

# Memorandum

## Planning and Urban Development Department

### Planning Division

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**To:** Members of the Land Bank Commission

**From:** Caitlin Cameron, Urban Designer, Dept. of Planning & Urban Development

**Date:** April 12, 2018

**Re:** Congress Square Redesign Progress + Land Bank Ordinance Approval

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#### 1. Redesign Progress + Feedback

The Congress Square Redesign project is in the Design Development (DD) phase. The project partners – The City of Portland, Friends of Congress Square Park, and the Public Art Committee – have continued to work with the consultants from WRT, Sebago Technics, Patrick Cullina Horticultural Design + Consulting, Tillett Lighting Design Associates, and Sze Studio on the landscape, traffic, lighting, water feature, and public artwork components of the project. The overall concept remains the same as presented in 2017 as part of the Schematic Design phase with continued refinement of circulation, planter placement and details, material selection, water feature, lighting scheme, grading and drainage, and planting selection. The project has reached 50% in the DD phase and at this point City staff seek feedback from the Land Bank Commission on the conformity with the vision and program goals (attached), especially on those design elements mentioned above.

The project partners will also seek feedback from the Parks Commission, the general public, neighboring stakeholders and abutters, and other City agencies.

The new design and public art will include approvals from the following entities:

- Land Bank Commission – Land Bank Ordinance
- City Council – Land Bank Ordinance
- Historic Preservation Board – Certificate of Appropriateness for landscape and artwork
- Planning Board – Site Plan
- MDOT – PDR and changes to the roadway (High Street is a State road)

#### 2. Approval of Tree Removal + Design Concept

Per City of Portland Code of Ordinances Ch. 2 Administration Sec. 2-43 Establishment of Land Bank (b) Maintenance of land. “Except upon approval, in accordance with section 2-43(c), of the commission, the City Council, . . . the commission or City government shall not allow:

**3. Removal or destruction of trees, shrubs or other vegetation**, except where necessary for management purposes and to enhance natural systems or open-space uses;”

The concept for the Congress Square Redesign includes the removal of all the existing vegetation and trees so that the site may be re-graded and redesigned to meet the project goals

of accessibility, cohesive identity, and usability for passive and active programming. Though removing existing trees is not ideal, there are several reasons why staff feel this is an appropriate request:

- The trees will be replaced at least in equal number, if not more, and placed in more functional ways (shade, character, viewsheds) and with more appropriate species – see diagram.
- Many of the existing trees are problematic species that are not well-suited for park use (such as the Lindens which drop a residue) – see City Arborist memo.
- The City Arborist further elaborates on the condition of the existing trees below and supports the proposal to remove and replace those trees.

**Congress Square Park Tree Condition Report** – from Jeff Tarling, City Arborist

*The existing tree design concept dates back to the original Sasaki design for Portland Downtown 'Mainway' project of the 1970's. Species makeup include Little-leaf Linden, Honeylocust and Callery Pear.*

*Of these tree types we are currently only using Honeylocust due to problematic characteristics of both Callery Pear and Little-leaf Linden, this includes invasive plant listing for the Pear and 'Sootymold' related damage on the Linden trees.*

*The original Mainway project for Portland's Downtown consisted of three species - Little-leaf (European) Linden planted throughout the downtown as the primary species along streets and in parks, London Planetrees (the original species of choice by the designers but were only selected for Spring Street between Union and High Streets due to suspected lack of cold hardiness issues.*

*Congress Square Park trees mentioned have been replaced over the years following the original design intent, we have not replanted any of the Pear or Linden varieties of recent knowing that a park redesign was pending.*

*Current Tree Condition - Portland Forestry crews recently conducted routine tree pruning and removal work in the park as part of ongoing tree maintenance. Two trees were removed, a declining Pear and Linden located on the Congress Street and High Street right of way and not in the park.*

*With the exception of the Honeylocust trees located near the stage and along the building edge the rest of the trees are mostly Little-leaf Linden which we are phasing out in all city locations. The health condition of the remaining trees are rated in the 'fair to good' category range.*

*The average life expectancy of urban trees in situations like Congress Square park would be 7 - 15 years for street trees in sidewalk cutouts or tree pits and 15-25 years for trees planted in larger tree planters with adequate root zone. Knowing the date of the design, the age of trees within the park and surrounding streetscape I would fully support removing the existing trees and replacing with a more sustainable planting.*

Therefore, City staff are seeking approval from the Land Bank Commission, and ultimately the City Council, for the removal of the existing trees and landscaping in the park in order to execute the redesign concept as presented in April, 2018.

**3. Attachments**

- a. Congress Square Redesign Vision + Program
- b. 50% DD Layout Plan
- c. 50% DD Planting Plan
- d. 50% DD Perspective
- e. 50% DD Details
- f. Diagram of Existing vs. Proposed Tree Concept
- g. Planting Plan Concept