

APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Ed Murray
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Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Shannon Loew

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

April 3, 2014

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 5:00 pm

Projects Reviewed

Waterfront – Union Street

Denny Substation

Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair

Bernie Alonzo (arrived at 11:15 am)

Brodie Bain (excused at 2:00pm)

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Shannon Loew

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

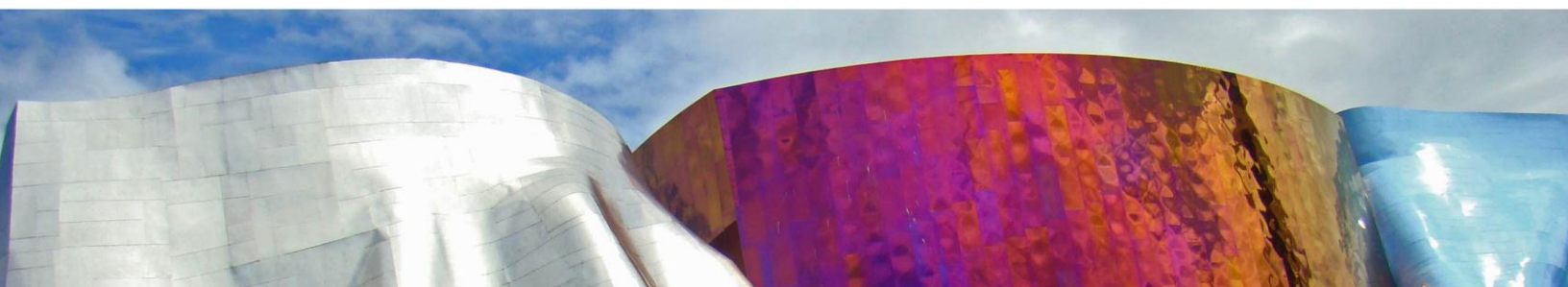
Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Nicolas Welch

Joan Nieman



April 3, 2014
2:00 – 5:00 pm

Project: **Denny Substation**

Phase: 60% design, Urban Design Merit

Previous reviews: October 18, 2012; June 6, 2013; November 7, 2013

Presenters:

Jose Sama	NBBJ
Kathy Fendt	SCL
Mark Johnson	Environmental Sciences Assoc.
Chris Hoffman	Stepherson & Associates
Reiner Blanco	SDOT
Marni Heffron	Heffron Transportation
Juliet Vong	HBB

Attendees:

Phil Abrose	SCL
Matt Ayer	SCL
Beverly Barnett	SDOT
CJ Brockway	NBBJ
Jenifer Clapham	KPFF
Michael Clark	SCL
Lloyd Douglas	Cascade Neighborhood Council
Blake Fisher	NBBJ
Laurie Geissinger	SCL
Theresa Hohman	Plymouth Housing Group
Jason Huff	Office of Arts & Culture
Luke Korpi	SDOT
Brad Lange	Capitol Hill Housing
Sandra Lorentzen	Cascade Area Property Owners
Ina McCready	community member
Susan McLaughlin	SDOT
Jared Moore	Jacobs
John Pehrson	community member
John Savo	NBBJ
Jack Schwaegler	Jacobs
Reena Shakra	Environmental Science Assoc.
April Soetarman	NBBJ
Greg Stamatiou	SCL
Annaliese Stelzer-Terminello	Community Member
Sam Stubblefield	NBBJ
Louis Terminello	Cascade Substation Task Force
Carl Tully	NBBJ
Colin Vasquez	DPD
Loretta Vosk	South Lake Union Dog Park
Marcia Wagoner	Studio 3MW

Recusals and Disclosures

Commissioner Regge disclosed that NBBJ is his former employer. Commissioner Egging disclosed that his firm, KPFF, is the civil engineer for the project, but he is not involved in the work.

Purpose of Review

Denny Substation is simultaneously under review as a CIP project and for the proposed vacation of Pontius Ave N. Today's review is for the 60% design of the CIP and the urban design merit phase of the proposed street vacation.

Summary of Proposal

Seattle City Light is proposing to build an electrical substation on a full block bound by Denny Way to the south, Minor Ave N to the west, John St to the north, and Yale Ave N to the east 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 via primarily 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 non-vacation alternative entails two facilities, increasing maintenance costs and precluding the public open space amenity along Minor afforded by the vacation. According to the design team, the preferred alternative is more efficient, better meets the circulation and access requirements for the substation, and allows all power transmission to occur below grade.

The proposed open space aims to address the lack thereof in this part of the city and provide a valuable amenity and pedestrian connection for the Cascade neighborhood. An elevated walkway is intended to be an interpretive center and the fenestration to break the scale of the building as much as possible. A pocket park is proposed on John St, which is also a designated Green Street. Along the alley is an activated lighting piece. Two "shell spaces" are proposed at the southeast corner of the site and the through-block connection on the west side of the substation. 12 surveillance cameras are proposed to be installed.

URBAN DESIGN MERIT**Summary of Presentation**

Carl Tully described the organization for the presentation, dated April 3, 2014, and available on the [Design Commission website](#). Mr. Tully summarized the recent and upcoming milestones for the project; construction is expected to begin in the first and second quarters of 2015.

The team described the status of the EIS, focusing specifically on aesthetic and transportation impacts. Visual simulations from both a bird's eye and street-level view show the height, bulk, and scale of the three alternatives considered in the EIS. Mark Johnson provided analyses of the façade lengths and heights not only of the three alternatives but also of all adjacent buildings; they noted that from the upper floors of the Mirabella more of the interior yard is observable.

Chris Hoffman shared an update on the communications and outreach component of the project. The team has had four open houses to date and made presentations to roughly 20 groups and organizations in the neighborhood and along the transmission line route.

Jose Sama began the urban design merit portion of the presentation and reviewed how the team has responded to previous Commissioner comments.

Marni Heffron reviewed the existing conditions at Pontius Ave N for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. She stated the transportation impacts associated with the project will occur on a temporary basis during the construction of the transmission lines, where crews will go block by block assembling a below-grade duct bank. A nearby transmission line held in a pressurized, oil-filled pipe will need to be connected to the substation. This will require 24-hour, 7-day access to a site on Denny Way for roughly 4-6 weeks; a detour route would be in effect for westbound traffic on Denny.

Ms. Heffron then discussed the transportation impacts associated with the proposed street vacation. Pontius is relatively low volume and currently carries roughly 105 vehicles per day. 37 parking spaces on Pontius would need to be relocated under the proposed design; parking counts find that roughly 25 vehicles regularly park there, 13-18 of which have residential permits displayed. According to Ms. Heffron, this is a minor impact that SDOT does not believe would require mitigation. Access, storage, and loading at the Brewster Apartments would be affected.

Mr. Sama described currently observed bicycle and pedestrian routes and transit activity surrounding the site. The team is striving to support with the SDOT streetscape concept plan for Denny, specifically providing a wider sidewalk area on Denny, realigning a crosswalk to the Mirabella, and adding a bus stop. Further, he showed the alley improvements that have been done at nearby residential projects that have inspired the current design. Mr. Sama described the potential “thread” uniting all of these alleys then described the proposed open space.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission considered the potential impacts of the substation and the proposed vacation of Pontius on the vehicle and pedestrian transportation network as well as impacts to abutting residents at the Brewster and Mirabella apartments. There was discussion of parking data that could better illustrate how the removal of a couple dozen parking spaces will affect current and future residents and the neighborhood at large. The Commission strongly commended the opportunity for a signalized crosswalk at Minor Ave.

The Commissioners sought greater clarity and specificity around the proposed ramps and walkways at the site and saw excellent potential in the proposed shell spaces; to that end, the Commissioners encouraged the design team to pursue funding to successfully implement, program, and maintain that component of the project. There was discussion in the design and programming of the proposed open space and a request for a strong sustainability strategy for the project as a whole. While certain elements of the park design need resolution, the Commissioners believed the proposed scheme achieved a level of urban design merit, fit into the larger neighborhood context and, through further iterations, could be adequately refined.

Agency Comments

Reiner Blanco, SDOT, acknowledged the Commission’s request for a pedestrian crossing of Denny Way at Minor Ave N. Mr. Blanco stated that, given the traffic volumes on Denny Way, a crossing would require a signalized intersection. SDOT does not object to a crossing at this location on the east leg of the intersection if a pedestrian signal is installed. Further, Mr. Blanco recognized concerns about the west leg of the Denny Way and Stewart St intersection, where one option is to “fan” the crosswalk to create more width for pedestrians to cross. SDOT does not object to fanning the crosswalk somewhat to the west, towards the substation property. He expressed concern about fanning too far to the west since that puts pedestrians outside the area where vehicles typically expect them.

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, stated that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been released so new information is under review. The first component of the Design Commission review is the potential loss of Pontius Ave N, an unusual one-block street. At first glance, no fatal flaws have been identified with the proposed vacation, so SDOT is exploring long-term impacts and how City Light is designing the facility to meet City goals and plans. Of particular concern to SDOT with a proposed vacation are the concerns of abutting properties; accordingly the issues identified by the Brewster Apartments will be weighted more heavily than the larger community context. Given the special relationship that exists between a street and its abutters, SDOT looks to resolve such issues before a vacation proceeds. This is a critical issue for City Light to work on, and negotiations should continue towards developing a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to provide specificity and clarity about what City Light is proposing for design and mitigation.

Susan McLaughlin, SDOT, thanked the project team and celebrated that the project has come a long way towards complying with the Denny Street Concept Plan and new amenities on John St. Because the substation is in an urban context, SDOT is look at a nine-block area. The proposed distribution network work is part of this context, and DPD and SDOT are working on a streetscape concept plan. How these improvements are implemented is an ongoing discussion.

Public Comments

John Pehrson, a Cascade resident, stated that he lives in the Mirabella and is a member of the Denny Substation Task Force, which represents four civic organizations and whose results were endorsed by the South Lake Union Chamber. Mr. Pehrson asked the team to ensure that the roof and/or equipment inside not be an eyesore to the neighborhood. He noted that since John St is a Green Street it shouldn't have loading or curb cuts.

Loretta Vosk, an advocate for an off-leash area at the substation, noted that that 1000 employees of Amazon.com bring their dogs to work and many more dogs live in the neighborhood. She cautioned that a small off-leash area will not be used. According to Ms. Vosk, at 6,500 sf the proposed off-leash area is too small, its shape does not all for ball or Frisbee throwing, and it would be one of the two smallest off-leash areas in the city.

Annaliese Stelzer-Terminello, a member of the Cascade Substation Task Force, works at Food Bank. She thanked the team for putting thought into the design and sees improvements in the process. She enumerated a couple concerns: the loss of 25-35 parking spaces, a significant change given the residential density of the neighborhood, and the risk of undesirable activities occurring in the park given that City Light is not in the property management business. Ms. Stelzer-Terminello stated that nearby Cascade Playground has been abandoned because of negative elements, drugs, and prostitution. She said that a space that isn't highly managed will not be used. An organization needs to manage the park.

Ina McCready, citizen, noted that City Light began the Denny Substation process after the South Lake Union rezone, which made Cascade primarily a residential area. Many residential projects are in the pipeline. Mr. McCready stated that he wants his neighborhood whole, not defined by an industrial facility placed here. He asked hypothetically how another neighborhood like Laurelhurst would respond to a proposal to locate a substation there.

Brad Lange, Capitol Hill Housing, which owns the Brewster, stated that the building has 35 units for low-income residents making 30-40% of area median income (AMI). His organization believes siting a large industrial facility adjacent to affordable housing is inequitable and discriminatory. People of greater means who can choose where to live, he said, would not live here. He is also concerned about unknown construction and long-term impacts, such as noise, size, loss of views, and magnetic fields. Mr. Lange also raised the issue of lost parking spaces due to the proposed vacation of Pontius.

Action on Urban Design Merit

The Design Commission thanked the Denny Substation team for a thorough and rigorous presentation of the urban design merit of their proposal to vacate Pontius Ave N between Denny Way and John St to facilitate development of a new electrical substation. We understand that this is a major piece of necessary infrastructure to support the growth of our city, including residents and businesses in the surrounding area of the site, and stability of the electrical grid through the city overall.

The Commission noted the value of this project to the public realm, acknowledged the limited impacts to the transportation network and circulation surrounding the site, and appreciated the massing of the proposed design over the other alternatives. The Commission applauds City Light's thoughtfulness in determining how this building is sited and designed within such a dense urban area.

With a **vote of 9 to 0**, the Design Commission unanimously approved the urban design merit of the proposed vacation of Pontius Ave N with the following conditions and recommendation:

Conditions

1. Further develop and refine the public spaces to provide clarity on how they will indeed provide valued spaces to the public. The team should address program at all edges of the site, develop a plan and qualify their commitment to operations for the public spaces at the site, and provide more specificity around how these spaces will be understood as public and accessible, including through the use of transparency in the façade design.
2. Continue the strong commitment to community outreach and develop a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Brewster Apartments prior to the next Commission review to provide confidence that an agreement has been reached.

Recommendations

1. Develop a general sustainability strategy that includes stormwater management. Additionally, develop a clear strategy for how sustainability will be understood by the public and visible at the site.

Urban design merit is the first in the Design Commission's two-step review of the proposed street vacation. The project will return to the Design Commission for review of the proposed public benefit package. Approval of both urban design merit and public benefit constitutes a recommendation to the SDOT director to approve the vacation. The ultimate decision lies with the City Council.

CIP 60% DESIGN

Summary of Presentation

Mr. Sama presented a narrative of Cascade, Seattle, City Light, and the Northwest that has informed the design. Each façade of the building is intended to tell a part this narrative, adding layers of meaning to

the proposed design. The team then invited the Commissioners to view the physical model they brought to the review. Mr. Sama described how the “We” narrative plays out around and is observable through the site. He noted where the proposed Percent for Art pieces are sited. Lighting along the alley is intended to evoke a brook; the alley is patterned after Alley 24. Ned Kahn’s piece would be located along Denny. Along John St, the terminus of Pontius is proposed to be a lit focal point; the team intends to describe some of the history and community in the Cascade neighborhood along this façade. In discussing views from the Mirabella, Mr. Sama discussed how the equipment might be housed and lit.

Ms. Vong then described changes to the open space and the community’s desires for function and safety. The team worked with someone at Parks specializing in downtown who was adamant that the space be programmable so it doesn’t become a nuisance. The 6,400 sf off-leash area is the main component of the program, has community support, and provides surveillance. The community has also expressed desire for a flexible space with more aesthetic and park-like experiences. The open space design strives to integrate the art more gracefully and serve as a buffer for the Brewster and Mirabella apartments. Landscaping is a mix of open lawn, shrubs, and ground cover in order to preserve site visibility and safety. The streetscape character is consistent on three sides of the project, and the pocket park has been design with ample seating. One area would be a flexible space that could accommodate a food truck or market. Sustainability is predominantly in the landscape concept itself, as well as remediation of contaminated soils and a retention swale along the alley. The building also maximizes solar alignment for the onsite PV array.

Daniel and Annie of Lead Pencil presented their proposed art piece “Transforest.” The artists discussed the history of Cascade and the story of power consumption in Seattle. The proposed art is inspired by both of these elements: the potential scale of new development in Denny Triangle and the old growth forest displaced in the construction of Seattle. Three trees made of metal and painted are proposed for the open space: one as a gateway closer to Denny and two smaller ones that demarcate the open space diagram.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission appreciated the proposed interpretive elements but noted that several need further refinement. There was strong interest in seeing greater resolution of how the shell spaces will function and operate, specifically how buses will drop off and manage Denny Way, what the operation budget is, and how they will be curated and relevant to the community. The Commissioners raised the issue of accessibility to the community space. The Commissioners also recommended that the design team be judicious with the “high-tech” approach to lighting and interpretive elements and suggested some “analog” activities in places.

Several comments focused on the building façades. The Commissioners agreed that the design is most successful at transparent segments like the southeast shell space, where pedestrians see people occupy the space inside and thus won’t perceive they’re passing a fence for an electrical substation. Such moments and spaces can activate the street frontage. That said, the Commission recognized that for such a long building modulation in metal, transparent, and translucent façades could be a strong approach. Likewise there was support for exposing more of the equipment as an educational piece for viewers at the street level rather than enclosing it all in containers.

The Commission enjoyed hearing from the Lead Pencil artists, commended their ambitious design, and encouraged the team to provide better access to the pieces. Some Commissioners were concerned

about the siting of the art pieces and felt the landscaping as proposed didn't respond to the siting of those pieces. There were also various opinions about how and whether the open space relates to the community space and, more broadly, the aesthetic of the facility and open space. Whether distinct and organic or complementary and rectilinear, the relationship between the building design and park design needs a more deliberate approach. Finally, reiterating their previous recommendations, the Commissioners again requested a more comprehensive sustainability strategy at the next review.

Agency Comments

none

Public Comments

Theresa Hohman, Plymouth Housing Group, stated that she lives in and manages the Pat Williams Apartments about a block from the substation. While she appreciates the work that has gone into the design, which she finds beautiful, Plymouth is concerned about the safety of the alley by the David Colwell apartments (apartment Plymouth building), specifically the lighting of the alley. A second concern is how the lighting of the art installation will affect that building's tenants.

Lloyd Douglas, Cascade neighborhood resident, stated that the traffic study he and his colleagues received was inadequate. The questions from Commissioners during the urban design merit review reflect his view. He is concerned about how John St will be activated. He stated that he and his neighbors like having NBBJ in the neighborhood but disagree that a food truck during lunch constitutes adequate activation. The activity they are concerned about is at night. Additionally, Mr. Douglas addressed the Resident Parking Zone (RPZ); he believes that residents of buildings that have parking should not be eligible for RPZ permits.

Action on 60% Design

The Design Commission again thanked the team for a deep and thoughtful presentation and for accommodating separate reviews of urban design merit of the proposed vacation and the 60% design of the substation as a capital improvement project. The Commission was particularly appreciative of the overall depth and quality of the presentation.

With a **vote of 9 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the 60% design of Denny Substation with the following recommendations:

1. Pursue a pedestrian crossing of Denny Way at Minor Ave N, either as part of the public benefit package or otherwise. This is a critical component of the overall urban design of the project.
2. Define more clearly the proposed "shell spaces" and the exterior public "moments" that are to be devoted to public programming and use to better illustrate their proposed value to the public over time. Refinement of these components should include
 - a. a commitment to an operating budget
 - b. detail on how they will be curated
 - c. examples of the types of content within them
 - d. an explanation of whom these spaces will serve, how their design will support that content, and the logistics of parking, accessibility, etc.
3. Refine the integrated art and lighting strategies, including the several art elements or "moments" near the door on John St and the monolithic pieces at the elevated southeast

corner of the site. Consider the amount of transparency, very diverse lighting strategies within the façade design, and how lighting is used at the site overall. The Commission found the proposed lighting scheme busy and potentially overwhelming and recommends the use of a more unified and perhaps simpler strategy throughout.

4. Show more clearly that this is a Seattle City Light project. The Commission is inspired by the old logo that appears at Denny and Minor and suggests pursuing identity in non-site-specific ways elsewhere at the substation.
5. Provide a clearer and more comprehensive sustainability strategy for this building. While the Commission appreciates the story of hydroelectric energy that constitutes the broader Seattle City Light approach to sustainability, there is strong interest in understand the sustainability strategy of this particular facility.
6. Further refine the overall landscape strategy, which currently does not relate to the building design. Include the language of the park itself as well as how the park relates to and can better integrate the artwork. Additionally, consider site circulation and accessibility surrounding the park's open spaces.
7. Clarify the plan for operations and maintenance of the public spaces overall.