. The unfinished nature of the storefront (it is undergoing renovation) offered a flexibility of use that turned the once empty space into a vibrant and creative hub over the five days, reflecting the larger goals of creatively activating O’Bryant Square before a permanent design is in place.

The following summaries document insight gathered from each engagement strategy. In addition to the public survey and feedback from focus groups, engagement tools were utilized at the project headquarters to offer participants a range of ways to share their ideas and concerns in ways that responded to varying time constraints, comfortability with engagement, and preferences for interaction. Tools offered to visitors to the open houses at the project headquarters included:

- **“Wishing Wall”** that served as both an infographic of what kind of place people would like the future park to be, as well as a tool to document specific ideas/ comments
- **Was / Is / If**
  - \*What Was: Memories of the park
  - \*What Is: Observations about the



- current site and neighborhood
  - \*What If: Ideas for a future park
- Large **Chalkboard Model** where visitors could sketch their ideas
- **Precedent Cards** representing placemaking elements to help people brainstorm possibilities for O’Bryant Square
- Suggestions for **Renaming O’Bryant Square** to promote thinking about what history/values the park should reflect

- **Timeline of Temporary Activations** on which visitors could place ideas for temporary activations
- **Interviews** were offered to visitors hoping to share their experiences and thoughts in a more in-depth format.
- **Comment Cards** available to visitors to provide feedback on design proposals that were exhibited on March 11th.



## SURVEY

### Things that make you feel safe in public

- **Lighting - 281**
- **Other People - 270**
- **Adj. Business Activity - 245**
- **Vegetation - 194**
- **Programmed Activities - 146**
- **Security Cameras - 85**
- **Security (uniformed) - 80**
- **Cultural Representation - 78**
- **Security (non-uniformed) - 53**
- **Community Service - 14**

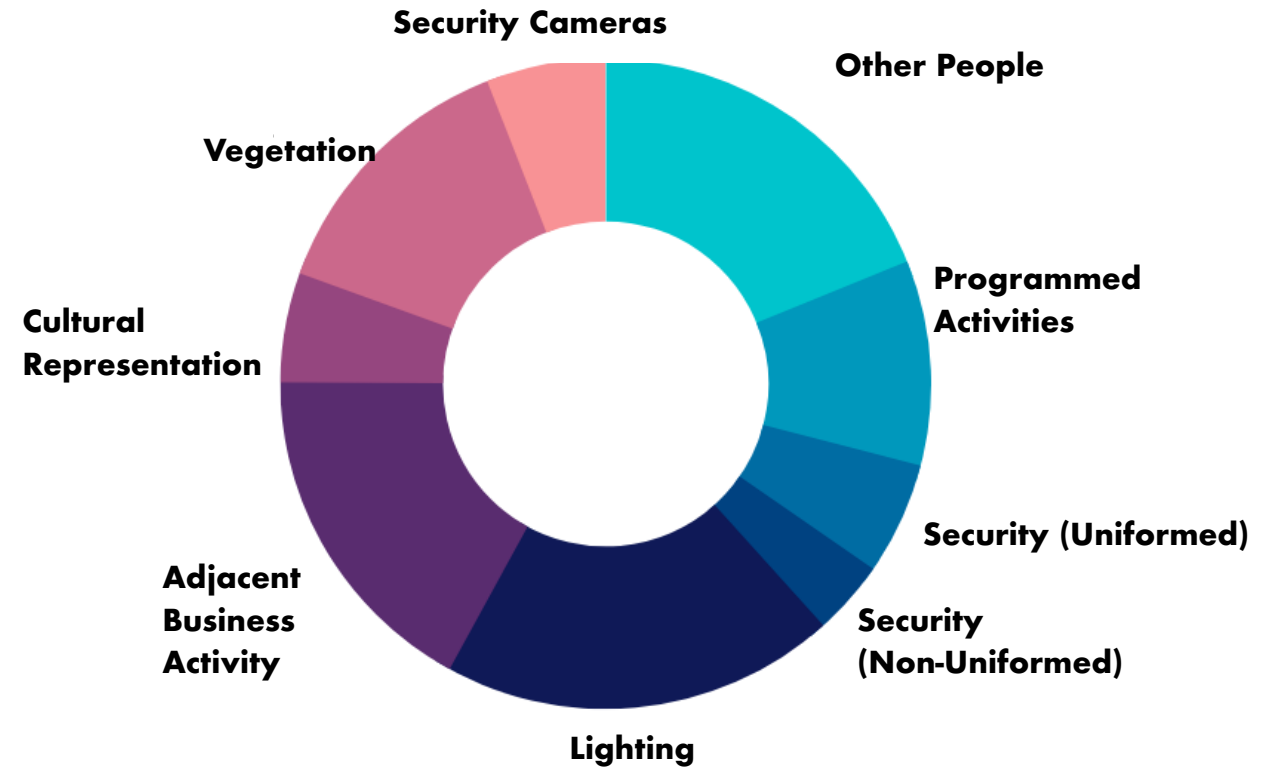
### Survey

The CPID created a public survey in collaboration with the Portland Parks Foundation and Portland Parks and Recreation. The goal of the survey was to gather feedback that can inform both the March design workshops and long term visioning of the park.

The survey received nearly 400 responses over a two month period between 2.1.23 and 4.1.23. The survey was advertised and promoted in conjunction with PPF's Green Dreams Lecture Series, shared on social media by groups like Friends of O'Bryant Square, and linked to PPF and CPID's websites.

Approximately 25% of respondents self-identified as neighbors of the park, with 51% identifying as park enthusiasts and 68% as Portlander interested in what is happening. Respondents were diverse by age range and fairly equally distributed across age categories between 12 and 75. 80% of respondents identified as white (higher than the general population of 72% in Multnomah County), so additional work is required to ensure that the voices of communities of color are fully represented.

### Things that make you feel safe in public space (select all that apply):



The words most commonly used to express a desire for future parks (in order) included:

- Food / Carts / Lunch
- Nature / Garden / Greenery / Vegetation
- Places for sitting / seating / benches
- Art / Music / Concert / Entertainment
- Recreation - Skate / Playground / Sports

For a temporary uses at the park, the most requested ideas were:

- Food / Carts / Lunch
- Art / Music / Theater / Dance
- Farmers / Holiday Markets

Comments around safety, metrics for success, and challenges for the park all focused largely on the presence of homeless camping and illicit drug sales and use on the site.



# WISHING WALL

## A Place For...

- **Gathering - 37**
- **Nature (Green Space) - 32**
- **Entertainment - 21**
- **Night Use - 21**
- **Play/Recreation - 20**
- **Rest - 16**
- **Community Service - 14**

**[Total responses: 161]**

## WISHING WALL

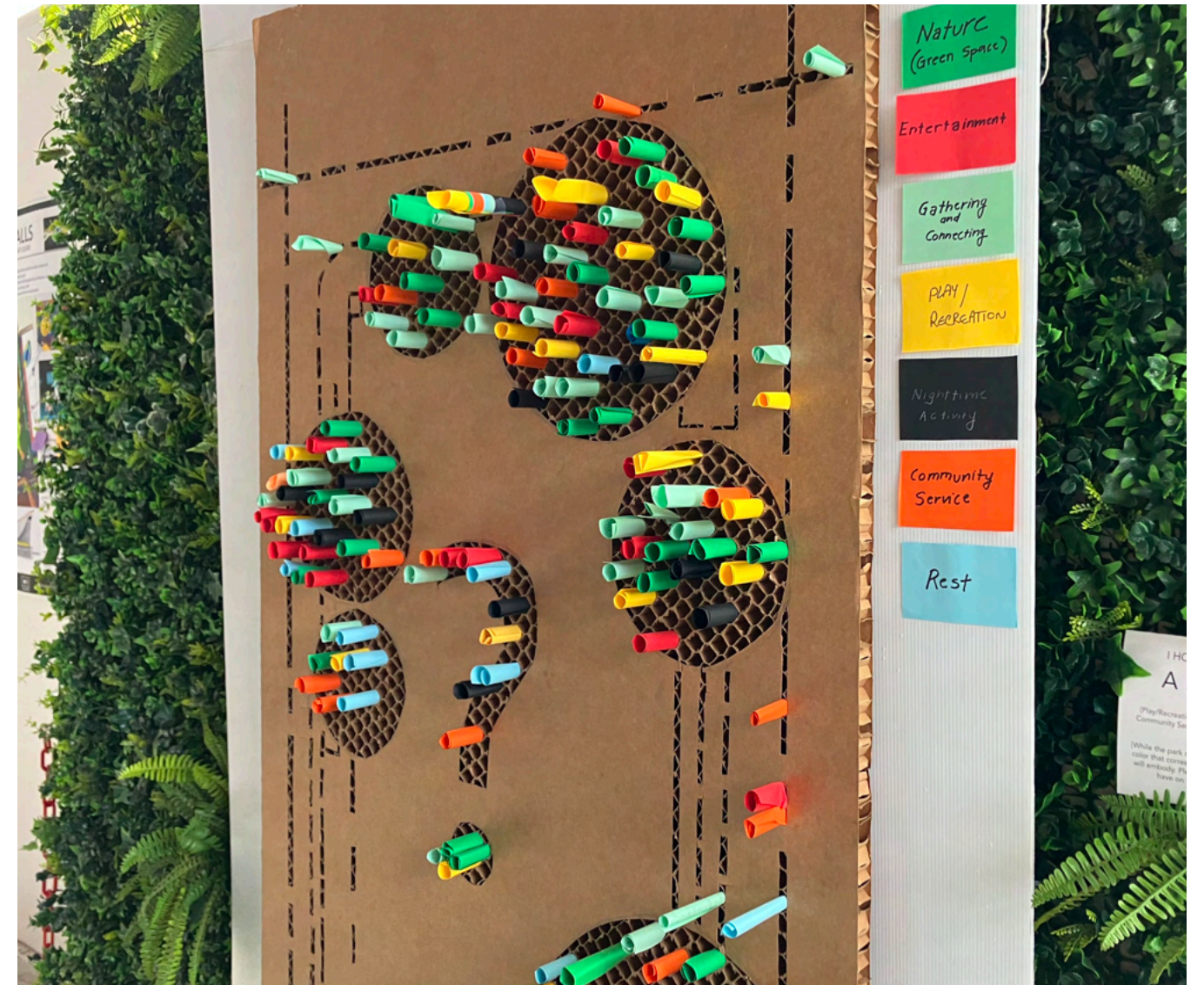
The wishing wall activity provided a changing physical infographic that allowed visitors to quickly voice their opinion by choice of color representing a category, and provide more specificity by writing on the card if they so desired. Importantly, the way in which this information was collected allowed visitors to see what was important to other people in their community by making the information collection process fully transparent.

### Activity Instructions:

I HOPE THAT THE PARK WILL BE  
A PLACE FOR...

*Play/Recreation, Rest, Gathering/  
Connecting, Entertainment, Community  
Service, Accessing Nature/Green Space,  
Night Use.*

While the park may serve different purposes, please choose ONE color that corresponds to a characteristic that you hope the space will embody. Please write on the paper any specific thoughts you have on that category before placing it in the wall.



These categories were very similar to those asked in the survey, but were adapted to reflect interests expressed by survey respondents not previously represented. Themes that came up frequently in comments on the cards included a desire for: a night market, friendly lighting, skateboarding, access to nature (trees, gardens, running water) that promote calm, inviting spaces to eat, and live music.



# RENAME THE PARK

## Preferences for names that:

- Emphasizes Portland’s values (34%)
- Reflects site history (32%)
- Embeds use of park in name (15%)

## Portlanders commonly mentioned to honor:

- Bud Clark
- Minoru Yasui
- Mulugeta Serew
- Vera Katz
- Darcelle

“Park Block One” most chosen

## RENAME THE PARK

### Activity Instructions:

[O’Bryant Square was named for Portland’s first mayor who only spent one year in office due to a failure of governance, leading to a new city charter in 1852. Some have advocated for renaming the park. What would you rename the park? While there are currently no formal plans to give the park a new name, this activity can help identify how people, history, culture, site context, and/or values are incorporated into the new park.]

Total Responses: 52

There were 13 proposals honoring Portlanders included:  
 Bud Clark (5), Minoru Yasui (3), Mulugeta Serew, Vera Katz, and Darcelle (Walter Cole)

The remaining 39 responses largely reflected values/site/city/history, with the largest number of votes (6 votes) for Park Block One (or variations thereof).



### Key opportunities associated with considering a new park name:

- Reset branding of the park
- Provides a sense of possibility, starting over, while referencing original intention with names like Park Block 1 or similar
- Honor LGBTQ+ identity with names such as “Darcelle Square”
- Focused community engagement in naming that builds ownership of park





# ACTIVATION TIMELINE

## Suggested Uses:

Wine-tasting, caroling/choir/singing, dog shows, nature play, pop-up plant sales, free walls for street art, skate park, diagonal walking paths, water activities, seasonal sales, dancing, storytelling, health clinics, coffee, free event space, walking labyrinth, Juneteenth, movies in the park, new year party central, bike parking, reading events partnering with Powell's and literary arts, pet parades and pet adoption, board games and recreation games for self-activation, Urban Gleaners event sign-up, Survival supplies hand-out, book swap, folk dancing, Portland's Lounge, Urban farming demonstration...

## ACTIVATION TIMELINE

This activity was intended to encourage participants to think about what temporary activations they might like to see in the park at various times of year and what local organizations might make good partners / activation agents.

### Activity Instructions:

What temporary activations would you like to see in the park? What Portland organizations should we reach out to about hosting an activation/event in the park? If YOU personally hosted an event, what would it be given your interests, skills, and networks? Please add your thoughts to the board with the activation timeline

### Specific partnerships for activations suggested through this activity:

- Community Sings, Professor Coty Raven Morris (Music + Social Justice)
- Public mural space with Portland Street Art Alliance
- Opera in the park with Opera a la Cart, Portland Opera
- Solitary Gardens with Jackie Sumell
- Create App for reservations with PSU Computer Science Students
- Outdoor Board Game Day with Mox Boarding House
- The Jantzen Beach Carousel





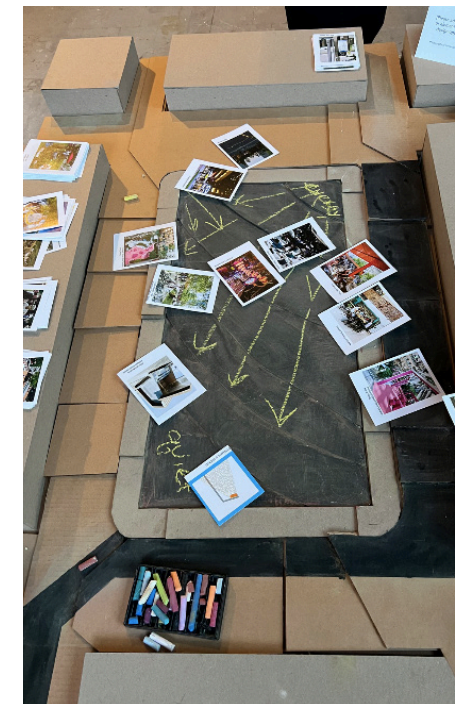
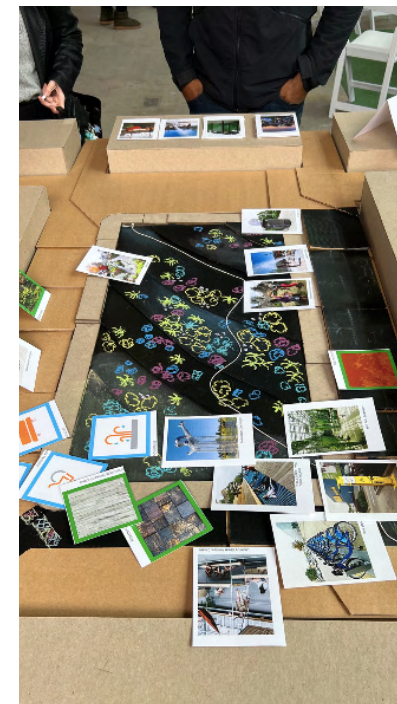
# CHALKBOARD MODEL

## CHALKBOARD MODEL

The large chalkboard model was used to help participants communicate design ideas for the park holistically and in relation to the specific context of the site. A chalkboard surface over the site model was intended to make interaction with the tool more inviting and lower the expectation of precision or drawing skill associated with other types of visual communication. Furthermore, the chalkboard area extended into the areas designated as Green Loop / street plaza, emphasizing the need to consider the park in relation to these important conditions. Precedent cards were present at the model to further decrease barriers for interaction, and participants were invited to place precedents of their choice in areas of the park that they found most appropriate.

### Activity Instructions:

Please add words, sketches, images, or elements to the model to explore design opportunities for the park.





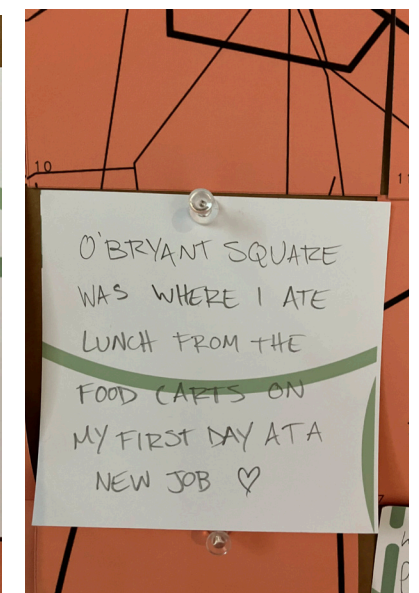
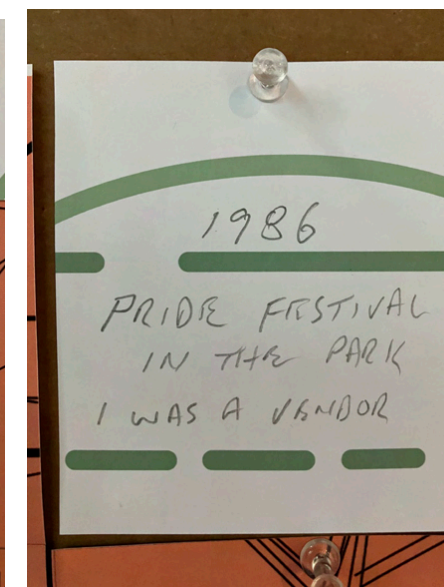
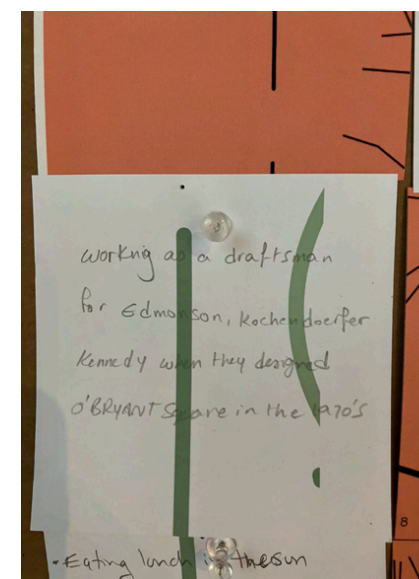
## WAS / IS / IF

### WAS / IS / IF

This activity aimed to promote consideration for the park's past, present, and future. As participants responded to each prompt, they flipped over a site plan of the current park to gradually reveal the outline of the blank slate ("park ready") park that will remain after demolition. Participants reflected on the past vibrancy of the park as a place to gather, eat lunch, celebrate, and pass through while working downtown. Observations about the present park commonly noted a lack of safety & maintenance, a need to make the park more accessible and inclusive, and the possibility of the park differentiating itself from Pioneer Courthouse Square and Director Park by serving as a significant public space and Green Loop connector. Aspirations for the park included creating a space for dogs, food, nature, people experiencing homelessness, and entertainment.

#### Activity Instructions:

Please share a memory (what was), an observation (what is), and an aspirational idea for the park (what if) by flipping over the cards and writing on the backside.



# Focus Groups

Focus groups with 8 key stakeholder groups were held March 7 - 8, 2023, with representatives from Portland Parks Foundation, Center for Public Interest Design, and Harvard Loeb Fellows attending and supporting facilitation of each meeting. The stakeholder groups included representatives from the following categories: Arts & Culture, Property Owners, Downtown Youth, Retail / Food / Hospitality, Service Providers, Safety / Management / Maintenance, Behavioral Health Resource Center Clients, and Downtown Residents. Each focus group lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The following summaries represent key themes from each discussion, but there is a wealth of information regarding specific ideas, precedents, and reflections that we will continue to unpack and document in the coming months.

## **DOWNTOWN YOUTH (Pear)**

Tuesday, March 7th, 2023, 11:30 AM

10 community members & Pear Director + 5 members of convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Harm Reduction Amenities (Pragmatism): - participants were very vocal about “this is going to happen anyways” referring to drug use and houseless sheltering/resting - so how can the park be planned with material means to work with the inevitable uses of the park - Use of partnerships that understand the target populations, rather than traditional law enforcement.
- Separation but Centrality: - creating a sense of separation for different types of users - but a sense of/place for gathering that is accessible - accessibility, a place for convening.
- Materiality: - soft/spongy surfaces for comfort, walking surfaces, but appropriate for different uses in different parts of the park - e.g. skating-appropriate surfaces vs. walking or resting).
- Night Use: - houseless and those in mental crisis want to feel safe at night, too; - good lighting and accessibility help

## **PROPERTY OWNERS**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 8:00 AM

15 PARTICIPANTS representing Property Owners and convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Property owners #1 desire is more safety and protection
- Property owners have tried to pressure City to invest more in downtown, but they feel pushback
- Feel they have already paid a lot and can't contribute more, but there are opportunities to activate their buildings
- Public space is top priority for Commissioner Ryan
- Well-lit, manicured landscape preferred over activations
- PDX needs a rebrand; O'Bryant can make or break downtown
- Steering Committee: All property owners are interested

## **ARTS & CULTURE**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 11:00 AM

35 Participants representing Arts & Culture organizations, PBOT, and convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Accessibility and Inclusion should be a priority from programming to site/virtual design
- Strong support for the idea of temporary activations with art organizations
- In order for this to be an effective space for art activation there must be electricity, wifi, easy permit process, & clearly communicated amenities to be used by orgs (ex: chairs, tables, storage shed, pop-up tents)
- Opportunity for revolving murals made on and around the site
- There is interest in having these activations lead to unexpected partnerships between orgs or artists.
- There needs to be a clear convening organization to coordinate and curate process.
- Enthusiasm for potential annual arts festival/initiatives that may emerge paralleling precedents shared by the group.

# Focus Groups (continued)

## **SAFETY / MANAGEMENT / MAINTENANCE**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 12:00 PM

24 Participants from neighboring organizations, City representatives, and convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- City code needs to be changed so we can better manage camping and bad behavior in public space
- Partnership between safety, maintenance, and management is needed to make O'Bryant work
- Management and operations should be overseen by entity (Portland Mall Management as good model)

## **DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 5:30 PM

10 Participants including residents and members of the convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Green space is needed for downtown neighbors since they don't have lawns
- Spontaneous recreation and individual use chairs to sit are desired
- Storytelling is great way to show visitors places in Portland
- Safety from unpredictable violence + pedestrian safety is important

## **RETAIL / FOOD / HOSPITALITY**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 2:30 PM

15 Participants including local business operators and members of the convening group.

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Fees and regulations push out food vendors and events; business coalition to come together and pressure city to relax regulations.
- Need a dedicated manager to oversee programming and operations
- Food cart business is coming back but new infrastructure regulations are making it hard for them to operate; Ritz food carts will be good for everyone
- A few participants against bringing food carts back to the Square; want something new
- Tourism dead; need to think of activating Square as an organic "Instagrammable" spot to change image and make people want to stop and take pictures in space
- Architecture teams and Loeb Fellows should think about fencing/borders

## **Behavioral Health Resource Center**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2023, 2:30 PM

11 Residents from the BHRC + 4 members of the convening group

### DISCUSSION THEMES:

- Community members of the BHRC would like to be involved with construction and/or maintenance of O'Bryant Square.
- Community Members felt that BHRC, The Portland Art Museum, homeless people, or a council comprised of these organizations would be trusted to own and/or operate O'Bryant Square.
- To feel welcomed and included, community members stated that it was important to them for the park to:
  - o Remain open at night
  - o Be able to participate in activities
  - o Be run by trusted organizations and/or people
  - o Members of other communities (Condo owners at Ritz Carlton) to have mutual respect and understanding for the lived experiences of BHRC community
- BHRC members felt that the following would be useful temporary park programming that would serve their community:
  - o Mobile shower units
  - o Narcan station
  - o Blanket exchange
  - o Community Art groups
  - o Seasonal Essentials
- BHRC members felt that the following would be useful permanent park programming that would serve their community:
  - o Bathroom
  - o Water fountain
  - o Trash Cans
  - o Charging station with lockers
  - o Lockers to store belongings during the day while working/finding work
  - o Medical shed with essential items
  - o Community garden
  - o Community art space where street art is permitted
  - o Music Venue
  - o Movies in the Park
  - o Place for fundraising
  - o Bulletin board for community information
  - o Booth to sell hot water at night
  - o Community Feed (Currently Sunday Feed)
  - o Park Attendants who may also represent BHRC
  - o Dog run or relief station
  - o Mini golf

# Next Steps

Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) issued a Request for Information in June (2023) with the goal of identifying a partner to assist in the design, implementation, and operation of an interim entertainment and recreation venue that can facilitate events and activate the downtown area. PP&R is specifically interested in engaging in negotiations for a non-exclusive licensing agreement spanning 3-5 years, with a partner(s) willing to provide up to as many as 150 public and private events and/or activations each year.

The Center for Public Interest Design will continue to work with project partners to ensure that community feedback is integrated into plans for O'Bryant Square, and provide ongoing design support in the event that alternative plans are needed.