

Willow Crossing Street Vacation

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Samuel Asefa
Director, OPCD

Ben de Rubertis, Chair

Brianna Holan, Vice Chair

Justin Clark

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Mark Johnson

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Commissioners Present

Ben de Rubertis, Chair
Brianna Holan, Vice Chair
Justin Clark
Mark Johnson
Amalia Leighton
Vinita Sidhu

Commissioners Excused

Laura Haddad
Rick Krochalis
Elaine Wine

Project Description

The applicant is proposing to vacate an unimproved segment of 39th Ave S, south of its intersection with S Willow St, in the Othello Neighborhood. If the vacation is approved, a 7-story mixed use building would be constructed. The development would include ground floor commercial spaces along ML King Jr Way S, 211 residential units, amenities for residents and the public, and below grade parking with 42 parking stalls. All of the residential units planned for the development will be for individuals earning 60% of area median income (AMI) or less.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) third review of the Willow Crossing Street Vacation project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the public benefit proposal for the project. After the presentation and discussion, the SDC voted, 6-0, to approve the public benefit proposal for the Willow Crossing Street Vacation with several conditions and recommendations.

Recusals and Disclosures

None

September 19, 2019

9:00 - 10:30 am

Type

Street Vacation

Phase

Public Benefit

Previous Reviews

9/5/19, 6/6/19

Presenters

Jeff Walls
Studio 19 Architects

Attendees

Beverly Barnett
SDOT

Genevieve Hale-Case
GMD Development

Cynda Rochester
HOSTED

Lish Whitson
Central Staff

Summary of Presentation

Jeff Walls, of Studio 19 Architects, presented the public benefit proposal for the Willow Crossing Street Vacation project. The presentation focused on updates made to the proposed public benefit proposal in response to recommendations made during the previous SDC meeting held on September 5th, 2019. The current proposal includes design updates to MLK Plaza and Willow Walkway, off-site donation, and the monetary value of providing on-site affordable housing. The proposal has removed art and street lighting as public benefit elements.

MLK Plaza is designed to incorporate better circulation between the sidewalk and building entrance and includes a simplified material palette with landscape planters, outdoor seating with metal screening, doors connecting the plaza with adjacent commercial space, and concrete pavers to distinguish between public and semi-private spaces. The proposed seating is arranged to facilitate community gatherings and the landscape planters will include a variety of low groundcovers and shrubs. The planting along Martin Luther King Jr. Way will include low shrubs and street trees. *See figure 1 for more detail.*

Willow Walkway design includes concrete pavers and a bike rack as well as a series of outdoor benches with metal screens and landscape planters between the building façade and sidewalk along Willow St. *See figure 2 for more detail.*

The public benefit proposal also includes a \$25,000 to partially fund improvements to Inflorescence Park located along S Othello St near the intersection of S Othello St and Martin Luther King Jr. Way S. The project aims to increase safety along the walkway through the addition of landscape planters, seating, street trees, and increased sidewalk width. The project is sponsored by Healthy Othello Safer Through Environmental Design (HOSTED), a local community organization. *See figure 3 for more detail.*

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, stated that while they typically do not consider affordable housing when reviewing the public benefit matrix, they do recognize that the City Council supports affordable housing projects. Beverly then mentioned that they do want to acknowledge what the project is providing and to have a balance between what you are providing with the project and what is considered as part of the public benefit proposal. Beverly then stated that while they recognize the importance of the project, they are still looking at what the experience is like in the public realm and how the proposed public benefit elements will improve that experience.

Lish Whitson, Central Staff, stated that the associated policies were re-written last year to support affordable housing projects like this and to acknowledge proposed public benefits that are related to the street right-of-way (ROW). Lish then mentioned that while staff will not consider affordable housing as a public benefit element, they will consider affordable housing as one of the merits for the street vacation petition. Lish then stated that the policies are clear in that there needs to be benefits to the public in addition to the intrinsic value of the project.

Public Comments

Cynda Rochester, HOSTED, commented that several community members got together to learn about crime prevention through design (CPTED) principles to address issues happening near the proposed inflorescence park site. Cynda then stated that the community worked through several potential design ideas

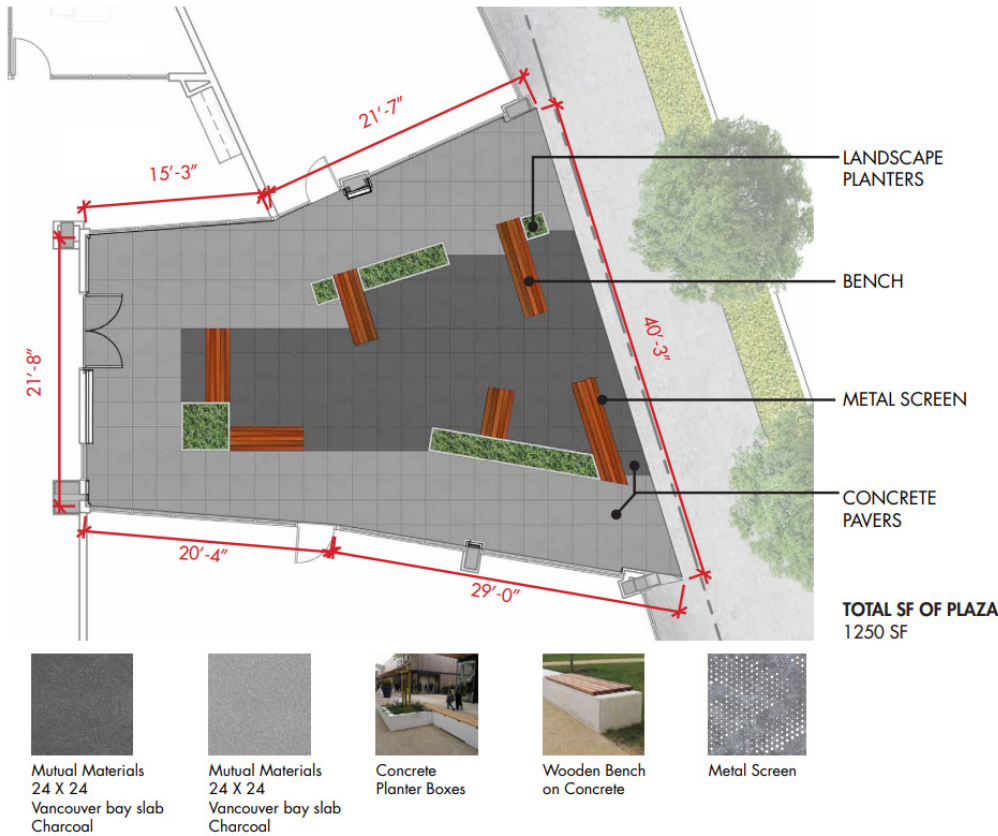


Figure 1: MLK Plaza updated design proposal

STATEMENT FROM LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

- Plaza is on grade with street and easily accessible from MLK Jr. Way.
- Planters and benches are grouped in central portion of plaza, edges to remain open for access of retail spaces.
- Different paving colors delineate semi-private and public spaces.
- Functional seating is provided to created groupings for community gatherings and interaction.
- Proposed benches are made from natural and durable materials, i.e. wood and steel.
- Seating and planting are low for visibility and safety throughout plaza area.
- Planting in plaza area to be low groundcover and shrubs, evergreen and drought tolerant, selected to provide color and texture throughout the year.
- Planting strip along MLK Jr Way will include low evergreen and native shrubs, and deciduous trees. Belle Tower Maples were discussed with urban forestry.
- Permanent irrigation will be provided to all planting areas in plaza and ROW areas.

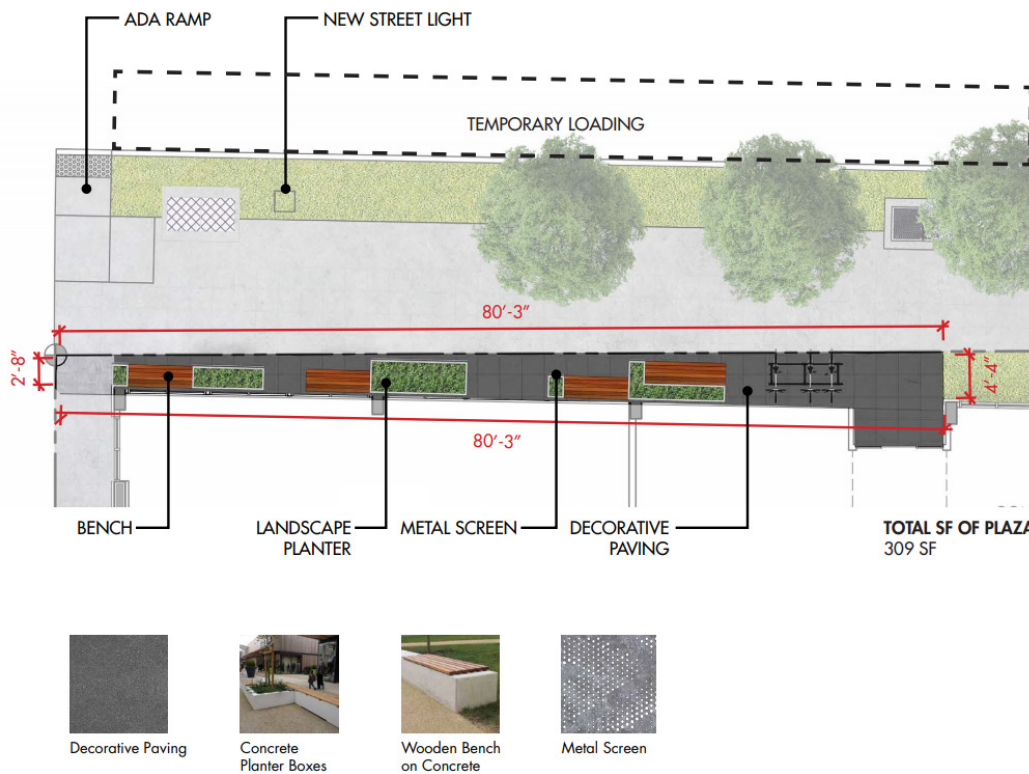


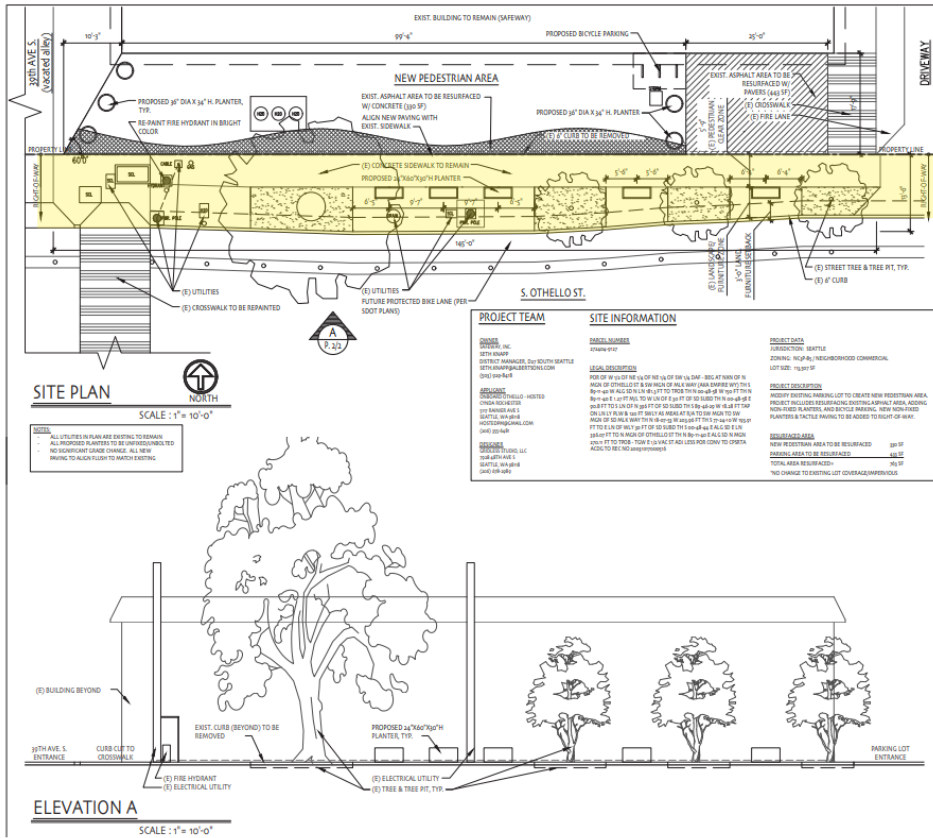
Figure 2: Willow Walkway updated design proposal

DESIGN REVISIONS BASED ON SDC COMMENTS

- Remove mosaic tile patterns from plaza due to ADA concerns.
- Simplify paver design.
- Revise landscaping that was flush with pavers to be in planter boxes.

STATEMENT FROM LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

- Façade in western portion of Willow is set back and walkway widens.
- Easily accessible seating and planting areas at retail spaces are provided.
- Planting along Willow ROW will include low evergreen and native shrubs, and deciduous trees. Willow Oak and Persian Ironwood are proposed by urban forestry.
- All planting areas will be irrigated by a permanent automatic irrigation system.



- Inflorescence Park project improves a busy section of sidewalk adjacent to the Othello Safeway, adding planters, seating, street trees and an enlarged pedestrian area. This project, on public and private property, enhances the pedestrian safety using the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).
- Project is sponsored by Healthy Othello Safer Through Environmental Design (HOSTED), a local community based non-profit, and was selected through an extensive outreach effort that revealed the highest priority public space enhancement projects in the neighborhood.
- Phase one of this project is fully funded by Kaiser Family Foundation, Rainier Beach Action Coalition and many others, and expected to be completed in 2020.



Figure 3: Offsite donation - proposal for Inflorescence Park

and then received funding from sources to develop the space to make it easier for people to move through. Cynda then mentioned they are working with SDOT and other City agencies to see what improvements can be approved and that they feel confident in the improvements they are proposing will make the area safer for all users.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- MLK Plaza
- Willow Walkway
- Off-site donation
- Overall public benefit proposal

MLK Plaza

The SDC appreciated the updated design proposal for the MLK Plaza. Overall, commissioners thought the updated design solved several of the issues brought up during the previous SDC meeting. The commission appreciated the addition of doors connecting the plaza to the adjacent commercial space as well as the orientation of the seating throughout the plaza. Commissioners encouraged the project team to continue refining the design, specifically seating areas, as the project evolves. The commission then recommended the project team also ensure that bench screens are used consistently and to consider back lighting for night time appeal.

Willow Walkway

The SDC recommended the project team work with SDOT to develop a better terminus for the pedestrian route along Willow Walkway as well to consider providing a courtesy strip or cut through pathway between the sidewalk and street along Willow Way. The Commission then recommended the project team continue to refine the seating area along Willow Walkway. Commissioners also suggested the project team consider located the bike rack closer to the plaza and commercial space.

Off-site donation

The SDC recognized the value in providing \$25,000 to partially fund improvements for Inflorescence Park but is concerned with the limited details provided in how the allotted funding will be used. The Commission expressed their desire to see the funding go to providing physical improvements and conditioned that the project team return for a subcommittee meeting prior to the issuing of off-site permits to review the offsite donation public benefit element once it has been fully development and vetted by the appropriate City agencies and organizations.

Overall public benefit proposal

While the SDC agreed the public benefit matrix should not include the overall cost of the project, the Commission did suggest that the team include that 33 additional affordable housing units will be constructed as a result of the vacation. Commissioners then recommended that the project follow the Office of Housing's anti-displacement policy to give preference to renters already located in the neighborhood.

The SDC conditioned that if any changes are made to the approved public benefit proposal, the project team should return for an additional subcommittee review prior to the approval of construction and street improvement permits.

Action

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation of the public benefit proposal. Overall, the Commission appreciated the continued development of the MLK plaza and Willow Walkway as well as continued coordination with the offsite donation public benefit element. The SDC voted, 6-0, to approve the public benefit proposal for the Willow Crossing Street Vacation with the following conditions:

1. If any changes are made to the approved public benefits, the project team should return for an additional subcommittee review prior to the approval of construction and street improvement permits
2. Return for a subcommittee review of the \$25,000 off-site donation once it has been fully developed and vetted prior to approval of the off-site permits. The \$25,000 off-site donation should provide constructed physical improvements within the immediate neighborhood rather than programmatic elements.

The SDC also provided the following recommendations:

1. Housing should follow the anti-displacement policy to give preference to renters in the neighborhood
2. Work with SDOT to develop better terminus for pedestrian route on Willow Way
3. Work with SDOT to include a courtesy strip or cut through pathway between sidewalk and street along Willow Way
4. Continue to refine the design for MLK plaza and seating areas along Willow Way to make them appealing to public and comfortable to use
5. Ensure screens are used consistently on the benches at MLK plaza and consider back lighting for night time appeal.