

Bangor city officials eye historic overhaul of Pickering Square

BY NICK MCCREA
OF THE BDN STAFF

City councilors had their first look at plans for the proposed overhaul of downtown Bangor's historic Pickering Square during a meeting Tuesday night.

The city's development and engineering staff outlined a concept plan that involves rerouting the city's buses, planting more grass and trees, removing the fountain and updating the overall look of the brick plaza.

Last year, the city completed a major, \$975,000 update of neighboring West Market Square, and the city wants that new look to stretch down Broad Street.

"Pickering Square is more challenging," Tanya Emery, Bangor's economic development director, told the city's Business and Economic Development Committee during the meeting.

The plan includes significant changes to the city's parking garage. First, the entrance would be moved toward the middle of the structure, near Water Street. This change would

allow the city to close off the road that passes in front of the garage.

The city's buses would still be stationed at the parking garage, but drivers would pick up, drop off and transfer passengers behind the garage, rather than queuing between the garage and square as they do now. Buses would pass through the garage using the existing opening that leads to the Kenduskeag Stream, take on passengers behind the parking area and then drive onto Washington Street to continue their routes.

Emery said that change is meant to separate the uses of the space and prevent buses, pedestrians and cars trying to get into the parking garage from crossing paths in the congested area during busy times of day.

"We really wanted to find a way to separate those things to make it a safer and more functional space," she said.

The parking garage office would be moved to the garage's new entrance, and new public restrooms would be built.

With the reduced traffic resulting from moving the

buses and the parking garage entrance, the city would expand the square, lay down grass and plantings, build new walking paths, install new lighting and tear out the old fountain, among other changes. The sidewalks connecting West Market Square to Pickering Square also would be improved.

An awning could be installed over a portion of the garage to make it look more inviting, and food trucks or other vendors could be given the option of setting up shop there, Emery said.

Exactly what changes happen and when they happen will depend on the level of support from councilors, and how much money the city is able to allocate to improvements over the next couple years. City officials are in the midst of crafting the budget for the next fiscal year.

Councilors expressed support of the goals and early concepts of the plan during Tuesday's meeting, but many more details have to be worked out before they approve moving for-

ward with any significant changes. Several public meetings are likely to be scheduled as the city works to come up with a solid proposal, so plans could evolve.

Emery said it's likely the bulk of the work would wait until 2017, but the city could check some small items off the list this year, such as removing the fountain.

Historically, Pickering Square was one of several open areas in the downtown where merchants gathered and set up wagons and stalls to sell their wares -- from slabs of beef to jewelry.

George Pickering, for whom the square was later named, was among Bangor's most prolific merchants and developers for the better part of the 19th Century. Born in 1799, he started building blocks of wood-frame structures in the area between Main Street and the Kenduskeag Stream in his mid-20s, according to Deborah Thompson, who wrote a book about Bangor's architectural history including the period when Pickering was most active.

Later, when his career

was further along, he rebuilt those structures with brick and spread his work into other parts of the city. He served as Bangor's mayor for two years in the 1850s, and he was vice president of Bangor Theological Seminary.

Many of Pickering's projects stood near the square that would later carry his name, including the iconic curved building in the former circular block that housed Merchant's Bank and is now home to Evenrood's restaurant. He continued building almost until his death in 1876. One of his last major projects was the building at 105 Main St., currently home to Bangor Window Shade and Drapery, which was completed in 1871.

Relatively few of the buildings Pickering built survive today. Some burned in fires, others were destroyed during the city's Urban Renewal efforts in the 1960s, when the city demolished most of the historic structures along the Kenduskeag Stream.

Before urban renewal, the

area around Pickering Square was bustling with activity and business, according to city historian Richard Shaw, 63. The square was flanked by bars, lunch counters, grocery stores, fish stalls and other businesses.

"On a hot day, it had real ambiance," Shaw said of the square in his youth.

After all those buildings came down, "it became a little nondescript," Shaw said. The area built up slowly with the addition of Key-Bank, One Merchants Plaza and the parking garage, but it was largely left open for parking and open space.

It also is unclear what the renovations might mean for a quirky Pickering Square phenomenon. If a person stands in the center of the square, where the brickwork meets at a central point, and claps their hands, the echo returns as a "squeaking" noise.

Emery acknowledged the squeak during Tuesday's meeting and said the city hoped not to eliminate the sound with these renovations, but she wasn't sure if it could be avoided.

Orono Middle School show choir places first at state competition

Orono Middle School's fledgling show choir is on a roll. For the second consecutive year, Riot Sound placed first in its division at the Maine Vocal Jazz Festival at Stearns High School in Millinocket.

Now in its second year, the 33-member group of sixth-through eighth-grade students performed the set "Loser Like Me," which earned it first place in Division 2 on Friday, said Orono High School teacher Cami Carter.

The performance depicted how one teenage girl felt like an outcast until she realized her peers had insecurities of their own, Carter said.

Carter, fellow teacher Terry Henry and University of Maine student Daniel Perkins directed the production. Perkins choreographed the 20-minute number, Carter said.

Also on Friday, Orono Middle School eighth-grader Katie Owen won one of the four musicianship awards, Carter said.

The following day, Orono High School's new show choir took second place in its division with their set "Time," which Carter described as a story about what people would do differently if they could rewind time and make different choices.

"The set was inspired by someone who lost a friend to brain cancer last year and thinking about what she would have done if she'd had more time with her daughter," Carter said.

Orono High School senior Giorgia Calcagno won one of four musicianship awards, Carter said.

Henry and Carter directed that performance, while Carter, Perkins and August Eaton provided choreography. Bob O'Neil and Jon Hawley of Maine Robotics helped with the set.

Earth Day Festival set for Pickering Square

Transportation for All groups are planning an Earth Day Festival to be held 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, April 22, at Pickering Square, downtown Bangor.

Member groups Community Partnerships for Protecting Children; Dignity for All, a project of Power in Community Alliances; and Food and Medicine are planning a family-centered, child-friendly Earth Day Festival to celebrate the importance of the Community Connector bus system.

The event's underlying message is the necessity to tend to the social and economic sustainability of the local community even as we take care of our planet. There will be a variety of children's activities, read-aloud stories, music, food from local vendors, possibly even a musical flash-mob. Local businesses have donated door-prizes, and there will be donated books for kids to take home.

Transportation for All is an umbrella campaign for a spectrum of congregations and local volunteer organizations working in partnership with the City of Bangor to promote improvements in the Community Connector public transport system.

For information, contact: Dennis Chinoy at 659-2474.

Northeast Technical Institute donates half of all admission fees to Camp Sunshine

Northeast Technical Institute, a career school with campuses in Scarborough, Bangor and Lewiston, once again lives up to its commitment to support those less fortunate in Maine. Effective April 15 and continuing through the year, NTI will contribute half of all application fees to Camp Sunshine. The students and staff at NTI take their civic responsibility seriously and hold regular events to highlight and support others.

Camp Sunshine is located on Sebago Lake in Casco. They inspire hope in families from all over Maine affected by life-threatening childhood illness through their unique, supportive programs and are the only full time facility in the nation whose sole purpose is to provide respite for the entire family. Their programs are all offered free of charge to the families. They remain grateful to their donors and are committed to showing the utmost respect for every dollar contributed by ensuring the greatest possible impact on children and their families.

This ongoing contribution follows a recent generous contribution to Trinity Jubilee Center in Lewiston. Each year, Trinity helps thousands of hungry people by providing not only hot meals and healthy groceries, but assists their clients in addressing the reasons they are hungry and helping people find jobs, housing and to negotiate the challenges in their lives.

NTI also sponsored and donated to the WCYY Mark-A-Thon to benefit the Center for Grieving Children Telethon. NTI has participated in the Mark-A-Thon since 2012 in support of the Center for Grieving Children and this year NTI donated \$1000.00. The Center, based in Portland, Maine, serves more than 4,000 grieving children, teens, families, and young adults annually through peer support, outreach, and education.

St. Joseph Hospital doctor named occupational medicine fellow

Dr. Craig Curtis, medical director of St. Joseph WorkWell and Occupational Medicine, has been elevated to Fellowship status in the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Fellow is the highest class of membership within organization. It recognizes physicians who have been engaged in the full-time practice of occupational and environmental medicine and who have exhibited significant leadership. Fellows have demonstrated their expertise within the specialty by achieving certification in occupational medicine or in another medical specialty. Curtis also has held a dual fellowship in the American Academy of Family Physicians since 1995.

Occupational and environmental medicine is the medical specialty devoted to prevention and management of occupational and environmental injury, illness, disability and promotion of health and productivity of workers, their families and communities. Created in 1916, the college is an international medical society with approximately 5,000 members. The college provides leadership to promote optimal health and safety of workers, workplaces and environments.

Senior Beat
Advice from
Carol Higgins Taylor
about growing older
TheWeekly



TheWeekly
Picture from the Past



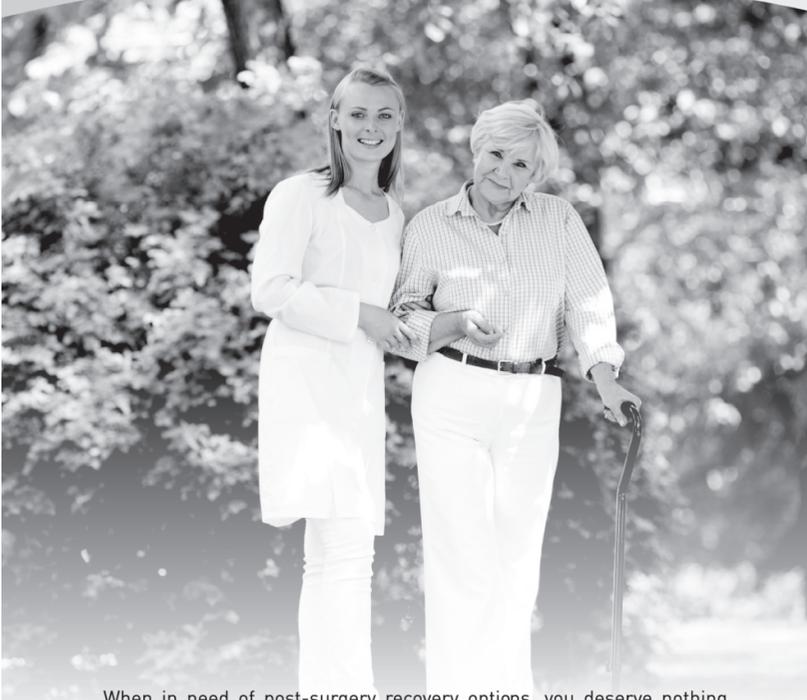
BIG BIRD



PHOTO COURTESY RYAN HASKELL

This Airbus A380 made a roughly hour-long stop in Bangor on Sunday morning while en route from Abu Dhabi to John F. Kennedy International Airport because of poor weather in New York City. Passengers and crew members remained in the plane while it was in Bangor.

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