



APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Mike McGinn
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Tom Nelson, Chair

Osama Quotah, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Megan Groth

Debbie Harris

Laurel Kunkler

Shannon Loew

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Joan Nieman
Administrative Staff

**Department of Planning
and Development**
700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000
PO Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

TEL 206-615-1349
FAX 206-233-7883
seattle.gov/dpd

October 17, 2013

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 5:00 pm

Projects Reviewed

Waterfront – Union Street

9th & Stewart Alley Vacation

Commissioners Present

Tom Nelson, Chair

Osama Quotah, Vice Chair (excused at 2:30 pm)

Bernie Alonzo

Megan Groth

Shannon Loew

Ellen Sollod

Commissioners Excused

Brodie Bain

Debbie Harris

Laurel Kunkler

Martin Regge

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Joan Nieman



October 17, 2013
9:30 – 11:30 am

Project: Waterfront – Union St
Phase: 15% design
Previous reviews: none

Presenters: Hannah McIntosh SDOT
Tatiana Chouluka James Corner Field Operations
Guy Michaelson Berger Partnership

Attendees: Andrew Barash CH2M Hill
Ethan Bernau Shiels Oblatz Johnsen
Karen Branick Schemata Workshop
Jessica Clawson McCullough Hill, PS
Lee Copland Mithun
Shane DeWald SDOT
John Ellis community member
John Feit Schemata Workshop
Mike Johnson SDOT
Kate Martin Park My Viaduct
Steve Pearce SDOT
Geri Poor Port of Seattle
Matt Roewe VIA Architecture
Sarah Sodt Historic Preservation
Lauren Stensland EnviroIssues
Connie Zimmerman SDOT
Sara Zora SDOT

Recusals and Disclosures

Andrew Barash, a member of the Waterfront project team, disclosed that he was a member of the Design Commission from 2008 to 2011.

Purpose of Review

The Design Commission was reviewing the Union Street design for the first time. This project is one of the many Waterfront Seattle capital improvement projects that implement the framework and design concept plans completed in the summer of 2012. Union St is one of several “East West Connections” aimed at knitting the waterfront to the central business district, Belltown, Pioneer Square, and generally eastward to the downtown. Historically there has always been a disconnect because of the grade change, which has been bridged, ramped, stair-climbed etc. at various points.

Summary of Proposal

The City is proposing to construct improvements to the Union St right-of-way between Post Alley and Alaskan Way. At the east end, just above the project, is the Four Seasons Hotel and beyond it the SAM. Flanking the street are Seattle Steam, Public Storage, Antiques Warehouse, and 84 Union, a low-income housing, historic building. The Union Street project encompasses replacing the ground plane,

reorganizing vehicular and pedestrian movements, adding plantings, and adding a system of stairways, ramps, and elevators to connect people up and down the topographic divide.

Summary of Presentation

Hannah McIntosh introduced the project and talked about the role of the Design Commission in relation to the input from other sources.

Tatiana Choulika and Guy Michaelson gave the presentation dated October 17, 2013, and available on the [Design Commission website](#).

Summary of Discussion

Overall, the commission appreciated the direction the designers were taking and saw exciting possibilities for further development. They expressed approval of the massing and placement of the hill climb structures. They encouraged the team to be less restrained with the design of the structures though. Commissioners did not see cohesion in the layering of the public realm on the structures and at the ground plane, and how those relate to the vertical flow of space. They encouraged the team to think further about the gateway they were *de facto* creating for pedestrians heading down Union from the downtown core.

The area where the project connects to the street terminus by the Four Seasons Hotel was seen as critical. The team explained that they hadn't spent as much time yet on this part of the design. The street end there is not part of the scope of work and was constructed with a complex street use agreement as part of the Four Seasons development. Commissioners requested that minor changes to this area be considered that would facilitate a seamless connection to the Union St project.

Commissioners asked about the heights of proposed structures and how they fit in with heights of existing structures as viewed from the east, uphill. The viability and intent of the tree plantings was discussed, as was color and weather protection.

Commissioners were concerned about how the use of the three patterning concepts would play out when applied across so many large areas up and down the Waterfront. They were interested in how the patterning would extend eastward to permeate into the city, including up and down Western.

Agency Comments

Sarah Sodt of the City's Historic Preservation Program offered support for locating the stairway structure away from the historic buildings.

Public Comments

John Ellis, a condo owner in 98 Union since 1985, spoke in support of the proposed design. He noted that the Union Street connection as it exists now is increasingly used by pedestrians, especially since the opening of the Great Wheel. He suggested exploring a pedestrian bridge from the street end at the Four Seasons down to Alaskan Way, passing over Western Ave.

Kate Martin of Park My Viaduct suggested incorporating the viaduct structure into waterfront plans. Her group is promoting this idea and investigating preserving the upper deck of viaduct from Pike Place Market to Pioneer Square.

Matt Roewe, an architect and member of the design community, commented that the plans are a nice improvement. He questioned the need for two elevators and was interested in providing a canopy to the upper walkway of the stairway structure. He stated that grade difference could mean extra capacity to ease transmission of traffic.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for their presentation of the Union Street plans. Overall, they applauded how the challenge of placing structures to span a topographic change in a built urban context was being resolved. They agreed with the choice of a direct and legible approach. Commissioners believe the design balances scale, bulk and presence and provides a respectful treatment of Western Avenue. The Commission anticipates reviewing the project again at 30% design.

With a **vote of 6 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the 15% concept design of Union Street with the following recommendations:

- Have more fun and consider how to bring whimsy to the design. This could involve departing from the literal use of the truss and trestle references. Break out of the rigidity, taking the basic elements, programing, and spaces and pushing them. Some ideas might be to play on the folds idea, draw on the presence of the steam plant, or bring the concept of providing light to the fish from the Seawall up to this level.
- Consider making each of the two structures unique and less similar to one another.
- Consider exuberant colors.
- Explore the elevators and a place where something special could occur with the design.
- Carefully consider opportunities for creating special view moments, not just toward the water, but also in all directions. Focus the balcony moments. Think about view experiences as people use the elevators.
- Pay special attention to the gateway experience that will occur at the joint between the existing uphill porte-cochère of the Four Seasons and this project.
- Improve the connection toward the east, where the project meets the porte-cochère/street end uphill at the Four Seasons. Instead of just providing a narrow connection, consider minor adjustments that can better knit the designs that come together at this point. While the Commission understands that the City has an agreement in place with the Four Seasons for use of the ROW, this joint is a critical piece of the Waterfront plan and minor changes can make a significant difference in meeting the higher goal of connecting to downtown.
- Be judicious about the use of weather protection on the top deck of the stairway structure. It can affect views and may only be necessary at elevator waiting areas.
- Be thoughtful about the at-grade crossing and treatment of Western, even north and south to weave the project into the neighborhood. This is another place to consider breaking the rigidity of the design.
- Limit planting to areas to where they can be successful. Do not over-plant. Consider utilities, soil volumes, and safety.