

July 19, 2010

Elliott Bay Seawall Replacement Scoping Comments
c/o Tetra Tech, Inc.
1420 Fifth Avenue, Suite 550
Seattle, WA 98101

RE: **Scope of the EIS for the Elliott Bay Seawall Replacement**

On June 3, 2010, several members of the Elliott Bay Seawall Replacement Team met at the Seattle Aquarium with then Director John Braden regarding the Seattle Aquarium's relationship to Seawall planning, potential impacts to the Aquarium's operation and survival during construction, and how the Aquarium's future plans and growth should be factored in to Seawall planning. We appreciate this attention to the Aquarium as a vital element in the city and the Central Waterfront. As a follow-up to this meeting we submit these written comments to supplement the conversation.

History of the Seattle Aquarium

- Opened in 1977, constructed with \$5.5million King County Forward Thrust bond funds. A \$42 million capital project was completed in 2007, expanding the Aquarium by one-third and opening several new exhibits and food and gift facilities.
- The Aquarium is owned by the City of Seattle and was operated by the City Department of Parks and Recreation until June 30, 2010, with the support of the nonprofit Seattle Aquarium Society.
- Much of the Aquarium's two piers, 59 and 60, are built over tidelands owned by the State of Washington and leased to the City of Seattle.
- Has welcomed 21 million visitors during these 33 years of operation
- Has welcomed 1.7 million students in organized groups
- The Aquarium is an international leader in sea otter propagation, since it was the first aquarium to successfully raise a sea otter from birth to maturity in 1979. It also has leading edge programs in marine science education, interactive interpretation, volunteer service and an active program in conservation research.

Current Operating Status

- 7th largest U.S. Aquarium by attendance, accredited by American Association of Zoos and Aquariums
- Largest platform for marine science conservation and education in the State of Washington
- 3rd largest paid visitor attraction in the City of Seattle at 830,000 visitors in 2009
- 50,000 students came to the Aquarium in 2009 or participated in beach outreach efforts and other programs.
- Effective 7/1/10 the Aquarium is managed by the nonprofit Seattle Aquarium Society on behalf of the City of Seattle. It's operating budget is \$11.2 million with a full time staff of 92 and over 700 volunteers

Collaborative Community Impacts

- The Aquarium works with over 900 schools throughout the State of Washington and has collaborative programs with the University of Washington, NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NASA, the National Science Foundation, University of California Davis, Washington State University, Oregon State University, the Army Corps of Engineers, Virginia Mason Benaroya Research Institute, King County METRO, the Hawaii Department of Aquatic Resources, the Olympic Coast Marine Sanctuary, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and AMGEN. It works with many civic and nonprofit organizations through the use of its facilities and staff, and welcomes thousands of people to the Aquarium each year through its outreach programs.

Waterfront presence and Access Requirements

- The Aquarium currently operates on Piers 59 and 60, in 81,798 square feet of space.
- The Aquarium operates 24 hours/day, 365 days/year because it is a life science institution with a live animal collection requiring constant attention.
- The Aquarium public operating hours are 9:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.; it hosts frequent evening rental and civic events.
- A majority of Aquarium visitors drive to the Aquarium in private vehicles, usually in family groups and often including infants and young children (with strollers), parents and grandparents. As a result, public transportation is neither an efficient nor convenient option for a large number of our visitors. Access and proximate parking are requirements for these customers.
- The 50,000 school children who arrive in organized groups most frequently come in school buses. At an average of approximately 45 students per bus, this translates to roughly 1,100 school buses during a year that need to drop off their students at the Aquarium and have 2-hour parking in the vicinity.
- The Aquarium's operations include a wide array of support services for everything from repair of exhibit pipes and tanks to fresh food delivery for the café, evening catering events and sea otters. Roughly 15 service vehicles/day need access to the Aquarium.

Future Expansion Plans

Future expansion plans are based in the context of the 2010 City of Seattle/Seattle Aquarium Society Operating and Management Agreement (Ordinance 123205), and the 2004 Amendment to the City of Seattle Central Waterfront Master Plan: Pacific Northwest Aquarium and Waterfront Park (Resolution 30717), adopted after a lengthy public process. These affirm the location of the Seattle Aquarium on Piers 59-60, with expansion envisioned as a new Pier 58 and a new or reconfigured Pier 60 (See attached Figure 12 from the Master Plan support document illustrating the general aquarium configuration). These plans would remove Waterfront Park, allow for a new Pier 58 wing of the Aquarium and rebuild or replace Pier 60, bringing the aquarium to roughly 150,000 square feet vs. the current Aquarium's approximately 82,000 square feet.

The Aquarium is now in the midst of a strategic planning process which is expected to be completed in December 2011. Preliminary thinking related to Seawall planning:

- The current Aquarium footprint on Piers 59 and 60 services exhibits, support spaces and public visitor spaces for an attendance base of 830,000 visitors. Exhibit and program enhancements over the past eight years have increased attendance by 200,000 visitors/year.
- The Seattle Aquarium ranks in the second tier of U.S. public aquariums when assessing the combination of attendance, square footage, scale of exhibitry, research and educational program outreach. The Aquarium aspires to become one of the top-tier aquariums in the U.S. in order to maximize its capacity to achieve its Mission: *Inspiring conservation of our marine environment*.
- The top-tier Aquariums in the U.S. are the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago; Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta; Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey; and National Aquarium in Baltimore, and Steinhart/California Academy of Science in San Francisco. These aquariums each generate an attendance in the range of 2 million annually, and their program impact in their communities and states is commensurate with this scale.
- Economic studies done as part of earlier planning for the aquarium indicated that the demographics of the region, the tourism concentration on the waterfront and the Aquarium's location create the market opportunity for attendance in the 2 million range. The removal of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and channeling of traffic to an underground tunnel adds further credence to this analysis.
- We anticipate that exhibit and other enhancements within the current footprint will be executed over the next decade that will increase Aquarium attendance to the 1.2 million visitors/year range.
- Further square footage will be required beyond this in order to meet more rigorous animal management, educational, scientific research and exhibit standards.

Seawall opportunities for public access to or interface with Elliott Bay

- The public discussion of opportunities created by the removal of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and replacement of the Seawall has included a number of ideas

for direct public access to or interaction with Elliott Bay. This has included everything from creation of sandy recreational beaches to underwater viewing stations.

- We believe that there could be great value in an opportunity for the public to have an interactive connection to Elliott Bay along the Central Waterfront if this can be feasibly accomplished from an engineering and economic standpoint; and, further, that the Seattle Aquarium has an interest in incorporating such an opportunity into its interpretive program. In fact, the 2004 Amended Central Waterfront Master Plan referenced an important opportunity for creation of “intertidal beaches”. Our understanding is that there are only two locations on the Central Waterfront where the Seawall might have a potential for a “beach treatment” that has any realistic chance of practical construction and durable life, in the area adjacent to the Aquarium and at Pier 48.
- This is a complex issue, and as you consider this these are among the points requiring research or analysis:
 - Tidal action. Common tides at Piers 59-60 range from 7'-10'. As a point of comparison the tide range at Monterey Bay Aquarium is from 2'-5'. Monterey Bay Aquarium has constructed a tide-pool exhibit as part of the Aquarium, with the idea of interpreting this aspect of Monterey Bay. We think a design approach along these general lines is promising, though challenging.
 - Defining the interactive objective. We believe it would be inappropriate to attempt to create a sandy, recreational “beach” in Seattle’s Central Waterfront, where no such beach ever existed. We think it may be possible to create a tide pool interface, which would require controlled access for safety and other reasons, and could be a platform for valuable educational interpretation.
 - Design and construction issues:
 - Flotsam and jetsam comes and goes with the high tides, and presents design and maintenance issues to be addressed.
 - Visibility of live animals in a potential tide pool. Distance from the tide pool is one question, visibility through the water at different tides is another.
 - Kelp, algae, sea stars, anemones and sea urchins might survive well if the treatment is properly designed; but such wildlife would need adequate protection from vandalism and human and other predation.
 - The *idea* of an interactive element to the Seawall is not the same as the creation of something that works in practical terms, that is durable enough to survive tidal action and storms, and can be managed in a safe and economically viable manner.
 - Permits. The Seawall Design Team is cognizant of the extensive State and other permitting required for the Seawall generally. A design feature potentially involving tide pools and live animals will simply add to this.

We look forward to cooperating with you in your analysis and planning for the Elliott Bay Seawall. As our Strategic Planning process progresses we will furnish additional information pertinent to your work. We note that the business issues raised by the Seattle Historic Waterfront Association in its comment letter of July 13, 2010 apply to continuing successful operation of the Seattle Aquarium as they do to all waterfront businesses. The decision to build the region's largest platform for marine science conservation and education in the middle of Seattle's Central Waterfront was made in 1977, with a fresh investment of \$42 million in 2007. We ask that you carefully keep the Aquarium's survival and future in mind as you proceed through the planning process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert W. Davidson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Robert W. Davidson
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Board of Directors

Note: This illustration was part of the report for the 2004 Amendment to the City of Seattle Central Waterfront Master Plan.

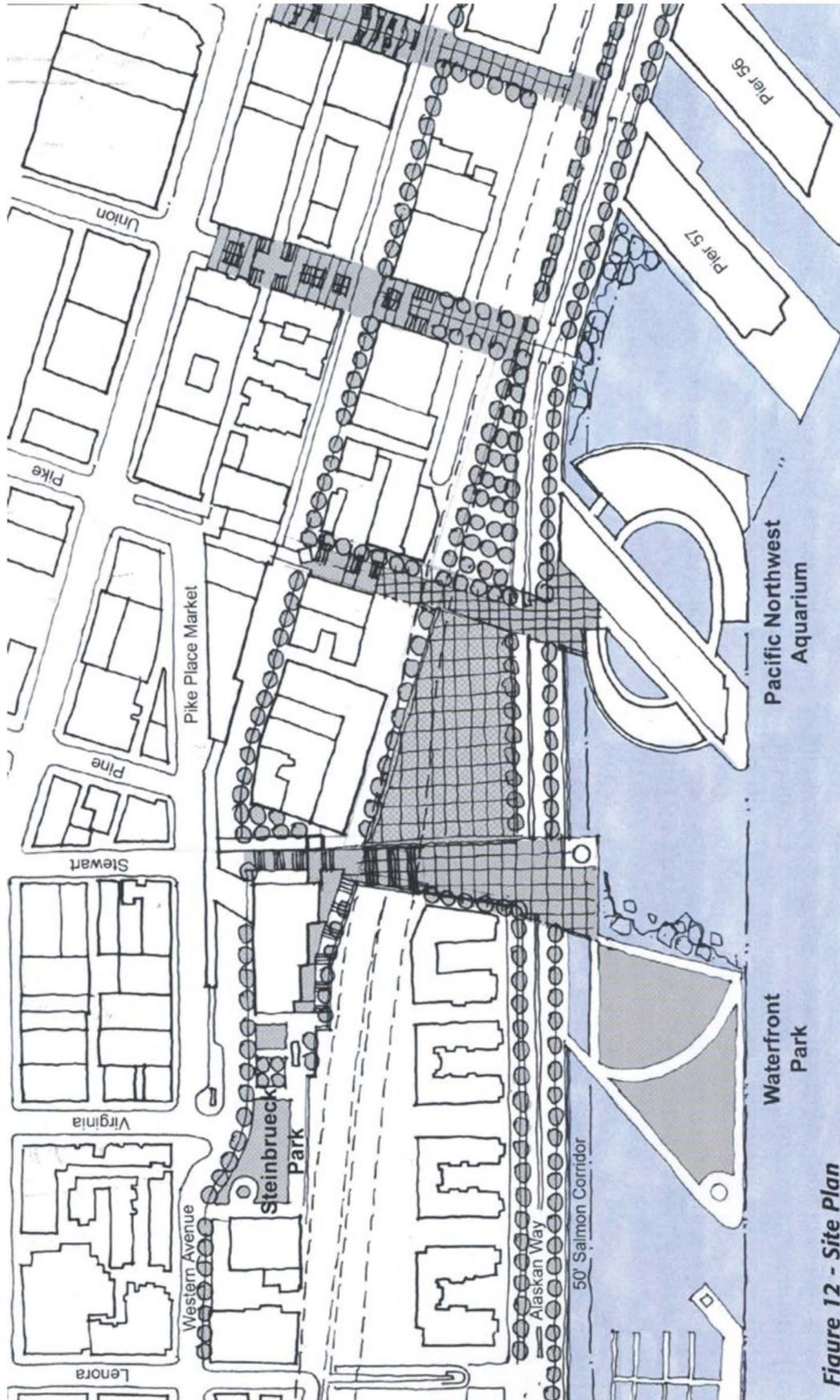


Figure 12 - Site Plan