

# Freeway Park Improvements

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Mayor

**Samuel Assefa**  
Director, OPCD

**Justin Clark**, Acting Chair

**Kim Baker**

**Elizabeth Conner**

**Azzurra Cox**

**Mark Johnson**

**Amalia Leighton**

**Vinita Sidhu**

**Elaine Wine**

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## Commissioners Present

Justin Clark, Acting Chair  
Kim Baker  
Elizabeth Conner  
Azzurra Cox  
Mark Johnson  
Amalia Leighton  
Vinita Sidhu

## Commissioners Excused

Elaine Wine

## Project Description

Opening in 1976, Freeway Park provides over 5 acres of open space within the Downtown area. The park also provides a connection between Downtown, First Hill, and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. Since its construction the park has continued to evolve with trees and vegetation having matured within the park boundaries while high rise development has occurred around the park's edge, creating several design and programmatic challenges. The Freeway Park Improvements project builds upon previous work conducted by Freeway Park Association to repair, restore, and enhance infrastructure and design elements within Freeway Park. The project will improve park wide elements such as wayfinding, park entrances, and lighting as well as design elements that are unique to specific areas within the park.

## Meeting Summary

This is the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) second review of the Freeway Park Improvements project. The purpose of today's meeting is to review the schematic design phase (60% design phase) for the project. The SDC voted, 7-0, to approve the schematic design phase for the Freeway Park Improvements project with several recommendations.

## Recusals and Disclosures

**Vinita Sidhu**, disclosed that her firm worked on the Finding Freeway Park project, but that she was not involved in the project.

**March 4, 2021**

9:00 - 11:00 am

**Project Type**

CIP

**Phase**

Schematic Design

**Previous Reviews**[4/2/20](#), [12/19/19](#)**Presenters**Katie Bang  
SPRCalder Gillin  
Walker MacyKristine Matthews  
Studio MatthewsLara Rose  
Walker MacyMark Smedley  
Bassetti Architects**Attendees**Adam Amrhein  
AttendeeRiisa Conklin  
Freeway Park AssociationJill Crary  
AttendeeDavid Graves  
SPRMatt Gurrad  
HDRAlex Hooper  
Bassetti ArchitectsJoy Jacobson  
FASRhoda Lawrence  
Bola ArchitectureElaine Liang  
AttendeeAmy McHorse  
Studio MatthewsMaija McKnight  
OACJason Neches  
Watt Lighting**Summary of Presentation**

Katie Bang, of Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), Calder Gillin and Lara Rose, of Walker Macy, Kristine Matthews, of Studio Matthews, and Mark Smedley, of Bassetti Architects presented the schematic design proposal for the Freeway Park Improvements project. The project team provided an overview of the project (*See figure 1*) followed by an update on the community engagement process. The team met with the community, neighborhood organizations, and historic preservation experts to discuss project themes and priorities. Key project themes that emerged from outreach include repairing and restoring parkwide elements, improving entrances, and improving sense of safety. Project priorities that emerged from outreach include addressing parkwide elements such as accessibility lighting, drainage, irrigation, wayfinding, planting as well as addressing improvements for park entrances and the renovation of Seneca Plaza. *See figure 2 for more detail.*



Figure 1: Project location

The team then presented the updated design proposal, which includes parkwide and site-specific improvements that were selected from the master plan design. Parkwide elements that are addressed in the design proposal include lighting, signage and wayfinding, seating, planting, irrigation, and drainage. The proposed lighting plan includes new and refurbished pedestrian light poles, refurbished mast lighting, and landscape lighting. The lighting plan also includes accent lighting beneath the 8th Ave underpass as well as lighting integrated with seating and stair elements. The proposed wayfinding and signage plan includes a series of sign types located throughout the park, including park entrance and interior signs that include maps and directional signage, park entrance markers, and secondary signage elements that include directional signage and interpretive/historical information. The plan also includes the refurbishment of existing seating with new timber seats and arm rests as well as new seating that is designed to respond to, but not replicate the design of existing seating. *See figures 3& 4 for more detail.*

The project team then discussed the project's canopy management plan, which specifies the removal of 106 of the park's existing 500+ trees and large shrubs, planting of 24 new trees, and the restoration of the park's understory planting. The updated design will also address parkwide accessibility and drainage issues.

The remaining portion of the presentation focused on site-specific improvements for entrances and spaces located within the park. The updated design proposal includes improvements for the 8th Ave, Upper Seneca St, and 6th and Seneca St park entrances. General improvements for each entrance focus on addressing visibility and sight lines, paving, lighting, and

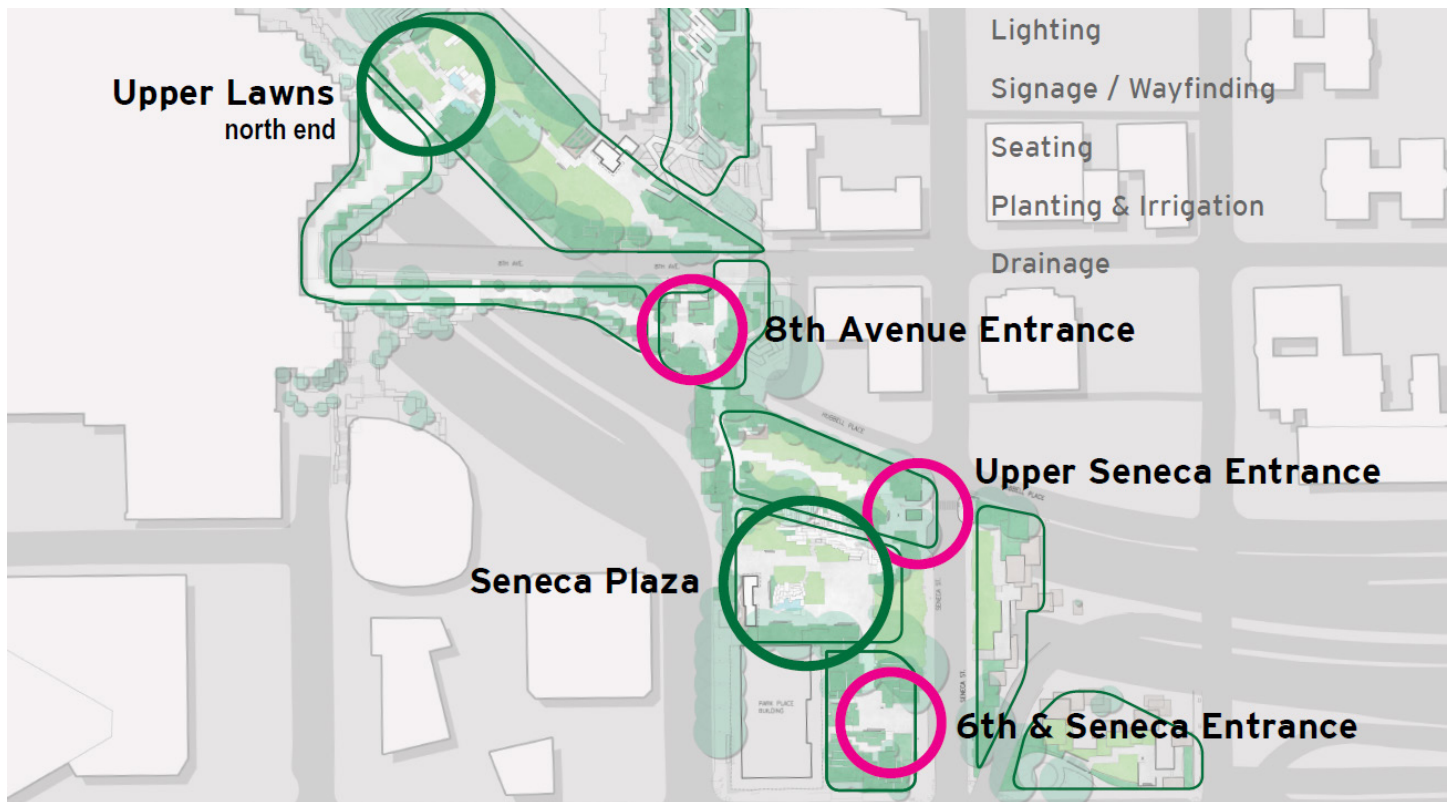


Figure 2: Diagram of park wide and site specific elements included in project proposal

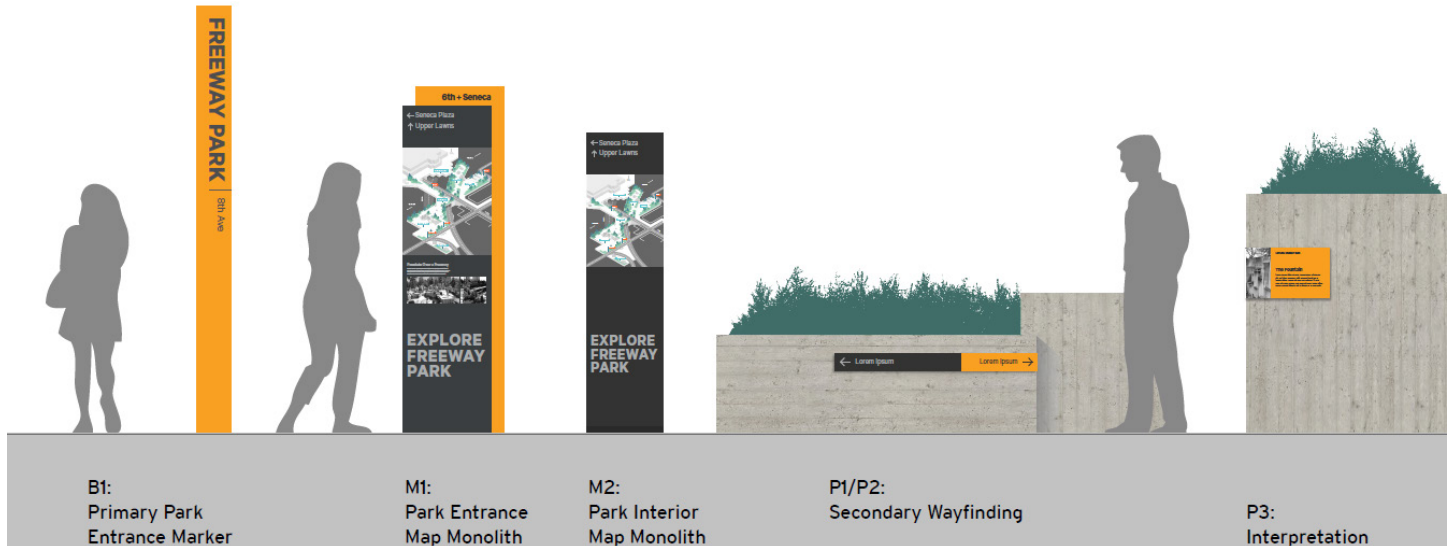


Figure 3: Wayfinding and signage types

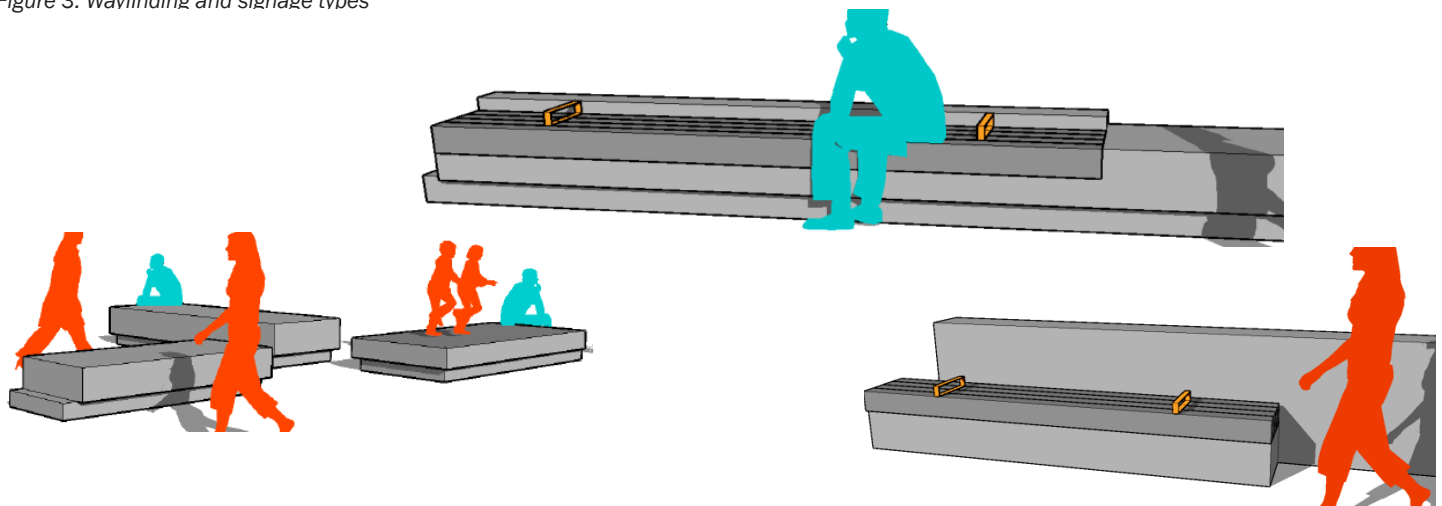


Figure 4: Design proposal of new bench seating (top), new plinth seating (bottom left), refurbished bench seating (bottom right)  
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signage as well as increasing gathering space and providing additional seating opportunities. Improvements to the 8th Ave entrance will also include realignment of the stairway to create an overlook and gathering space as well as modifications to existing walls to improve access and visibility. *See figure 5 for more detail.*

The updated design will also focus on restoration and improvements for the Upper lawns, Seneca Plaza, and Canyon Fountain. The Upper Lawn proposal includes improvements for the existing lawn and updates to improve ADA access. The proposal also includes the restoration of the existing fountain and comfort station. The Seneca Plaza and Canyon fountain proposal includes expanding the open space to support larger programming, restoration of existing fountains, and increased access through the Canyon fountain. The proposal also includes the development of a new concierge/comfort station and storage facility locate at the northwest corner of Seneca Plaza. Both buildings are considered as an add alternative to be constructed if additional funding is available. *See figure 5 for more detail.*



Figure 5: Rendering of proposed design updates for the 8th Ave Entrance (top) and Seneca Plaza (bottom)

### Agency Comments

None

### Public Comments

None

### Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Community outreach
- Park elements in plan
- Parkwide improvements
- Specific area improvements

#### **Community outreach**

The SDC appreciated the project team's approach to community outreach and recommended the team continue to work with the community throughout the design process.

#### **Park elements in plan**

The SDC commended the project team for their ability to identify and prioritize specific elements to be addressed in this project. Commissioners recommended the project team provide additional information about which elements will be considered as an add on for the initial phase of the improvement project as well as information on funding need to include add-on elements as part of the project scope.

The Commission then encouraged the project team continue to think about which elements, that are not included in this phase of the project, should be addressed in the future project phases. Commissioners identified the Box Gardens and the Pike St Entrance corridor as potential elements to be addressed with future funding.

### ***Parkwide elements***

The SDC commended the project team for their detailed development of parkwide elements. The Commission then discussed the integration of existing elements with elements that are either new or being restored or modified. As the plan continues to develop, the Commission recommended the project team overlay existing and proposed elements so to better understand how each element will work together as an integrated system. The Commission encouraged the project team to continue to be thoughtful about the proposal, balancing the need for transparency and sight lines with the sense of exploration that it found in the park. Commissioners also encouraged the team to provide a materials palette that will show existing and proposed materials together. Specifically, commissioners requested additional information about proposed and existing pavement materials and as well as information about the transition and edge conditions between them.

The Commission appreciated the wayfinding proposal. Specifically, Commissioners appreciated the design of the maps. The Commission commended the project team for their use of sign prototypes to better understand if the location and design of each sign type worked well within the surrounding site context. The Commission also appreciated the use of color, which will provide a contrast to the cool color palette of the park. Commissioners recommended the project team consider a hierarchical approach when deciding where it is and is not appropriate to use color.

Commissioners then discussed details related to the lighting and seating elements. The Commission appreciated the project team's approach to lighting beneath the 8th Ave underpass. Commissioners commented that the proposal was a creative opportunity to provide an art element while also addressing personal safety. The Commissioners then commented that the existing seating grips have a strong visual presence and encouraged the project team to consider this as they continue to develop the design proposal for new seating grips.

The Commission commented on the proposal for wall modifications throughout the park. Commissioners stated that the proposal for walls cuts, and other similar changes, are appropriate and encouraged the project team to continue to be thoughtful about the proposal. The Commission recommended the project team provide a diagram showing where visibility will change as a result of wall modifications. Commissioners then strongly encouraged the team to continue to think about the materiality of areas where wall modifications will occur and how it will relate to the materiality of existing walls. The Commission also encouraged the team to use mock-ups to test concrete cuts and to compare materials so to work through any potential issues and to better understand specific details about the design prior to construction.

The SDC then recommended the project team continue to think about the proposed materials palette as it relates to the construction budget.

### ***Specific area improvements***

The SDC appreciated the project team's approach to improving specific areas within Freeway Park. Commissioners appreciated the team's proposal to improve specific park entrances through the provision of additional gathering space, updated plantings, seating, and wayfinding. The Commission thought this improvement would help to increase the legibility of and visibility into the park. While the Commission appreciated the team's approach to increase visibility and transparency by adding tempered glass near the 8th Ave park entrance, they encouraged the team to use the tempered glass material in other areas of the park for consistency.

The Commission then discussed the proposed design updates to Seneca Plaza. Commissioners commended the project team for their proposal to reactivate Seneca Plaza through the restoration of the fountains, increasing existing gathering space, and the addition of a concierge/ comfort station and storage facility. While the Commission appreciated the team's approach for activating the northwest corner of Seneca Plaza, they recommended the team reconsider the proposed layout of the concierge/comfort station and storage facility to better improve sight lines. Commissioners also appreciated the design approach to create a concierge/comfort station and storage facility that is visually light in appearance, but encouraged the project team to continue exploring ways to increase the visual expression of lightness, conveyed through a thin eave to better reciprocate with the heavy concrete forms in the landscape.

**Action**

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation of the schematic design (60% design phase) for the Freeway Park Improvements project. Overall, the Commission appreciated the thorough and detailed presentation and responses provided to previous recommendations. The Commission also appreciated the project's focus on providing well thought out design interventions for the restoration of existing spaces as well as the addition of new programming and park elements, such as the wayfinding program, thread of color, and updated lighting scheme for the 8th Ave Underpass. The SDC voted, 7-0, to approve the schematic design for the Freeway Park Improvements project with the following recommendations:

1. Continue community engagement throughout design process
2. Provide additional details on which elements will remain in the program and which will be considered as an add-on as well as information on funding needed to include add-ons as part of the project scope.
3. Continue to think about proposed materials palette based on construction budget
4. Overlay of existing and proposed elements on a plan to better understand how they will work as an integrated system. Specifically focus on the following elements:
  - a. Placement of color
  - b. Paving transitions and paving locations
  - c. Planting & tree restoration
  - d. Wall cuts and modifications
5. Consider how changes to the layout of the concierge/comfort station and storage facility can improve visibility and sight lines throughout the plaza