

Denny Substation

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

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Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair
Shannon Loew, Vice Chair
Bernie Alonzo
Brodie Bain (excused 1:00 – 2:15 pm)
Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging
Grant Hromas
Ellen Sollod
Martin Regge (excused 1:00 – 1:30 pm)
Ross Tilghman

Project Description

Seattle City Light is proposing to build an electrical substation on a full block bounded by Denny Way, Minor Ave N, John St, and Yale Ave N and bisected by Pontius Ave N and a north-south alley. A roughly nine-block area surrounding the project site will see below-grade improvements to the transmission network in the ROW. The proposed substation will connect to the Massachusetts substation primarily via underground lines.

The preferred design for Denny Substation proposes to vacate Pontius Ave N between Denny Way and John St to optimize the functional design of the substation. The vacation allows for the creation an open space along Minor Ave N as valuable amenity and pedestrian connection for the Cascade neighborhood. The project includes an elevated interpretive walkway, a pocket park on John St, and two shell spaces: a learning/resource center and a community meeting space at the southeast and southwest corners of the facility, respectively.

Meeting Summary

At today's meeting, the project team showed a preview of the proposed public benefit package for the vacation of Pontius Ave N. The Commission had approved urban design merit for the vacation on April 3, 2014; they also approved the schematic design for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project on that date. Because the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not yet published, the Commission did not take an action today.¹ They will likely vote on the public benefit package at the next meeting when the Final EIS has been published.

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

¹Since features proposed in a public benefit package must exceed any code requirements for the project and required project mitigation, the notice of the Final EIS must be published before the Commission votes on the public benefit package.

November 6, 2014

1:00 – 3:00 pm

Type

CIP Project and Street Vacation

Phase

Public Benefit Briefing

Previous Reviews

[April 3, 2014](#)

[November 7, 2013](#)

[June 6, 2013](#)

[October 18, 2012](#)

Project Team Present

Phil Ambrose Seattle City Light

Matt Ayer Seattle City Light

Jennifer Clapham KPFF

Michael Clark Seattle City Light

Ryan Fagre NBBJ

Kathy Fendt Seattle City Light

Blake Fisher NBBJ

Laurie Geissinger Seattle City Light

Jose Sama NBBJ

Greg Stamatiou Seattle City Light

Carl Tully NBBJ

Juliet Vong HBB

Attendees

Beverly Barnett
SDOT

Terrence Danysh
Dorsey & Whitney

Lloyd Douglas
Cascade Neighborhood Council

Kevin Duffy
Walsh Pacific

Amy Friedland
REI

Chris Hoffman
Stepherson Associates

Jason Huff
OAC

Lisa Kennan-Meyer
Kennan Meyer Architect

Kim Lokan
Plymouth Housing Group

Sandra Lorentzen
Cascade Area Property Owners

Susan McLaughlin
SDOT

John Pehrson
community member

Jack Schwaegler
Jacobs

Colin Vasquez
DPD

Loretta Vosk
South Lake Union Dog Park

Marcia Wagoner
Studio 3MW

Greg Wharton
Callison

Summary of Presentation

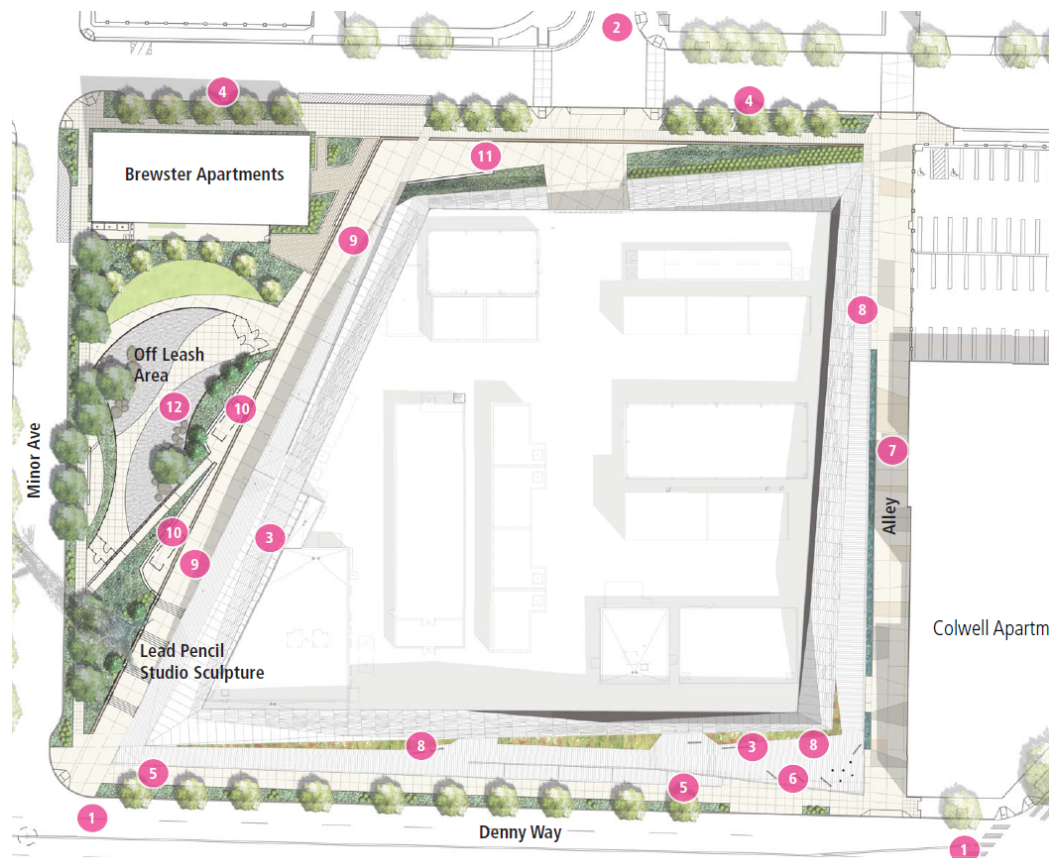
Jose Sama summarized the current design and the team's response to Commissioner feedback from the April 2014 review. Carl Tully described the seven waivers from development standards that the project will require. The presentation is [available on the Commission website](#).

Michael Clark reviewed the conditions and recommendations the Commission made in its approval of urban design merit. First, Mr. Clark stated that a City Light team has begun working on the proposed shell spaces along with interior designers from NBBJ. The Office of Arts & Culture (OAC) has agreed to be a partner for the long-term curation and programming of the community space. Second, Mr. Clark expressed confidence that the team will develop a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the adjacent Brewster Apartments prior to the Commission's review of design development for the CIP project.

The Commission had also recommended a comprehensive sustainability strategy, and Mr. Clark gave three highlights of this effort:

1. The proposed shell spaces are intended to be net positive energy facilities
2. Integrated site water components that will be visible to the public
3. Integrated educational components to raise awareness of sustainability efforts

Mr. Sama showed the following diagram identifying the location of the public benefit features and described each in detail:



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|--|---|
| 1. Pedestrian crossings on Denny Way | 6. Bus shelter / transit hub |
| 2. Pontius and Thomas street improvements with SDOT | 7. Alley improvements |
| 3. Shell spaces | 8. Elevated interpretive walkway |
| 4. John St Green Street enhancements | 9. Pedestrian-through block connection |
| 5. Implementation of Denny Way Streetscape Concept Plan | 10. Event zone |
| | 11. John St pocket park |
| | 12. Open space |

Juliet Vong described the evolution of the open space design. A series of maps showed Seattle Parks and Recreation's "gap analysis" and Maps showed parks gap analysis and neighborhood connectivity that through-block would enhance. Mentioned changes to public art—three pieces now one. Looked at adjacent context in response to SDC recommendation to integrate art and context.

Finally, Mr. Sama gave a brief outline for the design development phase of the CIP project, which the Commission anticipates reviewing along with public benefit in early 2015.

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett reminded the audience that the City Council makes the final decision whether to grant a street or alley vacation. She stated that in making its decision Council will consider the whether the project reflects the community context, the design character and quality, the adequacy of mitigation for identified impacts, and whether the public benefit proposal is commensurate with the benefit that the vacation confers to the petitioner. Ms. Barnett believed today's discussion was helpful for identifying what is mitigation, what is code required or standard design practice, and what is public benefit. She sees the project making good changes and listening to the community. Ms. Barnett is interested in but still unclear about the pocket park and skeptical about the elevated walkway.

Michael Jenkins noted that the City Council will see the vacation petition along with the code waivers for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project.

Susan McLaughlin stated that SDOT appreciates the ongoing partnership between her department and City Light on the public benefit enhancements at Thomas Street and Pontius Ave N. DPD has helped in designing the streetscape concept plan for these rights-of-way, which will be adopted into the [Right-of-Way Improvements Manual](#) soon.

Public Comments

Sandra Lorentzen, a member of Cascade Neighborhood Property Owners and the South Lake Union Denny Substation Task Force, stated that historically City Light substations were often built in neighborhoods that are different now. When City Light last built a substation, no one talked about electromagnetic fields (EMF) or cyber security. The Cascade neighborhood has 36 apartment buildings and 80 percent of South Lake Union's low-income and social service housing. Some of its most vulnerable residents will be closest to the substation. Ms. Lorentzen noted that in Cascade the new substation will be constructed, streets will be torn up for distribution lines and potentially a transmission line eventually. Her organization recognizes that this infrastructure must go somewhere at a cost that ratepayers can afford. Her concerns are 1) are the spaces safe and 2) the streets torn up should be rebuilt to high quality. She hopes that construction mitigation measures will be adequate and encouraged the Commission to weigh if the public benefit package is sufficient.

John Pehrson, a Cascade resident and member of the same task force as Ms. Lorentzen, stated that his group has reviewed and analyzed all 12 public benefit items [this analysis was submitted electronically and provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting]. Mr. Pehrson stated that the analysis uses the City's street vacation policies adopted in July 2009. He referred to the policy that public benefit must exceed all code and SEPA mitigation requirements. According to Mr. Pehrson, the vacation provides a big benefit to City Light, so the public benefits should be commensurate. He then discussed certain public benefit items in more detail. He acknowledged that the southwest shell space is very important and valuable as public benefit, though he's concerned that the entrance to one is only eight feet high. However, Ms. Pehrson stated that he believes the shell space on Denny is not public benefit but instead benefits City Light and its ratepayers. Since Denny is a Class II Pedestrian Space, he also believes the shell space is needed to meet transparency requirements. Lastly, he expressed his longstanding concern about the elevated walkway. Above all, Mr. Pehrson wants the facility and open space to be safe.

Loretta Vosk spoke on behalf of the South Lake Union Dog Park organization. Ms. Vosk stated that she accepts the 6,000 square feet for the off-leash area (OLA). She wants that space to be utilitarian, not an art project. She stated that the OLA needs to be useful to be used. Ms. Vosk also advocated for turf as the substrate rather than gravel, which dogs dislike walking and playing on.

Lloyd Douglas, a Cascade resident, spoke about the impacts of construction and equipment delivery on the neighborhood streets. He referred to the impacts of the nearby Troy Laundry project and stated that he sees motorists

blow through stop signs as they cut through neighborhood streets to avoid the half-block traffic closure. Accordingly, he is concerned about similar impacts when entire blocks are closed for months at a time.

Kim Lokan spoke on behalf of Plymouth Housing, the owner of the Caldwell Building across the alley to the east of the substation site. Ms. Lokan stated that the residential building is six stories and the units begin at the second floor, which is level with the highest point of the elevated walkway. She is concerned that people on the walkway will be able to see into residential units and feels the project team is not adequately considering adjacent uses. She believes the Ned Kahn piece and info sculptures do not belong next to a residential use. Ms. Lokan stated that the vacation of Pontius means the loss of valuable street parking for her tenants. She applauded the development of the open space but advocated for more attention to Denny, where she is concerned about the long substation façade. Given that the elevated walkway will take people off of the Denny Way sidewalk, she encouraged activation along Denny.

Terry Danysh, counsel to REI, endorsed the other public comments. He attended the meeting due to concerns about the livability of neighborhood related to traffic and parking. Specifically Mr. Danysh is skeptical about the rationale for vacating Pontius; REI hired him to look at how the project is being handled at SDOT, City Light, and DPD. Mr. Danysh stated that REI's concerns have not yet been addressed to date, though he acknowledged that he didn't expect resolution today and looks forward to more information in the Final EIS. He wanted the audience to be aware that REI has concerns.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission appreciated the progress the team has made in the design and their progressive approach to dealing with essential infrastructure in a dense urban area. At the same time, they recognized the public's longstanding concerns and encouraged the project team to continue its close outreach with the community. There was also appreciation for the proposed signalized crossing of Denny Way at Minor and Stewart but acknowledged that they may be identified in the EIS as required mitigation elements. In a similar vein, the Commissioners appreciated the resolution of the bus dropoff but asked for further study of the "transit hub" area on Denny in order to demonstrate how it functions successfully for people locking their bikes, waiting for the bus, and entering or occupying the south-east shell space.

Much of the discussion provided guidance to the team as they refine the public benefit package. For example, the Commissioners requested more information about how the substation in general and elevated walkway in particular affect the adjacent uses. The Commission was pleased to learn that OAC is onboard as a partner with the shell spaces and, at the next review, hopes to see a more detailed plan for operations, maintenance, and programming of these spaces. They also recommended more thought about how the southwest shell space and open space function together as one entire zone. Some Commissioners remain skeptical of the elevated walkway, while others expressed newfound interest in it as public benefit; all agreed that the next presentation should explain the strategy for making the elevated walkway safe and secure.

Finally, there was some discussion about the off-leash area (OLA) design. Echoing one of the public comments, some Commissioners stated that the OLA must be functional to be useful and shouldn't necessarily try to combine uses; some suggested if it's a dog park, make it a dog park. Others felt that it must serve more than just dog owners and accommodate a variety of uses. There was agreement that the next review should show more detail about furnishings, benches, railings, and materials in the entire open space.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for the preview of the public benefit package. Because all public benefit items must exceed any code or mitigation requirements, the Final EIS must be published prior to a vote on public benefit. Accordingly, the Commission did not take an action at this meeting but expects to vote on public benefit (and review the design development of the CIP project) in early 2015. The Commission looks forward to discussing and reviewing the public benefit package once the Final EIS is published.

The Commission appreciated several positive changes since the last review, such as the two proposed pedestrian crossings at Denny Way. All of the offsite elements are positive, and the collaboration with other agencies is very encouraging. The Commission found that the public benefit package is generally on the right track and provided the following comments and recommendations to guide the team's development of the public benefit package:

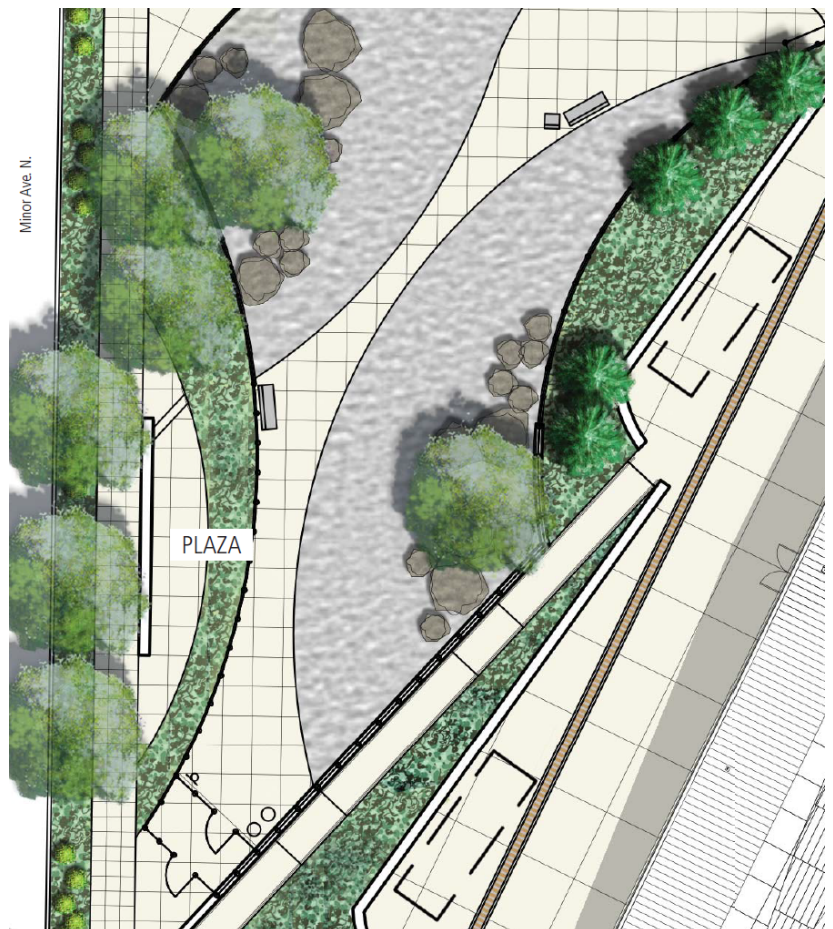
1. Continue outreach to ensure that you adequately address neighbors' concerns. At the next review, help us understand how you are achieving that. Given that City Light is building a substation in this location, we appreciate your efforts to integrate it into the urban environment.
2. While we are generally happy with the progress on the shell spaces, there are several outstanding issues that should be resolved at the next review. Ensure the southwest shell space is a flexible, multi-use, but not multi-useless space. That shell space and the adjacent open space should function together as a single event zone. Consider whether the food trucks may be better suited for another location.
3. Refine the relationship between the transit hub and learning center so the two work together successfully. Consider how people waiting for the bus affect the experience of entering or occupying the southeast shell space.



View looking northwest at the bus shelter / transit hub in front of the southeast shell space.

4. Develop a stronger strategy for the entire open space. Continue the positive improvements you showed today. Ensure that the off-leash area is functional for dog owners. Consider how all of the open space features function together as a single element, not separate pieces.
5. At the next review, present 1) the implementation schedule for the project, ideally in a graphic and/or spatial way, and 2) more information about operations, maintenance, and programming of all public spaces.

Note that the comments listed above do not address the CIP project design, including color, materiality, and other outstanding concerns from the Commission's schematic design review in April 2014.



Enlarged plan view of the open space plaza and off-leash area.