

Moore Sq. redesign moves forward, lacks funding

By Jennifer Wig • Feb 15th, 2011 • Category: News, The Latest

Highly acclaimed plans to renovate Moore Square downtown are moving forward, despite a lack of specified funding.

Renovation plans for Moore Square, which started with a design contest in 2009, have now reached the beginning stages of the approval process.

The draft master plan for the massive makeover will be presented to the Parks Recreation Greenway Advisory Board PRGAB at its regular meeting at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Chavis Park Community Center, 505 MLK Jr. Blvd. (Check it out [on the city's website](#). Click on "Draft Master Plan" on the right.)

Learn more about the plan at the Parks Recreation Greenway Advisory Board (PRGAB) meeting at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Chavis Park Community Center, 505 MLK Jr. Blvd.

The park board will listen to public comments at Thursday's meeting and make a recommendation to City Council, which is scheduled to discuss it April 19. The state will also have to approve the plan before the design phase can begin.

Accompanied by beautiful sketches, the plan promises visitors "a sense of welcome, safety and excitement." It's a far cry from the Moore Square of today, a rundown, flat space with broken sidewalks and grass trampled from too many free concerts.

This vision for the square is the product of Designer Chris Counts' work, a series of public comment sessions, plus input from the Public Leadership Group, made up of representatives from downtown organizations and city and state boards and committees.

Proposed features include:

Central Lawn – For usable social space.

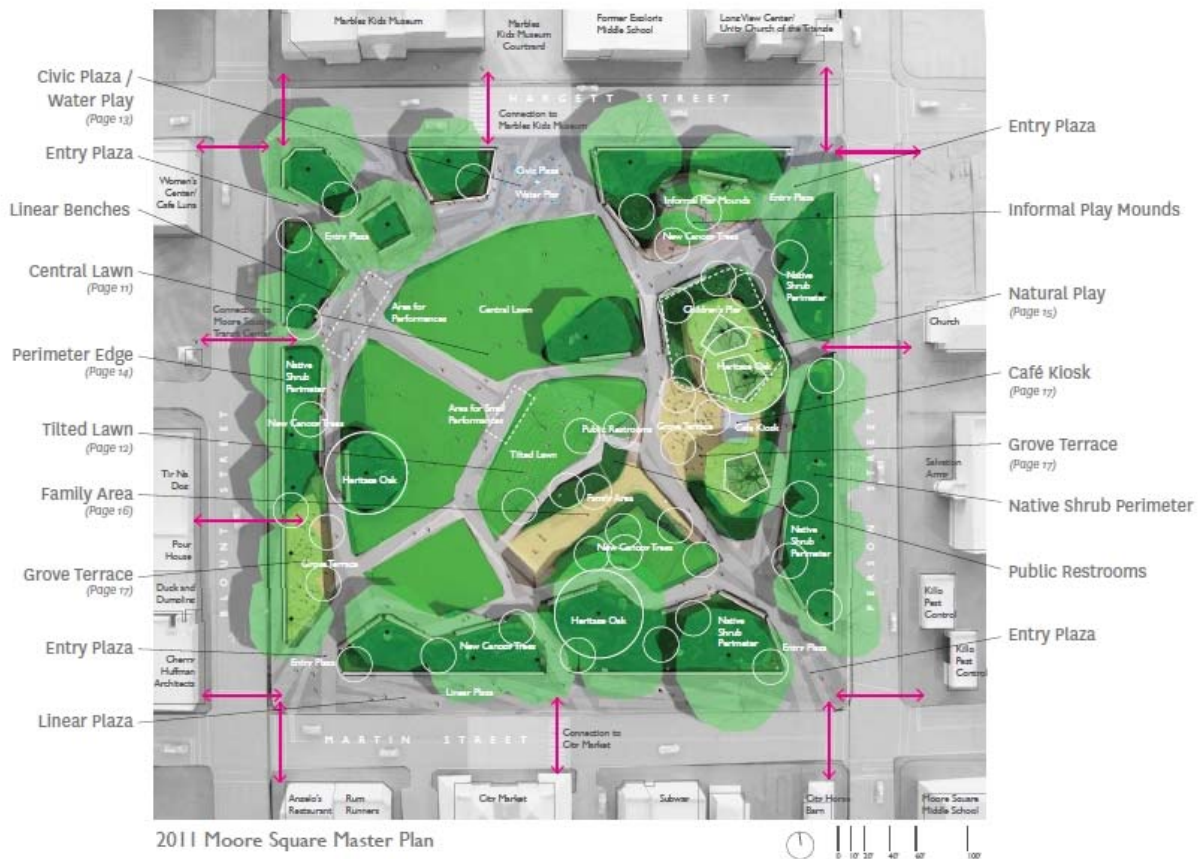
Titled Lawn – An elevated grassy slope for people to play or sit on. The titled lawn would embed a utility vault, a public restroom and a stormwater cistern. Cistern water would be recycled to flush the bathroom toilets.

Civic Plaza – Plans call for stone pavement with benches to offer views, invite people watching and provide a surface for events.

A Granite Pavement and Seat Wall – To create "a dignified frame" around the new square.

Family Area/Natural Play – Instead of a formal playground, Moore Square's play area will feature rocks, sand and grove terraces.

Cafe Kiosk – A small business offering refreshments and snacks.



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This is not the final design, explained Counts, who will be at Thursday's meeting to present information to the parks board. This is merely the vision to be approved; final schematics and design specifics will come later. However, from a technical standpoint, all aspects of the plan are feasible, he said.

"These are broad concepts and principals. If you look at the process from master plan through construction, then we're at the beginning stages," Counts said. "What we're asking for is adoption of these concepts."

Construction likely won't begin for another two years. Still, response to the plan has been overwhelmingly positive from merchants and downtown groups, most of whom participated in the process through the public input sessions.

David Diaz, president of the **Downtown Raleigh Alliance**, said renovating Moore Square is just one step toward changing and improving the face of downtown Raleigh.

"Some [people] want a silver bullet, meaning don't just fix the square but fix all of the challenges we have in the square with loitering, panhandling and all of those things," he said. "We can't solve all of those problems all at once. Designing the square won't solve other issues, but man, does it help bring more attention and more care and more eyes to a public space if the public invests in it."

Moore Square was originally planned in 1792 when it was **designated as one of four public**

park spaces in Raleigh. Only two – Moore and Nash Squares – remain as open spaces.

Jim Belt, co-founder of the **Downtown Living Advocates**, said with Umstead Park and other green spaces around Raleigh, it might be easy to forget that there isn't much park space downtown.

Belt has not formally polled residents, but said group members have identified "open space," as a downtown need, asking for more of it and better use of what remains.

"There's no one saying, 'I like it the way it is.' From a resident perspective, this is a resident park. Residents really want this thing to be better utilized," he said. "That's one of the few places we have left and we have to make sure it gets used."

One of his favorite parts of the redesign is a plan to create space along Martin Street where vendors, such as those for a Farmer's Market, could set up shop. He also likes the proposed changes to the grading and added water elements.

"[This plan] is more than a little landscaping," he said. "It's big. It's something that could really influence the area."



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Tir Na Nog owner Pete Pagamo has represented the Moore Square perimeter property owners at the public input meetings. He called the plan "insightful" and "accommodating" for the area.

"It's going to be a great spot for smaller events," he said. "You look at Raleigh and that's the one thing we don't have is a functional green space. For people to come out, put down a blanket, have a picnic. [We need] to develop this area more as a destination for visitors."

The \$14-million question

The glitch in this new vision for Moore Square is the funding. So far, there is no money set aside to pay for the estimated \$14.7 million needed for the facelift.

City Project Manager Cassie Schumacher-Georgopolis said the money for funding design and construction documents will likely come from the Raleigh Parks and Recreation department's budget.



Funding for the actual construction could come from the general public improvement fund, she said, but that is not set in stone.

Some have questioned whether the bathroom, proposed to be built into the graded area, would draw criminals or incite vandalism.

Diaz said that having a bathroom is a key part of bringing people downtown. Safety and security is a management issue, he said, and a bathroom should not be omitted to allay fears that may never materialize.

“At some point, closer to the implementation process, we’re going to talk about ... who’s going to watch over those restrooms and keep them clean and maintained,” Diaz said. “That is crucial. They will be abused if you don’t manage them, if you don’t clean them regularly, if you don’t make sure there is a safety protocol and security around those more than we have now.”

The **city’s recent changes to the panhandling law** make it unlawful for people to collect from Moore Square visitors.

Public input has been part of the process all along, and Counts said that will continue as the plan moves through the approval process and into design.

Belt and Diaz both said timing is critical, and that continued public input is important so that the effort does not derail later.

“It’s not an ideal time to be asking for money, but in the scheme of things, it’s a small amount of money,” Belt said. “It would be such a shame to have this thing filed away somewhere to be addressed someday, somewhere when somebody thinks they can afford it.”

Diaz said unlike prior attempts to renovate the square, this effort seems to have more support. The recent overhaul at City Plaza sparked interest from a number of retailers, Diaz said. He expects similar results if the Moore Square plan is eventually realized.

“The comments I’ve heard from downtown merchants are positive. They want to see that square be an asset and not a liability. I firmly believe the whole area will only go as far in its revitalization as Moore Square itself. Moore Square is the heart of that district.”