

1101 8th Ave Alley Vacation

Edward B. Murray
Mayor

Samuel Assefa
Director, OPCD

Ross Tilghman, Chair

John Savo, Vice Chair

Lee Copeland

Ben de Rubertis

Thaddeus Egging

Rachel Gleeson

Laura Haddad

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Commissioners Present

Ross Tilghman, Chair

John Savo

Lee Copeland

Ben de Rubertis

Rachel Gleeson

Laura Haddad

Jescelle Major

Brianna Holan

Rick Krochalis

Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging

Project Description

Lennar Multifamily Communities is proposing to vacate an alley in the block bounded by 8th Ave, Seneca St, Hubbell Pl, and Spring St. The vacation proposal includes the development of two high-rise residential towers with ground level retail, restaurant, office, and residential space. The proposed alley vacation would allow for the combination of loading, storage, service facilities, and parking below grade. Specific elements of the project proposal include:

- Two high-rise buildings, 300 ft. in height, abutting Spring St, Hubbell and 8th Avenue
- 42 ft. wide pedestrian passage, including a one-way truck access for Town Hall
- Publicly accessible open space, terraces, plazas, and seating areas
- Approximately 387 stalls of below grade parking
- Drop-off and pick-up zones along Spring St; and
- Connections to adjacent Freeway Park and Town Hall property

The property is located within a study area included in the First Hill Public Realm Action Plan.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the proposed alley vacation. The purpose of this meeting was to review the Urban Design Merit proposal. The commission did not take an action during today's meeting. The SDC provided the project team with recommendations to address prior to the next review.

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

March 2, 2017
9:00 – 10:30 am

Type

Alley Vacation

Phase

Urban Design Merit

Previous Reviews

None

Presenters

Brad Hinthorne

Perkins + Will

Kelty Mckinnon

PFS Studios

Daria Supp

Perkins + Will

Attendees

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Jim Erickson

FHIA

Stephen Goodman

LMC/Lennar

Jason Haase

Perkins + Will

Wier Harman

Town Hall Seattle

Doug Holtom

FHIA

Liang Huang

University of Washington

Katie Kendall

McCullough Hill Leary, PS

Lindsay King SDCl

Sophie Krause

University of Washington

Janice Lee

University of Washington

Jack McCullough

McCullough Hill Leary, PS

Emily Minor

McCullough Hill Leary, PS

Dan Shieder

LMC/Lennar

Chris Tyner

Perkins + Will

Lish Whittson

Seattle City Council



Figure 1: Neighborhood context

Summary of Presentation

Kelty McKinnon, of PFS Studios, and Brad Hinthorne and Daria Supp, of Perkins + Will, presented the urban design merit proposal. Brad Hinthorne discussed the project's background, goals, and objectives and addressed the surrounding neighborhood's context. The project site is located next to Town Hall Seattle and across the street from Freeway Park in the First Hill Neighborhood (see figure 1). The site is located within a study area as identified in the First Hill Public Realm Action Plan. The existing alley is 16 feet wide and runs north/south between Seneca St and Spring St and is no longer connected to the greater alley network. As part of the Urban Design Merit presentation, the project team provided a vacation and no vacation scenario. See figure 2 for more detail.

The vacation scenario includes the development of two 300-foot-tall residential towers along Spring St. with consolidated parking, storage, and service areas located below grade. Below grade parking and service areas will be accessed along Hubbell Pl. The vacation would allow for a 42-foot-wide pedestrian pathway, referred to as a woonerf, terraces, and open space throughout the project site. The streetscape along the perimeter of the project site will include mature street trees, landscaping, and seating. Loading zones will also be located along Spring St. The Woonerf, pedestrian pathways, terraces, and outdoor seating area will include hardscape materials, landscaping, and seating. Under this scenario, a pedestrian plaza will be located along the northwest corner of the site. The design will include terraced waterfalls, seating, landscaping, and programmable space that can be used for community events. The plaza is being proposed as a public benefit element and will be reviewed at a future meeting. See figure 3 for more detail.

The no vacation scenario includes the development of two 240-foot-tall residential towers along Spring St. Both towers would include 7 levels of below grade parking and services with separate access ramps. Under this scenario both vehicular and truck access points to below grade parking and service areas will be located in the existing alley. The tower located on the southwest corner of the site would include a podium spanning the entire length of Hubbell Pl from Spring St to Seneca St. The podium would interfere with a proposed at-grade entrance and loading area for Town Hall, which will begin construction in summer of 2017. The no vacation scenario includes minimal amounts of open space along 8th Ave, Spring St. and Hubbell Pl.

After the presentation on Urban Design Merit the project team provided an overview of the public benefit package.

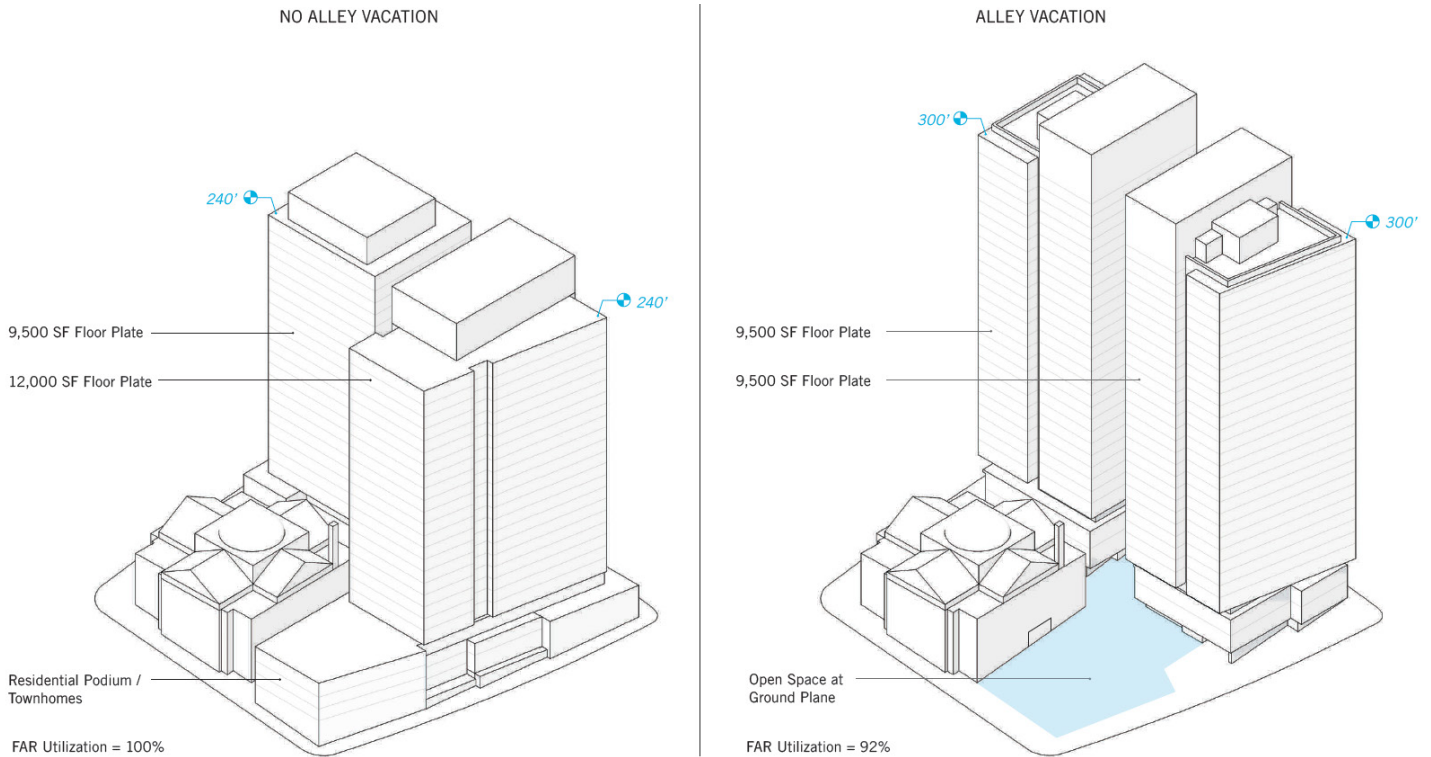


Figure 2: Proposed no vacation (left) and vacation (right) scenarios



Figure 3: Proposed landscape plan under the vacation scenario

Agency Comments

Lindsay King, SDCI, mentioned that the project has gone through early design guidance and is currently in an initial plan review for a master use permit. Ms. King stated that SDCI will conduct a SEPA adjacent review with the Department of Neighborhoods for landmark structures as well as SEPA shadows study on Freeway Park, which is a protected park within downtown. Ms. King then stated that the design review board is generally supportive of the massing alternatives. She then mentioned that the interior separation for the plaza space at the center of the site

comes with a balanced request with a further encroachment onto the street setbacks, which were not brought up during today's meeting.

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, we do have the vacation petition in. Although it is early so I don't have a lot of answers. We have started the SIP process. We are doing early design review. We met yesterday and starting looking at access points and traffic. There are issues to work on, but no red flags. We just need more detail work. When we have a vacation with two property owners we want to make sure both are treated equally. Having a clear understanding that Town Hall's current and future needs are protected is important. We need to understand how often Town Hall will need to use the alley, which will help us understand the public benefit features and elements. This is a difficult site in terms of access. We are now seeing a lot more drop off points that have not been something we envisioned in the past. We are looking how we will move forward with things like this. In terms of vacation policy, we are looking at creating a way to enhance visibility for Town Hall -- this is important.

Public Comments

Jim Erickson, FHIA, stated that the nine-block area surrounding the project site in the First Hill neighborhood is a pedestrian hub. Mr. Erickson mentioned that events at Town Hall are heavily attended. He also mentioned that the proposed Madison St. BRT line will cross over I-5 on Spring St, passing by the project every 5 minutes. Mr. Erickson stated that the ground level campus design needed to accommodate retail public space, low level lighting, landscaping, and wayfinding.

Wier Harman, Town Hall, stated that the alley shared with the development site is critical to the operations for Town Hall. Mr. Harman believes the vacation scenario requires careful consideration so that any adverse impacts on operations are mitigated. Mr. Harman wants to see more concrete plans for long term maintenance impacts before Town Hall can be sure that an alley vacation will not be detrimental and stated that the organization's full support of the alley vacation petition is contingent on the execution of the final easement agreement with the petitioner. He then stated that Town Hall expects to continue working with the petitioner to reach the appropriate agreements. Mr. Harman recognized the proposed plaza is an extremely attractive site amenity that will serve as a gathering space for Town Hall events as well as a gateway to and from the neighborhood. The Town Hall organization will provide additional comments as needed.

Summary of Discussion

The commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Vacation vs. no vacation
- Circulation
- Massing (light air and views)
- Landscape and sustainable features

Vacation vs. no vacation

The SDC acknowledged the proposed vacation resulted in a better design than the no- vacation scenario, specifically stating that the layout and design proposed in the no-vacation scenario could negatively impact the adjacent property. While there is little difference between the vacation and no vacation alternatives in terms of creating shadows on surrounding properties, the commissioners did note that the vacation alternative would result in shadows on the proposed on-site open space at the NW corner of the site. However, commissioners noted that the proposed open space would receive full sun light during the mid-day hours. The commission also agreed the location of the proposed public space would serve as a positive adjacent use to the new entrance to Town Hall. The commission recommended the design team ensure that the relocation of utilities will not create long-term maintenance issues for Town Hall.

Circulation

Although the SDC agreed the overall circulation proposal made sense, commissioners requested more detail about the proposed one-way circulation through the site as well as better understanding of how Hubbell St will function with the increased vehicular traffic. Commissioners are concerned with the lack of a clear and accessible pedestrian route through the project site. Given the steep grade change, commissioners recommended the design team include a clear wayfinding plan that includes ADA accessible routes. The SDC also recommended the design team provide a greater distinction between pedestrian and loading areas through the use different materials, bollards, or other similar tools. The commission questioned the proposed loading area location for the Town Hall property.

Commissioners recommended the design team widen the area between the Town Hall property and proposed open space to reduce potential conflicts with pedestrians and any loading issues.

Massing

The SDC agreed light, air, and views are improved because of the vacation. Commissioners commented that the tower massing and open space in the vacation scenario improved the area surrounding Town Hall. To provide greater context, commissioners recommended the project team provide a massing study for the existing and proposed projects occurring on the surrounding blocks.

Landscape and sustainable features

The SDC thanked the design team for incorporating landscape design elements that related to Freeway Park, Town Hall, and the surrounding environment. Commissioners recommended the team reduce the landscaping divisions between programmable space (open space, upper plaza, and pedestrian passages) which will result in programmed spaces that blend in with each other. The Commission requested information about the appearance of the proposed water terraces when water is not circulating.

The SDC requested more information about sustainability features.

Action

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation on Urban Design Merit. The SDC did not take an action during today's meeting. Although the project is heading in the right direction, the commission acknowledged the need for the project team to answer further questions prior to voting on the Urban Design Merit Proposal. The commission provided the following recommendations that should be addressed prior to its next review:

1. Confirm that the relocation of utilities will not create long-term maintenance issues for Town Hall.
2. Provide a wayfinding plan that includes publicly accessible and ADA routes through the project site
3. Provide greater distinction between pedestrian and loading areas near the Town Hall property
4. Provide a massing study for existing and proposed projects occurring on the surrounding blocks
5. Minimize landscaping edges between on-site programmed spaces
6. Provide elevations of Hubbell St including access and surrounding context