

Site Selection

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Summary: Site Selection

Where is the best location in downtown for a new signature downtown park?

Selecting the “right” location is the first decision of many that will lead to the success or failure of an urban downtown park. How should a potential park site be selected: available land; proximity to other attractions; filling a gap in park space? The answer can be complex and dependent on many criteria. In order to objectively assess the over 200 blocks in downtown Minneapolis and identify the prime signature park sites, a number of physical and feasibility criteria were first identified.

Nearby worker and resident densities – To be successful, a park must be near people. In downtowns, most workers will not visit a park unless they are within a five-minute walk or a quarter mile of a park. Some will go no farther than one-eighth of a mile.

Land boundaries and size – Parks are more successful if there is a clear delineation between public and private land. For a downtown park, a full block, bounded on all sides by public streets, is ideal, and a half block (about the size of Peavey Plaza) is the minimum size.

Location relative to other parks – A new park should not duplicate existing park resources or draw users away from other successful open spaces.

Mix of adjacent existing uses and potential mix of adjacent uses – The perception of safety is essential for a successful park. One well-known strategy is to have nearby people who are likely to be observing– or “eyes” on the park– at all hours. Therefore, the mix of uses adjacent to the park should support activity nearby and within the park at all times of day.

Proximity of existing supportive uses – How close the site is to uses that have complimentary services or overlapping audiences with the park is important for attracting visitors. Examples include retail stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

Pedestrian, transit, and open space connectivity – Connections to primary pedestrian corridors and transit links promote equitable park access and attract people going or coming from other places to visit the park.

Visibility – If a park is visible from important destinations such as theater or sports venues, it will promote synergy between uses as well as increase community recognition of the park resource.

Microclimate – To be appealing throughout the year, a park site must have opportunities for sun and shade as well as areas that will allow for respite from the noise of the city.

Architectural quality of surrounding building facades – If there are aesthetically pleasing buildings surrounding a park site, it will enhance the atmosphere of the park.

Sight lines to architectural or natural landmarks – Views of landmarks enhance the experience of being on the park site, and help park visitors contextualize and orient a park in the broader downtown area.

Property value and existing buildings – It is essential that a site be financially obtainable for conversion to a park. The less expensive a property, the more likely it will be feasible to convert it to park space. Conversely, the presence of historic buildings on a site may make it inappropriate or unfeasible to convert the site to park space.

Process

Using the criteria for potential park locations, the Project Team created a three-part site selection and assessment process. The first round was designed to quickly eliminate unsuitable property based on minimum thresholds for *density of surrounding uses, land area and size, location relative to other parks, mix of adjacent uses, pedestrian transit and open space connectivity, and property value*. This process identified 17 sites that have potential for future park development. Since the intent of this study is to identify a *signature* park site, and the success of this type of park will be highly dependent on attracting significant numbers of park users, a second round of selection applied three additional thresholds related to proximity to potential park users. This narrowed the potential park location to six sites, three near the Central Library in the Downtown Core, and three near the Metrodome in Downtown East. These six possible sites then underwent detailed analysis using all of the criteria.

Conclusion

There are both needs and opportunities for parks in two areas of downtown: the Central Library area (Downtown Core) and the Metrodome area (Downtown East). Detailed analysis of potential park sites revealed that, today, the Metrodome area does not have the critical mass of uses and activity needed to support a successful signature park, but a significant park should be established in this area in the future, preferably in conjunction with the redevelopment of the stadium land. The three identified blocks in the Downtown Core near the Central Library offer the greatest opportunity for a successful new signature park. The ultimate recommendation for which of these three blocks is most suitable depends on a variety of factors that are more detailed and more nuanced than this current stage of analysis provides.

Site Selection

HKGi conducted an analysis of downtown Minneapolis to identify sites that are strong candidates for a new, signature, urban park. This analysis was done in three rounds.

Process

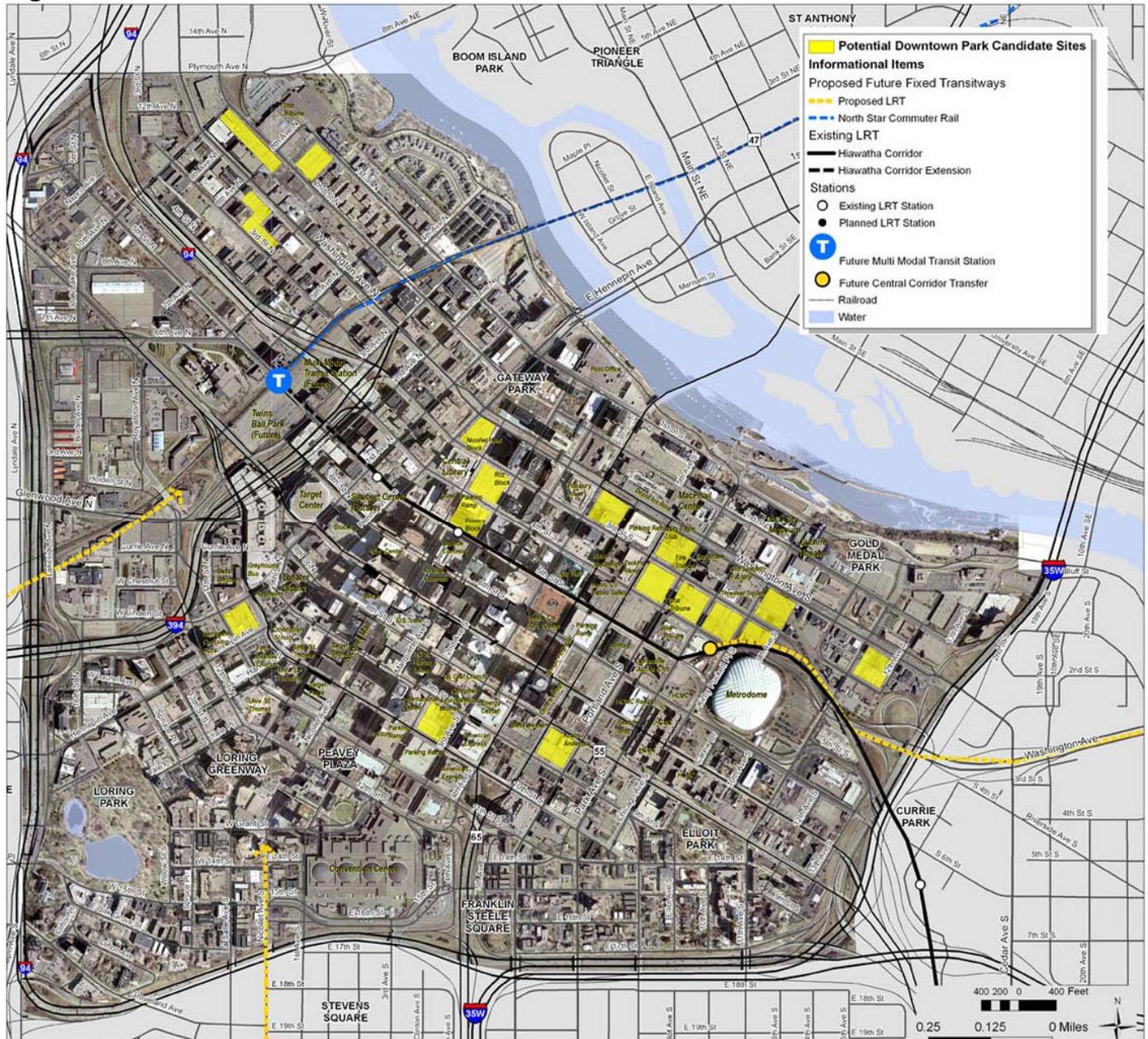
Round 1 identified and applied minimum criteria a site would have to meet to receive further consideration (Table 1). This process yielded 17 sites scattered throughout downtown

(Figure 1). Since the success of a future signature urban park is highly dependent on it being people-intensive, Round 2 applied three criteria related to proximity to potential park users to remain in contention (Table 2). This yielded 6 Potential Park Candidate Sites for consideration, three in the Downtown East neighborhood and three in the Downtown Core. The third round, which is discussed in detail in this memo, assessed the remaining six sites based on 14 physical and feasibility criteria (Tables 3 and 4), with the intention of selecting the three sites with the highest potential for

Table 1 - Round One Selection Criteria

	Criteria	Definition	Rating of Poor (thrown out)
Physical	density of surrounding uses	<i>There is intensity of use and population</i>	Site is within a TAZ low employment density (<10 employees per acre)
	land area / size	<i>Large enough to support prominent space that can accommodate a variety of park space needs. Large enough to be clearly a public park for use by anyone and not just a certain business or group of residences.</i>	Site is on a small block (less than 1.25 acres) or has existing buildings on more than 1/2 of a standard block (2.5 acres)
	location relative to other parks	<i>MPRB policy of a park within six blocks of every resident in city – does the site support or suplicate other park resources.</i>	Site is within 1/4 mile of Loring Park, Elliot Park or Franklin Steele Square or within 1/8 mile of Peavey Plaza or Hennepin. Co. Government Center Plaza North, or has another existing park, plaza or open space on the same block.
	mix of adjacent uses	<i>Mix of uses supports wider range of hours of activity nearby and within the park. Provides safer-feeling environment and avoids park dead space.</i>	adjacent to a highway
	pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity	<i>Park has connections to other open spaces, business needs, transit (equity – not just for people living or working in close proximity), and/or cultural amenities.</i>	Site is isolated from downtown core by highways
Feasibility	property value	<i>Property is financially obtainable for park space conversion.</i>	There is a parcel with high Estimated Market Value on the block (>= \$15,000,000)

Figure 1 – Round 1 Candidate Sites



more detailed study.

Criteria considered in Round 3 include:

- Density of surrounding employee population
- Density of surrounding residential population
- Land area and size
- Location relative to other parks
- Mix of adjacent existing uses
- Proximity of existing supportive uses
- Potential mix of future adjacent uses

- Pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity
- Visibility
- Micro-climate
- Architectural quality of existing surrounding building facades
- The ability to preserve prominent views of architectural or natural landmarks
- Property value
- Historic value of buildings on the site

Table 2 – Round 2 Site Selection: Refinement

	Criteria	Definition	Threshold for site to remain in contention
Physical	density of surrounding uses	<i>There is intensity of use and population</i>	Site is within a TAZ with high employment density (≥ 50 employees per acre) and within 1/4 mile of a TAZ with high residential density (≥ 30 residents per acre)
	proximity to supportive uses	<i>Uses that create an instant demand; synergy between uses (going out for lunch then to the park)</i>	Site is within 1/8 mile of an event or retail destination (Theatre District, Future Twins Stadium, Target Center Guthrie Theatre/Mill City Museum, Metrodome, Nicollet Mall)
	pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity	<i>Park has connections to other open spaces, business needs, transit (equity – not just for people living or working in close proximity), and/or cultural amenities.</i>	Site is with 1/8 mile of a fixed transit route (Nicollet Mall, LRT Line, Future Multi Modal Station)

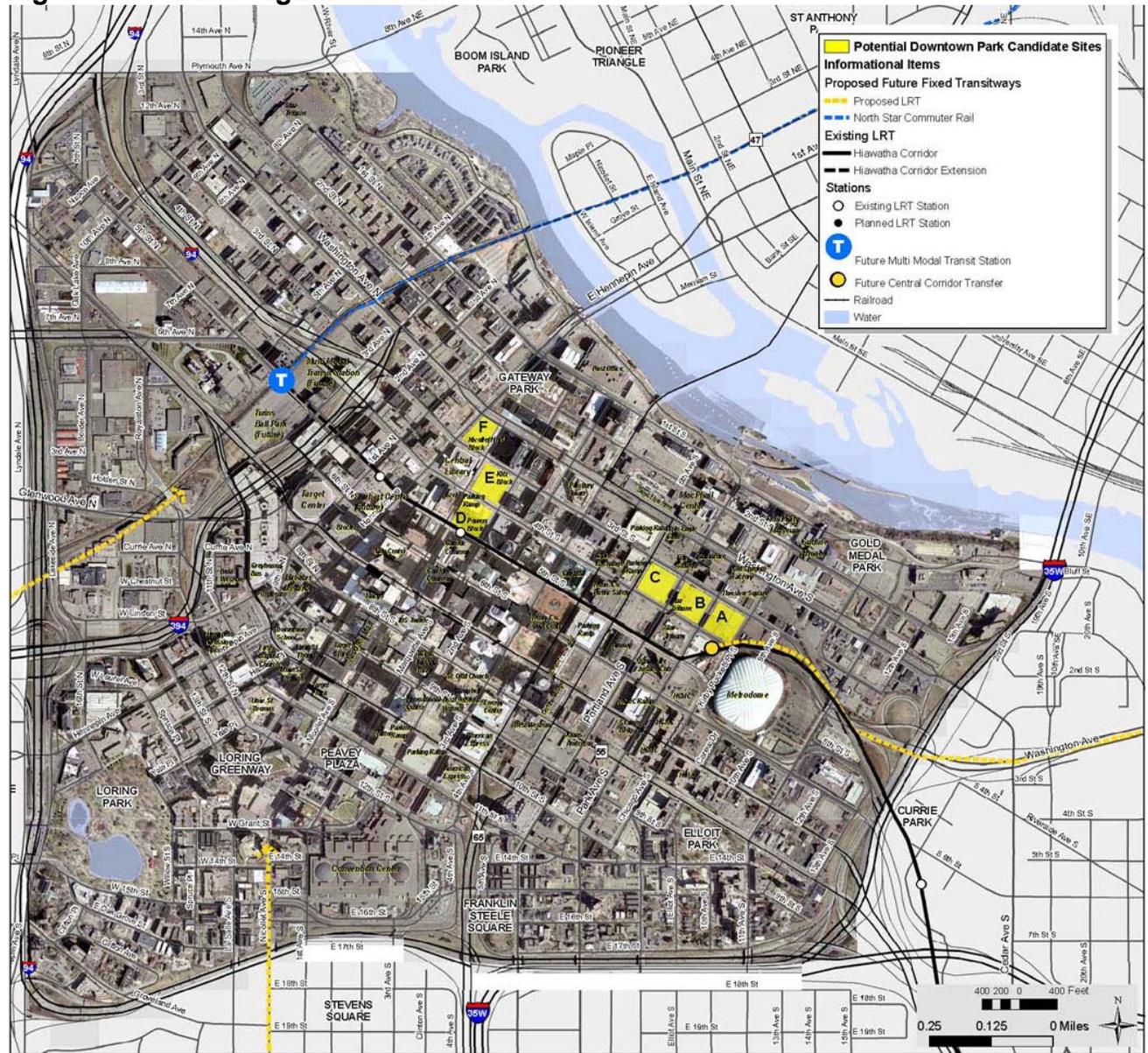
For each criterion, metrics were established and each site was evaluated and given a Rating of Best, Good, or Fair. To facilitate comparison of the results, the ratings were quantified and tallied. Best was given a numeric value of 2, Good a value of 1, and Fair a value of 0. Each criteria was given equal weight and, when tallied, the possible numeric scores range from 0-28 (Table 4).

Because the proximity to potential park users is so important for the ultimate success of an urban park, this aspect is being measured in many of the criteria. *Mix of existing adjacent uses, mix of future adjacent uses and proximity to supportive uses* all measure different aspects of surrounding uses and building orientation on the critical four blocks surrounding the site. *Pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity, density of surrounding employment uses, and density of surrounding residential uses* also look at the proximity to potential park users. Of the six categories relating proximity to potential park users, two, *mix of future adjacent use and proximity to supportive uses*, take into account

the extent to which blocks surrounding the park could be redeveloped in the future to be supportive of a new park. The four other categories address only current development patterns. Therefore, while potential for future change is taken into account, heavier emphasis is placed on existing conditions.

The distribution of the six potential sites indicates both the northern end of the Downtown Core and the Downtown East neighborhoods are prime locations for future parks. Results of the Round 3 analysis show sites in the Downtown Core scoring higher and therefore are stronger candidates, than sites in Downtown East (Table 4). This reflects that there is more existing activity and more supportive uses in the Downtown Core than Downtown East, where there is uncertainty with respect to future development. A brief description of each site along with its advantages and disadvantages follows.

Figure 2 Potential Signature Park Candidate Sites



Downtown East Sites

Site A: Numeric Score – 8

Description

Site A is adjacent to the Metrodome and north of the Metrodome LRT Stop. Most of the site is currently being used as a surface parking lot but a historic building, with potential for historic designation, sits on the southwest corner of the site. The block immediately to the south is owned by the City and has a foundation for a new building. The block to the west is a

surface parking lot. On the block to the north sits Thresher Square which is being used as office space and is a designated historic building with entries facing the park. The block to the east has utilities related to LRT on the southwest corner and the remainder of the block is surface parking.

Discussion

The strength of this site is that the blocks to the south and west of the site have a strong potential to be redeveloped into supportive uses. In

addition, the orientation, use and architectural quality of Thresher Square would be a strong supporting adjacent use for a future park. The east facing block is more problematic; the LRT utilities are surrounded by an unattractive wall facing Site A and are unlikely to be relocated. Other advantages to this site are the close proximity to an LRT stop and visibility from the Metrodome. The primary disadvantage of this site is that the surrounding blocks do not have existing supportive uses and are dependent on future development. Another, potentially serious, disadvantage is that the existing building on the site has potential for historic designation which may make it difficult to remove to allow for a full-block site. Though it is not accounted for in the ranking system, is also worth noting that current future plans for the Metrodome call for a plaza in front of the Metrodome which may make a park on Site A redundant.

Site B: Numeric Score – 8

Description

Three quarters of Site B is being used as a surface parking lot. A Star Tribune office building with low architectural value sits on the southwest corner. On the block immediately to the south sits a Star Tribune warehouse/office building. This building has garage doors facing Site B and has potential for historic designation. The block to the west of the site is a surface parking lot. The block to the north has two buildings facing Site B, one is a designated historic building currently being used as an office and the other is housing. The block to the east of the site is Site A, containing a surface parking lot and a building with potential for historic designation.

Discussion

Like Site A, the primary advantage of this site is that the surrounding uses have strong potential for redevelopment into supportive uses. The blocks to the east and south have historic buildings that would need to be rehabilitated

and the surface parking lot to the west has strong potential for future redevelopment. The existing office and residential uses facing the site on the north side would be assets to a new park. While Star Tribune building on the site is scheduled to be vacated and has little architectural value, the fact that it would have to be demolished for a full-block park is a disadvantage for this site. In addition, the building on the site increases the site's value, which could complicate acquisition. The other major disadvantage for this site is that, like Sites A and C, the surrounding blocks have few existing supportive uses and are dependent on future development.

Site C: Numeric Score – 10

Description

Site C is a surface parking lot. The block immediately to the south is also a surface parking lot and to the west is a newer parking ramp with street level storefronts facing the site. To the north is a surface parking lot and fire station and to the east is Site B, with a Star Tribune building on the southwest corner and surface parking on the remainder of the block.

Discussion

Again, the primary advantage of this site is that the surrounding uses have strong potential for redevelopment into supportive uses. The blocks to the north, south, and east are all strong candidates for redevelopment. This site scores slightly better than Sites A and B primarily because there are no existing buildings and the total value of the block is relatively low, making conversion to a full-block park more likely. Disadvantages to this site include an existing parking ramp building on the west facing block; that the remaining blocks are dependent on future development for supportive uses; and the site is further away from the Metrodome LRT stop than Sites A and B.

Downtown Core Sites

Site D: Numeric Score – 17

Description

Site D is the Powers Block and is bound by 5th Street on the south and Nicollet Mall on the west. A parking ramp and retail space (much of it vacant) occupy half of the site and half the site is surface parking. Immediately to the south are a LRT station and the north end of Gadiive Plaza, currently occupied retail space. West of the site and across Nicollet Mall is the Excel Energy Building. Northwest of the site is the Central Library and immediately north of the site is a surface parking lot. East of the site is the 5th Street Tower on half the block and a parking ramp on the other half block. There is a built skyway connection extending from the 5th Street Tower across Marquette Ave. to the site.

Discussion

This site is probably the strongest site from a location perspective. It is immediately to the north of the portion of downtown with the highest employment density and is at the intersection of the City's two primary pedestrian/transit streets, 5th Street and Nicollet Mall. There are also strong existing supporting uses on three facing blocks and nearby blocks have supportive uses and street level retail or street level space that could easily convert to retail or restaurant uses. In addition this site is likely the strongest in terms of micro-climate. Two of the fronting streets have low traffic volumes and the building immediately to the south is low (4 stories) allowing sunlight into the park. The primary disadvantage to this site is the existing parking ramp/ retail space, which would need to be demolished for a full-block park. In addition, because of the existing buildings and the location, this block has the highest value of any being considered.

Site E: Numeric Score – 19

Description

Site E is the Ritz Block and is a surface parking lot. South of this site is the Powers Block with a

parking ramp. On the west is Nicollet Mall and the Central Library. The north facing block has a high (6'+/-retaining wall) facing the site with the Cancer Survivor's park and Marquette Plaza above. Hennepin County Family Services, a mid-scale office building with little architectural value, is on the block to the east and while there are side doors facing the park, the main entrance is on 4th Street.

Discussion

The primary advantage of this block is the proximity and relationship to the library's main entrance. A park in this location would enhance views to/and from the library and preserve the current view from the library to City Hall's Clock tower. Also a plus is its current use as a surface parking lot, unencumbered by buildings that would need to be removed for a full-block park. In addition, the site to the south, Power's Block, has high potential to be redeveloped into a supportive use. Disadvantages of this block are non-supportive uses on the north and east sides that are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future and being slightly further from the heart of downtown than Site D.

Site F: Numeric Score – 15

Description

Site F is the Nicollet Hotel Block and is currently a surface parking lot. To the south of this block is the Central Library; to the west is Hennepin Avenue and a new development currently under construction; and to the north is Washington Avenue and a significant office building. To the east is the Cancer Survivor's Park and Marquette Plaza.

Discussion

Advantages to this block are a relatively low property value and lack of any existing buildings. The architectural quality of surrounding buildings is good. The primary disadvantage is the mix of adjacent uses and their relationship to the block. Though the office building to the north and the Library to

the south are architecturally attractive buildings, they are not oriented with entrances to the site. There is a nice synergy between the Cancer Survivor’s Park to the east and a potential future park, but Marquette Plaza is set back beyond Cancer Survivor’s Park and does not significantly contribute to street activity on Nicollet Ave. Overall, proximity to supportive uses is not as strong for this park as the other two Downtown Core blocks. The site is three blocks from the LRT station and the center of downtown employment density and the reduction in activity is noticeable. Advantages that have not been quantified but are worth mentioning include: a park on this site would be supportive of the Mayor’s plans for Washington Avenue; a park on this block would strengthen the connection between the Downtown Core and the River; and the site could provide a gateway from the North Loop area to the Downtown Core.

There are both needs and opportunities for parks in two areas of downtown: the Central Library area (Downtown Core) and the Metrodome area (Downtown East).

The Metrodome area does not currently possess the critical mass of uses and activity needed to support a successful park. However, a significant park (full block) should be established in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Metrodome area. The three identified blocks near the Central Library clearly offer the greatest opportunity for a new downtown Minneapolis signature park. The one of these three ultimately pursued will depend on a variety of factors more detailed and more nuanced than this current stage of analysis provides.

Conclusion

There are several primary conclusions that can be drawn from this comparative analysis.

Table 3 – Round Detailed Analysis of Potential Candidate Sites

	Criteria	Definition	Rating		
			Best	Good	Fair
Physical	density of surrounding employment uses	<i>There is intensity of use and population</i>	Site is within a TAZ (Transportation Analysis Zone) with high employment density (200- 450 emp/acre) and is immediately adjacent to a TAZ with the highest employment density (450 + emp/acre)	Site is within a TAZ (Transportation Analysis Zone) with high employment density (200 -450 emp/acre)	Site is within a TAZ with the moderate employment density (50-200 emp/acre)
	density of surrounding residential uses	<i>There is intensity of use and population</i>		Site is within a TAZ with moderate residential density (10-29 res/acre) or is within 1/8 mile of a TAZ with the high residential density (30-49 residents per acre)	Site is between 1/8- 1/4 mile of a TAZ with high residential density (30-49 res/acre)
	land area / size	<i>Large enough to support prominent space that can accommodate a variety of park space needs. Large enough to be clearly a public park for use by anyone and not just a certain business or group of residences.</i>	Site is entire typical city block (2.5 acres) with no existing buildings	Site is an entire small block (between 1.25-2.5 acre) with no existing buildings	Site is an entire typical city block (2.5acres approx.) with existing buildings

Table 3 Continued

	Criteria	Definition	Rating		
			Best	Good	Fair
Physical	location relative to other parks	<i>MPRB policy of a park within six blocks (approx. 1/2 mile) of every resident in city – does the site support or suplicate other park resources.</i>	Site is 1/2 mile or more from existing neighborhood parks and is 1/4 mile or more from existing programmed plazas	Site is between 1/4-1/2 mile from existing neighborhood parks and is between 1/8-1/4 mile from an existing programmed plaza	
	mix of existing adjacent uses	<i>Mix of uses supports wider range of hours of activity nearby and within the park. Provides safer-feeling environment and avoids park dead space.</i>	Supportive uses (office, residential or prominent destination) with building entrances on at least 3 facing blocks	Supportive uses (office, residential or prominent destination) with building entries oriented to site on 2 facing blocks	Supportive use (office, residential or prominent destination) with primary building entries on 1 facing block or less
	potential future mix of adjacent uses	<i>Adjacent blocks have a strong potential for redevelopment into supportive uses</i>	Three or more adjacent blocks are surface parking or have buildings that are likely to be redeveloped/reused in the future	Two or more adjacent blocks are surface parking or have buildings that are likely to be redeveloped/reused in the future	One or more adjacent blocks is surface parking or has buildings that are likely to be redeveloped/reused in the future
	proximity to supportive uses	<i>Uses that will create instant demand: synergy between uses (going out for lunch then to park).</i>	Existing first floor retail/restaurant facing the site and buildings with space suitable for conversion to first floor retail (windows and building entries) on 5 surrounding blocks	Existing first floor retail/restaurant on one block facing the site and buildings space suitable for conversion to first floor retail (windows and building entries) on 1-4 surrounding blocks	No existing first floor retail/restaurant space on any blocks facing the site
	pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity	<i>Park has connections to other open spaces, business needs, transit (equity – not just for people living or working in close proximity), and/or cultural amenities.</i>	Adjacent to Nicollet Mall and an LRT station and skyway access	Adjacent to Nicollet Mall or within 1 block of an LRT station	Not adjacent to Nicollet Mall or within 1 block of an LRT station
	visibility	<i>Park is visible from prominent destinations</i>	Direct sightline from prominent destination (from a facing block)	Sightline from a prominent destination (from a surrounding block)	Site does not have a direct sightline from prominent destination
	micro-climate	<i>Park space has a pleasant environment.</i>	Existing buildings on block to the south do not block sun and site is adjacent to two or more low traffic adjacent streets (Nicollet Mall, 5th Street)	Existing buildings on block to the south do not block sun and site is adjacent to 1 low traffic Street (Nicollet Mall, 5th Street)	There are no existing buildings on the block to the south and site is not adjacent to a low traffic street
	architectural quality of surrounding building facades	<i>Building facades attractive and enhance the overall aesthetics/view from the park site.</i>	Existing contributing building facades on a minimum of 2 adjacent blocks and no detracting building facades on any facing blocks	Existing contributing building facades on a minimum of 1 adjacent block with no more than 1 adjacent block with detracting building facades	No more than one adjacent block with detracting building facades
	ability to preserve prominent views	<i>Park can help preserve views to river, historic buildings or other prominent buildings/city features.</i>	Has a direct sightline to architectural or natural landmark (on an adjacent block)	Has an indirect sightline to an existing architectural or natural landmark (on a surrounding block or a distant view)	Does not have a sightline to an existing architectural or natural landmark
Feasibility	property value	<i>Property is financially obtainable for park space conversion.</i>	Total Estimated Market Value is less than \$5,000,000	Total Estimated Market Value is between \$5,000,000 - \$15,000,000	Total Estimated Market Value is more than \$15,000,000
	unconstrained by easements, long-term uses, buildings, etc.	<i>Site is not limited in ability to change use to park space</i>	There are no buildings with potential for historic significance on the site		There are building with potential historic significance on the site

Table 4 - Detailed Assessment of Candidate Sites

	Criteria	Definition	Site											
			Downtown East						Downtown Core					
			A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F
Physical	density of surrounding employment uses	<i>There is intensity of use and population</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Good	1
	density of surrounding residential uses	<i>There is intensity of population</i>	Good	1	Good	1	Good	1	Fair	0	Good	1	Good	1
	land area / size	<i>Large enough to support prominent space that can accommodate a variety of park space needs. Large enough to be clearly a public park for use by anyone and not just a certain business or group of residences.</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1
	location relative to other parks	<i>MPRB policy of a park within six blocks (approx. 1/2 mile) of every resident in city – does the site support or supplant other park resources.</i>	Good	1	Good	1	Good	1	Good	1	Good	1	Best	2
	mix of existing adjacent uses	<i>Mix of uses supports wider range of hours of activity nearby and within the park. Provides safer-feeling environment and avoids park dead space.</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Fair	0
	potential future mix of adjacent uses	<i>Surrounding uses have high potential for redevelopment</i>	Best	2	Best	2	Best	2	Fair	0	Good	1	Fair	0
	proximity to supportive uses	<i>Uses that will create instant demand; synergy between uses (going out for lunch then to park).</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Fair	0
	pedestrian, transit and open space connectivity	<i>Park has connections to other open spaces, business needs, transit (equity – not just for people living or working in close proximity), and/or cultural amenities.</i>	Good	1	Good	1	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Good	1
	visibility	<i>Park is visible from prominent destinations</i>	Good	1	Fair	0	Fair	0	Good	1	Best	2	Good	1
	micro-climate	<i>Park space has a pleasant environment.</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Good	1
	architectural quality of surrounding building facades	<i>Building facades attractive and enhance the overall aesthetics/view from the park site.</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Best	2	Good	1	Best	2
ability to preserve prominent views	<i>Park can help preserve views to river, historic buildings or other prominent buildings/city features.</i>	Fair	0	Fair	0	Fair	0	Good	1	Best	2	Good	1	
Feasibility	property value	<i>Property is financially obtainable for park space conversion.</i>	Best	2	Good	1	Best	2	Fair	0	Best	2	Best	2
	unconstrained by easements, long-term uses, buildings, etc.	<i>Site is not limited in ability to change use to park space</i>	Fair	0	Best	2	Best	2	Best	2	Best	2	Best	2
Total Numeric Score				8		8		10		17		19		15

