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SCULPTURES, MONUMENTS WOULD BE REPLACED BY ARCH, SPINNING RODS



The Civic Center park, between the Civic Center Music Hall and City Hall, is surrounded by streets torn up as part of Project 180.

PHOTO BY PAUL B. SOUTHERLAND, THE OKLAHOMAN

Makeover challenged for Civic Center park

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City Hall fought City Hall this week and both sides finished the discussion confused and exasperated.

Public works officials and consultants overseeing the Project 180 reconstruction of downtown streets, sidewalks and parks were seeking approval Thursday from the Downtown Design Review Committee of final plans for a makeover of the Civic Center park, which is between the Civic Center Music Hall and City Hall.

The city already has accepted construction bids



A view of the proposed Project 180 makeover of the Civic Center park is shown in this drawing.

DRAWING PROVIDED

application, but pending proposed Spinner Towers the new design distracts

for part of the park in front of the music hall, while plans call for the park area surrounding City Hall to be added to Project 180 projects that, for funding reasons, are being delayed to future years.

Plans by Tulsa-based PDG Inc. and Oklahoma City's Elliott Associates call for removal of all sculptures, monuments and landscaping.

A series of benches and landscaping would be added, along with a "fountain stage" consisting of spray jet portals.

Potential improvements also included in the design

private-sector funding, include new signs, a gateway arch, a series of spinning rods called "Spinner Towers," and shade pavilions.

A report written by Scottye Montgomery, an assistant city planner, advised the committee several parts of the application conflict with the city's design ordinance.

"The Gateway arch, while possibly reflecting the curve of (adjoining street) Patience Latting Circle, is not reflective of the history, architecture, or significance of the site," Montgomery wrote. "The

are a strong visual element. However, they also serve as a visual and physical barrier dividing the site in two. The Spinner Towers may not be appropriate within the grounds of the Municipal Building, where a more sedate environment would be considered more fitting to the gravity and significance of the structure and activities taking place within."

Montgomery also noted no relocation plans were provided by public works officials for the site's sculptures and monuments, which have historic and civic merit, and that

from the prominence and significance of the Art Deco Civic Center buildings constructed in 1937. She also noted the project proposed to eliminate the original City Hall fountain.

"This assembly of multiple disconnected features neither preserves the historic connection nor allows for easy circulation and flexible utilization of the pedestrian spaces," Montgomery wrote.

Montgomery reiterated her concerns at Thursday's meeting and suggested the project, funded through a

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tax increment financing district created through the construction of the \$750 million Devon Energy Center, be delayed.

Laura Story, a former assistant city engineer who now works as a private consultant for the project, repeatedly pleaded with the committee to approve the project design and let construction begin.

Story, joined by the city's Project 180 coordinator Michael Clark, said she wanted to submit the park plans to the committee last fall, but was rebuffed by Montgomery and told to wait until the project design was complete.

Montgomery responded the committee no longer gives conceptual review and approval, following a successful extended challenge to an earlier design approval request for a Project 180 makeover along the 500 block of N Walker.

That challenge, waged by area property owner Rick Dowell, resulted in the work being scrapped altogether.

Blair Humphreys, an urban planning consultant and executive director of the OU Institute for Quality Communities, told the committee that while the Project 180 makeover of



A drawing of the proposed makeover of the Civic Center park.

DRAWING PROVIDED

tion of this park at an informational meeting about Project 180 over two years ago when I was told that this park would be focused on passive observation," Humphreys said.

"I am not aware of a single successful public park created for passive observation. Citygarden in St. Louis, the best new sculpture garden in the world, is the opposite, encouraging interaction with the art and among the adults and children that flock to it."

Humphreys asked why no public meetings were held on the park design. A committee was convened, Story noted, that consisted of neighboring property owners and city staff. Those meetings, reported in *The Oklahoman*, resulted in approval for the basic park design but did not in-

is it's the (question of which came first, the) chicken or the egg," she said.

"We paid a consultant to design this hoping it would be approved, but now we might need to go back to the drawing board if they want it to be redesigned. I don't know what they want. They may want just minor changes that we can make and move forward."

A major redesign, she warned, could result in construction bids expiring and park completion being delayed. That could complicate the city's efforts to complete reconstruction of adjoining streets.

"It's not just the park that's at stake here — it's Project 180," she said. "There are significant construction issues related to this."

the Myriad Gardens has won widespread praise, the revamp of the Civic Center park is "less walkable, less flexible, less respectful to our city's history, less safe and far less appropriate for such an important civic site."

He warned the Civic Center park is designed to fail.

"I expressed similar concerns to the project manager about the direc-

clude the arch, spinning towers or signs.

With the two city departments at odds, the Downtown Design Review Committee voted to delay consideration of the project for another month. Story said that delay could jeopardize efforts to have the park makeover completed for a potential Sept. 25 celebration of the Civic Center's 75th anniversary.

"The problem with this

Neither Story nor Montgomery could predict what happens next. Eric Wenger, who was not at the meeting, said later he's hopeful the questions and confusion can be successfully addressed.

"We clearly need to address some questions out there," Wenger said. "If we can do that in February, I think there is a very good opportunity of getting it done on time."