APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

May 5, 2011
Convened 10:30 am
Adjourned 2:00 pm

Projects Reviewed
Alaskan Way Viaduct Sound End and Portals
Unico

Commissioners Present
Julie Bassuk, Chair
Graham Black
Malika Kirkling
Tom Nelson
Julie Parrett
Osama Quotah
Norie Sato
Donald Vehige

Commissioners Excused
Laurel Kunkler

Incoming Commissioners Present
Debbie Wick-Harris

Staff Present
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Presentation

WSDOT and SDOT summarized the history of the planning of the south portal area. In 2009, WSDOT, SDOT, ROMA and NBBJ created the Portal Area Design Guidelines. The Design Commission reviewed these guidelines; they became part of the RFP for the design build contract.

WSDOT and SDOT presented the urban design components of the south portal area, including plans for bike and pedestrian access, redevelopment opportunities on 1st Ave, a new waterfront connection via Railroad Way, the connection to adjoining neighborhoods, the S. Atlantic Street overcrossing, and the tunnel portals. They emphasized that the design-build team, Seattle Tunnel Partners, has continually referred to these guidelines throughout its design process.

At a Design Commission review in March 2011, WSDOT and the design-build team presented changes to the south portal area, specifically adding an elevated ramp, moving and consolidating the tunnel entrance portals, and modifying the "little h" overpass design. The Design Commission denied approval of the changes because they did not meet the intent of the visual guidelines. (See Design Commission’s actions from its 3-17-11 meeting.) WSDOT explained that the design-build team suggested the changes to improve constructability, reduce risk, and reduce the expanse of pavement in the final design. WSDOT and SDOT felt the tradeoff was reasonable; the new ramp was not in a sensitive location, was lower than the viaduct, and helped make the transition into downtown as the change in elevation and offered a sense of arrival.

SUMMARY

The Design Commission thanked WSDOT and SDOT for presenting a background summary of the Alaskan Way Viaduct South End and Portals project. Given WSDOT’s commitment to the elevated ramp and relocated and consolidated tunnel entrances and that WSDOT and SDOT did not present a revised design in response to the commission’s March 17, 2011 recommendations, the commission made the following comments:

- Respond to the commission’s suggestions to improve design and mitigate negative impacts as identified in its March 17, 2011 actions.
- Refine the landscape design concept and enhance its connections to adjacent neighborhoods. The quality of the space is as important as the quantity of space. Don’t just apply landscaping.
Explore design solutions that can help mitigate the problems created by the new elevated ramp and consolidated and relocated portals. Apply CPTED principles, maintain street-level views to the waterfront from the development sites that border 1st Ave, and minimize spaces that create antisocial behavior. Think creatively and broadly about how the design can create a new opportunity for better urban design and connections to the neighborhood; it should not be an excuse to degrade the urban environment.

Adhere to the documented urban design goals. The ROMA plan looked more urban and appropriate to the setting; the current concept looks more like a highway interchange. Pay just as much attention to the pedestrian experience in the public spaces and urban realm shaped by this project as the experience of the driver that is bypassing the city.

Provide a plan and chart of the timing and location of all contracts associated with the Viaduct Replacement project (and not just those reviewed by the Design Commission). This analysis will help the commission and team understand how pieces fit together.

At the next review the commission would like more than an hour to review the project.