



DRAFT / APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Greg Nickels
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Mary Johnston
Chair

Andrew Barash

Julie Bassuk

Graham Black

Brendan Connolly

Lauren Hauck

John Hoffman

Julie Parrett

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Guillermo Romano
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
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Tom Iurino
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November 5, 2009

Convened 10:00 am
Adjourned 5:00 pm

Projects Reviewed

Neighborhood Planning Streetscape Design
DPD Green Building Team
South Park Pump Station
Admiral Way Safeway
Seattle Center Fun Forest

Commissioners Present

Mary Johnston, Chair
Andrew Barash
Julie Bassuk
Graham Black
Brendan Connolly
John Hoffman
Julie Parrett
Dennis Ryan
Norie Sato

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano
Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino
Tim Trujillo
Jenny Hampton

Celebrating 40 Years 1968-2008



November 5, 2009 **Project:** **Seattle Center Fun Forest**
Phase: Alley Vacation
Last Reviewed: N/A
Presenters: Robert Nellams, Seattle Center
 Owen Richards, Owen Richards Architects

Attendees:

Jill Crary, Seattle Center	Layne Cubell, Seattle Center
Kate Cudney, ORA	Michael Dorcy, DPD
Richard Hartlage, AHBL	Joan Rosenstock, Seattle Center
Ron Sevart, Space Needle Corporation	Amy Worthington, Seneca Group
A.J. Yang, UW student	

Time: 1.50 hrs

(121/RS0611)

ACTION

The Design Commission thanked the Seattle Center staff for their thorough update and the Space Needle Inc. and design team for their presentation of plans for the Fun Forest area at the Seattle Center. Commissioners applaud the dialog that is ongoing among the parties involved and encourage continuing the exchange on the future of this important place in the city.

The Commission unanimously approved the concept of programming interim uses for the north Fun Forest area and looks forward to reviewing the RFP for events, installations and activities that will lead up to the 2012 Anniversary celebration at the Seattle Center.

With a vote of six for and one against, the Design Commission approved the concept ideas and thinking behind the proposal to locate a glass museum operated by Dale Chihuly and the Space Needle Inc. in the south part of the Seattle Center Fun Forest, but does not approve the conceptual design as presented.

The dissenting vote was due to skepticism that a Chihuly museum, or exhibit space, is a unique, forward-looking solution for Seattle Center and a concern that locating the works in the existing building or a new building (which would need to be great) would work. Closing off public access to this area and loss of the green space envisioned in the master plan is also a concern.

The Commission offered the following recommendations:

- The project envisioned would need to be spectacular. Through some bold thinking, further explore the concept presented without retention of the existing building. Think big.
- Not only should the objects in the exhibit inspire awe. The qualities of the facility experienced from the outside should be just as inspiring.
- Draw on the idea of transparency in developing the perimeter of the project and in considering how the site will be seen from above, from the north, and by people entering the Seattle Center from the east.
- The building should reflect its function and what is occurring on the inside. If it is to be the largest repository of Chihuly work, it should be at the cutting edge of glass construction in the United States. The state of the art of structural glass has become very advanced; draw upon this.
- In the master plan this area was meant to serve as a connecting open space and to open the views to the Center. Address how the proposal concepts respond to the framework of the Seattle Center Century 21 Master Plan. Consider a phased approach and explore the eventual removal of the existing structure.

- While the Commission agrees that the master plan is a base from which to approach opportunities, the organizing and qualitative underpinnings of the plan must be maintained.
- The Commission supports the design principle in the master plan of weaving new forms and experiences into the fabric of the Seattle Center and not simply filling in areas with isolated projects. If the project does not allow for this area of the Seattle Center to be a large open landscaped room as planned, it must become something better.
- The tentativeness, scrappiness, and insular nature of what is proposed is not spectacular or ambitious. The existing full building envelope is maintained in all three scenarios, limiting the potential of a total design approach.
- If a new structure is to be built to house the Chihuly work, and it takes away “free” public space for paid access, it should be as interesting and spectacular without the need to enter. Taking away “free” space and turning it into “paid” space is a big issue that requires a grand gesture worthy of that sacrifice. The existing building holds limited potential. The Commission encourages the partnership to look beyond the cost savings from simple building reuse and further explore the “greatness” of what is envisioned for this important site.
- Reiterate to presenters that the proposal is not the issue, but instead it is the presence and use of the existing building to achieve such a lofty goal.
- Consider the long term when designing the project. What will the project's relation to the City's treasured Seattle Center be in 30 years?

Presentation

This presentation is intended to focus on the Fun Forest elements. The project is divided into areas north of the monorail and south of the monorail.

Context:

Strategies: increase open space, Center House, and Memorial Stadium

The Seattle Center Fun Forest team is requesting feedback. What to do from a public view and a private view? The Center is home to more than 30 non-profit organizations. The Center has incurred a loss of funding for the Fun Forest. One of the main reasons for this is that real estate excise taxes have plummeted. This presents an opportunity for Public-private partnerships.

North of the monorail:

- Asphalt currently covers much of the site.
- Fun Forest lease expires on December 31st and rides will leave or be consolidated at south end
- Want to open up the Center House to create connections
- SC intends to put out an RFP to explore the potential for the area in 2010 and 2011
- Maintenance shop will be vacated in 2011, opening up anew possibility there
- North side will feature small, incremental changes in the interim, until the 50th Anniversary in 2012.

South of the monorail:

- The amusement park will exist for another 9 months through the summer of 2010 and the Fun Forest will continue to operate in the existing Arcade structure west of Space Needle.
- In a partnership project with the Space Needle, there exists an opportunity to highlight local artist, Dale Chihuly, with a new visitor destination museum or exhibit space that could open in 2011. This proposal is not in the master plan but is considered complementary.



Figure 4: Project Location

- In tough economic times, the prospect for new investment at Seattle Center and the chance to capitalize on new opportunities such as this is enticing

Owen Richards, architect for the partnership project, presented early site studies and highlighted the master plan principles. Maps were generated to assess the site from an urban design perspective and study pedestrian flow around the site. Key influences were identified by first understanding the site, its connections and vantage points. Constriction points in terms of circulation on site present opportunities.



Figure 5: Available Area

Image boards presented by landscape architect, Richard Hartlage, show some of the inspiration for the design and prospects for how the art and landscape interact. Key elements include:

- Integration of landscape is central to the design
- Porous fences are intended to artfully create necessary secure boundary. Low impact development (LID) techniques for the site will be pursued, Impervious surfaces will be removed or minimized
- Enhancing the tree canopy at the project edges
- Sustainable planting that is both beautiful and educational
- Green screens intended to help improve some of the existing blank facades

Owen presented three early project concept design alternatives:

- 1) Entry on north side
- 2) South side entry, perpendicular glass house
- 3) Entry on south side with parallel glass house. Key program elements for each alternative are the Art Garden, Glass House, and the 20,000 square foot existing building would be converted to a gift shop, exhibit space and café.

These alternatives are all conceptual in nature at this time and the Commission's early feedback is valuable. It is noted that project capital is coming from the Space Needle in partnership with Chihuly Studios.

Commissioners' Questions/Comments:

"Request for clarification of the Glass House."

"It would be a conservatory and event space. The program would be developed by the Seattle Center and Chihuly Studio."

"What will be free and accessible? What is the time frame?"

"The Glass House and garden are intended to require fees for entry. The art at the project edge will be visible to the public. Robert states that completion is intended for 2011."

"The Commission expressed concern over loss of Space Needle Open Space."

"Robert expressed confidence in creating a spectacular space worthy of the space it occupies."

"Concern for green screens as building treatment. Fisher Pavilion mentioned as wonderful example."

"Mention of a loss of landscaped open space. What is the reasoning behind the conceptualized access from the east side of the site in each scenario?"

"Most traffic currently streams in from the East side of the site."

"Master Plan does provide framework for increased traffic to come from north."

"Likely development and increased density near the southeast corner of the site might influence this flow."

"Expressed concerned that Chihuly might not be the right direction for Seattle Center, in general. "

"Research has been done and it is believed that there is a market and the Glass House and exhibit space is an opportunity to create a spectacular destination. In addition, a feasibility study says this is a very realistic and

potentially large project that people are enthusiastic about. This would be the largest collection of Chihuly work. “

“What is the duration, tenure and lease arrangements?”

“This will be a permanent transfer, a long-term ground lease.”

“Why are we preserving a structure that is arguably insignificant?”

“The best plans need to be flexible. The building, its location, and its bulk are too large of a compromise when considering the opportunity to open up the space.”

“The existing building intended for reuse is a giant impediment to creating the spectacle that is intended.” “Perhaps the north side is a better alternative.”

“The project should be at the cutting edge of glass materials if that is the focus.”

“The Commission questioned whether alternatives to the big glass roof have been explored. Response: this is a key design feature, though sustainable design is a factor as well.”

“What is the public benefit of preserving the structure?”

“Transparency is what the commission is searching for.”

“The proposed open space design in the Master Plan with its concentric rows of trees design is lacking in originality. The commission understands the desire for programming that complements the Space Needle.” “There is a need to produce a place that is truly unique.”