

## **Central Park and Main Street Project**

Extended Press Release / **Project FAQ**

### **WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT?**

The scope is to make pedestrian and stormwater improvements to Main Street from Sargent's Point Stadium to Frankstown Road (.65 Miles), make improvements to Central Park (1.25 Acres), and improve two City-owned parklets across from City Hall.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT?**

The project will make much needed improvements to Downtown's infrastructure including stormwater management, lighting, and pedestrian accessibility improvements. By improving the quality of life for everyone that lives or visits downtown, the improvements will help to grow businesses and attract residents.

### **WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT FOR JOHNSTOWN?**

Access to high quality park space and bike infrastructure [has been proven](#) to support healthier communities. Johnstown already has a great downtown for walking and biking, but these improvements will encourage more people to spend more time outdoors.

### **WHERE DOES THE FUNDING COME FROM?**

The \$17.2 Million in funding for this project comes from both the State and Federal government, perhaps the largest public investment in local infrastructure in decades. From the Department of Transportation, the City received a Rebuilding America's Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant which will also fund improvements to the Inclined Plane, CamTran, Train Station, and connections to the area's trail networks for a total of \$24,448,164. An additional \$2 Million was secured from Pennsylvania's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. The balance of funds comes from the American Rescue Plan Act, which was part of COVID relief.

## **WHO IS INVOLVED?**

The project is managed by the City of Johnstown, CamTran, and the Johnstown Area Heritage Association, who hired SCAPE Landscape Architects, an acclaimed landscape architecture practice that has completed comparable projects around the country. SCAPE's team includes Johnstown native Thad Pawlowski of Partners in Public Design who is leading public engagement, and CJL Engineering, a major local employer based in Hornerstown with a strong track record of building the region's infrastructure.

## **HOW HAS THE PUBLIC BEEN INVOLVED?**

On May 31, 2023 the design team hosted an open house to hear the public's aspirations for the project. The design team also had dozens of meetings with the property owners, the business community, local artists and makers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, students, young adults, people with disabilities, and veterans who were concerned about the future of the monuments in the park. The team also talked with people about the project at events like Juneteenth, Polkafest, and Pride. At the second public meeting on July 19, 2023, over 250 people came to review the three initial concept designs and express their preferences. Another 250 people completed an on-line survey. The design team used this information to make the preferred concept plan. At a third public meeting on August 30, 2023, the concept plan was presented to the public. All of the project materials are currently on display at the Gallery on Gazebo.

## **HOW HAVE YOUNG PEOPLE BEEN INVOLVED?**

The project team joined community days in Roxbury and Coopersdale with Vision Together and the Community Foundation. They made a "My Central Park and Main Street" activity book for kids. They also hosted a design workshop with the Flood City Youth Academy, in which they were asked what they would like to see in the future of Johnstown. At the design unveiling on August 30, these visions of the future were displayed and the young people were given awards for their participation and for the best visions of the future.

## **WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE MONUMENTS IN CENTRAL PARK?**

The design team hosted a series of meetings with Veterans to make a plan together about the best way to treat the monuments respectfully. Tom Caulfield from the Conemaugh Veterans Initiative urged the team to use the project to create something special for Veterans. After several meetings, the group agreed that the project could help create a Veterans Memorial Walk at Sandyvale Memorial Gardens, a 12-acre, riverside park one mile south of downtown. The Johnstown Military Service Memorial (aka, the “Eagle Obelisk” ) will be relocated to the Veterans Circle in Sandyvale, as will the Pasquerilla Fountain. The Joseph Johns Statue, the Civil War Statue, the Military Police Memorial and the 1977 Flood Victims Memorial will remain in Central Park but in new locations.

## **HOW IS THE PROJECT HELPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?**

The team learned a lot from disability advocates, especially Barb Zabloutney, former Ms. Wheelchair Pennsylvania who is working on a Masters in Disability Studies at New York City College. Barb gave a detailed tour of the challenges of getting around downtown in a wheelchair and instructed the team about how improvements for people with disabilities will make a more welcoming and inclusive downtown for everyone. The project will improve all the sidewalks and crosswalks along the length of Main Street and the accessibility of all areas in Central Park. The project will also update all the street trees, selecting appropriate species with room for roots to grow without pushing up pavement over time.

## **WHAT IS THE PREFERRED CONCEPT DESIGN?**

Of the people who attended our public meeting or completed the on-line survey, there was a clear majority support for making a bold redesign of Central Park. The concept design for Central Park reflects voices from the community who called for a family-friendly destination. The preferred design includes a new accessible performance area in front of a gently-sloped lawn for seating and gathering. Throughout the park there will be stone outcrops along accessible pathways with improved lighting and plenty of seating. There will be a memorial walk along stormwater glen on the Franklin Street side. Thanks to the strong voices of the Veterans, the park will retain important historical monuments like the 54th Regiment statue, while at the same time reflecting

the changing nature of downtown. There will be space for children and adults to enjoy and a unique water feature. There will be flexible, programmable space along Main Street and in a pedestrian-friendly Gazebo Place for markets and special events. Healthy trees and plantings in the park will be kept. Others will be removed to make way for new trees and planted areas, appropriate for the new park and for ease of maintenance. The two parklets by City Hall will become spaces for small gatherings and to enjoy public art.

## **WHY A BIKE LANE?**

The public showed support for a bike lane on Main Street. Johnstown is not crowded with people on bikes today, but a bike lane through the center of town will be a clear signal to the world that Johnstown is open for business for an outdoor recreation economy. When bikers and hikers come to town with the National 9/11 Trail that connects Washington to Shanksville to New York City, Main Street will be a must-see destination and the central hub for recreational trails and parks within the region.

## **WHAT ABOUT PARKING?**

The bike lane will replace some parking on Main Street west of Franklin Street. Even though there are about 3,000 parking spaces downtown, it doesn't feel like there is a lot of parking when driving downtown today. The abundance of parking isn't easily accessible, convenient or affordable to everyone. If Johnstown is going to grow and attract more people downtown, the public and private sectors need to get together to create a parking plan. The plan should assess current and future parking needs, inventory all public and private parking spaces, and come up with some practical solutions. Those solutions might mean making some surface parking lots public, or making some improvement to the public garages, or innovative things that other small cities have done.

## **WHAT ABOUT MAINTENANCE?**

Today Central Park is maintained primarily by City staff, with assistance from volunteers from the Garden Club, Discover Downtown, Kiwanis Clubs and other groups. This project aspires to make a park that is easy to maintain. The City is confident that City staff and current volunteer groups will be fully capable of maintaining a new, more efficient Central Park and Main Street.

## **WHAT ABOUT ART?**

Local arts and cultural groups also have a big role to play in the future. Along Main Street, in Central Park, and in the City Hall parklets, there will be opportunities for public art. The team is proposing project funding to be dedicated for arts programming, which will hopefully be matched by local philanthropy. To attract more people downtown, Johnstown should showcase local and international artists doing public work on a rotating basis.

## **WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?**

A major project like this takes time and hard work to go from concept to completion. SCAPE is now proceeding with the technical design and documentation of the selected concept. They expect to be finished in the spring of 2024. Then, contractors will be selected to implement the project. If all goes well, groundbreaking will occur sometime in 2025. In the meantime, there are many ways to stay involved in this transformational work. Please join the mailing list to stay up to date on the project.