

Principles for the Redevelopment of JFK Plaza

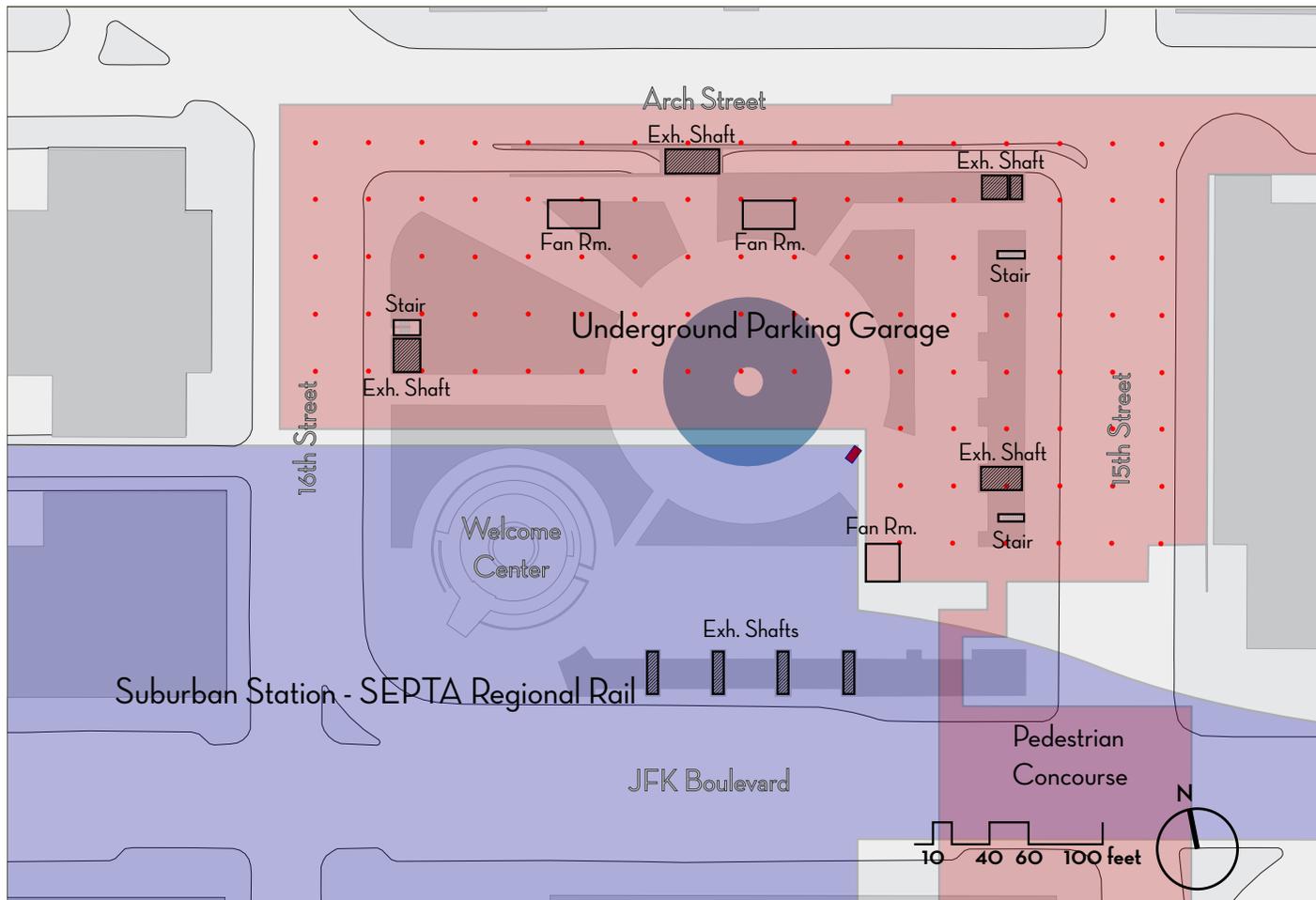


Principles for the Redevelopment of JFK Plaza

JFK Plaza, more familiarly known as Love Park, was constructed in 1964 to function as an introduction to Fairmount Park and to mark an end of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The plaza was constructed as the roof of a parking garage that was part of the redevelopment plan for “Penn Center” in Center City in the early 1960s.

The opportunity to enhance JFK Plaza has arisen because improvements to the waterproofing membrane of the parking garage are anticipated, among other significant improvements. In order to maximize the project’s benefits for the public realm, reconsideration of the design of the park’s pedestrian environment must start now.

Listed to the right are eight key principles for the redevelopment of JFK Plaza which are detailed in the document. JFK Plaza is a complex urban space and therefore its redevelopment must differentiate between components of the park that will simply be replicated, components that must be preserved in their original state and location, and components that could be fully redesigned in order to improve the overall quality of the park.



JFK Plaza Underground Structures

Three elements that must be replicated in any rebuilding:

1. The circular fountain and its central jet of water

The single most animating feature of the park is the spectacular jet of water that thrusts from the origin of the circular fountain.

2. The bed of annual planting at the northwest corner of the park

Plantings at the intersection of 16th and Arch Streets, perform as a “bouquet” along the Parkway’s diagonal. The garden is a well-recognized and much-loved feature of the park and must be maintained.

3. The diagonal path between the corner of 15th and JFK Boulevard and the corner of 16th Street and Arch Street

This diagonal axis of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway must be maintained as a pedestrian path through the park. Pedestrians should sense that in this place, they are part of the established diagonal tension between City Hall and the Art Museum.

Two elements that must remain in any rebuilding:

4. The Welcome Center building

The Welcome Center building, part of the mid-twentieth century Penn Center redevelopment, was completed shortly before the remainder of JFK Plaza. The primary recommendation for the structure is preservation.

5. The “Love” sculpture by Robert Indiana

The installation offers the combination of a beautiful, compelling sculpture that reads “LOVE,” with the vista of the Parkway that features the Art Museum. The sculpture must be reinstated at its current location. The spot is useful, romantic and iconic.

Three elements that must be improved in any rebuilding:

6. Accessibility into the park along the JFK Boulevard and 15th Street perimeters

The replacement of the waterproof membrane over the entire garage presents an opportunity to lower the plaza elevation along the south and east sides, giving pedestrians much more direct access into the park.

7. The parking garage and all its dependent vertical circulation

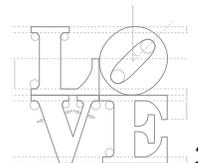
Existing vertical circulation must be enhanced. This may necessitate improvements to the existing stairs that lead up from and down into the garage levels. At the same time, it may be that new egress stairs could be located elsewhere. Elevators must be installed.

8. The integration of ventilation shafts with pedestrian circulation along the south, east, and west perimeters of the park

The ventilation of the garage and commuter tunnel should be investigated to determine if new technology exists that would allow for less intrusive punctuations in terms of the number and size of ventilation shafts and resultant noise produced.



JFK Plaza Street Level



Replicate the Circular Fountain

The circular fountain, punctuated by the jet of water at its origin will be replicated. The central fountain of JFK Plaza not only represents the iconic center piece of the park, but also establishes a link to the fountains of the Parkway.

The jet of water is visually related to the multiple jets of water in the Swann Fountain at Logan Square, and to the Washington Fountain in Eakins Oval, and finally to the jet of water within the fountain on the plateau at the termination of the Art Museum steps. All these fountains can be visually collected along

the axis of the Parkway from vantage points on the diagonal.

The thrusts of water on the diagonal reinforce the tension between City Hall and the Art Museum. At JFK Plaza, additional jets of water could be added to the generously-sized basin around the major jet, in the same fashion as those in the Swann Fountain. At regular periods of time throughout the day, the jets could be programmed to assume varying configurations of water display. At night, the fountain could be flooded with lighting of various

colors to complement the mood of evening. The fountain might even have seasonal lighting.

It may be that in rethinking the fountain's design, the basin might be eliminated and the number of jets increased within the circle of the fountain. In this manner, the area where the fountain is located could become a gathering space when the fountain is not operating. This approach would allow greater flexibility for park events.



Fountain with multiple jets and lighting, Houston, TX
Image source: wikipedia.org



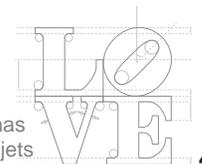
Swann Fountain with multiple jets
Image source: wikipedia.org



Fountain with multiple jets and lighting, Barcelona, Spain
Image source: wikipedia.org



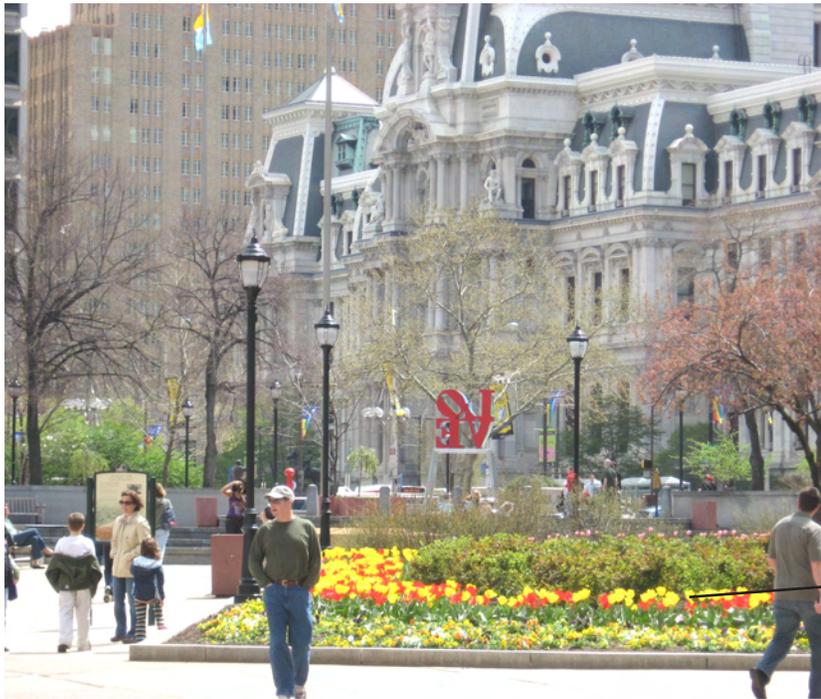
Existing conditions
The fountain basin has space for additional jets



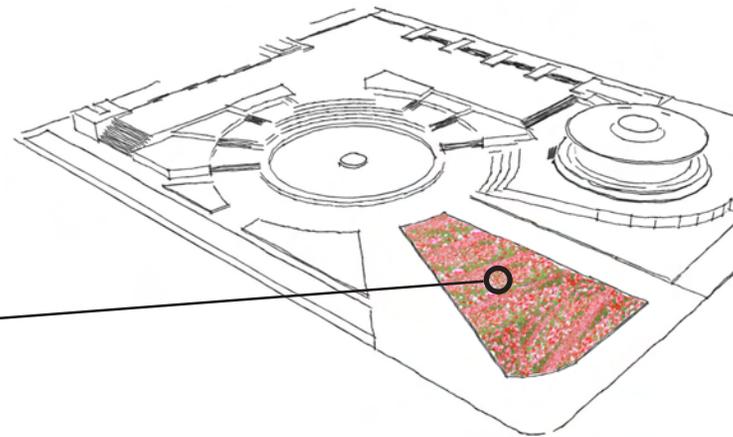
Replicate the Annual Planting Bed

Plantings at the intersection of 16th and Arch Streets, on a triangularly-shaped garden at the northwest corner of the park have always heralded the arrival of a new season. Plantings here are smaller in scale, and more accessible than plantings in nearly any other portion of the park. It is here, where the Parkway begins, that this small garden performs as a “bouquet” along the Parkway’s diagonal. Intense energy

is given this small garden by Fairmount Park gardeners, and is enjoyed by all park visitors and passersby. The garden is a well-recognized feature of the park and must be replicated in a future design for the plaza.

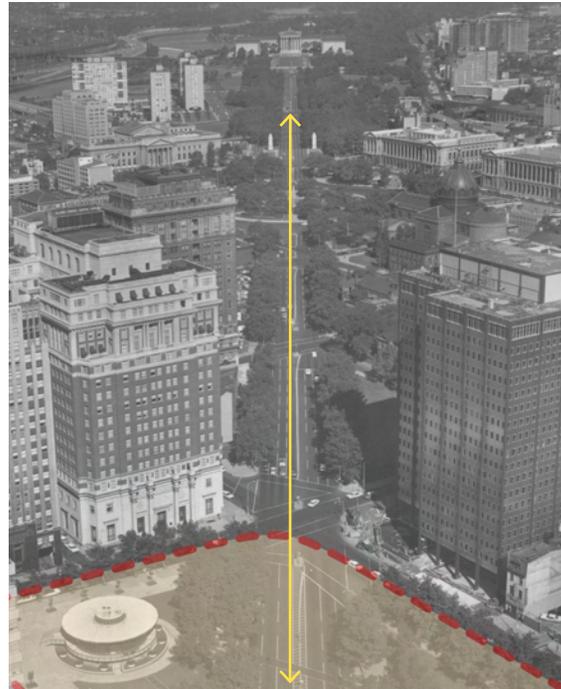
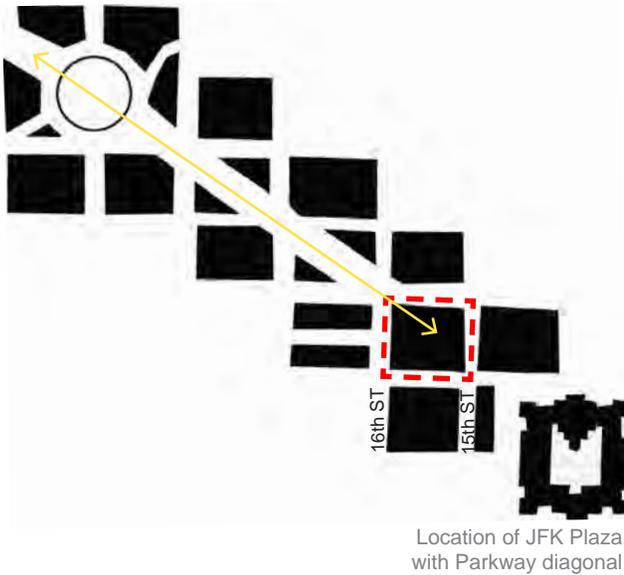


Existing conditions

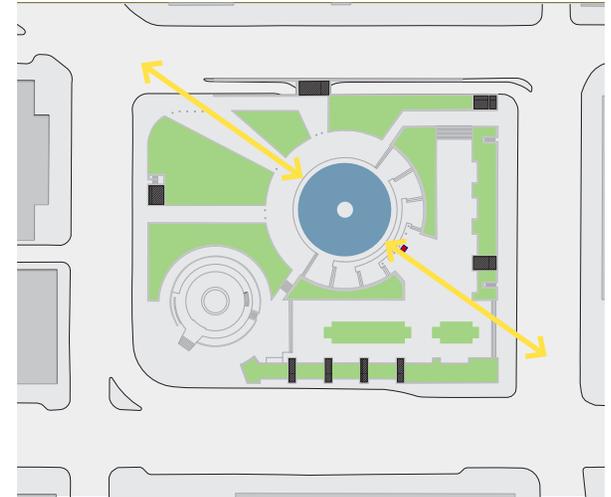


Replicate the Diagonal Pedestrian Path

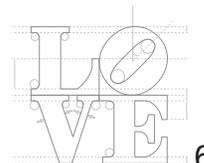
Diagonal pedestrian movement through the park, from the intersection of 15th Street and JFK Boulevard to 16th Street and Arch Street, will be replicated. The diagonal axis of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway becomes a pedestrian path through the park. The pedestrian should always sense that he/she is part of the established diagonal tension that the Parkway creates between City Hall and the Art Museum. The view corridor must only be interrupted by the fountain within the park.



Site of JFK Plaza and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, c. 1962
The Parkway once ran diagonally through today's park



The diagonal park path as shown here, should be interrupted only by the fountain



The Welcome Center Building Must Remain

The tourist center at the southwest corner of the park must be maintained and renovated to support its tourism functions. Architecturally, the “spaceship building” is one of Philadelphia’s few examples of the “Googie style,” an exaggerated Modernism of the early 1960s. The building serves as a geometric counterpoint to the rectilinear, boxy Penn Center buildings.

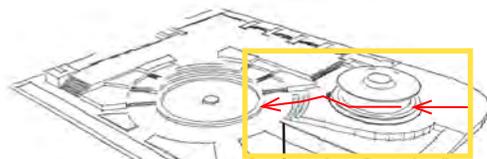
Existing roofing and perimeter glazing material should be replaced with more sustainable, energy-saving materials without compromising the building’s architectural character. The windows

should be more transparent and their E-value should be enhanced to meet current energy codes.

The building does not allow for pedestrian circulation into the park from its northeastern side. This could be remedied, without sacrificing much landscaping, with a new set of broad terraced steps or stairs that lead from the circular building toward the fountain itself. A new stair should be added for direct access from the building’s balcony level to the terraced steps. Furthermore, the existing handicapped access ramp should be replaced with one that meets ADA code requirements.

Re-use of the interior of the building, which admittedly does not offer much floor space, must be efficient and creative. Restrooms can be opened to the public in the lower level of the building. A new handicapped ramp could be constructed to provide access to this level.

The visitors’ center should be lit at night both on the exterior and the interior – to function as a welcoming lantern, even when the center is closed for the day.



Example of broad terraced steps, Union Square San Francisco



Replace dark glazing with energy efficient clear glazing

Existing conditions

Reinstall the Love Sculpture at its Current Location

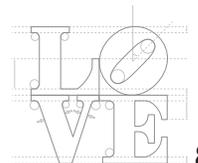
The “Love” sculpture by Robert Indiana will be reinstalled in the Park at its current location. Perhaps there is no place in the City of Philadelphia that equals the iconic importance of this place for photography. People are drawn to this spot; its significance cannot be underestimated. The installation offers the happy combination of a beautiful, compelling, sculpture that reads “LOVE” – where couples, families, and friends, happily pose,

with the vista of the Parkway that features the Art Museum in the long view – a mile away. The spot is both useful and romantic. People line up to have their pictures taken here. A park location cannot perform more admirably than that. Nothing can be done to enhance this location – the City would do well to leave success alone in this regard.

The word “love” also serves the City of Philadelphia admirably, for “Philadelphia,” in Greek, means, of course, “The City of Brotherly Love.” Perhaps no other City in the United States is so associated with the “backstory” of its name. The sculpture also offers up a nickname for the park – “Love Park” – that is not even its proper name.



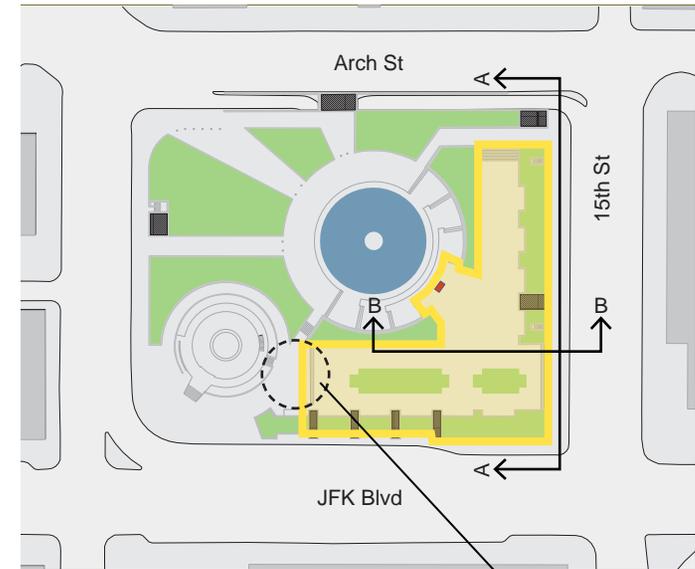
Existing conditions



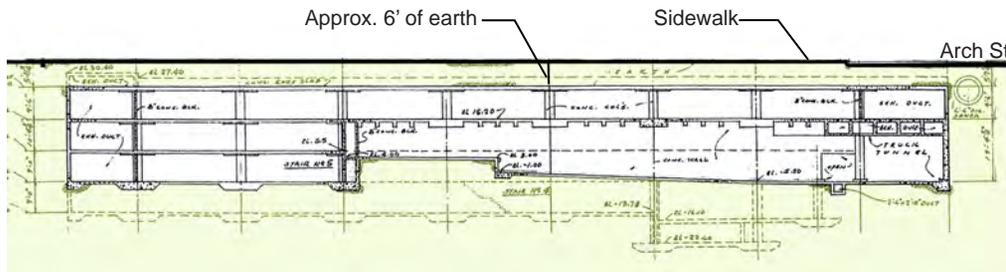
Lower the JFK Boulevard and 15th Street Perimeter Grade

The elevation of the plaza along the JFK Boulevard and 15th Street perimeter of the park should be lowered. By removing the 2 steps that lead up to the level of the plaza at 15th Street and JFK Boulevard (approximately 1'-2") and the 3 steps at the southwest corner of the park adjacent the Welcome Center, more immediate access will be facilitated for anyone wanting to enter or exit the park. By lowering the elevation of the plaza at this key plateau, there are additional advantages in lowering the height of retaining walls throughout the park, and allowing for improved visibility into the park by pedestrians on all perimeter sidewalks.

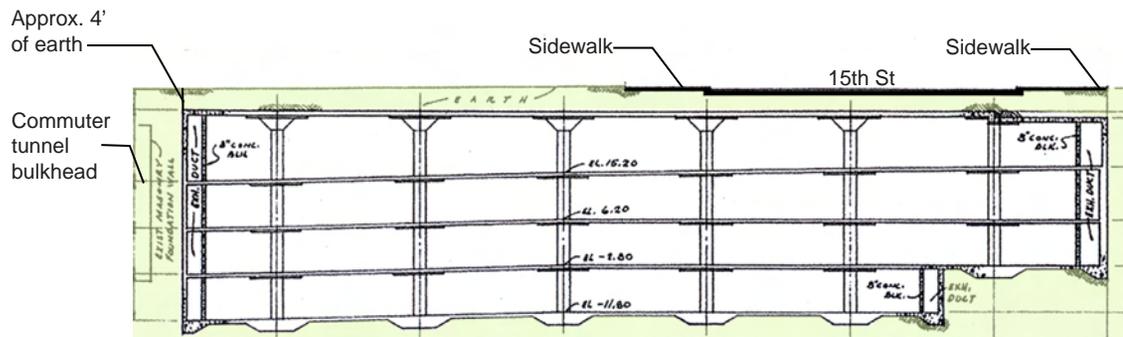
The structural concrete platform beneath the finish level of the park should be studied to determine whether this elevation change can be facilitated. Sections from the JFK Plaza working drawings indicate that there is sufficient earth between the plaza level and the top of the garage roof to lower the plaza between 1' and 2' at the southeast corner. Further research is needed to determine if the plaza level could be lowered a similar distance over the commuter tunnel chamber.



Section of plaza to be lowered by removing steps



Section A
near 15th St looking west



Section B
near JFK Blvd looking north



15th Street

Lowering the height of most retaining walls about 2' would greatly improve visibility into the plaza from the perimeter sidewalks



Remove steps and integrate plaza with the existing performance area. A new stage could be built with both permanent and temporary components. The stage floor might be permanent, while its enclosure and roof could be removable.

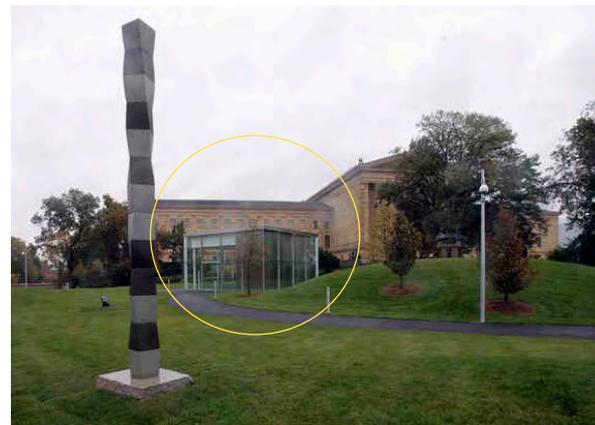
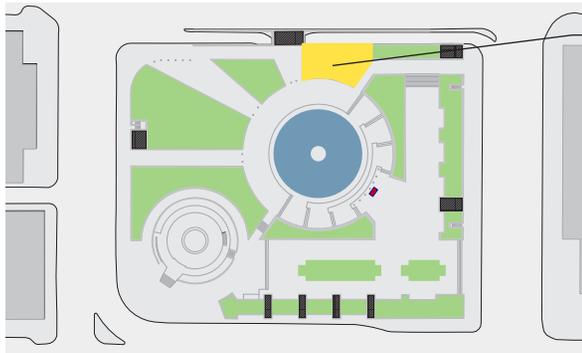


Improve Access to the Parking Garage

Means of pedestrian movement to the levels of the parking garage below the park must be improved. Improvements to the stairs that lead up from and down into the garage levels below must be made, and elevators must be installed for the convenience of garage patrons. In addition, handicapped access to parking and places beyond must be facilitated. Existing stairs within the garage might be widened and made weather-tight to protect them from becoming filled with snow, ice and rain. At the same time, it may be that stairs might be relocated entirely. In such case, weather protection for the stairs is essential.

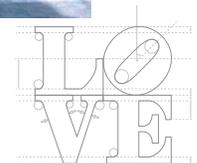
An area in the parking garage should be identified for a new core that would include exit egress stairs, elevators, and a mechanical room. Ideally, this core could be positioned at the north perimeter of the park, in an area immediately against the vehicular ramps that lead into the garage from Arch Street. Of course, the new core cannot conflict with the alignment of the ramps, but this location, or one nearby, is an ideal place to introduce new energy to one of the most underutilized sections of JFK Plaza. Garage patrons must actually use the park – that is, be physically within it – to access the new core that leads to the garage below. This new core has the potential

of rationalizing the peculiar alignment of the east/west paths on the northern perimeter of the park. Their alignment will lead to the core from the intersections of both Arch and 16th Street, and Arch and 15th Street. No core should be placed in the park that does not engage the garage patron in the life of the park itself.



Proposed location for circulation core

- Weather protection
- Improved Lighting
- Signage indicating entrance to parking garage
- Attractive barrier
- Attractive non-slip treads



Integrate the Ventilation Shafts with Perimeter Pedestrian Circulation

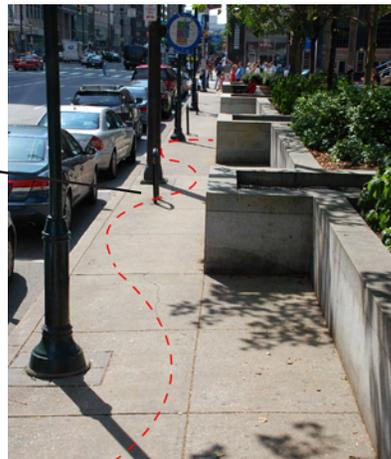
Minimize, to the extent possible, the number and size of ventilation shafts that serve the parking garage or regional rail system below the park. In any reconstruction of the parking garage below the park, the question of the number and size of shafts that serve either the parking garage or the regional rail system might be reevaluated. Particularly along the south side of JFK Plaza, but also along the west side of the plaza, shafts are large and intrusive. Many of these shafts were placed when the parking garage and regional rail tunnel were built decades ago. Because of advances in air handling equipment that changes air in and out of subterranean chambers more efficiently, it may be that these shafts can be made smaller in plan, repositioned or eliminated entirely.



Existing ventilation shafts



Large vents along 15th Street separate the plaza from the sidewalk



Sidewalk between JFK Blvd and JFK Plaza does not have adequate clearance for pedestrian movement. Light posts and vents impede the public right-of-way.



Ideally the walls enclosing the vents would be removed and the plaza lowered to sidewalk level



Steps inserted between ventilation shafts would enable pedestrian access. The new elevation of the plaza here must be reconciled with the elevation of the sidewalk along the northern boundary of JFK Boulevard - some steps or perhaps a ramp may be required.