

Willow Crossing Street Vacation

Jenny A. Durkan
Mayor

Samuel Asefa
Director, OPCD

Ben de Rubertis, Chair

Brianna Holan, Vice Chair

Justin Clark

Rikerrious Geter

Laura Haddad

Mark Johnson

Rick Krochalis

Amalia Leighton

Vinita Sidhu

Elaine Wine

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Strategic Advisor

Aaron Hursey
Planner

Juliet Acevedo
Administrative Staff

**Office of Planning and
Community Development**
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue, 5th Floor
Seattle, WA 98124

TEL 206-684-0435
FAX 206-233-2784
seattle.gov/designcommission

Commissioners Present

Ben de Rubertis, Chair
Brianna Holan, Vice Chair
Rikerrious Geter
Laura Haddad
Mark Johnson

Commissioners Excused

Justin Clark
Rick Krochalis

Non Voting Commissioners Present

Amalia Leighton
Elaine Wine
Vinita Sidhu

Project Description

The applicant is proposing to vacate an unimproved segment of 39th Ave S, south of its intersection with S Willow St, in the Othello Neighborhood. If the vacation is approved, a 7-story mixed use building would be constructed. The development would include ground floor commercial spaces along ML King Jr Way S, 211 residential units, amenities for residents and the public, and below grade parking with 42 parking stalls. All of the residential units planned for the development will be for individuals earning 60% of area median income (AMI).

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the Willows Crossing Street Vacation. The purpose of this meeting was to review the public trust analysis for the project. After the presentation and discussion the SDC voted, 5-0, to approve the public trust analysis with one condition and several recommendations.

Recusals and Disclosures

None

June 6, 2019

1:00 - 2:30 pm

Type

Street Vacation

Phase

Public Trust Analysis

Previous Reviews

None

Presenters

Hui Tran

Studio 19 Architects

Emily Thompson

GMD Development

Jeff Wall

Studio 19 Architects

Attendees

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Genevieve Hale-Case

GMD Development

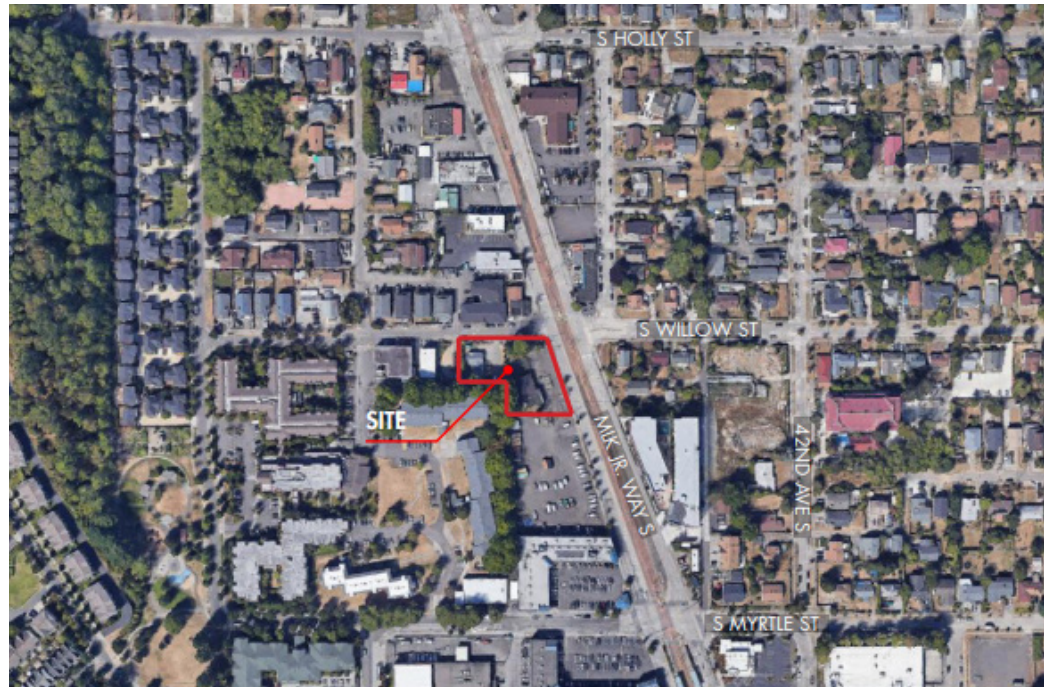


Figure 1: Project location

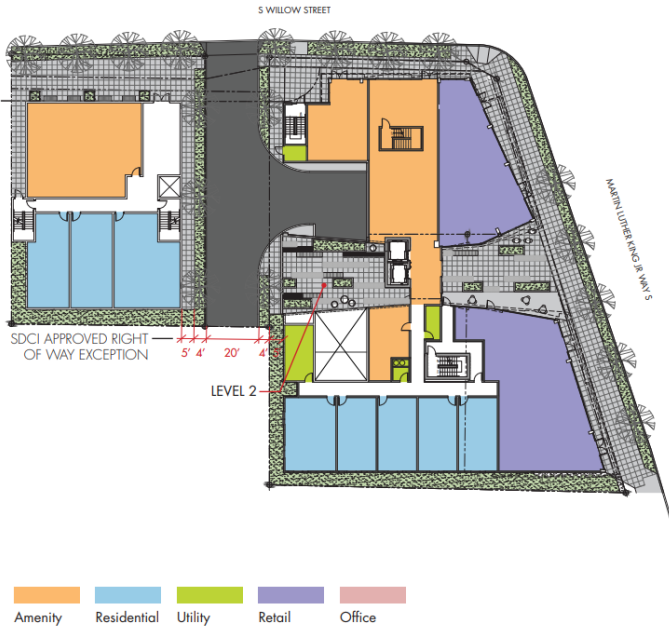
Summary of Presentation

Emily Thompson, of GMD Development, and Jeff Wall and Hui Tran, of Studio 19 Architects, presented the public trust analysis phase of the Willows Crossing Street Vacation project. The project team provided background and surrounding context information for the project. The original project, proposed by a different developer, assumed market rate housing on the parcel located at Martin Luther King Jr Way S and S Willow St. The original project team obtained a master use permit (MUP) for the project. The current developer purchased the site as well as the adjacent parcel to the west across the unimproved 39th Ave S right of way, in order to develop a larger affordable housing project. The current project team has submitted MUP modification drawings to be reviewed by the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI). Although the project team provided vacation and no-vacation alternatives for review, the project team stated that if the vacation were not granted the development would not occur and control of the site would be given to the City of Seattle's Office of Housing.

The proposed vacation scenario includes a 7-story residential building with 211 units of affordable housing, private open space for residents, pedestrian courtyard, and building setbacks for additional accessible open space. The vacation scenario will also include area for public art, street level retail, streetscape improvements. Parking for 42 vehicle parking stalls and 60 bicycle stalls will be located below grade. Access to the below grade garage will be from S Willow St. Trash collection would occur on Willow St and accessed from the sidewalk. *See figures 2 & 3 for more detail.*

For the purpose of the no vacation scenario, the project team used the original design proposal for the east parcel and assumed there would be a future development on the west parcel. The no vacation scenario included the development of market rate housing. The development would include street level commercial space as well as a publicly accessible courtyard. The project team reminded the SDC that the courtyard proposal was not required by code and that any future development without a vacation would not be required to include it as public space. Garage entry and trash collections would occur along 39th Ave S, which the development would be required to improve with curb, gutter, sidewalks, and landscape.

WITHOUT STREET VACATION



WITH STREET VACATION



Figure 2: Proposed design layout without a vacation (left) and with a vacation (right)

WITHOUT STREET VACATION

VIEW ALONG WILLOW ST

WITH STREET VACATION

VIEW ALONG WILLOW ST



+/- 140 Market Rate Apartments for MLK site. (Previous MUP)
 +/- 178 Market Rate Apartment potential for both sites. (No affordable housing)

+/- 211 Affordable Housing Units

Figure 3: Proposed design without a vacation (left) and with a vacation (right)

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, reminded everyone about recent updates street vacation policies, which now includes a community engagement plan. Ms. Barnett then explained that recent updates include community engagement and Council briefings to the Transportation Committee early in the process as a way for community members and city officials to help guide and to support the project early on. Updates also include an initial review by City Departments and the SDC at the subcommittee level prior to a full review. Ms. Barnett mentioned that the Transportation Committee was very interested in this project as it will provide affordable housing. Ms. Barnett closed by stating that SDOT does not have any major issues or concerns with the proposed project.

Public Comments

None

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Circulation
- Access
- Utilities
- Free speech and public assembly
- Open space
- Light and air
- Views
- Land use and urban form
- Outreach, equity, and community

Circulation

The SDC discussed the difference in circulation patterns between the vacation and no vacation scenarios. Commissioners acknowledged the difference for pedestrians between crossing a street (the no vacation scenario) and crossing in front of a parking garage entrance (vacation scenario). The Commission is concerned about pedestrian safety and visibility near the garage entrance, location of garbage services, as well as circulation patterns for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles near the garage entrance and adjacent public space. The SDC then conditioned that the project team return for a subcommittee review prior to the next SDC meeting to review the access and safety near the garage entrance. Specifically, commissioners' requested more information about garage egress and ingress for vehicles and bicycles, trash pickup locations, and potential interactions between vehicles and pedestrians.

Access

The SDC recognized the significant differences in access for the vacation and no vacation scenarios. Although the Commission supported access in the vacation scenario, they recognized that more services, such as garbage pickup, would be relocated to Willow St, potentially making them more visible to the public than what would have occurred under the no vacation alternative. Commissioners also expressed concern with proposed access for bicycle parking and encouraged the project team to distinguish the access areas for cyclists and vehicles.

Utilities

The SDC expressed concern with the location of garbage services adjacent to public space along Willow St. Commissioners encouraged the project team to show how the trash pickup and public space areas will function together.

Free speech and public assembly

The SDC recognized that 39th Ave S is a public space for gatherings and assembly, which would be lost due to the street vacation. The commission then commented that there are more opportunities for free speech and public assembly along Martin Luther King Jr. Way S than S Willow St.

Open space, light, and air

Although not a part of a continuous street network, the SDC recognized that 39th Ave S would provide a greater amount of public space and street trees under the no vacation alternative. Commissioners recommended the project team consider how to better activate the north retail plaza area at the northeast corner of the building.

The SDC also recognized the potential impacts to light and air between the vacation and no vacation scenarios. Commissioners understood that creating a larger building envelop in the vacation scenario would impact access to light and air along Willow St. Commissioners are concerned with the potential impact that increased shade will have on programming, street activation, and plantings within the courtyard along Martin Luther King Jr Way S. Commissioners recommended the project team explore opportunities to make the public spaces feel more inviting to mitigate for the amount of shade through the use of programming, activation, and

appropriate plantings. The SDC then recommended the project team explore providing additional planting off site as part of their public benefit proposal.

Views

The SDC did not have any concerns with this issue.

Land use and Urban form

The SDC commended the project team and City agencies for using this vacation request to provide affordable housing opportunities. The Commission agreed that this project fit in with land uses and urban form of surrounding buildings in the neighborhood.

Outreach, equity, community

The SDC commended the project team for their approach to community outreach. Commissioners were excited to hear that the community is in support of the proposed project. The commission then commented on the proposed artwork location on the northeast façade, which will serve as a gateway element. Commissioners are concerned the artwork will get lost due to its location behind private balconies. The commission then recommended the project team consider expanding the artwork area to wrap around the northeast corner of the building façade onto Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Action

The Commission thanked the project team for their presentation on public trust analysis for the Willows Crossing Street Vacation. Overall the Commission appreciated the opportunity to use underutilized public space for affordable housing in the neighborhood. The SDC voted, 5-0, to approve the public trust analysis for the Willows Crossing Street vacation with the following condition:

1. Return for a subcommittee review prior to the next SDC meeting to review the access and safety near the garage entrance. Specifically, commissioners requested more information about garage egress and ingress for vehicles and bicycles, trash pickup locations, and potential interactions between vehicles and pedestrians

The SDC also provided the following recommendations:

1. Consider how to activate the corner of the building adjacent to Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and Willow St.
2. Recognizing the amount of shade that will exist on the north and east side of the building, explore public benefit opportunities that make the public spaces feel more inviting with programming and activation or appropriate plantings
3. Explore opportunities to include planting offsite as part of public benefit proposal
4. Consider expanding the artwork area to wrap around the northeast corner of the building façade onto Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.