



APPROVED

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
May 1, 2008**

**Seattle
Design
Commission**

Convened: 9:30am
Adjourned: 2:00pm

Greg Nickels
Mayor

Karen Kiest
Chair

Tasha Atchison

Brendan Connolly

John Hoffman

Mary Johnston

Juanita LaFond

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Darrell Vange

Darby Watson

Guillermo Romano
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Projects Reviewed

Little Saigon Public Realm Work
Council members Sally Clark and Tim Burgess

Design Commissioners Present

Karen Kiest, Chair
Mary Johnston
Juanita LaFond
Dennis Ryan
Norie Sato

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino



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1 May 2008

Project: Little Saigon Public Realm

Phase: Concept Design

Last Reviews:

Presenters: Robert Scully, DPD
Dieter Grau, Atelier Dreiseitl

Attendees: Jeff Boggess, Atelier Dreiseitl
LaTonya Brown, City Council
Gordon Clowers, DPD
Andrea Felt, City Council
Rebecca Frestedt, DON
Trong Tang, Vietnamese American Community of Washington
Quynh-Tram Nguyen, Vietnamese Community Member

Time: 1.0 hours

(SR169 /RS0613)

ACTION

The Commission thanks the team for their presentation and unanimously approves concept design with following comments:

- **Appreciate the team’s new, broad and creative way of thinking about urban streets and spaces that might be translated to other parts of the city. Appreciate the visionary approach to this difficult part of the city and the use of Asian and European street /street use/open space models.**
- **Appreciate the way the plan maintains the traditional Vietnamese culture while also creating a strong link with future commerce that is central to this part of the city.**
- **Appreciate how the plan acknowledges the private/public nature of the mid-block crossings and spaces, and how the design encourages breaking the grid to create interest and nodes that are useful. We appreciate the slightly chaotic nature of the plan and yet how responsive it is to how the area will likely be used.**
- **Consider edges and borders more dynamically and connectors rather than just as borders. Consider the use of gateways more carefully, not to separate but to mark.**
- **Suggest involving and engaging the broader community in the process and use other means of public outreach that will be more appropriate for the community they want to engage.**
- **Suggest starting the next public meeting with the larger context of the Livable South Downtown Strategy.**
- **Encourage building upon the Bicycle Master Plan to ensure bicycle movement through the space.**
- **Encourage further consideration of Dearborn and Rainier Streets as connectors rather than barriers.**
- **Appreciate the creation of new open space and that proposed strategies will make them valued but encourage special care for the plaza at 12th and Jackson.**

- **Appreciate the integration of green infrastructure and sustainable neighborhood ideas. Look at small moves as well as broad moves there. Though it seems very difficult at present, we appreciate your vision for under I-5, 12th Ave S. Bridge and along Dearborn and to find a good use for all of that seemingly “useless” land.**

Project Presentation

Project Background

The Little Saigon area was once home to a lively jazz scene, and is now a thriving business district. The area is in transition with a mix of industrial, commercial and other zoning. This has made for a harsh pedestrian environment that lacks open space.

Two redevelopment projects in the area, Yesler Terrace and the Goodwill Properties, have brought urban design concerns to the forefront. Because Little Saigon is not as cohesively organized around planning issues as other neighborhoods, a visioning process was held to brainstorm urban design elements for the area.



Figure 1: Concept plan for Little Saigon

After meeting with the community in October 2007, it was determined that a bold approach to the project is needed that integrates both the standard grid and the organic development patterns seen in Asia and Europe. This would provide a unique cultural approach to looking at the urban design elements. Another goal is to create a sustainable city environment.

A third goal is to create a pedestrian friendly environment that continues to promote community and business. Through-block connections are proposed that create open space on a human scale and bring the interaction between the public, semi-public and private realms to the forefront. The team looked at interactions with the surrounding neighborhoods (Chinatown, Yesler Terrace, and Jackson Place) as well as the entire city. Little Saigon has potential due to its central location between Lake Washington and the waterfront, downtown, public transportation connections and opportunity to connect green spaces.

The plan transforms S. King Street and S. Weller Street into ones which are pedestrian friendly and integrate green infrastructure. Parking could be shifted towards the periphery of the area near I-5 and along Rainier Ave S. Several nodes are proposed that will be shared spaces with pedestrians and vehicles. These spaces will incorporate plaza paving over the street, Vietnamese designs and reduced curbs with safety measures. Pedestrian cross-block connections could be created that will integrate water features, stormwater management and cultural elements. A terraced community garden is proposed for the sloped area along Dearborn Street (below the 12th Avenue S. bridge) that integrates

stormwater harvesting. The swath of land south of Dearborn is proposed to be transformed into a stormwater retention area.

Creating public/private partnerships will be key as a joint effort is needed to see the completion of the vision for Little Saigon.

Public Comments

- Didn't know City was planning for Little Saigon, would like to be kept informed.
 - Start of a long term process. Working with community members to get people involved.
- The presentation has been helpful to learn more about the design elements to understand the broader context.
- Appreciate the integration of green infrastructure and engaging the community. Integrating green buildings, neighborhoods and infrastructure is the goal of sustainable neighborhood development; it is great to see it going on here, and hope that attention is paid to all three areas.
- The project is good at pulling together and integrating the area. Encourage the mid-block connections and open spaces created.
- Appreciate work and culturally sensitive approach. Wants to make sure cultural identity part is brought to the table. Concern about the hierarchy of communication and involving more community members, only twenty people came to the meeting.
- Appreciate paying attention to surrounding neighborhoods. One concern is the area just east of I-5 and King Street as a potential parking node. This area may not be appropriate since it would be located in the core of the collective International District Little Saigon neighborhood, and a parking lot is located under the interstate. Moving the parking to the periphery to the extent possible would be more appropriate.

Commissioners' Comments

- Appreciate the conceptual plan. Commissions comments will tend to focus on the larger goals of the project.
- Can you describe how this plan reinforces the connections up and down the hill?
 - Recommend Jackson become a main street and King a mixed-use street. Gateways will also be incorporated to improve connections.
- Historically there has been a synergy between the communities, important to keep and enhance those.
- Rainier is more of a barrier. There is potential to connect to Jackson Place and Yesler, areas where there will be more residential development.
- Appreciate the cultural identity elements, but also see this on a larger scale where the policies are applicable to every neighborhood in Seattle.
- Underscore the importance of bicycle movement. Building upon the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan.
 - There are existing bicycle routes, but are not through connected. This is an area where the plan could facilitate this.

- Commend the team on the balance between neighborhood spaces and outward gateways.
- 12th and Jackson plaza. Could be very successful, but also difficult due to the ownership issues. How do you sell this and make it a successful plaza?
 - A commercially oriented plaza that could be a display to the city, where the green streets are internally focused to the neighborhood. The plaza acts as a connection to the public. Having levels of hierarchy in the street system can facilitate this.
- Images should be street tailored, not commercially so.
- Make sure south downtown context is apparent in June 11 meeting, especially concerning open space element. Larger context of neighborhoods should come out.
- Dearborn is an interesting street, but not recognized as a gateway in the plan. Wonder what the future of Dearborn will be, could perhaps be incorporated.
- Those reviewing the plan should be aware of how development will take place, land owners, geographic distribution of space.
 - Quite a bit of work done on the land use and zoning side has been done.
- Just have it available so people can see that the background work is being done.
 - Creating incentives to encourage through-block connections rather than make it regulatory.
- Quality of life and air quality issues with the community garden located next to I-5.
- Providing an open space strategy. Intriguing mid-block connections through incentives exciting.
 - The sites at 12th and Jackson and parcels along King have the most potential due to only having one owner, could get a larger passage through the site.
- Biggest worry is Rainier and not paying attention to the edges.
- Shared plazas with pedestrians/vehicles as well as public/private space.
- Always a desire to make gateways to zones and am wondering if this is a good idea. It makes a separation when connections and transitions are needed.

1 May 2008 Project: Commission Business

Time: 0.5 hours

Action Items A. Submit Timesheets

Discussion Items B. Outside Commitments
 C. Recruitment

1 May 2008

Project: Council members Sally Clark and Tim Burgess

Phase: Discussion

Last Reviews:

Presenters: Sally Clark, City Council
Tim Burgess, City Council

Attendees: Vince Lyons, DPD
David Yeaworth, Councilmember Clark's Office

Time: 1.0 hours

(SR220 /RS)

ACTION

The Design Commission would like to thank Councilmember Clark and Councilmember Burgess for updating the Commission on recent Council activities, and offers the following comments:

- **Share concerns on specific details of the Block 101 project such as overhangs and massing, and look forward to further review of the project.**
- **See value in the DC being involved in complex developments such as CarrAmerica and SLU. The Commission represents an independent body that is not tied to development funding and look forward to future opportunities.**
- **Look forward to potential overlap in other project areas that the Commission doesn't currently review such as Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market through ROW and other avenues to create effective overlap.**
- **Share many of the same concerns about the DRB. The Commission is encouraged by the opportunities through the belated review of the process and hope the DC can participate in a more effective way.**
- **The Commission agrees that the piecemeal approach to planning and zoning needs to be integrated more holistically and hope collectively we can impart positive change to this situation. The Commission welcomes collaboration and ways to help these changes, and sees potential through the new neighborhood planning efforts.**
- **The Commission also values the broader perspective and will continue discussions on the appropriate role of the DC. Concerned with the nodes as well as the spaces between them and how to keep the perspective. Ballard and West Seattle can act as examples of neighborhood planning and holistic thinking.**
- **Encourage communication on all levels throughout the planning process.**
- **Encourage big picture thinking and interrelationships to temper the provincial attitudes of specific neighborhoods.**
- **Support culturally sensitive design, which was shown in the Little Saigon proposal.**
- **Looks forward to update their Committee on all of the Commission's activities of this year.**

Discussion

The Design Commission appreciated the visit that Councilmember Clark and Councilmember Burgess did on May 1st of this year. The following is a summary of the informal conversation:

The Commission appreciates that the Council pays attention to detail on the design elements of many of the structures that are being built around the City. One in particular, a project requesting a partial alley vacation in block 101 in SLU, appeared to have a skybridge element in its design. Council expressed concern about the appearance of such a structure and its interpretation in the public realm. The Commission shared the same concern but explained that it was beyond the Commission's purview and is more suitable as a review element for the Design Review Board. The Commission was aware of this issue and provided guidance that could address the concerns of overhang and massing related to public space and public benefits that were being presented. The massing between the building structures enabled the building to become a large 'L' connecting functional spaces that would satisfy their required needs. The DC understood that the Design Review Board would still be looking at the project. Providing the public benefit will be the next part that the Design Commission's review of this project. It is expected that the project will retain the Terry Ave building and create a generous public space. Suggestions will be made related to how the massing and bulk of the surrounding buildings could determine the perception of the space.

Council members appreciated the value of early involvement of the Design Commission in complex projects, as the Commission represents an objective voice that is not tied to funding and project ownership. Related to this, Council members asked if there should be a stronger regulatory role for the DC related to public policy and design review. The DC does have collaborative overlap with the DRB, especially with the ROW and joint review project types. One potential opportunity is the comprehensive evaluation of the DRB process. This will be a great time to enhance the effectiveness of the DRB process and a possible collaborative role. The Commission's strongest role can be at the front end of the review process rather than another later review. It would be beneficial if the review process can be applied to smaller projects, as the sometime piece meal nature of construction frustrates neighborhoods. On this issue the DC identified that at times, the complexity of the codes set a precedent for builders to "get away with it" that are sometimes imitated or referenced by others. Perhaps an early design review on the front end and on smaller projects could help define more comprehensive guidelines. In its reviews, the DC asks for a nine-block overview of projects to see the context of the larger picture before looking at the specific details. The Commission will welcome participation in any opportunity that could be implemented in order to help address the simplification, comprehensiveness and effectiveness of design review, and sees potential through the new neighborhood planning efforts. A question was raised on how the threshold of design review that will capture the lower intensity development can be achieved and if there could be a role for the DC. The DC looks at ROW issues and the public realm; residents have well founded questions on who is keeping track of the bigger picture. The Commission values the broader perspective and will continue discussions on the appropriate role of the DC in this arena.

The same has been the case related to Bus Rapid Transit, where some corridors have not been targets for station area planning, and should be. The DC agrees that bus rapid transit corridors could benefit from station area planning, and integrated thinking between City departments and community with more coordination and more funding would help. The lack of communication between city, developers, and residents has been a common theme. An example occurred the same morning with the Little Saigon presentation. Some residents expressed that they were not informed of the project and were more upset with that than speaking on the actual presentation. Perhaps a broader public outreach effort would create open lines of communication and will help improve all planning projects.

Council members questioned if there were or could be Planning Commission and Design Commission collaborative efforts. A direct application of this could be around neighborhoods, specifically Ballard and West Seattle, where explosive mixed-use development is happening. There have been review boards where both Commissions have been involved in the past, like the Light Rail Review Panel. On other occasions both Commissions have joined to express or support a City decision, as seen in the case of the replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct. Both Commissions hold briefings and joint meetings annually to identify priorities and strategic opportunities. There may be potential to join forces to oversee neighborhood development in areas like West Seattle and Ballard as “Test Review” areas to promote the best neighborhood urban village growth and development.

The Commission also tries to coordinate with other boards and City units, to understand other initiatives or goals. The Commission encourages big picture thinking of interrelationships to temper the parochial attitudes of specific neighborhoods, address issues of environment, public participation, development, neighborhood planning and growth expectations. Is a constant goal for the Commission to see projects in a holistic way focus on edges and connections, not just the core areas, and sees the Little Saigon proposal as a successful model of cultural sensitive design with a good planning approach.