

# Seattle design Commission

**Mike McGinn**  
Mayor

**Diane Sugimura**  
Director, DPD

**Marshall Foster**  
Planning Director, DPD

**Julie Bassuk**  
Chair

**Graham Black**

**Malika Kirkling**

**Laurel Kunkler**

**Tom Nelson**

**Julie Parrett**

**Osama Quotah**

**Norie Sato**

**Donald Vehige**

**Debbie Wick-Harris**  
(awaiting confirmation)

**Valerie Kinast**  
Coordinator

**Tom Iurino**  
Senior Staff



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## APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**March 17, 2011**

Convened 10:00 am  
Adjourned 5:00 pm

### Projects Reviewed

Alaskan Way Viaduct Sound End and Portals  
Active Voice Building Skybridge  
Capitol Hill Water Quality Project (aka Swale on Yale)  
Waterfront and Seawall

### Commissioners Present

Julie Bassuk, Chair  
Graham Black (Excused from 10 am until 12:45 pm)  
Malika Kirkling  
Laurel Kunkler (Excused from 11 am until noon)  
Tom Nelson  
Julie Parrett (Excused from 12:30 pm until 3 pm)  
Osama Quotah  
Norie Sato  
Donald Vehige

### Incoming Commissioners Present

Debbie Wick-Harris

### Staff Present

Valerie Kinast  
Tom Iurino  
Jenny Hampton



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<b>March 17, 2011</b>	<b>Project:</b>	<b>Alaskan Way Viaduct South End and Portals</b>
	<b>Phase:</b>	Concept Design
	<b>Last Reviewed:</b>	May 20, 2010; May 6, 2010; Mar 18, 2010; Feb 18, 2010; Jan 21, 2010; Oct 1, 2009; Jun 18, 2009; May 21, 2009
	<b>Presenters:</b>	Susan Everett, WSDOT Mike Johnson, SDOT Brian Elrod, Seattle Tunnel Partners
	<b>Attendees:</b>	Katie Zemtseff, DJC Terry Bulfin, Seattle Tunnel Partners Laura Smith, Seattle Tunnel Partners Lorcan French, WSDOT Jessie Clawson, McCullough Hill

**Time: 10:30am – 12:00pm**

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## Presentation

The design builder, Seattle Tunnel Partners, presented the changes to the plans for the south portal area. The portals have been moved south and the two south bound portals were consolidated into one. The presenters explained that this new design would be more advantageous for the boring work, and that it reduces the roadway footprint. It allows for overall more landscaping and distributes the green space differently across the project area. Consolidating the south bound portals by stacking them led to the need for an elevated, northbound off ramp, which was not proposed with the previous design. The design of the “little h” overpass bridge was also changed. The columns were narrowed. A pedestrian stairway on the east side of the overpass was removed from the plans because it would not meet ADA requirements, and the cost and amount of space to bring it up to ADA standards would be high.

## ACTION

The Design Commission thanked WSDOT and SDOT for presenting the Alaskan Way Viaduct South End and Portals project. While the commission appreciated the difficult and complex design problems the team is tasked to solve in the South End in taking down the viaduct and building the tunnel, the new solution presented does not meet the design guidelines that WSDOT created in consultation with the Design Commission, nor the intent of the Viaduct project as a whole. The city was party to selecting the tunnel to replace the Viaduct in part to reconnect the city with its waterfront. The presented design undermines the connections created in the previous plans, by creating more fragmented green spaces of lower quality, and visual and physical blockages between the city and Elliott Bay. The commission expressed the need for a fundamental rethinking of the project in light of the fact that it will be a major component of the city for the next 50 to 70 years. They advised that any changes to the design for short term construction needs should not come at the expense of the best, long-term solution.

With a vote of two to five (with one abstaining and one not present), the commission did not approve the design presented. The commission had the following comments:

### Urban Design Concept

- Strengthen the overall urban design concept for the south portal area.
- Relate the area and its elements to the character of the three or four neighborhoods this project adjoins. Create original, site-specific and authentic spaces, not generic spaces that could be anywhere.

- In the design guidelines, trees were employed in the overall concept as a way to signal the entrance to the city. Make a dynamic, expressive and significant design with the trees, not just a standard planting of street trees. The rising exit ramp has made it more difficult for the trees to be expressive and visible.
- Look at the spaces created for the trees and other landscaping. Perhaps the spaces could be aggregated into fewer, more significant spaces rather than so many little spaces that limit the impact each could have.

### Portals

- Moving the portals south has resulted in a shorter distance between them and the little h overpass. Because they will be seen in quick succession, the little h overpass and the tunnel entrance faces will become two parts of one entry experience. The little h bridge is more prominent than the actual portals and becomes, in a sense, the portal. As such, the design of the bridge needs much more sensitivity. It should not be just a generic bridge structure as presented.
- The choice of materials for the bridge and the portal faces should be honest, and the two should be considered together. The big gesture of granite portal faces is a good direction, because they will be seen only very briefly by car and will not be very visible to pedestrians.
- Limit reinforcing the “portal” just for drivers on SR-99 and look beyond the faces of the h bridge and tunnel entrances to achieve this. Prioritize good urban design and quality urban spaces from the point of view of those drivers, but also bicyclists, pedestrians and cars on surface streets.

### Elevated Ramp

- Rework the lane configurations to eliminate elevated roadways. The new profile of the exit ramp has created a series of walls that are unacceptable, and it severs the Pioneer Square and stadiums area on the east side from the waterfront and the water views.

If there is an overriding necessity for the new design with the elevated ramp, and WSDOT chooses to proceed with that design element, the commission recommends the following:

- Reduce the number of walls and wall heights, and improve the treatment of the walls and structures. Make them more interesting and softer, not brutal and high. Do not rely on landscaping and artwork to resolve the fundamental design issues the walls create.
- Penetrate the wall of the elevated ramp more where it is adjacent to city side trail to reduce the barrier between the city and the waterfront, especially where the wall is highest. As designed, the space created between the wall and potential new development will be unpleasant, narrow, constrained by the tall wall and will hamper the development and urban design potential of the adjacent lots.
- Given the height of the wall and the narrow distance between the wall and adjacent future development, consider whether having just the city side trail there is the best solution, or if activation with a vehicular road might solve some inherent problems of a space like that.

### Sustainability

- Incorporate sustainability practices which go beyond stormwater management. Consider composition of concrete, tree planting, etc. and other elements within the design and building of this section. Plan for it now and do not leave it until the end.

### **Transportation**

- **Plan for ferry routing and stacking in the South End design. While most of it may be north of the immediate project area and be part of the Central Waterfront Plan, think about and plan for its ramifications on this project.**

**Commissioner Quotah voted no because he was concerned about the added aerial structure and the loss of connections between the city and the waterfront.**

**Commissioner Sato voted no because she thought that many aspects need a lot more thinking, most notably the heights of the structure and the pedestrian experience along the trail.**

**Commissioner Parrett voted no because of the loss of connection to the waterfront, and because the design did not meet the intent of the design guidelines established for the project.**

**Commissioner Bassuk voted no because, though the design changes may be necessary, the significant negative urban design and public realm impacts from the changes have not been adequately considered and addressed.**

**Commissioner Vehige voted no because the change was a fundamental one, and the commission needed to better understand the decision process for the solution presented.**

**Commissioner Kunkler wasn't at whole meeting and thus abstained from voting; Commissioner Black did not attend and did not vote.**