

## Mason Center Development Public Comments

---

Madam Mayor, Councilors, City Staff Members,

With work beginning on demolition of the Mason building, there is increasing concern in the historic district about the future of the site. Members of our Association have heard that various proposals are or will be offered for new housing or a mixed-use building there.

The rest of the site already is a rare and valuable recreational space used on a daily basis by school children and tennis players. With the loss of park space at the city's sewer plant and questions about the future of Buckley Park, Durango more than ever needs enhancement of its green space. Such land, already in short supply, provides space for use by the entire community not just members of the immediate neighborhood.

We believe nothing could be more destructive than adding density at the one place recreational land already exists. For that reason, the Boulevard Neighborhood Association members strongly advocate replacing the Mason building with open space for aesthetic and recreational purposes. We look forward to further discussion of this important matter.

BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Tony Rocha, President;

Karen Anesi, Mike Todt, Jim Foster, Tom Darnell, Board of Directors

---

January 10, 2021

Hi Cathy and staff--This is Dave Mehan and Julie Meadows who live on the north side of the Mason Center Park. We are unable to attend the Zoom the meeting on 1/21, so we want to provide you with our thoughts here, just in case. First of all, and as you know, the future of this property is really important to us for our quality of life and future home value. And, we appreciate the City involving us neighbors in the planning process, with the call as the first step.

Some backdrop....Since we moved into our house on 13th St in 2013, we have seen some not-so-good (for us) changes to the hood and the park. First of all, it is our understanding that the City allowed an increase in office space and use of the Smiley Building--converting the auditorium into offices, the cafe, etc--but did not require the private owner to have to provide more parking. So, 13th St is the new parking lot for the Smiley Building! Secondly, several charter schools and a Montessori school hatched in the hood; they did not have their own play grounds (which they should if this is an essential part of the school), but the City let the park be their facility. So, now we can have screaming kids in the park for hours 5 days of the week!

We think this background is important for the future of the Mason Center/park. To maintain the character of the park, as originally created, and maybe address some of the recent changes we, above all, beg the City to keep it a passive, quiet park. No pickleball courts; no new pavillion for use; no concerts like in Buckley Park; no other uses like housing....Basically, tear down the old building and do a nice landscaping job. Scott Mc can help with that! And no more uses that require more parking (see above). Or provide parking--though not for Smiley--you need to make them use their space for more parking and the Montessori school that needs (!) a play space. And no uses which require lighting.

Other possible uses that we think would be compatible include a community garden with limited hours... and another tennis court would be OK. Also maybe things like a horseshoe pit (s); volley ball court; bacchi ball field.

What does the City have in mind? I don't see any reference to a plan or goals on your website, but you must have some ideas. It would be helpful to know before this call/meeting.

We do hope to participate in the call on 1/21, but in case we can't, we really hope the City reads this email and integrates our thoughts into the planning process. Thanks!

Dave Mehan and Julie Meadows

---

January 20, 2021

Parks and Recreation Department

RE: Mason Center Park Development

Regarding the future use of the Mason Center Park, I would advocate for the following:

1. Maintain and improve the gym for needed additional recreational space for basketball, pickleball, volleyball and other uses.
2. Reserve the northwest portion of the property for additional parking. This is badly needed as a result of the extensive use and numerous classes at the Smiley Building. All residents near the Smiley Building are faced with the daily inability to park near or in front of their homes. The City's approval of the Smiley Building uses appears to have been done without LUD code required parking. This has been a problem ever since. As the owner of 1320 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, directly across from Smiley, I am constantly reminded of this problematic situation.

Tim Wolf

---

January 21, 2021

Hi Cathy,

Thank you for hosting the community engagement meeting earlier this evening re: Mason Park.

My only additional comment is: Since the storage building will remain for the foreseeable future, it would be a significant improvement if there was a way to demo a large section of the degraded parking lot by the storage building and replace the asphalt with turf grass/green space. Allowing enough of the lot to remain for vehicles to get to and from the storage unit but not allow the space to continue to serve as a parking lot for city vehicles (which it was this last summer).

Having more green space on the corner of 4th and 12th would create a more welcoming entrance and view into the park.

Thank you for your time and for all your efforts to make Durango a better place to live.

Rick Rodgers

---

January 22, 2021

Hello Cathy et al,

Thanks very much for the presentation yesterday on near term plans for the Mason Center. We live just above it, on 12<sup>th</sup> Street Place and have been there for over two decades. We look out over the eastern half, and walk by and through it often. (We also own a lot at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> at the northeast corner of the park.) During the day and in the evening we hear the group activities, especially children's games. It's a wonderful neighborhood sound and overcomes the steadily increasing traffic noise from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. As so many others expressed yesterday, it is an important and valued park in our neighborhood. I had a few thoughts by the end of the call yesterday, so will share those now:

- 1) While I understand the value to Parks and Rec to have a storage facility, I strongly hope that is only a temporary solutions and ongoing investments are not made to "improve" it as a storage facility. There is a tendency

anywhere and everywhere to allow temporary uses to become long term uses. I agree with the other comments that a neighborhood park is not the place for trucks and equipment to be stored.

- 2) As part of the demolition, I hope you will seriously consider reducing the asphalt footprint in front of the storage building. Back to point 1, if a large parking area is kept and maintained, it will result in lots of vehicle storage. This has become an increasing eyesore in the past couple of years as the facility transitioned in its use from community space to city space. If the 4000 sf storage space is to be used temporarily, at least what is inside is not a feature of the park and neighborhood. Please resist the temptation to store and park vehicles and equipment outdoors simply because there is an asphalt pad today. How about cutting that area at least in half, allowing access to the storage facility but not encouraging outdoor storage?
- 3) A suggestion for near and long term use within the park, perhaps in the area where the building wings are today, is a seating area, perhaps a circular garden with concentric benches. (Maybe the Garden Club would be willing to work on a garden, much as they have in front of the 9R building.) As was noted, because the park is a full block and much of it is flat, it is a popular walking place for older folks, but there are few place to sit. I especially noticed this in the past year, while walking with my 93 year old mother. It's a lovely park, but not especially practical for someone who needs to rest from time to time. I resorted to lugging camp chairs down to the park for our walks.
- 4) The "wild" area along the east side and in the northeast corner is deserving of care, and I echo others comments about considering irrigation there to preserve trees. Grass doesn't grow well under spruce trees but the landscape will be more obvious when the building is gone. It is interesting to watch the different kinds of uses in each area of the park and the treed area has its own use, but is suffering from erosion and general neglect.
- 5) I well realize yesterday's session was purely about the near term plans for the Mason Center, but Geoff opened a can of worms with his mention of using part of the park for affordable housing development. Medium to longer term, my wife and I feel very strongly the entire block should remain a green area entirely, including elimination of the old gym and the asphalt lot serving it. Yes, affordable housing is important for the city, but development is a one way street. Once paved or built on, lots don't go back to being open space parks. On the other hand, there are plenty of lots (Boker Lumber?) where affordable housing can be situated, without giving up important green space in an increasingly densified downtown. Increasingly densified if all of the planning of the last two or three decades is followed. We must preserve the downtown parks we have. Part of the value (and beauty) of the park is that it is effectively an entire block. It will be that much better after the demolitions this summer. It is a gem, as so many noted, and it is the only community park for the areas from College up to 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Buckley is a wonderful park (and should absolutely be acquired by the City to remain so) but it is downtown, not in the neighborhood, and its uses are different. Whether the 9R building is developed commercially or razed and new buildings are built, for business or residential or both, the need for a community park on the other side of 3<sup>rd</sup> will be all that much greater. So, while I know visioning and decisions about the Mason Center park may lie several years ahead, I don't believe it is too early to register my very strong feelings about its ultimate use. Make it 100% outdoor use and preferably greenspace where buildings now exist.

Thanks again and I very much look forward to seeing the park after the demolition. It's a long awaited and welcome step!

Henry Dudley

---

January 23, 2021

Hi Cathy,

We were sorry to have missed the Zoom meeting regarding the future of the Mason Center, but wanted to give you our input. We strongly hope that the playground, tennis courts and green space are staying. Having lived in the neighborhood for over 40 years, our family has utilized all the above, including when Mason was still a school, and when it housed the Teen Center. The Smiley Building has impacted the area quite a bit, and parking has become a problem for people who have to park on Third Avenue or Thirteenth Street. So, we strongly oppose any housing planned in the future for the space that the Mason Center now occupies.

Thank you, Kent and Becky Wigton

---

January 26, 2021

Thank you all for taking time last Thursday to inform and receive input on Mason Park. We attended the meeting but did not speak.

We love the park, and we support your short-term plans for getting rid of the dilapidated structure.

We would object to converting the property from a park to housing of any kind, but we are not concerned about that right now. We feel certain the city and the residents will overwhelmingly support keeping our parks as parks, and redeveloping better-suited parcels for residential or other development.

You guys appeared to have a pretty good handle on how the park is currently used, including lots of dog walkers. People are pretty darn good at cleaning up after their dogs, but maybe they would do even better if there were doggy bags and a trash can handy to the grass area?

We look forward to having a voice in eventual future planning for the park. Thank you again and kind regards,

Matt & Kristi Barnett

---

February 19, 2021

Hi All! My name is Jim Shadell, and I live a half-block east of Mason Center Park. Like all NIMBY's I would like AT LEAST PART OF THE PARK to remain as a tennis court, BUT ESPECIALLY as a neighborhood park.

Thanks,  
Jim Shadell

---

February 20, 2021

Good morning,

My husband "attended" the January 21st Zoom meeting regarding the future for the Mason Center Park. I was unable to attend but would like to add my thoughts.

- \* Keep green spaces - wonderful area for children, families, school groups, dogs to play and recreate.
- \* Maintain the play equipment - perhaps expand - many children utilize this area.
- \* Provide a "tennis wall" - for practice in controlled hitting of tennis ball. I think this would be helpful to those interested in tennis, especially to beginners of all ages.
- \* Maintain "recreational" uses for buildings and property - gymnastics classes were held here before they were relocated to Bodo Park. Perhaps other community classes, recreation can be held here.
- \*Between Mason Center Park, Smiley Building, and Buckley Park - we have wonderful areas that are critical to the character and quality of the town.

Thank you  
Karen McManus

---

February 26, 2021

Dear Ms. Gantt, Ms. Metz, and all the Parks and Rec. Folks,

My congratulations to you all on an outstanding plan for the Mason Center. I think it is excellent in all regards.

There is, however, one suggestion I would like to make: If, without undue difficulty, the tall evergreen tree in the center of the school courtyard could be preserved, that would be great.

The tree's name, as perhaps you know, is "Robin Hood."

The story behind the name:

During the first year of school after Mason was built, our fourth grade teacher (I think it was Ms. Schosher) read to us for a few minutes each morning. Our favorite book of the year was Robin Hood. So, when midway through the year, the school asked students to vote on a name for the just-planted tree, our class -- being an enthusiastic and energetic gang -- got the vote to come out for "Robin Hood." It was so named.

I have enjoyed seeing the tree grow over the years, and it would be fine to see how tall it might eventually get. (I wouldn't mind if it outlasted me.)

Thank you again for a great vision for the park.

Best Regards,

Don Weinig

P.S. The old Central School building burned after my 1st Grade year. My class had 2nd Grade in the upstairs of the old Methodist School (Ms. McConnell as I recall). We had 3rd Grade with Ms. Dawson in the American Legion hall. During the Mason School construction, we kids were sad to see that the great snow sledding hill down the north side of the block was cut off by the long "1st, 2nd, and 3rd class Wing" of the building. It's great to see that your plan might bring back the chance for sledding there.

DW



---

February 27, 2021

Hi Cathy,

I live across from the Mason Center. I made a few comments at the Zoom meeting you held. After reading through the public comments, I would like to add a few more:

As many people have voiced, I would love to see the entire area as a park. Keeping the existing trees and getting water to them would be great. The northeast corner is often used for sledding and kids biking through the dirt. It would be nice if people could continue to do this and if it could be in a more natural state.

I agree that a trash can somewhere near 4th and a pet litter bag dispenser would be great and also agree that personally, I would appreciate it if there were not streetlights added as it diminishes the night sky and we already have a very bright one at 4th and 12th.

Henry Dudley made a great point about seating. I love what he suggested about a circular sitting area with some landscaping. It would be nice if that could be constructed of stone or some kind of natural material. I know Dave Manley did a project up by the golf course for the city that is very pretty, but not specifically designed for seating.

Otherwise, I gave my reasons why I think it is so important to keep this beautiful block of land as a park area and many people have listed great reasons for this as well. I realize I live across the street and have a vested interest in a park across from me and I deeply feel that even if I didn't live here, this area of land is a gem for people in the city. Parks are so key to the well being of people...even simply walking by does something to one's being that is uplifting. Our little town has so much to offer and this little area just makes it prettier and more welcoming.

Warmly,

Terra Brooke

---

February 27, 2021

I just read The Herald article regarding the demolition of the Mason Center and public comments regarding further use. I don't live in the neighborhood, but do use the tennis courts and appreciate the positive aspects of having a community park remain in place of the dilapidated building. I have two thoughts to contribute:

1. I echo some writers' sentiments that the gym NOT remain as a city storage facility. This is just inappropriate in the middle of a residential neighborhood.
2. Though I agree with the space being used as a park, I would encourage Parks & Rec to think more about what kind of park. Specifically, as we read more about water becoming scarce, they should think about a park that is compatible with our arid climate, rather than relying on irrigation and "traditional" green grass. When this part of the city was originally developed, it was traditional for all yards to be lovely, water-hungry grass. Those times have changed. Consider educating the local population with xeric planting, such as some botanical gardens do. Maybe consult with the Durango Botanical Society about what would be appropriate.

Thanks,  
Betsey Butler

---

April 25, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

As a resident of Durango, CO since 1996 and current Durango Montessori teacher, I have a love and deep appreciation for Durango's trails, parks, and open use spaces. I propose that the current Mason Center location be re-purposed as an outdoor city pool. I remember when we had an outdoor pool near the current high school. I guarantee that the new pool would be just as appreciated as that one once was.

Sarah Rankin