

**University District
Future Development and Urban Design Working Group Meeting #9
November 2, 2012**

Draft Meeting Notes

Members in attendance: Nancy Amidei, Stephen Antupit, Rebecca Barnes, Marty Curry, Steve Wilkins, Anne Gantt, Mark Griffin, Ron Moe-Lobeda, George Petrie, Miles Richardson, Ruedi Risler, Matt Roewe, Alfred Shiga, Scott Soules, Patty Whisler

Also in attendance: Sonya Warner, Peter Steinbrueck, Kateri Schlessman, Suni Pak, Matt Hoehnen, Jeffrey Linn, Cory Crocker

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

Overview

This meeting included a review of draft recommendations for the Commercial Revitalization Plan and draft graphics from the Urban Design Framework. The main topic of discussion was the 2 block radius immediately surrounding the future U District light rail station.

After a presentation from DPD on “transit communities” and various approaches to creating active, walkable neighborhoods, the Working Group discussed a series of questions about the immediate station area. This discussion started with three short presentations from Working Group members who have been thinking about the station site:

Ruedi Risler presented on his idea for a European-style transit station “galleria.” Using images from Zurich and other cities, Ruedi advocated for a large, indoor open space with clusters of small commuter-oriented businesses and flexible spaces that could be rented for a variety of temporary events. He stressed the importance of good connections between transit modes, especially coordinating the pedestrian and bus infrastructure with the light rail station. As part of this coordination, Ruedi recommended moving buses off of the Ave onto Brooklyn and closing the Ave to vehicular traffic.

Anne Gantt provided an update on community organizing around the idea of a plaza on the station site. She reported that the volunteer task force has expanded, including a variety of technical experts on architecture, planning, and engineering. The group has also been speaking to potential developers supportive of a large new open space. They recognize the importance of maintenance and programming, and intend to do further work to make recommendations about those issues. Anne argues that a large, centrally-located urban open space is vital to the future U District, and she believes that the station site is the best place for that to happen. The group has a new website at www.udistrictsquare.com, where they will take comments and post examples of parks around the country that could serve as precedents for the U District.

Rebecca Barnes gave an overview of the UW’s thinking about this site. The University owns some of the property that Sound Transit needs for the station, and the two organizations are in the process of transferring the development potential above the station site to the University. These negotiations are likely to be complete

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in early 2013. Rebecca acknowledged the importance of a network of open spaces in and around the U District, and identified some examples of how UW has contributed and will be contributing to that network, including: the new public space at NE Campus Parkway that was established as part of the new Elm Hall, future community gardens at Mercer Court, and the new waterfront “Bryant Park.”

Summary of “What We Heard”

Responses to draft Commercial Revitalization recommendations

- Steve: Does it make sense to talk about increasing residential density? Won't a lot of the housing demand be met by all of UW's new buildings? Responses from group: in the past meetings, we've said that we want to see non-student housing across a range of affordability levels, including market-rate housing for people who work at the university, South Lake Union, or downtown.
- Rebecca: It seems like a lot of housing, but there will still be demand for more student housing. When all of the buildings in progress are finished, we'll have gone from 17% of UW students living on campus to 21% of students living on campus.
- Stephen: Our recommendations should include a full range of housing diversity and choices – range of affordability and range of housing types (single-family, lowrise, midrise, highrise, variety of unit sizes). Highrise is appropriate as part of that but won't work for all residents.
- The language should say something about the importance of bus circulation.

Responses to Urban Design Framework draft figures

- On the public space network, include the shoreline pathway that starts behind South Campus Center and heads east.
- Consider using transfers of development rights (“TDR”) to preserve the fine-grained commercial uses along the Ave.

Immediate station area

- George: mix private development with public space on the station site – it should be closely coordinated so the activity from the private uses spills into any public space. Activate the alley, look for opportunities for a through-block crossing. The “galleria” concept is interesting – station utilities should be designed to allow that.
- Stephen: Taylor 28 (in Uptown) provides a good example of how to use the adjacent right-of-way in a smart way with private development. A “street park” like that one could spill over into an abutting festival street.
- Stephen: It's premature to make specific recommendations about buses – routes will be fundamentally changed by the availability of light rail.
- Patty: make sure that development preserves architectural tradition. Both in the sense of preserving character buildings, but also interpreting historic architectural elements in contemporary design. Great design is key to having development that adds to the neighborhood character.

- Steve: If the station is not engineered to hold a building on top, it would reduce construction costs. In response to Ruedi's bus proposals: moving buses off the Ave and onto Brooklyn would be bad for businesses, and put too much traffic in the station area.
- Miles: The "galleria" idea is likely to siphon business off the Ave. Existing businesses are willing to put up with Sound Transit's disruptions to the area because they're expecting more customers. Commercial uses at the station site could divert those customers.
- Tony: While it might be premature to make specific recommendations about bus lines, seamless connections between buses and trains will be essential. Timing of routes and clear information for riders will make a big difference. We should work with Metro to start planning this coordination early – it's too important to leave until 2020.
- Marty: We should develop clear principles for what should happen on the station block; what do we want? Then let those principles guide specific recommendations.
- Ruedi: FDUD recommendations should go beyond minimal adjustments to bus circulation. My proposals might not be the right answer, but we should be thinking bigger.
- Stephen: Brooklyn is an important bike route – don't neglect it. Think about potential conflict points and how to avoid those conflicts.
- Ruedi: the sidewalk in front of the Neptune is a pinch point for pedestrians. Moving the bus stop across Brooklyn (in front of UW Tower) would provide some relief.
- Miles: Don't forget about accommodating cars and parking. While lots of people will be coming on light rail, there will still be plenty of drivers.
- Patty: east-west connections to the Ave are critical. 43rd St. is important, and the mid-block pass-through idea would also help. Scramble crossings across 45th at the Ave and Brooklyn would be great.
- Nancy: Look for ways to support the following features/uses right around the station:
 - Child care
 - Accessibility improvements – make it's easy for everyone to get into and around the station
 - Public bathrooms
 - Senior housing
 - Wayfinding help for visitors
- Ron: What about permanently closing off Brooklyn? Design it like Westlake with an extension from sidewalk to sidewalk, and leave the roadway closed to vehicular traffic?
- Ruedi: Why activate Brooklyn for peds? We should keep foot traffic concentrated on the Ave. Susan: Multiple levels and types of sidewalk space are needed. We do want to keep retail uses and shoppers concentrated on the Ave, but that sidewalk is already really crowded. Brooklyn could serve as more of a secondary route for residents or workers who are trying to get from point A to point B.
- Scott: What about a "galleria" concept with activation other than retail? Roll-up doors for a semi-outdoor space, climbing wall, etc.
- Matt R.: 43rd might make more sense to close off as a festival street. It would help draw foot traffic onto the Ave. Also, the west edge of Brooklyn (base of UW Tower) might not be able to transform to a truly active edge.
- Sonya: Be careful and thorough about any traffic calming on 45th... I already avoid it due to congestion, which means I drive on side streets. Anything you do to slow 45th further will push the traffic elsewhere.

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- Kateri: Think about how to provide spaces for kids older than child-care age. Pre-teens and early teens need different kinds of space than college kids or little kids.
- Matt R.: Look at Melrose Market as a precedent. It's like a small, daily farmers market along a through-block pass-through. Might help meet the needs of the U District Farmers Market, and create an active galleria-type public space without competing with Ave retail.
http://www.melrosemarketseattle.com/pdf/press/DJC_051811.pdf

"Station area principles"

The following is DPD's first pass at summarizing key points where we thought we heard some agreement:

- **East/west pedestrian connections** are crucial between the station site and the Ave, campus. Improve sidewalks along NE 45th St and NE 43rd St, and explore the idea of a mid-block pass-through between Brooklyn and the Ave for pedestrians.
- **Improve surrounding intersections** to make them safer and more convenient for pedestrians. The intersections of Brooklyn and the Ave with NE 45th St. are the most important, but intersections on 43rd between Brooklyn and the campus should be considered also.
- Explore opportunities to **create "festival streets" around the station**; i.e., streets that can be closed off easily for special events, ideally with design elements that tie the sidewalks and the street together in a more continuous design. The west and south edge of the station block are the highest priority, but there could be benefits of extending these festival streets farther along Brooklyn and NE 43rd.
- Redevelopment of this area should include some kind of **public space** such as a park, plaza, galleria, or arcade. There are several parcels that may be appropriate for this along Brooklyn between 45th and 42nd; the station is probably the largest potential site, but part of the site will be occupied by aboveground station utilities.
- **Thoughtful, continuous activation** will determine how successful any public space will be. This activation could be through retail, services, recreational uses, cultural programming, a farmers market, or a combination thereof, but it's not adequate to call for an open space without some defined activities. Commercial uses should be planned in a way that does not detract from the commercial corridor on the Ave.

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

Friday, Nov 30th
January (date TBD)
February (date TBD)