

South Park Plaza

Commissioners Present

Justin Clark, Chair
Adam Amrhein
Elizabeth Conner
Jill Crary
Mark Johnson
Amalia Leighton-Cody
Elaine Wine (present until 2:30)

Commissioners Excused

Vinita Sidhu, Vice Chair

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins
Valerie Kinast
Juliet Acevedo

Jenny A. Durkan
Mayor

Rico Quirindongo
Director, OPCD

Justin Clark, Chair

Vinita Sidhu, Vice Chair

Adam Amrhein

Elizabeth Conner

Jill Crary

Mark Johnson

Amalia Leighton

Elaine Wine

Michael Jenkins
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Juliet Acevedo
Administrative Staff

**Office of Planning and
Community Development**
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue, Floor 5
PO Box 94788
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

TEL 206-615-1349
FAX 306-233-7883
seattle.gov/opcd

Recusals and Disclosures

None

Project Description

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) is developing a 0.83 acre site located just west of the South Park Bridge between Dallas Ave S and S Orr St (*see Figure 1*). The park, currently referred to as South Park Plaza, is one element of the South Park Green Spaces Vision Plan (*see Figure 2*).

The main features of the Park include an open lawn, primary event space, play elements, seating terraces, accessible pathways, bio-swales, irrigation, and landscape improvements.

SPR purchased the site in 2014. The Seattle Metropolitan Park District is funding the development of this parcel into a park.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) third review of the South Park Plaza. On September 3, 2020 the SDC approved the concept design (30% design). On February 4, 2021 the SDC approved the schematic design (60% design) proposal for the project.

The purpose of this meeting was to review the design development (90% design) proposal for the project. At this meeting, the SDC voted, 6-1, to approve the design development (90% design) proposal for the South Park Plaza Project.

Summary of Presentation

The team presented information about the planning and community context of the site. They described the extensive outreach and collaborative work that has been undertaken with the community. Cultural overlays reflect two layers of culture at the site - Indigenous and Latinx. Plants, art, and interpretive storytelling elements reflect culture, as do the colorful furniture and plantings.

Daily use in non-event times would include pick-up soccer games and bike circuits for kids. Tables and seating would be a place for people to bring coffee and food from nearby businesses. Ten-by-ten pop up tents could be used flexibly for events on the plaza space. Plans are in place for banners that are often unused in the community. The design will shift the noise generating uses to where it is least impactful.

November 18, 2021

1:00 - 2:45 pm

Project Type

CIP

Phase

design development

Previous Reviews

2/4/21, 9/3/20

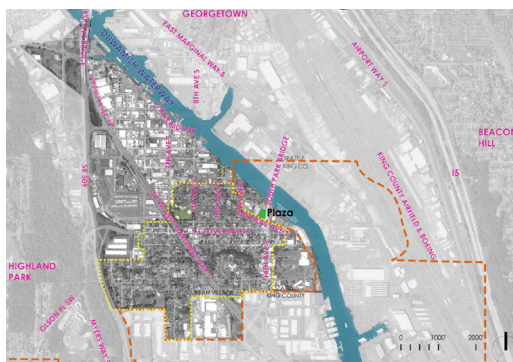


Figure 1: Project location

Presenters**Meredith Hall**

Karen Kiest Landscape Architects

Karen Kiest

Karen Kiest Landscape Architects

Jay Rood

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Ross Tilgham

Tilgham Group

Attendees**Kadie Bell Sata**

SDOT

Andy Epstein

Third Day Design

Elliot Feldman

UW

Laura Haddad

Haddad Drugan

Jason Huff

Office of Arts and Culture

Joy Jacobson

Finance and Administrative Services

Mario Madayag

Community Member

Karen O'Conner

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Owen Oliver

Headwater People

Ed Pottharst

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Amanda Sandys

Artmaranth



Figure 2: Community vision

The designers presented how design details for the site and program had advanced since the last meeting. Refinement of pedestrian circulation through the site was described and a new plaza was added as an entry element at the southwestern corner of the site. A red brick path across the site will draw people from the business district into the park. Designs for a performance space abutting a warehouse near the north property line were detailed. Refinements to the entry space included reducing the number of seat walls to two at the entry space and through the grassy space. The play area was shifted north, away from traffic on abutting streets (see Figure 3). Stormwater will be conveyed to S Orr St and Dallas Ave S and will not be absorbed on site.

Cultural references were included across the site that highlight Indigenous and Latinx communities. Shell middens of the historic Duwamish River oxbow of the site will be reflected in the use of crushed shells in the paving surface of paths. The inspiration for the play structure is the fish weirs used by Indigenous people of the northwest. In the south part of the site, near Dallas Ave S, the round form of the plaza references the traditional kiosk of South and Central America. The circle could be elevated to appear similar to traditional kiosks. Seat walls may be tiled with Latinx motifs. Furnishings may be off-the-shelf or custom, and bold colors will be chosen. Native plants will be used in most parts of the plantings, except around the kiosk plaza, where more colorful plants will support the Latinx cultural expression.

Some elements of the design are unfunded as yet, including the crosswalk over Dallas Ave S, an information kiosk with electric service, the brick paving, stage backdrop, event lighting, and electrical hookup, and off site nearby mural. Other elements that might be included if fundraising goals are achieved include a gateway monument in the style of Latin American back drop signs with the name of the neighborhood, a mural with information about the Duwanish culture and river, and cultural acknowledgment features might include carvings into brick and stone.

Finally, the team highlighted SDOT's plans for transportation improvements in the area. They described the various access points to the site from the surrounding rights of way. They explained that variable message signs would be added by SDOT in the neighborhood. Parking analysis was provided that detailed availability of parking was sufficient for both neighborhood use and for larger events (*see Figure 4*).

Agency Comments

None

Public Comments

None

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following five topics:

1. Equity;
2. Cohesion and connections;
3. Functionality of spaces;
4. Maintenance and operations;
5. Prioritization.

Equity

The Commissioners expressed appreciation for the high level of community engagement that the team had undertaken, and how that engagement was reflected in various programming and design features. Hiring of community members for engagement and art was noted as a positive action.

Naming of the spaces was discussed as a critical means to tell the story of the place and create a sense of belonging for Indigenous and Latinx communities.

The yet-to-be funded bridge mural, and the stage backdrop sign, were identified as strong moves to provide an expression of the community and sense of belonging in the space.

Concern was expressed that this project, like many others in under-resourced communities, would be bogged down with interagency logistics when it came to implementing cultural elements like the mural. Knowing that pockets of funding exist for the various elements, Commissioners felt City funding should be provided to support community expectations. They were very concerned that the very elements that most expressed the community and made the space welcoming would be abandoned over time.

Cohesion and Connections

Commissioners highlighted the various circulation routes and how the use of oyster shells for paving material would lend character to the identity of the park.

Commissioners were happy to hear about the work with King County to consider this site and the King County surplus site north of the site in tandem (*see Figure 5*). Limitations on impermeable paving were reduced on the subject site in exchange for more previous area north of the site. This will support achieving the greater vision of connecting the community to the river and naturalizing the Duwamish shorelines.

Functionality of Spaces

Commissioners expressed appreciation for including passive lawn areas. They were glad to see the play area moved northward, away from the bridge. They reiterated the need for seating for caretakers who wanted to watch and not join the playing children.

Maintenance and Operations

Commissioners discussed the need for electric and water service for the park. They were glad to see that power would be provided but had concerns that there was no water service. Commissioners understood the costs of providing water and sewer service, but also understood how important that service is to realizing the role the park will play for the community.



Figure 3: October 2021 design



Figure 4: Larger events



Figure 5: Northern surplus site

Prioritization

Commissioners considered whether they would approve the project if they knew that the optional elements would not be built, due to lack of City funding and expectations that several project elements are dependant on fundraising through Seattle Parks Foundation. These elements include the brick path, stage backdrop, steps to the plaza, bridge mural, special kiosk, event power and lighting, and funding for a continuing teaching artist. Each commissioner considered this in their vote.

Commissioners expressed the need to prioritize those elements of the design, in light of neighborhood expectations. The November 18, 2021

site infrastructure was seen as very important. Providing drainage so that both lawns remain usable was also identified as important.

Commissioners considered a condition of the project that full event infrastructure be provided, including power, water, and sewer. After discussion the SDC recognized that water and sewer had not been included in the design and would be a completely new addition to the scope of the project. They did believe that water would be very useful for the types of large events the community holds, and that a water fountain was necessary in this location.

Given the importance the commissioners placed on site infrastructure, they considered what could be eliminated or reduced to be able to provide it. The idea of foregoing certain materials or postponing construction of certain elements and shifting the funds toward providing water service was discussed. One idea was to perhaps forego the swales in favor of more simple surface water conveyance. Another was to use a less expensive material than bricks for the path. Postponing elements that could more easily be added later, such as materials and signs, was discussed.

Action

The SDC thanked the team for their presentation of the design development for the South Park Plaza project. Refinements to the park since the last meeting were commended because they both simplified the design and optimized use of the site. Commissioners commended the team for the extensive efforts to connect with community and build on the activities that the community was already organizing in this location. The idea of employing a teaching artist was lauded, as was the work with various government agencies. The SDC thanked the team especially for negotiating to consider this site and the north site in tandem for planning purposes.

The SDC voted, 5-1, to approve the design development of the South Park Plaza project with one condition and several recommendations. Justin Clark voted no with the explanation: Fully support the project and refinements. Agree that event power and lighting is important and should be a condition. Can't approve at this juncture because of the uncertainty that all cultural art and story-telling pieces will be funded and implemented. They are critical to identity of the park, to make it contextual, unique, and specific to the community, and if these pieces are not included in the current budget or have a concrete funding plan in place, then these critical pieces will most likely never be realized.

Condition

1. Revise the base budget and scope to include electric service for power and lighting to allow for community events.

Recommendations

1. Choose a name as soon as possible that considers the Indigenous, Latinx, and natural identities of the place. Please refer to the SDC letter about naming of public places, which you can find on our website.
2. Provide water if possible, most importantly a drinking fountain.
3. In allocating the limited funds, prioritize elements most necessary to improve the site for community use, such as electric service, drainage of the lawns, and the enhanced Dallas Ave S crossing to reach events. Prioritization should include:
 - a. An analysis of which project elements could more easily be added later and which elements, such as the mural and art signs, might be postponed so that the infrastructure can be provided.
 - b. Reexamine the necessity of swales and if there is a lower-cost alternative for conveying the surface water.
 - c. Explore less costly paving methods for the brick path.
4. Continue preserving sources of additional funding. The unfunded elements listed under *Prioritization* are critical to equity and making this unique and a place that reflects the community. Provide support to community in navigating the process of securing funding and delivering these types of projects, and continue to grow partnerships with City and County partners to this end.
5. Continue to design the north parcel in tandem with this site to connect community to the river.
6. Further refine the area southwest of the play area where three paving materials meet.