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Jamaica Plain GAZETTE

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CIRCULATION 16,420



Courtesy Photo

OUTDOOR ART—Beth Galston, the artist selected to work on the South Street Mall and Courts renovation project, helped design Thunderbird Bridge and its surroundings in Phoenix, Ariz. in the 1990s. See article on page 20.

Planning for South Street Mall and Courts begins

BY DAVID TABER
GAZETTE STAFF

The Art of Park Renovation

SOUTH STREET—Attendance was sparse at the first community meeting on the renovation of the South Street Mall and Courts, but

the half-dozen community members in attendance were not short on inspiration.

“It was really fun to freely

and creatively brainstorm,” said Beth Galston, a sculptor and “environmental artist” who has been commissioned to design an art element in the park.

Those present at the meeting all agreed the park could use more green space. Beyond that, ideas for the redesign included painting conga steps on the sidewalk so commuters waiting at the bus stop could learn new dance steps and a bicycle pedal-powered fountain. Another idea was to install a permanent slide projector displaying a cycle of works by local artists onto one of the park walls. A sculpture children could play on when their parents meet on the street and stop to chat was also suggested.

The effort to renovate the paved area on the corner of Carolina Avenue and South Street, which now features dilapidated tennis and basketball courts, rotten benches, vandalized trash cans, a rusty

Instead of providing the \$30,000 budget Giard said he expected for the mall renovation, the Boston Parks and Recreation Department put up \$230,000 to renovate the entire site.

Separately, CSMS applied for and won a \$5,000 Browne Fund grant and hired Galston, who lives in Carlisle and has a studio in Somerville.

Galston’s credits include the design of the eight-lane overpass Thunderbird Bridge in Arizona, and “Tree/House,” an installation that allows people to wander among the treetops of Socrates Park in New York City.

The South Street Mall and Courts are a much smaller space than she normally works with, but she said she is excited about integrating the site more effectively with the surrounding street life. She wants to create a situation that “invites people to use it,” she said. “There is all this life going on around and I want to bring it into the park.”

The point of this first meeting was to get a sense from communi-

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Courtesy Photo

Beth Galston, the artist selected to work on the South Street Mall and Courts project, created this architectural enclosure called “Tree/House” in Socrates Sculpture Park in New York City in 1994.

fence and numerous obsolete utility poles, is not short on funds.

Last year, when JP Centre/South Main Streets (CSMS) first considered renovating the space, their sights were set on the mall abutting South Street, which occupies about a third of the approximately 14,520-square-foot site. “It started off as some small effort to rehab the mall,” said Don Giard, who sits on the JP CSMS board of directors.

ty members about what goes on in the park now and what uses they envision in its Parks Development new and improved future, said parks department project coordinator Angie Murray.

Ray Dunetz, a JP resident and the lead landscape architect on the project, said he and Galston have met and are excited about working together, but had, as of the evening

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Realtors With Experience



Karen Colleen Greg Paula Joe Monroe Bryan Paul



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of the meeting, specifically avoided discussing any design ideas.

“We have not been discussing design at all. We have specifically been staying away from that until we get your input,” Dunetz said

Of the current layout, residents complained that inconvenient seating, the regimented grid pattern layout of the trees and masonry and the large chain link fence separating the mall from the tennis and basketball court make for an uncomfortable recreational experience.

“Its unwelcoming to me to have it all grid-like. I never stay too long in the park because it is just too square,” said JP resident Kathy Holland.

Joy Silverstein, who owns the Fresh Hair Salon and the building it occupies, across the street from the park, said her employees regularly take breaks there, and it is a congregating spot for homeless people.

It was also reported that staff at the Ferris Wheels bicycle shop uses the park to test bikes; the basketball court is regularly used; and the space sometimes utilized by the Agassiz Elementary School down the street, though no one representing these uses was present at the meeting.

Paul Daigle, who started on June 19 as the new director of JP CSMS said he would attempt to survey residents who use the basketball courts and get in touch with officials from the school to gauge their thoughts on how to redesign the park.

In the meantime, the consensus at the meeting seemed to be that, given the use it gets, at least a half-size basketball court should be part of the new design.

In addition to basketball, the court could also be used to stage farmers or artists markets, if it is made accessible to vehicles, said Michael Epp, chairman of the JP CSMS design committee.

But, in the current design, “it seems the park is too small and the hard-scape is too big,” Epp said.

Murray said if the green space design is too intricate, PRD may need the community’s help to maintain it. “The parks department is not good at maintaining anything other than trees. It’s really unfortunate that the city cannot, at this point, reach the level of maintenance we wish we could,” she said.

Epp suggested they could potentially get goats to tend to the grass in the park.

“Maybe we can work something out with the Franklin Park Zoo,” said Sarah Freeman.

Between now and September, the PRD is planning to host two more meetings. At the next meeting the design team will present developed alternatives to the community and, based on recommendations, work out a final design to be presented at the final meeting. Construction is set to begin in Spring, 2008.

Community members desiring to comment can contact Angie Murray at angela.murray@cityofboston.gov.