

April 18, 2024

WEST PARK BANDSHELL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

ROUND 1

This document summarizes feedback provided by the public and stakeholders during the first round of engagement for the West Park Bandshell Community Engagement project. Held between August 21, 2023, and October 18, 2023, the first round of engagement included four activities:

- Informational Webinar
- Resident Focus Group
- Stakeholder Focus Group
- Pop-Ups at West Park

Each activity sought to inform people about the project and gather feedback on their values, experiences attending events at the bandshell, thoughts on improvements required to host events at West Park in the future, and criteria for evaluating options for the future of the bandshell.

OVERALL SUMMARY

There were many common themes that revealed shared values, concerns, and priorities for the public. Additionally, responses from the public and the stakeholder group (representatives of organizations that are past or potential future renters of the bandshell) revealed minimum requirements to re-activate the performance venue. Below are the key points from all the engagement sessions:

- Community members feel strongly that performances and events are an essential part of the activities at West Park.
- A venue that is multi-purpose and flexible for various types of events to support increasing the frequency of events was identified as a high priority.
- People enjoyed attending a performance in a natural setting and the connections that were built in the community.
- Community members value increasing accessibility, improving stormwater / flood management, addressing safety, and fiscal prudence.
- Opinions were mixed regarding the importance of historic preservation of the bandshell structure.
- Past and potential future users of the bandshell as well as the public, indicated that improvements are required to restart hosting events at West Park. Necessary improvements include bathrooms, a larger stage and backstage, increased accessibility, improved acoustics, and removing the barrier between the audience and the stage.

INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

Date: September 11, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30pm

Format: Zoom meeting

Invitees: Postcards sent to residences within ¼ mile of West Park, 34 attendees

The webinar began with an overview presentation of this project and the history of the bandshell at West Park, which was followed by five questions that participants responded to virtually using Poll Everywhere. Responses were displayed live.

See the appendix to view all the responses in chart, word cloud, or list format.

SUMMARY

Attendees overwhelmingly felt that events are an essential part of the activities at West Park. When evaluating future options for the bandshell, the criteria with the highest number of responses included flexibility for a variety of uses, location of the venue, and impacts on stormwater / flooding. The most common responses to what attendees enjoyed about past events included feeling a sense of community, connection to nature, and the entertainment in a friendly atmosphere. Things attendees disliked about the bandshell and would like changed include the lack of bathrooms, infrequency of events, litter after events, and the lack of food options.

DETAILED OVERVIEW

- Events are an essential part of the activities at West Park (77% of respondents).
- The top 5 criteria that the City should use when evaluating future options for the bandshell include: multi-purpose / flexibility, location, stormwater / flooding, history, community

- The top 5 things people disliked about past events included: nothing, bathrooms, infrequent, litter, seating



- The top 5 things people would like to see if events resumed at West Park included: music events (civic band, local bands), frequency / regular events, food trucks, amplification, plays / theater

RESIDENT FOCUS GROUP

Date: October 11, 2023, 6:30 – 7:30pm

Format: In-person meeting at Mack School Library

Invitees: Postcards to residences on four streets that surround West Park (Miller Ave, Chapin St, 7th Street, Huron St), 12 attendees

The City of Ann Arbor met with residents that live on the four streets that surround West Park. The meeting began with an overview presentation of this project and the history of the bandshell at West Park, which was followed by a discussion of criteria the city should use when evaluating options for the future of the bandshell, likes and dislikes related to past experiences attending events at the bandshell, and improvements attendees would like to see to the venue.

SUMMARY

Similar to the Informational Webinar feedback, residents expressed a strong desire for events at West Park to resume and for the City to make improvements to the venue. It was very important to attendees that improvements increase the venue's flexibility for different types of events to ensure

any investment is successful in re-activating the park. They felt it is important for the City to keep in mind investments need to be budget conscious.

Residents valued how the current bandshell is in a natural setting that feels like an escape from the city. Additionally, they enjoyed how events brought the community together to make connections between neighbors and friends. They disliked the trash in the park after events, the distance between the stage and the seating, and the lack of shade, bathrooms, or food options.

DETAILED OVERVIEW

- What criteria should be used to evaluate options for the future of the bandshell?
 - Utility / flexibility for various uses
 - Location
 - Increased programming
 - Aesthetics
 - Cost & budget
 - Safety
 - Cultural value of local events
 - Acoustics
 - Patron amenities
- What did you enjoy about past events at the bandshell?
 - Connection to community / neighbors
 - Free
 - Aesthetics - nature venue
 - Local artists
 - Proximity to home
 - Hear music from home
 - Variety of events
- What did you dislike about past events at the bandshell?
 - Event announcements lacking
 - Trash after events
 - Loud events, sound bounces off Miller Manor
- What improvements would you like to see if concerts / events resumed at West Park?
 - Amplification for modern bands
 - Seating close to stage
 - Modernization of venue (infrastructure)
 - Announcement board / kiosk
 - Visibility to stage from all seats
 - Shade
 - Multi-use and flexible venue for various types of events
 - Restrooms
 - Lighting on paths in the park
 - Food trucks at parking lots

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP

Date: October 18, 2023, 10:00 – 11:00am

Format: Microsoft Teams meeting

Invitees: Ann Arbor Civic Band, Penny Seats Theater, The Ark, Ann Arbor Summer Festival, Creative Washtenaw, University of Michigan Music School, Sonic Lunch, Michigan Theater, and a member of a local band

The City of Ann Arbor met with organizations that either hosted events at the bandshell in the past or are interested in hosting events in the future. The meeting began with an overview presentation of the project and the history of the bandshell, which was followed by a discussion focused on limitations of the current venue and ideas for improvements to support future events.

SUMMARY

The stakeholders all expressed a desire to host concerts at West Park, as they liked its natural setting, connection to Ann Arbor neighborhoods, and proximity to downtown. However, the stakeholders said they would not return their events or start hosting new events at the bandshell without improvements to the venue because of numerous challenges. The challenges make the venue more difficult logistically and more expensive compared to other locations, and include poor acoustics, a long distance between the stage and the audience, an undersized stage, limited backstage storage and dressing room space, lack of bathrooms, and poor accessibility for both the audience and performers. Improvements to the current venue or building a new venue that addresses these issues would make West Park a more attractive rental venue.

DETAILED OVERVIEW

- Challenges related to hosting events at the current bandshell include:
 - Poor acoustics due to reverberations off Miller Manor
 - Audience is too far from the stage
 - Plaza has poor access to the backstage
 - No bathrooms for either the performers or audience
 - Stage is too small for the civic band and not temporarily expandable for larger events
 - Need more backstage space for storage and dressing rooms
 - Accessibility is poor for both the audience and performers
 - Limited power and lighting
 - Audience area is too small and does not allow for larger events
 - Insurance requirements limit users
 - Decibel limit prevents local bands from using the bandshell
- Infrastructure / improvements required to host events at West Park include:
 - Make it adaptable and scale-able – both audience and stage size
 - Improved backstage: bathrooms, storage, dressing rooms
 - Infrastructure to support bringing in A/V and lighting (power, places for mounting lights and sound, video screen)

- Audience directly in front of the stage
- Better acoustics / orientation of the venue
- Policy changes to decibel limit and insurance requirements for smaller bands
- More accessible performance space and audience seating
- To be successful in programming the future bandshell, the City will need to develop a Long-Term Maintenance Plan, Budgeting for Maintenance, and an Active Programming Plan.
 - If the City cannot devote resources to the bandshell, then it will be underutilized and this project is a historic preservation exercise, and not building an actively programmed venue.
- Other discussion items:
 - Stakeholders expressed an interest in hosting the following types of events, based on size:
 - Local Events / Outreach with 20-500 attendees. Events are non-promoted, non-ticketed. These events took place in the years immediately before the bandshell closed, such as Ann Arbor Civic Band performances.
 - Promoted + Ticketed Events with 1000-5000 attendees. Larger audience sizes are required for this type of event. The current configuration does not meet the needs of this type of event; the audience size is too small and the bandshell structure does not meet the needs for performance / staging of larger performances.
 - Discussion on the right location for larger events with thousands of attendees. This may not be appropriate at West Park, and if not, where could these happen in Ann Arbor?
 - Noise policy has a significant impact on the users of the venue. Improvements to the venue should match the policy of the city (i.e., provide power for amplification if the policy allows for amplified events)

POP-UPS AT WEST PARK

Date: August 21, August 24, August 28, September 8, September 11, September 16, September 20, September 27

Format: In-person drop-by conversations

Invitees: N/A – engaged people using West Park

SUMMARY

Park Staff planned and met with community members during several Pop-Up Events at West Park, adjacent to the existing bandshell structure. During these events, community members had the opportunity to talk informally about the project with Park Staff. Notes were not kept at these events, and Park Staff directed visitors to the Online Survey to submit comments and feedback.

ONLINE SURVEY

Open Dates: August 21 to October 23, 2023

Format: Online questions

Invitees: Residents of Ann Arbor + surrounding communities, 1,355 responses

The online survey provided an opportunity for the greater Ann Arbor area to provide their thoughts on the past and future of the bandshell at West Park. The survey asked about people's values related to the future of the bandshell, experiences attending events at the bandshell, experiences living within ¼ mile of West Park, and any other concerns related to the bandshell at West Park.

SUMMARY

Respondents to the online survey overwhelmingly said events are an essential part of the activities at West Park and supported an increase in programmed events to 4-6 times per week during peak season. They expressed a desire for the City to restore this amenity, and when deciding on improvements, to prioritize flexibility and adaptability of the venue, improve stormwater management, and increase accessibility. Respondents were mixed on the importance of historic preservation of the bandshell. Respondents also asked the city to consider the following when evaluating options for the future of the bandshell: safety, cost / budget, quantity of and proximity to parking, acoustics of the venue, noise impact on neighbors, and preserving the experience of a venue in nature.

Suggestions for improvements to the performance venue included additional bathrooms, accessibility of the stage and seating, proximity to accessible parking spaces, food options during events, shade in the audience area, and locating the audience directly in front of the stage.

Respondents expressed concerns related to the bandshell and West Park as a whole, which included lack of lighting, crime, drug use, presence of unhoused individuals, and trash.

DETAILED OVERVIEW

Below is a detailed summary of the responses from the online survey. The feedback is organized into the following themes: Values, Concerns, and Programming; Experiences Attending Concerts / Events; Experiences Living Near West Park. For the full report with the responses to each question, refer to the appendix.

VALUES, CONCERNS, AND PROGRAMMING

- **It is important to most respondents that West Park host events again** [Question 1], with 78% of people indicating it was either somewhat or very important.
- **A majority of respondents indicated the following values are important** when evaluating options for the future of the bandshell [Questions 2, 3]:
 1. **Flexibility / Adaptability to Increase Usage**
 2. **Improvements to Stormwater / Floodplain**
 3. **Improve Accessibility**

- **Responses were mixed regarding the importance of historic preservation** of the bandshell structure [Questions 2, 3, 6].
- **Respondents wrote the following values** to consider when evaluating the future of the bandshell [Question 4].
 - **Reiterated values** from Questions 2 and 3 include:
 - **Accessibility** and usability of the bandshell for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds.
 - **Stormwater/floodplain management** in the bandshell area, and the environmental impact of the bandshell.
 - **Historic preservation** of the bandshell structure, and the possibility of honoring its history in a new structure or exhibit.
 - **Flexibility and adaptability** of the bandshell to accommodate different types of events, performances, and activities.
 - **New values** include:
 - **Safety** of the park and the bandshell area, especially regarding drug use and crime
 - **Unhoused individuals** living in West Park was a concern.
 - **Cost** of restoring, maintaining, or replacing the bandshell, and possible sources of funding or fundraising.
 - **Parking** availability and accessibility for visitors and performers.
 - **Community engagement** and outreach, including partnering with local artistic groups, promoting local music, and providing education and history.
 - **Concerts** and events, such as the types, frequency, diversity, and publicity of the programming.
 - **Noise** impact on the nearby residents and neighborhoods.
 - **Acoustics** and sound quality of the bandshell and the surrounding environment.
 - **Aesthetics** and design of the bandshell and the park, and the potential for adding public art or other features.
 - **Other uses** for the bandshell or the space, such as bathrooms, food trucks, rentals, etc.
 - **Other locations** for a similar outdoor venue, either within or outside West Park.
- **A vast majority (90%) of respondents support an increase in events** (4-6/week) to activate the park and justify investment [Question 5].
- **Respondents wrote the following concerns related to safety and security** at the bandshell [Question 7].
 - **No Concerns** were expressed by respondents regarding safety or security at the bandshell in its current or future state.
 - **Structural Issues** were a point of concern, with respondents highlighting the bandshell's foundation and floor as unsafe. Suggestions included repairing or replacing the bandshell, while the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of such actions were questioned by some.
 - **Crime and Drug Use** were issues raised that pertained to West Park as a whole, not just the bandshell. Respondents mentioned crime, drug use, and instances of vandalism in the park. Proposals to address these issues included more activities, improved lighting, enhanced security, and increased outreach.
 - **Encampments** were a concern, some respondents expressed concern for the unhoused individuals and others felt unsafe when they were asked for money.
 - **Stormwater Management** was brought up by some respondents, specifically the exposure of Allen Creek and the flooding of the foundation. The environmental benefits or costs of the stormwater project were also questioned.
 - **Bathrooms**, or the lack thereof, were a concern. Respondents indicated that bathrooms are needed for the comfort and convenience of park users and event attendees, with some expressing concerns about the safety or cleanliness of potential facilities.

- **Noise** was another concern, with respondents worried that loud concerts or music could disturb nearby residents or wildlife. Suggestions included limiting the frequency or duration of events or imposing noise restrictions.
- **The following items not relevant to safety or security were also mentioned:**
 - **Cost / Budget** was a concern for some respondents, who suggested the city should weigh the cost of maintaining the current shell versus building a new one. Some respondents felt that the city should not spend money on the bandshell and should prioritize other needs instead.
 - **Design Concerns** were expressed by respondents, with preferences varying from preserving to replacing the shell structure. Others suggested improvements for accessibility, acoustics, aesthetics, or flexibility.
 - **Parking** was a concern due to the limited capacity in the park. Some respondents felt that parking was insufficient for the expected number of event attendees. Traffic or congestion problems resulting from increased park usage were also mentioned by some respondents.

EXPERIENCES ATTENDING CONCERTS AND EVENTS

- **The majority (72%) of respondents attended an event (or multiple) at the bandshell in the past. 25% of respondents attended an outdoor concert at another park** (including outside Ann Arbor) [Question 8].
- **For those that attended an event at the bandshell:**
 - The **vast majority (92%) attended a Concept / Music event**, many (39%) attended a Show / Play, 23% attended a Group Gathering, and 10% Other [Question 9].
 - A **majority of respondents traveled to the park by walking (63%)**, followed by driving (28%), and a smaller number bicycled (8%) or rode public transit (1%) [Question 12].
 - **Opinions on the difficulty of finding parking were mixed** for the people that drove to the park [Question 13].
- **Respondents that attended an outdoor concert / event at the West Park bandshell wrote the following was positive about their experience** [Questions 10]:
 - **Sense of community** was fostered through interactions with neighbors and other individuals in a casual and friendly atmosphere, with attendees enjoying the diversity and family-friendly nature of the events.
 - The **park setting** was appreciated for its natural and relaxing environment, stormwater features, green space, and the walkability of the location.
 - The **quality and variety of music and performances** were appreciated. Attendees liked the informality and accessibility of the events and enjoyed being exposed to new music or plays.
 - The **history and tradition** of the bandshell were noted, with shared memories of attending or performing at the bandshell as children, parents, or grandparents.
 - The **positive impact** of having such a resource, space, and opportunity to enjoy the arts and the outdoors in their community was expressed.
- Respondents that had not attended an event at the West Park bandshell but **attended an outdoor concert / event at another park wrote the following was positive about their experience** [Questions 15]:
 - **Community** was at the forefront of many respondents' experiences, with the engagement and gathering aspects being particularly positive.
 - **Outdoor** elements such as being outside, in nature, with fresh air, weather, or sunlight were enjoyed by many respondents.
 - **Music**, including the performers and the live music experience, was a key aspect appreciated by many respondents.

- **Accessibility** features like affordability, convenience, and flexibility of the outdoor events were highly valued by many respondents.
- **Food** availability, including drinks, vendors, and food trucks, was a positive aspect for some respondents.
- The **family-friendly** nature of the events, including their kid-friendly and casual atmosphere, was highlighted by some respondents.
- The **space** at the outdoor venues, including seating, room, and grass, received praise from some respondents.
- **Nothing** was positive about some respondents' experiences.
- **Safety** was a notable point for a few respondents, who appreciated feeling safe, the presence of police, and clean facilities.
- **Other** aspects such as art, shade, parking, or local businesses were positively mentioned by a few respondents.
- Respondents that **attended an outdoor concert / event at the West Park bandshell wrote the following was negative about their experience** [Questions 11]:
 - **Nothing** was negative about the experience
 - **Parking** was difficult, limited, or far away
 - **Mosquitoes or bugs** were annoying or abundant
 - **Bathrooms** were nonexistent
 - **Configuration & Condition** caused problems due to size, separation from the audience, and deteriorating structure
 - **Seating** was uncomfortable, unclear, or inadequate
 - **Sound** was poor, loud, hard to hear, or echoed
 - **Unhoused** people were disruptive or made people feel unsafe
 - **Shade** was lacking or insufficient
 - **Stormwater** wetland was in the way of ideal seating area, flooding, wet seating area
- Respondents that had not attended an event at the bandshell but had **attended an outdoor concert / event at another park wrote the following was negative about their experience** [Questions 15]:
 - **Nothing** was negative about the experience for many respondents
 - **Parking** was a common issue, especially in downtown areas
 - **Bugs or insects** were annoying for some attendees
 - **Weather** was unpredictable or unfavorable, such as rain, heat, or mud
 - **Lack of public restrooms or bathroom access** was a problem for some people
 - **Acoustics or sound quality** were not ideal for some venues or events
 - **Seating** was troublesome, such as finding a spot, bringing chairs, or seeing the stage
 - **Crowds or noise** from other people or activities were distracting or unpleasant
 - **Sightlines or visibility** of the stage or performers were poor for some locations
 - **Lack of shade or sun protection** made some events too hot or uncomfortable

EXPERIENCES LIVING NEAR WEST PARK

- **40% of respondents lived within ¼ mile or 3-4 blocks from West Park prior to 2020** (the last year events were held at the bandshell) [Question 17].
- **51% of the people that lived within ¼ mile from West Park could hear events from their home** [Question 18].
 - **The vast majority of people felt positive about hearing events at West Park from their home, including 58% reporting very positive and 26% somewhat positive** [Question 19].

- **The people that lived within ¼ mile of West Park wrote the following concerns if West Park were programmed more frequently (4-6 events / week) following any improvements [Question 20].**
 - **Noise level** and **ending time** of the events, especially for the nearby residents and neighbors.
 - **Parking** and **traffic** issues, especially on the adjacent streets and the park's limited parking lot.
 - **None** or **no concerns**, expressing support or indifference for more frequent events.
 - **Litter, trash,** and **waste** management, especially after the events and in the park area.
 - **Safety** and **security** for the attendees and the park users, especially at night and with the presence of unhoused people and drug users.
 - **Type** and **quality** of the events, expressing preferences or opinions for different kinds of music, performances, and activities.
 - **Accessibility** and **amenities** for the events, such as restrooms, concessions, seating, lighting, etc.
 - **Cost** and **funding** of the events and the improvements, questioning the sources and the priorities of the spending.
 - **Frequency** and **size** of the events, suggesting that 4-6 events per week is too much or unrealistic, and that the events should be limited to local or small-scale performers.
 - **Historical preservation** and **character** of the bandshell and the park, expressing appreciation or concern for the original structure and the park's natural features.
 - **Flood management** and **environmental impact** of the events and the improvements, mentioning the floodplain and the wetland issues and the potential damage to the park's ecology.
 - **Community engagement** and **diversity** of the events, expressing hope or concern for the events to reflect and serve the needs and interests of the local and multicultural community.
- **Respondents wrote the following was important for the city to know about the bandshell and West Park [Question 21].** Note the themes below were also mentioned in prior write-in questions.
 - **Safety concerns** were prevalent among many respondents, who were worried about drug use, crime, and harassment in West Park. Suggestions to improve safety included increased police presence, better lighting, and more park activation to deter negative activities.
 - **Unhoused individuals** were a concern of some respondents. Comments mentioned there were encampments in the past, others felt uncomfortable and unsafe when asked for money, and others noted the trash around sleeping areas.
 - The **preservation of the bandshell** was important to many respondents, who saw it as a historic and cultural asset that should be preserved or renovated.
 - The idea of a **new or improved performance space** in West Park or elsewhere in the city was supported by many respondents. They cited the need for better acoustics, accessibility, parking, restrooms, and amenities, and suggested more diverse and frequent programming to attract larger audiences.
 - **Floodplain issues** were acknowledged by many respondents, who recognized the challenges of maintaining the bandshell in the floodplain. Suggestions included relocating the bandshell within the park or city, or designing a new structure that is more resilient to flooding.
 - The **natural features** of West Park, such as the pond, creek, trees, and gardens, were appreciated by many respondents. Concerns were raised about water quality, wildlife habitat, and the ecological impact of any development.
 - **Other park amenities** were suggested by some respondents, including the addition or improvement of features like a cafe, dog park, playground, or picnic tables. The need for more trash cans and frequent maintenance was also mentioned.
 - **Cost and funding** of the bandshell project were questioned by some respondents. They suggested reallocating funds to other priorities, such as housing, sustainability, or infrastructure, and mentioned the possibility of partnering with other entities or seeking donations.