

**University District  
Future Development and Urban Design Working Group Meeting #8  
October 18, 2012**

***Draft Meeting Notes***

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Members in attendance: Rebecca Barnes, Chuck Broches, David Cohanin, Anne Gantt, Mark Griffin, Ron Moe-Lobeda, George Petrie, Barbara Quinn, Miles Richardson, Ruedi Risler, Kyle Rowe, Alfred Shiga, Scott Soules, Patty Whisler

Also in attendance: Michael de Groot, Kateri Schlessman, Suni Pak, Jeff Thompson, Matt Hoehnen, Jeffrey Linn, Max Blume

Staff in Attendance: Brian Scott (facilitator), Susan McLain (Seattle Department of Planning and Development-DPD), Dave LaClergue (DPD)

**Overview**

The meeting started with a review of summary graphics that DPD prepared based on discussions at the previous meeting. These included the discussion of “Gateways, Hearts, and Edges” in the neighborhood, as well as the group’s input on increased height in parts of the U District.

We moved into a review of draft language for the group’s Commercial Revitalization Plan recommendations, with general discussion of the main themes and specific edits to DPD’s proposed language. City staff then provided a presentation and led a discussion on environmental sustainability, and some of the approaches to sustainability that may be appropriate for this neighborhood.

**Summary of “What We Heard”**

Gateway, hearts, and edges review

- To acknowledge the working waterfront along the Ship Canal, DPD did not show an “edge” that participants had previously identified in the southern portion of the U District. Rebecca and Kyle clarified that the southern edge they were talking about in previous meetings (and the recommendation to improve connections) was not really about the shoreline, but about land uses along NE Pacific St. They recommended calling out that edge and recognizing the potential for Pacific to become more permeable to foot traffic.
- Participants agreed that the freeway off-ramp probably does not need to be identified as a “gateway.” But they recommended finding some way to identify it as a confusing intersection that needs improvement, especially for legibility to pedestrians.
- In one of the figures (probably public space network) show a finer grain of detail about where the public can access the shoreline. Waterfront trail, street ends, etc.



### Increased height review

- A few participants who were not at meeting #7 expressed surprise that the group had recommended exploring highrise development in the range of 240' or 300' heights. This prompted other members to review why they were supportive of those heights. Reasons included:
  - Tradeoffs between height and bulk – development that includes highrise is typically less bulky at the ground level, creating greater variety and more light and air in the pedestrian environment.
  - More highrise development likely means a greater number of people who will be able to live and/or work within walking distance of the light rail station.
  - A greater residential population in the core part of the U District will help support and grow local businesses and retail areas. In particular, increasing housing choices for non-students could help support a broader mix of businesses – not just student-oriented ones.
  - For lots with existing buildings in disrepair, height limits need to reach the point where owners have a real incentive to redevelop. Current height limits do not provide that incentive.
  - The City can enact rules that link increased “bonus” height and/or floor area with benefits like affordable housing, childcare, and public spaces.

- Coming out of this conversation, the group advised DPD to present any discussion of increased height in the context of the benefits listed above – not a height map by itself.
- Ruedi wanted to clarify that not every dot on the working group's height map represents a place for a new tower – rather, that figure is intended to show the general areas where greater height may be appropriate. DPD confirmed.
- Ruedi reiterated the importance of traffic studies to go along with any increases to height and density. DPD confirmed that this will be part of the EIS process.
- Miles suggested that the Urban Design Framework product should include images that show street-view, bird's eye view, etc., so that readers can understand the intended character of redevelopment.
- The fact that the U District already has highrise buildings helps demonstrate that higher scale and lower scale buildings can be reconciled in the same neighborhood.
- Several participants pointed out that while underground parking may be preferable from a design perspective, it is very expensive and reduces the affordability of homes or office space in the building. Be careful about not being overly prescriptive with regard to parking.



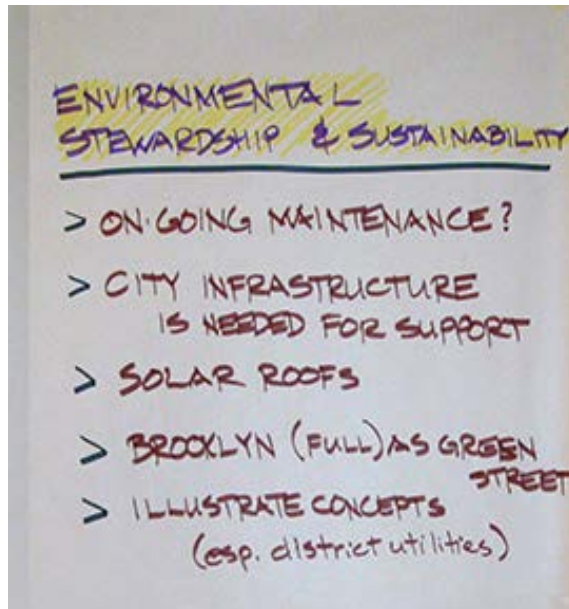


## Commercial Revitalization Plan recommendations



- Focus retail and services in key areas – do not require those uses too broadly, or you will have vacant storefronts and unnecessarily expensive buildings.
- High density development with residential uses at the ground level can work OK with good design.
- Be more flexible about allowed uses – only prohibit those that really have some kind of negative impact.
- It may not be appropriate to call out 45<sup>th</sup> as a retail corridor along its entire length – maybe just key nodes. Differing view: the high vehicular and pedestrian traffic on 45<sup>th</sup> don't make it very appropriate for residential uses at grade.
- Question: is there a specific density that new zoning needs to allow? It would be helpful for us to know what policies might drive the final outcome of this process. DPD: The Comprehensive Plan goals are being updated – we'll get back to the group as that process moves forward.
- It will be really important to get information about the economic feasibility of different development types in the U District prior to any final zoning recommendations.
- Anne reminded the group that the Comprehensive Plan recommends a central open space in the densest part of the neighborhood. Group comments should reinforce that idea. Small pocket parks and street furnishing are not the same.
- Patty suggested that it will be important to update the neighborhood design guidelines, as they have become somewhat outdated, and may not line up with the kinds of development we see in the future. She also suggested that the Commercial Revitalization language should say something about preserving historic or character buildings. More detail for that idea could be included in the UDF and/or EIS.
- Miles: Where are people going to park? Regulations should allow for a few garages. It's important to think about quantity and cost of parking if you want to be serious about supporting the commercial uses and increasing residential development.
- Ruedi: Make sure that residents will have adequate access to schools and services.
- Look for ways to encourage a range of housing options – not just in terms of affordability, but also a range of unit sizes, including 3 and 4 bedroom apartments.

## Environmental Sustainability



- Landscape maintenance is important. Getting landscape amenities in the first place is great, but there need to be systems in place to make sure they are well cared for.
- Solar rooftops present a major opportunity for electricity and hot water.
- Brooklyn should be designed and built as a continuous green street all the way from the Ship Canal to Ravenna.
- Request: please list all the City requirements and incentives that have to do with environmental performance to increase the group's understanding. Would help us think about how to leverage all of those requirements and programs into a model neighborhood.
- It would be great to spend more time talking about what district energy means and how it could play out in the U District.
- Balance performance goals with preservation of existing buildings.
- Certain aspects of existing utilities present barriers to new approaches. For example, Seattle Steam is perceived as expensive, unpredictable, and difficult to work with. SPU charges base drainage rates even if you are fully treating all wastewater on site – this creates a disincentive.

**Future meetings** will be held at the University Heights Center (Room NB1, downstairs) at 7:30 a.m. on the following days:

Friday, Nov 30<sup>th</sup>

January (date TBD)

February (date TBD)