



## Memorandum

To: Salt Lake City Historic Landmark Commission

From: Nancy Monteith, Senior Landscape Architect (Engineering)  
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Date: March 3, 2022

Re: Pioneer Park Vision Plan

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**SUBJECT:** Pioneer Park Vision Plan

**ACTION:** No action required.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Briefing

**BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:**

The Public Lands Department developed a Vision Plan in 2021 and 2022 to guide long-term improvements to Pioneer Park. Project team staff are presenting the Vision Plan to the Historic Landmark Commission to inform of the Vision Plan elements and to seek feedback from the Commission as we move towards the completion of the final concept. Feedback received by Historic Landmark Commission will be evaluated by the project team and incorporated to the greatest extent possible into the final Vision Plan. Requested input from the Commission may include but is not limited to favorable features of the Vision Plan, potential concerns with the Plan, and any foreseeable issues that may arise with the plan as the project team moves forward with Plan approval. Public Lands and Engineering staff will return to the Historic Landmark Commission for review and final approval of the Vision Plan at a later date. The final Vision Plan will a long-term vision that will guide near and long-term improvements to the park. Proposed improvements are intended to align with findings and treatment recommendations included in the recently completed Cultural Landscape Report, which was presented to the Historic Landmark Commission in February of 2022. The Cultural Landscape Report is a document providing the historic significance of the Park and provides recommendations for future treatment. The Vision Plan considers treatment recommendations while outlining capital improvements for the future. The Vision Plan is based on extensive stakeholder and community engagement, review of precedents set by other cities nationwide, and consideration of site history, historically significant park elements, and treatment recommendations outlined in the Cultural Landscape Report for Pioneer Park.

Throughout its history, the landscape of the Pioneer Park study area has been influenced by diverse groups of people from Indigenous Peoples to Mormon Pioneers, to subsequent waves of City residents – including immigrants, unhoused communities, business owners, politicians, and more. Pioneer Park is listed a Salt

Lake City Landmark and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Pioneer Park is Salt Lake City's only community-sized downtown park, serving immediate downtown neighbors, Salt Lake City residents and the entire region as a green oasis in the central city neighborhood. Community dissatisfaction with the park continues to activate discussion about how to improve the park so that it can be a community asset. This consistent interest in improvement over the last twenty years has resulted in community activism and several planning efforts for improvements to the park. Funding for previous improvements has been modest with just over \$3,000,000 dollars of capital improvements made in the last two decades. In 2019, City Council approved a budget amendment for \$3,445,000 of impact fee capital investments in the park. Planning for this next round of investments is underway but more funding is needed. With the progress made so far, the project is ready for the development of technical drawings and construction of phase 1 select features in the park. Park elements that will be included in phase 1 will be influenced by the public survey that closed February 18<sup>th</sup> and by the amount of funding available. Due to the large scale of this project, only a small portion of the full build-out will be able to be constructed with currently allocated development impact fees. Initial cost estimates show a full-build of the current concept coming in at \$20 million.

**VISION PLANNING PROCESS:** The city hired a planning and design consultant, Design Workshop, to create a vision plan for the park--Your Downtown Park. In early 2021, the planning team began with a thorough review and analysis of past process outcomes and feedback, then incorporated data about the changes in demographics, housing, development, and other information about the area within a 15-minute walk of Pioneer Park. Stakeholder engagement started in April of 2021 with public engagement persisting throughout the summer event season in the Park. The planning team also coordinated with the Cultural Landscape consultants as their studies ran concurrently and incorporated findings from the Cultural Landscape Report to create a vision that aligns with the treatment recommendations.

**ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY:** The concept team met with stakeholders engaged in previous planning efforts, current area residents, business owners and other stakeholders like the Downtown Community Council, Downtown Alliance, Pioneer Park Coalition, Homeless Service Providers, Farmer's Market, and other City staff to assess current needs of the downtown community at multiple phases throughout the planning and visioning process. In summer 2021, the team opened a survey asking Salt Lake City residents to provide input via an online survey. In addition, the team provided the same questions in-person to attendees of six events including the Downtown Farmer's Market, Food Truck Night and Field Day/Movie Night all held in the Park. Nearly 2850 respondents (over 1800 online and over 1000 in-person) identified their preferences for the park including amenity type, balance of active and passive spaces, potential configurations for the park and other park elements. The feedback informed concept development, which was then workshopped with area stakeholders and City staff. Their input was used to refine the layout, features, and proposed locations of amenities and park elements. In total, the project team held nine stakeholder meetings and workshops throughout this window of public engagement.

#### **CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FINDINGS:**

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Pioneer Park is one of Salt Lake City's oldest and most continuously used public spaces. The Park is significant for its association with Indigenous, Old Fort, Americanization, and Civic Periods (described in detail in the report).

**INTEGRITY:** The Park retains integrity of location for all historical periods, and retains integrity of setting,

materials, feeling, and association for the Americanization and Civic Periods. The Park, however, has undergone such significant change since its inception, very few existing physical park features retain historic integrity. Park facilities have come and gone with changing recreation trends and improvements. The Park has been maintained as a public recreation site throughout historical periods, and the Vision Plan proposes a program, use, and activity that responds to recent community input and is sensitive to the recreational nature of the park. In addition, the Vision Plan builds upon historic vegetative elements in the park protecting the majority of the existing trees and adding new trees and adding canopy to the park.

**TREATMENT:** Based on the significance and integrity of the park, the treatment approach provided for the park in the Cultural Landscape Report is [rehabilitation](#). The rehabilitation approach provides for preservation of the remaining landscape features “which convey [the park’s] historical, cultural, or architectural values,” while allowing for compatible improvements.

**HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL VALUES:** Pioneer Park is a historically significant site for its association with the Indigenous, Old Fort, Americanization, and Civic Periods, but retains minimal integrity after generations of changes to the landscape. It retains partial integrity to both the Americanization and Civic Periods, related to land use, circulation (diagonal patterns of circulation), and vegetation (turfgrass, interior mature trees, and park perimeter trees). This treatment approach of rehabilitation will allow for preservation of contributing historic resources as well as the alteration of non-contributing landscape characteristics to accommodate changes to the park.

**ARCHITECTURAL VALUES:** Recommendations made for architectural values include compatible massing and scaling of structures with historical architectural styles, without seeking to reconstruct or recreate structures that no longer exist. Small scale features should have minimal impacts visually. This treatment approach of rehabilitation will allow for open sightlines to remain throughout the park while minimizing visual impacts, as well as allowing for the alteration of non-contributing characteristic to accommodate changes to the park.

## **VISION PLAN:**

The proposed vision plan is described in response to the treatment recommendations and narrative design guidelines developed in the Pioneer Park Cultural Landscape Report. Key recommendations for the Cultural Landscape Report are included as a preface to the description of proposed improvements.

### **1. Treatment recommendations for Topography:** *Preserve contributing topographic features:*

- Maintain generally flat topography of the site
- Maintain existing sightlines across the park
- Avoid creating landform that block sightlines
- Low impact development strategies may be implemented provided that the swale is shallow and wide and does not interrupt the sightlines

**Proposed improvements:** The Vision Plan retains flat topography and visual sight lines across the park. The garden ribbon follows the natural topography from the NE Corner to the SE corner, utilizing the existing slope to direct stormwater to planting areas with low growing waterwise ornamentals. See Attachment A.

### **2. Treatment recommendations for Circulation:** *Preserve Sidewalks and mid-block circulation patterns:*

- Maintain sidewalk circulation patterns around the perimeter of the block
- Retain adequate soil volumes for large tree plantings between sidewalk and curb

- Maintain cardinal direction pathways beginning at the midpoints of the block and extending inward on the west, north and east sides of the park
- Maintain diagonal pathways beginning at the corners of the block and extending inward

**Proposed improvements:** The Vision Plan builds on the historic circulation patterns with park entries at the cardinal directions of the west, north, and east sides of the park and the corners. Circulation paths originate at the seven locations and go towards the center of the park, maintaining cardinal and diagonal pathways. The perimeter sidewalks are maintained and soil volumes for large tree plantings are retained.

**3. Treatment recommendations for Vegetation:** *Preserve contributing vegetation features:*

- Minimize use of inorganic and impermeable surfaces to no more than 25% of the park.
- Maintain use of mown lawn as a predominant groundcover on the site, consistent with the Americanization and Civic Periods. Water-wise plants are an appropriate adaptation.
- Protect and manage trees to prolong their lifespan
- Continue the use of shade trees in a variety of forms and size to create contrast as the predominant trees on the site consistent with the Americanization and Civic Periods.
- Maintain and enhance the perimeter of the park by preserving existing sidewalks, park strips, and street trees, including maintaining the existing American Elms on the west perimeter.

Contributing vegetation resources at Pioneer Park include the established trees from the Americanization and Civic Periods. The Park has had a predominant groundcover of mown lawn, perimeter trees and the scattered shade trees and open habit evergreens

**Proposed improvements:** The Vision Plan builds upon historic vegetative features in the park by retaining and protecting 85% of existing tree count, and will add roughly 90 trees to the park, increasing the current canopy by 29%, and by maintaining the mown lawn and adding enhanced pockets of native vegetation and maintaining perimeter trees.

**PARK SURFACE TREATMENTS:** The proposed plan maintains large areas of mown lawn and scattered shade trees. To add more botanic diversity, the plan includes a garden ribbon, planted with low-growing water-wise ornamental plants, to detain stormwater generated on site. The shallow swales make use of the existing grade and collect water generated from adjacent impervious surfaces. Planting ribbons, natural landscaping and biodiversity were also listed as passive feature priorities by the public during engagement. Planting design will intentionally include water-wise/drought tolerant, native plantings and will take advantage of the natural topography of the site, where water flows from the northeast corner to the southwest corner. Planting groups that favor more moisture will be placed in response to the natural slope for designed irrigation or rain events. This strategic addition will respond to the increased hardscape and impervious surface added to the park on this plan.

Consideration has been given to minimizing the amount of hardscape to be added, with basketball courts and other features to be a replacement of current impervious surfaces. The Vision Plan currently shows the maximum number of pickleball courts that could be accommodated, but further refinement from public input and funding availability may change this amount of impervious cover proposed.

**EXISTING TREES:** Trees and shade are important assets to any park, but particularly to a downtown park. The concept does impact a few trees, but limits tree removal whenever possible, retaining 85% of the current trees in the park. It also adds opportunities for small tree groves distributed in multiple locations around the park. The project team has worked with the Salt Lake City Urban Forestry Division to assess the health of trees and identified those that are unhealthy or approaching the end of their life for removal. Salt Lake City Public Lands has committed to replacing more trees in the park than are removed, which is reflected in the

current concept with the addition of approximately 90 new trees.

**PERIMETER TREES:** Trees around the perimeter of the park are significant and retain integrity. The vision plan preserves and protects the trees along the perimeter, except for along 300 South. The trees are younger and are in poor condition. The design proposes a newly planted Allee along this streetscape to reinforce the spatial composition and restore the formal perimeter planting.

#### **4. Compatible Alterations and Additions**

A hallmark of the Americanization period is the goal of bringing people together and this vision plan incorporates a new civic plaza, pavilion and recreation amenities and uses to create an active and welcoming public place. Aside from the perimeter tree planting that defines the edges of the site and circulation patterns, the park has changed dramatically over the years as a response to changing recreation interests and neighborhood demographics. The Cultural Landscape Report states new additions to the park should not harm the contributing resources that have been identified:

- New additions or alterations to the park should preserve the contributing landscape features identified
- New features shall be differentiated from the original landscape features in design
- Structures should be compatible with the scale and massing with the historical architectural styles that originally appeared on the site but should not seek to re-construct or otherwise re-create structures that no longer exist.
- Small scale features should be consistent in style and have minimal visual impact.

The Cultural Landscape Report also recommends the development of an archaeological discovery plan, an approach for which will be identified in the future. Through the implementation of the vision plan, disturbances deeper than base sod will include an archaeological review per recommendation of the report.

**Proposed Improvements:** The Vision Plan proposes structures, additions and amenities that maintain and preserve the contributing landscape features. The features proposed will be designed in a way that differentiates them from the original style and features of the park, and they will be compatible with, but not replicate, historical architectural styles in terms of scale and visual impact. The features and amenities that this vision plan proposes have been determined through public engagement. Architectural style and materialization of the features and amenities will be developed during the technical design and will be compatible with the recommendations outlined in the Cultural Landscape Report to the greatest extent possible.

**RECREATION AMENITIES:** During our public engagement process during summer of 2021 and stakeholder workshops in the fall, the project team heard that a variety of activities and a balance of features highlighting play and rest were important to park users and neighbors alike. The concept that has been developed provides opportunities for active play with a basketball and six pickleball courts, an all-ages playground, lawn game rental kiosk, and an enhanced dog-park. At the same time a shaded lawn, multiple seating areas, native plantings and tree groves offer a variety of places to relax. Finally, the most recent addition to the park, the multipurpose field, will remain the focus of the southern portion of the park.

**PAVILION:** A new signature pavilion/ shade structure acts as a focal point of the park. It offers the opportunity for small to mid-sized events when utilizing the plaza or larger-scale events when facing the great lawn. The pavilion is open and visually light on the landscape. It spans the width of the plaza and unifies the three proposed structures. The layout of the pavilion and plaza offers a number of event

staging options. A small event can be contained under the pavilion; a mid-sized performance can be staged under the pavilion with the audience on the plaza to the north of the pavilion; and a large event could be staged under the pavilion with the audience positioned on the multi-use field. Architectural style and materialization of the plaza and pavilion, and associated furnishings will be developed during the technical design and compatible with the recommendations outlined in the Cultural Landscape Report to the greatest extent possible.

**RESTROOM, CAFÉ, PARK RANGER STATION:** Under the pavilion roof, this plan adds a state-of-the-art restroom located adjacent to the most active area of the park – near the proposed café, park ranger station and plaza where the park amenities may remain most accessible and visible to park users. Rather than one large building, the plan proposes three small structures located near one another so that their visual impact is minimized and to maintain visual access across and through the park. Cost, maintenance, and infrastructure requirements are all important considerations that will be addressed in more detail in the design phase.

**ECOLOGICAL ELEMENTS:** Water features were identified as important amenities by the public throughout the planning process. The Cultural Landscape Report for Pioneer Park also notes that fresh-water springs drew Native Americans and the pioneers to this site. The Vision Plan proposes a misting feature to honor the springs and make water visible. “The Source,” is a sculptural feature that uses misting feature at key times throughout the season to add a water experience while being mindful of the arid climate in which we live, and the increased frequency and effects of drought. This feature will be interactive and will anchor the plaza feature.

## **5. Interpretation**

Future studies will explore how to incorporate historic interpretation on the site either through interpretive panels, art, or other integrated strategies. The project team will work to utilize the information provided in the Cultural Landscape Report to integrate the history and story of Pioneer Park on-site.

## **NEXT STEPS:**

Public Lands consultant team will begin development of construction documents for the first phase of improvements to Pioneer Park. Feedback gathered from a most recent public survey soliciting implementation priorities from the community will be considered in the phased development of introducing park features and amenities. The design team will refine the architectural design style and materialization of park structures and amenities. Plant and tree species will be determined, and historic interpretive strategies explored. The design team will also work with the Urban Forestry Division of the Salt Lake City Public Lands Department to determine the health of existing trees in the park and begin discussions and development of a tree succession plan. Finally, at a future date, Public Lands will work to develop an archaeological discovery plan, as recommended by the Cultural Landscape Report.

Public Lands and Engineering staff will return to Historic Landmark Commission for review and final approval of the Vision Plan. Cost, maintenance, operations, and infrastructure requirements are all important considerations that will be addressed in detail throughout the technical design period. Design development will further define architectural style and materialization of the implementation of elements.

For more information about the vision plan and “Your Downtown Park,” including a project video and vision plan overview, please visit: <https://www.slc.gov/parks/pioneer-park-improvements/>.