

Seattle design Commission

Mike McGinn
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Julie Bassuk
Chair

Mary Fialko

Laurel Kunkler

Shannon Loew

Tom Nelson

Julie Parrett

Osama Quotah

Norie Sato

Donald Vehige

Debbie Wick-Harris

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

May 17, 2012

Convened 12:00pm
Adjourned 4:30pm

Projects Reviewed

Amazon at Westlake and Lenora Alley Vacation
Fred Hutchinson Skybridge

Commissioners Present

Julie Bassuk, Chair
Julie Parrett
Shannon Loew
Osama Quotah
Don Vehige
Debbie Wick-Harris
Norie Sato
Laurel Kunkler
Mary Fialko
Tom Nelson

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino



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May 17, 2012**Project:** **Amazon at Westlake and Lenora****Phase:** Alley Vacation**Last Reviewed:** Apr 5, 2012**Presenters:** John Savo, NBBJ

Dave Alberda, NBBJ

Mark Brands, Site Workshop

Attendees:
Beverly Barnett, SDOT
Holly Golden, HCMP
John Schoettler, Amazon.com
Kristi Park, Site Workshop
Lindy Gaylord, Seneca Group
Lisa Rutzick, DPD
Lloyd Douglas, Cascade NC
Lyle Bicknell, DPD
Marc Stiles, Daily Journal of Commerce
Ryan Duncan, HCMP
Sandra Mallory, Office of Sustainability and Environment
Todd Leber, Seneca Group
Ty Rogers, Amazon

Time: 12:35pm-2:45pm

Summary of Project Presentation

The design team presented its design concept for Amazon's three towers, which consisted of 3.3 million sq ft of office space, retail, and a 2,000 seat meeting facility. To enable this design, the team requested three alley vacations, and made the case for urban design merit – that the removal of the three alleys would not compromise or negatively impact the urban design of the neighborhood. The team explained its design would: narrow the face of the towers on the north-south avenues, improving views, light and air; create fewer shadows at noon on public spaces; better sculpt the buildings' aesthetic and scale; improve traffic and circulation, in part due to reduction of curb cuts and a below-grade garage; improve and modernize utilities; and create opportunities for several different kinds and sizes of public space. The team also explored a design which did not require an alley vacation, but its design led to uniform towers which blocked light and views, dark alleys, 6-way intersections, and less public space.

The team then presented the highlights and changes to its preferred design since the commission's last review: Block 14 is now two buildings, with a mid-block "gallery" open space next to the auditorium and a trellis or glass roof over the open space; the tower on Block 20 is now more square and pushed to Westlake, which made the "garden" open space more open and sunny and increased the separation between the towers; the open space on Block 19 contains a field, park, a forest of trees, and a covered walkway; bike lanes in both directions on 7th Avenue, and no curb cuts.

The team planned to return in June for review of the public benefit package.

ACTION (by Loew)

The Design Commission thanked the team for the presentation of its request for an alley vacation and the proposal's urban design merit – the first component of the Design Commission's two-step alley vacation review process.

By a vote of 9-1, the commission approved the alley vacation's urban design merit. This area marks a transition of the grid; the alleys are truncated connections that terminate on Westlake Ave. in awkward multi-way intersections. Further, the current lots are less than standard dimension which challenges development feasibility given today's desired office floorplate dimensions and efficient parking layouts. Vacation of the alleys will create opportunities for several kinds of significant public spaces in an area of the city underserved by open space and public amenities. It will allow building configurations that maximize the light and air access of these public spaces and improve traffic and circulation by eliminating 7th avenue curb cuts and multi-way intersections on Westlake Avenue. The project includes improving and modernizing utilities currently present in the alley.

The commission looked forward to review of the public benefits package at a future meeting and appreciated the chance to preview the proposed benefits. The commission also appreciated the quality of the presentation, as well as the project's proposed utility upgrades, public pass-through blocks, bike infrastructure, and public spaces. The commission made the following recommendations to further develop the public benefit package:

- Provide more detail and show diagrams and experiential views of pedestrian and operational access to the buildings, open spaces and streets. The primary pedestrian access to the buildings at the interior of blocks should not be designed to drain activity from or decrease the importance of the secondary access on avenues; they should be equally and not less vibrant. Show an investment in design and materials in the streetscape as significant as in the interior open spaces.
- Refine the design of the open spaces by recognizing, to an even greater extent than shown, the value in passing through the block. Enhance the concepts of variability in the type of open spaces.
- Develop the design to better reference the grid and connect the campus to the surrounding neighborhood, an especially important consideration since the project will be phased in over time and there is a chance one or more of the blocks won't get built. Develop graphics that clearly illustrate the area in interim phases.
- The current configuration of floor size, lease depth, and floor to floor height challenges many high performance building techniques. Demonstrate that you are designing the buildings and campus with long-term sustainability in mind. Consider developing an energy conservation strategy which may include passive strategies, daylighting and natural cooling.

Commissioner Wick-Harris voted no because she wanted to ensure the entrances from the street (6th, 7th, and 8th Avenues) are designed to be as important as entrances from the courtyard public spaces and that street vitality will not be drained due to this project.