

APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Nicolas Welch
Planner

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September 18, 2014

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 5:00 pm

Projects Reviewed

Yesler Park

9th & Lenora Alley Vacation

Waterfront – Main Corridor North of Union St

Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain (arrived at 1:00 pm)

Lee Copeland

Megan Groth

Ellen Sollod

Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging

Martin Regge

Ross Tilghman

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Nicolas Welch

Joan Nieman



September 18, 2014 9:00 – 11:15 am	Project:	Yesler Park	
	Phase:	Concept Design	
	Previous reviews:	none	
	Presenters:	Frank Robinson	Seattle Parks and Recreation
		Shwu-jen Hwang	Seattle Parks and Recreation
	Attendees:	Melanie Davies	SvR Design
		Tom Eanes	Seattle Housing Authority
		Marieke Lacasse	GGLO
		Marcia Iwasaki	Office of Arts & Culture
		Toby Ressler	Seattle Parks and Recreation
		Michael Shiosaki	Seattle Parks and Recreation

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this meeting was to review the concept design for Yesler Park. This is the first time the project has been before the full Commission. A subcommittee of Commissioners provided feedback on the proposed design in two workshops earlier in 2014.

Summary of Proposal

Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) proposes to build a new 1.7-acre neighborhood park west of the existing Yesler Community Center. Parks would develop the park as part of the Yesler Terrace Master Planned Community using \$3.0 million of 2008 Parks and Green Spaces levy funding.

The proposed design includes a multi-use plaza near the community center, a play area, basketball courts, picnicking, and an open lawn. At the south end of the site, the project would link to the 10th Avenue Hillclimb connection to Little Saigon and the International District that broke ground in June 2014. Construction of the park is expected to begin in 2015.

Summary of Presentation

Frank Robinson introduced the project and members of the team. Mr. Robinson outlined his presentation, dated September 18, 2014, and available on the [Design Commission website](#). He mentioned the roughly 35 languages currently spoken in the Yesler community and highlighted to the convergence of street grids that occurs at Yesler Terrace.

A map illustrated the park's adjacency to downtown, connections to surrounding neighborhoods, and proximity to the future First Hill Streetcar. A series of historic photos showed the original conception and development of Yesler Terrace. Illustrative diagrams showed the heights, uses, and urban form anticipated in the eventual build-out of the Yesler Terrace redevelopment. The team shared their initial

sketches and site analysis, and photographs showed views of the existing conditions of the Yesler Community Center and park site.

Mr. Robinson then detailed the proposed program elements for the future park. Several respond to or are inspired by the diversity of cultures and ages in the community. The artist Christine Bourdette has joined the team but was unable to attend today's review. The team is considering relocating an existing sculpture currently adjacent to the community center.

The next series of slides introduced in both plan and section the three concept alternatives—terraces, ramparts, and plateau. Each offers a different approach to circulation and the topography of the site. Mr. Robinson stated that the team has found inspiration in the spiral, a sacred geometry present at all scales of nature and a figurative symbol for the cultural convergence found in the Yesler community. He also described how the design reflects a “yin–yang balance” between two contrasting sides of the site, one higher and more active, the other lower and more passive. Despite its rather significant grades, the park will be very accessible, according to Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson identified flexible spaces in the proposed design that could accommodate a variety of games and activities, including market stalls, small and large events, and active play spaces. A slide showed the proposed design of the roughly 10,000-square-foot plaza area. Variation in paving and materials would create a spiral form on the ground plane of the plaza. Mr. Robinson mentioned several strategies for green stormwater infrastructure at the site: stormwater collection from the open play area, trees, and pervious paving. Streetscape sections illustrated the design intent for the edges of the park. Slides showed a three-dimensional rendering of a play area and some of the tree forms and plantings under consideration.

Finally, Mr. Robinson and Shwu-jen Hwang walked the Commission through the physical model that they brought.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission was encouraged to see the park design progress from initial meetings with the Commission subcommittee. Given the size, breadth of uses, and importance of the future Yesler Park, there was a robust discussion about fundamental elements of the design. Some Commissioners felt the various concepts mentioned were not resolved into a singular design approach. There were mixed responses to the spiral form, which most Commissioners found more successful as a figurative concept than as a physical or graphic element as currently proposed. They believed the concept of cultural convergence could manifest in a richer way.

There was agreement that the design and configuration of the multi-use plaza needed further attention and resolution to be welcoming and integrated with the adjacent community center and play area. This was one of several instances where the Commission felt inadequate information prevented a thorough assessment and understanding of the proposed design. The spiral form and fountain, for example, could be a successful design element. However, seen only in plan, it appeared not to harmonize with other paving and might interfere with the dominant desire line from the 10th Avenue Hillclimb to 9th Avenue. Some Commissioners found the park's curvilinear forms at odds with the formality of the 10th Avenue Hillclimb axis and encouraged greater integration between these geometries.

Landscaping, art, and sustainability were also topics of interest. The Commission encouraged the team to select and locate plantings thoughtfully in order to preserve views, maintain porosity between paths and the open lawn, and create secure spaces. The Commissioners expressed a desire for a greater understanding of how the artist will be integrated into the design team and wished the presentation had included images of her past work. While they praised the team's efforts to preserve existing trees at the site, the Commissioners found a comprehensive overall approach to sustainability and stormwater management lacking in the concept design presentation and look forward to more clarity at the next review.

Agency Comments

Marcia Iwasaki noted that Christine Bourdette's intent as the artist is to use art as creative placemaking, not to create standalone item.

Public Comments

none

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for the presentation of the concept design for Yesler Park. The Commission greatly appreciated the time and energy the Parks team has devoted to its productive meetings with the Commission subcommittee. The subcommittee has seen significant progress in the design and has enjoyed their conversations with the Parks landscape architects. The Commission also thanked the team for a thorough presentation of the proposed concept design and particularly appreciated having a physical model to review.

With a **vote of 4 to 2**, the Design Commission approved the concept design for Yesler Park with the following recommendations:

- Ensure the park design reflects all communities, current and future, both locally at Yesler Terrace and in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Connect program elements more fluidly throughout the park so there is physical and visual continuity between park spaces.
- At the next review, provide a greater depth of information on 1) paving materials and 2) how the proposed plantings reflect the heights, grades, and view corridors present at the site.
- Refine the design and alignment of the park's major north–south axis to create more direct, consistent, and usable connections to program elements both within and from outside the park, including the entry garden, the multi-use plaza, and the 10th Avenue Hillclimb. Further consider the relationship between this axis and curved meandering path, particularly when shaping and sculpting the designated programmed spaces.
- Clarify the approach to signage and views at all entrances to the park, particularly the three major entrances at S Washington St and Yesler Way, Broadway and Yesler Way, and the junction of S Washington St and the 10th Ave Hillclimb connection to Little Saigon and the International District. Provide more illustrations of the pedestrian experience approaching and entering the park at these locations.
- Find opportunities to create more linkages into the park along S Washington St.
- Develop the play area, multi-use plaza, and community center as an integrated civic space. These spaces should be porous to allow people to move through them but also

support a variety of overlapping activities, as intended. Consider less emphasis on the graphic language of the spiral design if it inhibits or constrains this goal.

- Avoid creating a pinch point where the multi-use plaza and childcare plaza meet. Consider modifying the configuration of the multi-use plaza to create greater connectivity between the two spaces.
- Continue to develop the fountain as an interactive space that is integrated into the views and anticipated uses of the plaza. Consider designing it to be turned on or off depending on the requirements of events or activities to create more usable plaza space.
- Create a stronger connection between the play area and picnic area so both are safe and usable spaces. Reexamine the placement of the picnic area given concern about its proximity to the basketball court and distance from the play area.
- Strive to develop a play structure that is more integrated into the site design rather than a standalone structure.
- Consider adjusting the design and placement of the entry garden so it reflects its intended use and character, complements pedestrian movement through the park, and does not obstruct the primary throughway path.
- Locate trees to provide greater visual porosity between the pedestrian path and open lawn. Ensure the planting strategy makes sense not only in plan but also in elevation given the topography of the site. Consider a more direct approach to the use of plantings and materials to differentiate the character and experience of the throughway paths, meandering circulation, and soft landscape connections between programmed spaces.
- At the next meeting, provide information about the artist's proposed work and how she is being integrated into the design process. Reach a decision about the potential relocation of existing art pieces and clarify how they fit into the overall vision for art at the park.
- Clarify the overall approach to sustainability beyond tree preservation. Develop and present a clear and comprehensive plan for stormwater management. There is interest in understanding how you are balancing cut and fill given the grades at the site.

The reasons for the votes against were as follows:

Commissioner Sollod: There were several comments about issues fundamental to the overall design and the relationship of programmatic elements that concern me. These should have been resolved at concept design. The lack of clarity about the character, circulation, and design of important spaces like the multi-use plaza and entry garden is problematic. I would also have like to have received more information about the integration of the artist's work at this point in the design.

Commissioner Alonzo: I commend the team on the work presented. It is close to successful, but some of the conceptual and organizational elements are not yet resolved at key areas. These unresolved aspects must be reconciled for design approval at the 30% level.

The Commission anticipates reviewing the project at least once in subcommittee prior to a presentation to the full Commission at schematic design.