

Denny Substation

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Grant Hromas

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Nicolas Welch
Planner

Joan Nieman
Administrative Staff

**Department of Planning
and Development**
700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000
PO Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

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

Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair
Shannon Loew, Vice Chair
Bernie Alonzo
Lee Copeland
Ellen Sollod
Ross Tilghman

Commissioners Excused

Brodie Bain
Thaddeus Egging
Grant Hromas
Martin Regge

Project Description

Seattle City Light proposes 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. Below-grade improvements to the transmission network will occur in several rights-of-way in the roughly nine-block area surrounding the project site. The proposed substation will connect to the Massachusetts substation, located in the SoDo neighborhood, primarily via underground lines.

The preferred design for Denny Substation proposes to vacate Pontius Ave N between Denny Way and John St. The vacation would allow for a different facility design than if the street were retained. It also allows for the creation an open space along Minor Ave N.

The project includes an elevated interpretive walkway, open space along John St, public art, coordination with SDOT on streetscape improvements in the vicinity, and two shell spaces. Some of these elements are proposed public benefit items related to the vacation of Pontius Ave N.

Meeting Summary

In separate actions, the Commission unanimously approved 1) the design development of Denny Substation as a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project and 2) the public benefit phase of the proposed street vacation. The Commission was also unanimously supportive of the proposed development standard waivers and made recommendations for how the design team could move closer towards code compliance.

These minutes are divided into two separate sections for the design development and public benefit reviews.

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

February 19, 2015**2:00 – 4:00 pm****Type**

CIP Project and Street Vacation

PhaseDesign Development (CIP)
Public Benefit (Street Vacation)**Previous Reviews**[November 6, 2014](#)[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**Jenny Burns** Seattle City Light**Jennifer Clapham** KPFF**Michael Clark** Seattle City Light**Rachel Dotson** HBB**Gladys Dumo** Seattle City Light**Ryan Fagre** NBBJ**Kathy Fendt** Seattle City Light**Blake Fisher** NBBJ**Dean Koonts** HBB**Jose Sama** NBBJ**Greg Stamatiou** Seattle City Light**Sam Stubblefield** NBBJ**Carl Tully** NBBJ**Juliet Vong** HBB**Attendees****Beverly Barnett**

SDOT

Roger Benson

Mortenson Construction

Lloyd Douglas

Cascade Neighborhood Council

Ethan Kaufman

Walsh Construction

Chris Hoffman

Stepherson Associates

Jason Huff

Office of Arts & Culture

Brad Lange

Capitol Hill Housing

Pearl Leung

Vulcan

Kim Lokan

Plymouth Housing Group

Sandra Lorentzen

Cascade Area Property Owners

David Moore

Plymouth Housing Group

John Pehrson

community member

Colin Vasquez

DPD

Loretta Vosk

South Lake Union Dog Park

February 19, 2015

Design Development**Summary of Presentation**

Jose Sama introduced the project and oriented the Commission to the team's physical model of the substation. A table showed the rationale for each of the following seven development waivers that the project team requests. The full table explaining the waivers is available at the end of these minutes.

	Request	Standard
1	Waive minimum façade height	Per SMC 23.48.014-A.2 On Class 2 Pedestrian Streets, as shown on Map B, all facades shall have a minimum height of 25 feet.
2	Waive maximum permitted setback	Per SMC 23.48.014-A.3: Street-level Setback. Except on Class 1 Pedestrian Streets, as shown on Map B, structures may be set back up to twelve (12) feet from the property line subject to the following (Exhibit 23.48.014 B).
3	Waive façade transparency requirements on Denny Way and John St	Per SMC 23.48.014-D.1 Denny Way Class 2 Pedestrian Street requirement 60% transparency. John Street; Green Street facade transparency is requirement 60% transparency.
4	Waive blank façade limits on Denny Way, Minor Ave N, and John St	Per SMC 23.48.014-D.2 SMC 23.48.014-D.3 Minor Ave. has a 30' blank façade limit. Denny Way has a 15' blank facade limit. John Street has a 40% maximum blank façade and 15' blank facade limit requirement.
5	Waive Green Factor requirement	Per SMC 23.48.024-A.2 (SMC 23.86.019) Landscaping that achieves a Green Factor score of .30 or greater, pursuant to Section 23.86.019, is required for any lot with development containing more than 4,000 square feet of nonresidential uses.
6	Allow limited accessory surface parking	Per SMC 23.48.034-C.3 Accessory surface parking is prohibited unless separated from all street lot lines by another use within a structure.
7	Waive parking and loading access	Per SMC 23.48.034-D.1 Access to parking and loading shall be from the alley when the lot abuts an alley if it would not create a significant safety hazard.

Mr. Sama then presented samples of the two primary materials for the substation: stainless steel and translucent glass. He described how pleated panels would add visual interest to the exterior of the facility. Mr. Sama identified the proposed viewing portals into the substation.

Michael Clark showed a plan of the above-grade structures in the station yard and noted that much of the civil and electrical infrastructure is underground. According to Mr. Clark, the yard configuration and equipment treatment represent a compromise among efficiency, service needs, and integration into the neighborhood. A series of images showed the view from an upper floor of the adjacent Mirabella building of the yard.

Mr. Clark then addressed security concerns. 22 cameras will monitor the facility at all hours. He discussed input the team has received from the Department of Neighborhoods and the Seattle Police Department regarding security and enforcement at the facility. Mr. Clark noted that, while most substations direct the public to stay away, the public benefit items at Denny Substation will invite people in.

Mr. Sama briefly summarized how the team has responded to Commission feedback at the schematic design review. He described the intended character of and proposed features for each edge of the project.

Dean Koonts characterized the proposed open space along Minor Ave N as a transition from "active" at Denny Way to "passive" at John St. According to Mr. Koonts, the primary strategy for activating the open space is the proposed off-leash area. He explained screening requirements near the Brewster, ADA connections through and around the off-leash area, and coordination between the team and Lead Pencil

Studios on the proposed "Transforest" sculpture, shown in Figure 1.

Mr. Sama showed the community meeting space in more detail. The proposed tenant and curator of the space is the Office of Arts & Culture (OAC). Several perspectives showed the character and materials of the interior and the relationship of the community space to the open space.

To meet the City's sustainability goals, the team intends to pursue Petal Certification under the Living Building Challenge for the shell spaces. Mr. Sama said the most ambitious aspect of this pursuit is achieving net positive energy through daylighting, an on-site solar photovoltaic array, heat recovery, and natural ventilation. Mr. Sama noted that, as a brownfield site, the substation has limited opportunity for on-site stormwater infiltration.

During the discussion, the team showed a [video](#) of the digital content intended for display on the yard equipment. This content would be visible from the elevated walkway through viewing portals into the yard. OAC would help to develop the content.

Agency Comments

none

Public Comments

Sandra Lorentzen spoke on behalf of the South Lake Union Denny Substation Task Force, formed in 2013. Her group has evaluated the project from the neighborhood's perspective. Their goal is to make the most of the decision to place Seattle's largest substation in the Cascade neighborhood. Ms. Lorentzen stated that her group kept to their word not to appeal the FEIS, which would have delayed the process. She thanked the Design Commission for their support.

John Pehrson summarized the three primary issues from a letter he submitted to the Commission prior to the meeting. According to Mr. Pehrson:

1. The FEIS shows that the elevated walkway (Figure 2) is a risk from a CPTED perspective. Although visibility to the walkway was good from a police car going 30 miles per hour, the fact is you cannot see it from the Denny Way sidewalk. Mr. Pehrson believes it is not safe. The team's response to previous comments on this issue has not been to change the design but to sell it harder.
2. The John St façade (Figure 3) does not meet the City's transparency requirement. The Commission and public have repeatedly asked the team to look at all five façades of the project; nothing has changed despite suggestions from the public. The design is not good for the neighborhood.
3. Images of the view from above continually change, so it is difficult to evaluate whether the substation is an eyesore or source of light pollution. The presentation showed three pictures of artwork that might or might not be included. At design development, we expect you would see colors, shapes, and materials that are consistent over time and coordinated with the community. We request that you ask for that.

Kim Lokan represented Plymouth Housing Group, the owner of two nearby buildings. Plymouth looks for places to locate vulnerable people in secure housing. The managers of our two nearby properties remain very

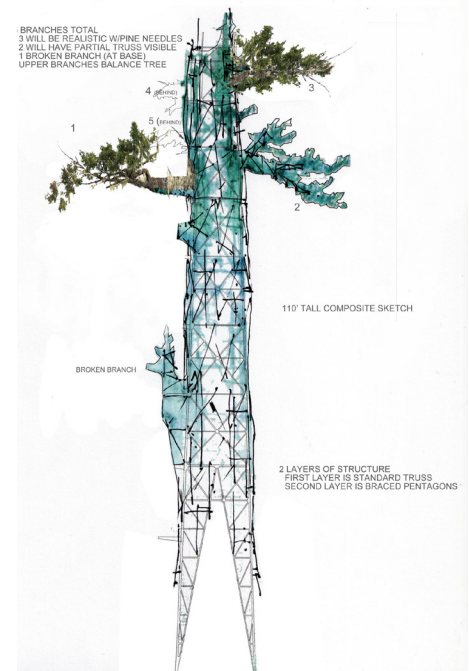


Figure 1. Update design for Lead Pencil's proposed sculpture "Transforest"



Figure 2. Looking northwest at the elevated walkway



Figure 3. Looking south at the John St façade and the door

concerned about the elevated walkway. It will be difficult to police. People can loiter removed from the right-of-way. The bioretention planters have been shown to be great places to hide drug paraphernalia; this facilitates drug dealing. The safety of the elevated walkway is a liability for our property management. Our tenants are also losing valuable parking due to the vacation. Our buildings have no parking. Our tenants are excited for the off-leash area and appreciate the proposed lighting along the alley. The design is beautiful, but the elevated walkway remains an unaddressed concern.

Summary of Discussion

Much of the discussion focused on the materials and design of the open space and their relationship to the building, as shown in Figure 4. The Commission believed that greater integration of the open space and building vocabularies would help the elevated walkway experience feel more connected to the neighborhood. Some Commissioners suggested that changes to the fencing, seating, or size of the off-leash area could make the entire open space more welcoming to dog owners and non-dog owners alike; others argued that, if the community desires for an off-leash area, it should reflect the design and include amenities they want.

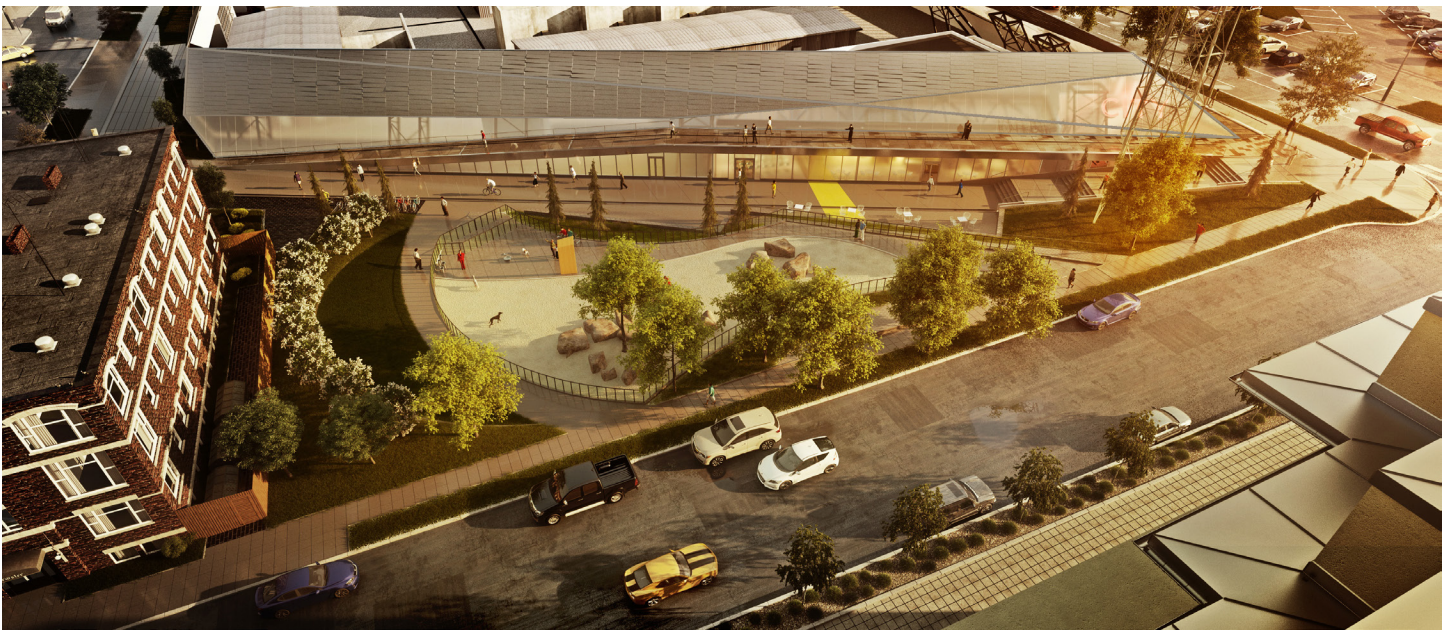


Figure 4. A view east towards the proposed open space, with the Brewster apartments at left. The Commission discussed the materiality and design of the open space and off-leash area in relation to the building itself.

While, the Commission supported the project's many educational and interpretive elements, they also recommended City Light develop a thoughtful plan for curating these pieces, incorporating them into long-term facility operations, and engaging the community in their creation. In fact, given the consistent presence of community members at its reviews of this project, the Commission also discussed some of the concerns raised around safety and light pollution.

There was general support for the proposed waivers, though the Commission also wanted to understand the limitations to achieving code compliance for Green Factor. The team had proposed a score of 0.171 compared to the required 0.30 because opportunities for open space, infiltration, and green roofs were limited due to the off-leash area, soil condition, and maintenance concerns, respectively. The Commissioners suggested off-site improvements as a way to meet the spirit, if not letter, of the Green Factor requirements.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for presenting the design development of Denny Substation. The Commission appreciated the creativity and thoughtfulness that the team has employed in the design and their responsiveness to many of the concerns expressed at the schematic design review.

The Commissioners also recognized the consistent presence of community members at its reviews of the substation and encouraged City Light to continue its engagement and close coordination with the project's neighbors.

With a **vote of 6 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the design development of Denny Substation with the following recommendations and comments:

1. Develop a thorough and detailed plan for curating the content of the project's digital screens and acoustical elements shown in Figure 5. Ensure these features are integrated into the long-term operations strategy for the facility. Work closely with the Office of Arts & Culture so that the content remains fresh and maintained.
2. Carefully consider the design of all interpretive elements so that they are durable aesthetically.
3. Build on the precedent of "[All Rise](#)," City Light's series of performances and temporary art installations at the Denny Substation site, to include in the project dynamic and changing art elements that continue to engage the community.
4. In response to concerns about light pollution, work with Ned Kahn to find ways to dim or moderate but not completely shut off the lighting of his piece during nighttime hours (Figure 6). Find the right balance so the lighting, akin to phosphorescence in water, is neither disruptive to neighbors nor a "black hole" of darkness.
5. Consider a different graphic treatment for the John St door, perhaps as part of the project's curated or rotating content (Figure 7).
6. The Commission is supportive of the overall materiality and finds the variation and combination of metal and glass quite successful. That said, reexamine the balance of durability and warmth in material selection, the latter of which is lacking in places. Consider expanding the wood shown in seating and signage posts to other parts of the design, especially where people are interfacing with the facility (Figure 8).
7. Pay close attention to the modulation and detailing of the translucent glass.
8. While the Energy Innovation Center shell space appears well integrated into the streetscape, the interface between the community space and the landscaped open space warrants further attention so that they become a seamless and unified public space (Figure 9).
9. Integrate the materiality of the landscape with that of the building more thoroughly, particularly so that the elevated walkway experience feels more a part of the neighborhood.
10. Further study how the landscape design responds to a piece as powerful as "Transforest." Some of the geometries in this part of the open space appear unresolved and certain "remnant" spaces of landscape difficult to maintain. Be particularly mindful of how the artwork meets the ground.

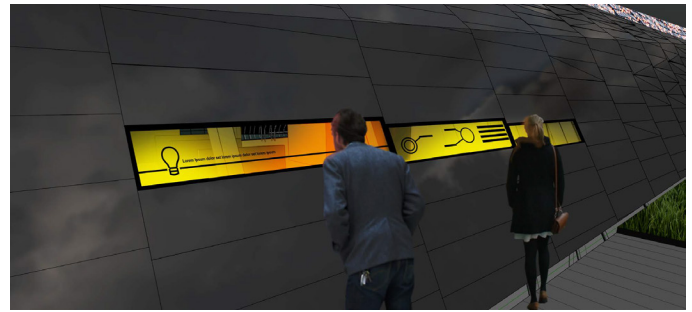


Figure 5. Portals with infographics offer views to digital content displayed on yard equipment beyond.

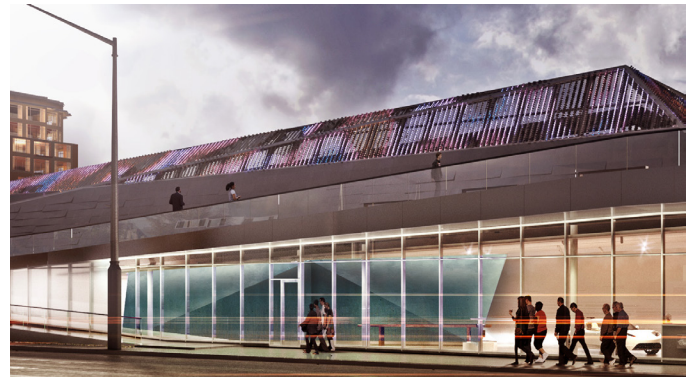


Figure 6. The Commission recommended dimming but not shutting off the lighting for Ned Kahn's "Switchwall" artwork.

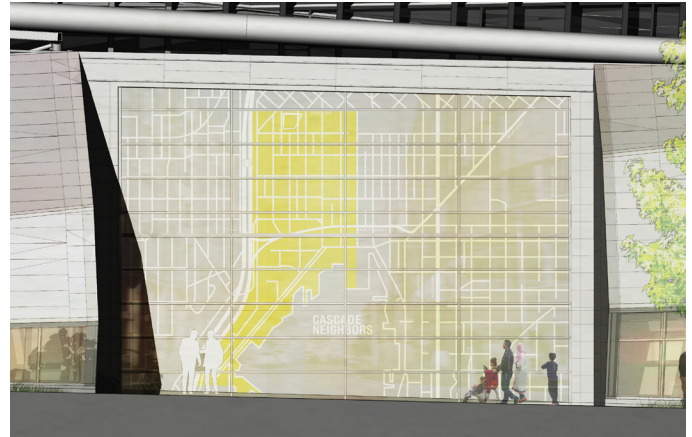


Figure 7. The John St door could be part of the facility's curated elements.

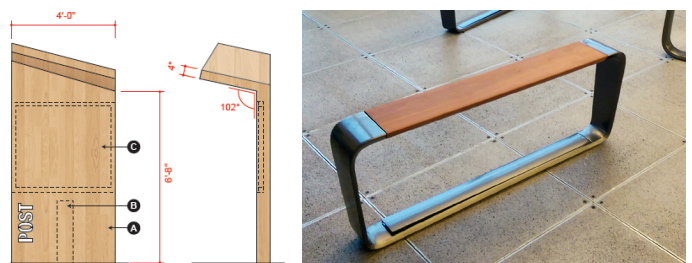


Figure 8. The Commission suggested additional wood to add warmth to the facility design.

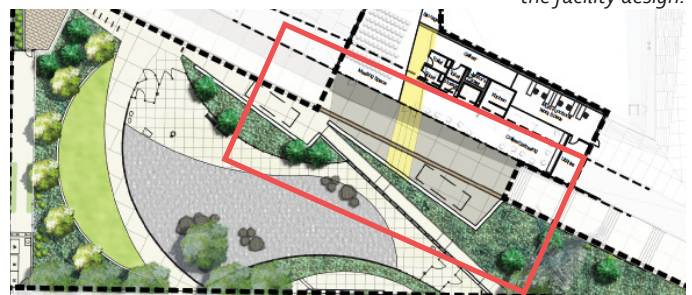


Figure 9. The team should reexamine the interface of the community space and open space.

11. Be open to adjusting City Light's approach to safety at this site. Remain flexible about any direct monitoring or programming on the elevated walkway. Be particularly sensitive in how you maintain the site and landscape given safety concerns.

The Design Commission took a separate vote on the seven waivers from development standards that the project team requested. With a **vote of 6 to 0**, the Commission recommended approval of the seven proposed waivers with the following comments:

1. The Commission recognizes that code provisions generally do not anticipate facilities like Denny Substation and, accordingly, finds the seven waivers to be justifiable in this instance. We appreciate the creativity has brought towards striving for code compliance where possible. However, this action does not set any precedent regarding waivers for such facilities, the merits of which should always be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
2. Identify and pursue off-site opportunities to make Green Factor improvements, even if they do not strictly contribute to the project's Green Factor score. Provide an analysis of how these improvements could increase the project's Green Factor score were such an off-site approach allowed. We recommend Council consider this approach to achieving Green Factor for this type of facility rather than an outright waiver of its Green Factor responsibility.

Public Benefit

Summary of Presentation

Mr. Sama briefly reviewed the Commission's comments from the public benefit preview presentation in November 2014. A diagram showed the land use code and SEPA requirements that have in part informed the public benefit package. A table summarized the proposed public benefit items, each of which Mr. Sama described in more detail. The full public benefit matrix is available at the end of these minutes.

Mr. Clark clarified that Seattle City Light is proposing to fund and implement streetscape improvements on Pontius St and coordinating with SDOT for improvements on Thomas St. Because City Light will install distribution lines in Pontius St, the team proposes to go beyond requirements to install pedestrian lighting, curb bulbs, pedestrian crossings, ADA improvements, and street trees as a public benefit item. City Light would fund these improvements to Pontius St and coordinate with SDOT on — but not fund — improvements on Thomas St.

Mr. Sama concluded stating that the team recognizes the importance of public right-of-way and have an obligation to compensate for its removal with a significant community amenity.

Agency Comments

As the reviewer of the street vacation petition for SDOT, **Beverly Barnett** said she believes City Light has been extremely responsive. She finds the proposed community space critical and appreciates the team's commitment to it. She praised the education features and the bus shelter, though she recommended benches rather than lean rails. Ms. Barnett found the simplification of the off-leash area design an improvement but, echoing the Commission's earlier comments, recommended the artwork become a stronger element of the open space. Finally, she reiterated the importance of the safety of the elevated walkway and reminded the Commission that the Council will be interested to hear community input.

Public Comments

David Moore is the manager of the nearby Colwell Apartments. He believes the loss of parking on Pontius Ave N is significant. Because older buildings like his do not have parking, tenants rely on street parking, particularly for guests. The availability of neighborhood parking is very important. Mr. Moore stated that anything the project team can do to add parking would be great.

John Pehrson asked to see the particular dollar values for each public benefit item. [That information is available on slide 103 of the presentation.] Mr. Pehrson argued that some of the public benefit items are in fact mitigation for the loss of Pontius Ave N. He said that the neighborhood is losing 37 on-street parking spaces. According to Mr. Pehrson, City Light claims that no mitigation is necessary only because they are using old data. Mr. Pehrson said that those 37 spaces have value today, and even more value in the future; he cited recent coverage in the Seattle Times

and on KING 5 News about parking losses citywide. He said mitigation should require replacing them here or elsewhere.

Brad Lange represented Capitol Hill Housing. He is also concerned about the loss of parking. He said the design team has been responsive and kept his organization in the loop about the proposed landscaping. Given that this large use is landing right next to a 35-unit affordable housing project, the team has done what they could. However, the loss of parking is huge and will have a long-term impact on the viability of the Brewster as a place to live.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission supported the public benefit package overall. They expressed particular appreciation for the team’s consistent responsiveness to feedback and for a public utility to commit such quality design to an important piece of infrastructure.

However, they also recognized the public’s lingering concerns around safety. The Commission suggested more attention the safety of the bioretention planters in the alley but also recognized that, from a storm-water and landscape perspective, these are important elements of the design.

The Commissioners were particularly supportive of the streetscape improvements that City Light proposed on Pontius Ave N and Thomas St (Figure 10) since they expand the project off site and into the neighborhood and demonstrate interdepartmental coordination. The Commission found this streetscape work important and, accordingly, asked that the team return with more detail on the design.



Figure 10. Thomas St with a festival setup, one of two streets where the team proposes to fund or coordinate with SDOT on streetscape improvements.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for presenting the public benefit and particularly for its responsiveness to previous Commission recommendations and concerns. The Commission saw great improvement in the design because the project team has tried to listen and, wherever possible, make changes.

The Commission particularly noted the inclusion of the bus shelter and a new signalized pedestrian crossing of Denny Way at Minor Ave N in the proposed design as significant improvements to the public realm.

With a **vote of 6 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the following public benefit package for the petition to vacate Pontius Ave N between Denny Way and John St to facilitate the construction of an electrical substation:

	Public Benefit Item	Description
1	Denny Way street crossings	Enhanced pedestrian crossing of Denny Way at the intersection of Denny Way and Stewart Street and a signalized pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Denny Way and Minor Ave. N.
2	Streetscape improvements on Pontius Ave N and Thomas St	In collaboration with SDOT, streetscape enhancements along Pontius Ave N between John St and Republican St and along Thomas St between Yale Ave N and Minor Ave N. These improvements include curb bulbs, treated pavement crossings, planter strips and trees, a rain garden, and additional pedestrian lighting.
3	Occupied use to activate street edge on Denny Way	A storefront space at the intersection of Denny Way and the alley in the southeast corner of the site currently programmed to be the Energy Inspiration Center for Seattle City Light.
4	Alley improvements	Paving enhancements, safety lighting, interactive micro-sound environments, and bioretention planters.
5	Bus shelter / transit hub	Integrated building overhang for shelter, passenger waiting lean rails, passenger waiting bench, bike racks, receptacles, and transit information kiosk.
6	Implementation of the intent of the Denny Way Streetscape Concept Plan	Voluntary setbacks along the Denny Way frontage.
7	John St Green Street enhancements	Increased pedestrian and planting zones north of the Brewster apartments and across the length of the project site; urban scale wayfinding and site related directional signage; bicycle parking.
8	Elevated walkway	Ambulatory walkway which includes a quarter-mile walking loop, seating elements, landscaped zones, educational viewing portals and interpretive graphics, and educational components integrated into the walkway experience.
9	Public open space	Programmed open space for public use resulting from generous setbacks. The open space includes: SW shell space which is currently programmed as the Community Meeting Space; Off Leash Area; event zone and spill-out space which will be a dedicated paved zone for rotating uses such as food trucks, street fair, farmers market, or spill out for the Community Meeting Space; and street furniture.

The Commission's approval of public benefit is subject to the following condition:

- Return to the Commission to present the designs for streetscape improvements on Pontius Ave N and Thomas St.

The Commission also made the following recommendation:

- Continue to analyze functionality of the bus waiting and queuing area to understand and evaluate the potential for crowding and the use of the sidewalk.

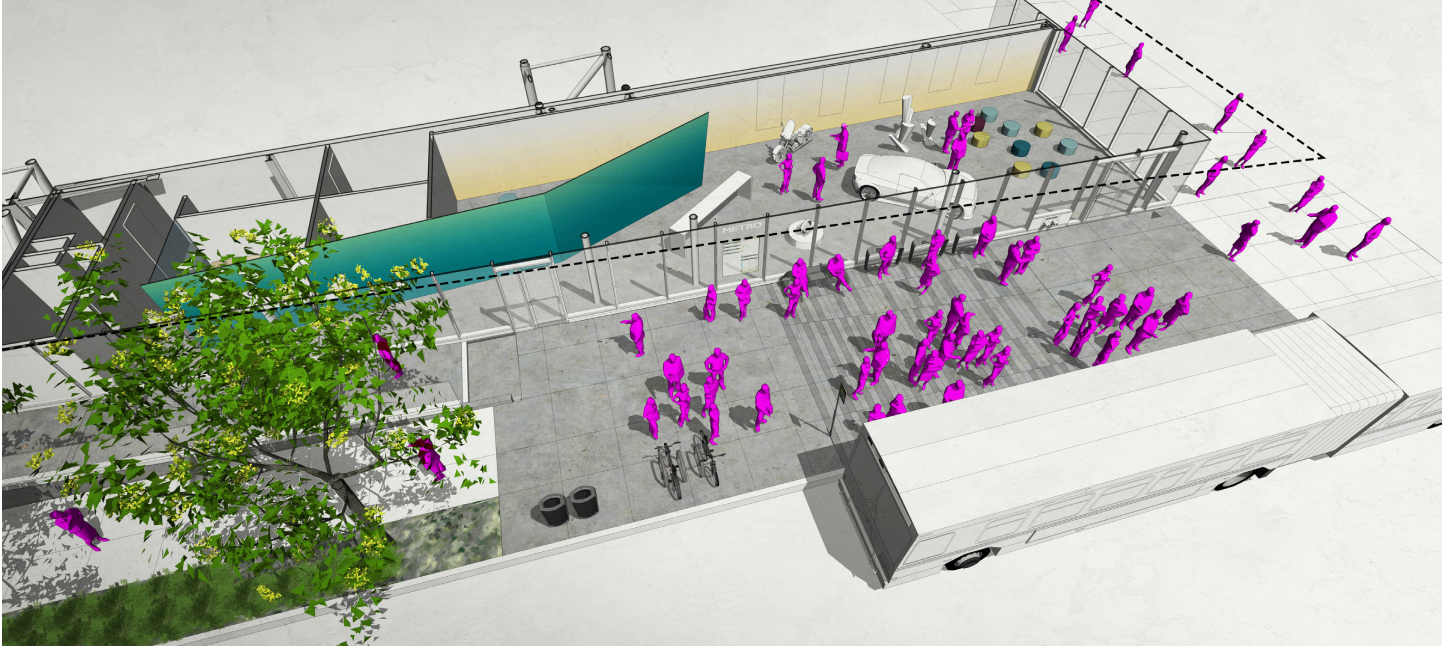


Figure 11. Though it praised the inclusion of the bus shelter, the Commission again recommended the team look closely at how waiting and queuing affect the use of the sidewalk and entry to the Energy Innovation Center.

Note that all comments and recommendations made during the CIP portion of today's review apply wherever relevant to the proposed public benefit items.

This is the last time the Commission will review the petition to vacate Pontius Ave N. The Design Commission reviews street and alley vacation petitions in two phases. Approval of both the urban design merit and public benefit phases constitutes the Commission's recommendation to SDOT that the vacation be approved. The City Council ultimately decides whether to vacate the right-of-way.