

APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Ed Murray
Mayor

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

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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 (excused at 4:00pm)

Ross Tilghman

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Nicolas Welch

Joan Nieman



April 3, 2014
9:00 – 11:00am

Project: Waterfront – Union Street
Phase: 30% design
Previous reviews: 10/17/2013

Presenters:

Marshal Foster	Office of the Waterfront
Steve Pearce	Office of the Waterfront
Tatiana Choulika	James Corner Field Operations
Grace Kim	Schemata Workshop
Norie Sato	Project Artist
Jill Cody	Dark Light

Attendees:

Andrew Barash	CH2M Hill
Laura Becker	Office of Arts & Culture
Ethan Bernau	Shiels Oblatz Johnsen
Angela Brady	Office of the Waterfront
Clair Enlow	Daily Journal of Commerce
John Feit	Schemata Workshop
Margaret Jankowsky	James Corner Field Operations
Duane Kelley	Friends of the Waterfront
Martha Lester	City Council Central Staff
Kate Martin	Park My Viaduct
Hannah McIntosh	SDOT
Guy Michaelson	Berger Partnership
David Miller	Miller Hull
Matt Roewe	VIA Architecture
Andrew tenBrink	James Corner Field Operations
Connie Zimmerman	SDOT

Recusals and Disclosures

none

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this meeting was to review the 30% design of Union Street, one of several east–west connections in the Central Waterfront redevelopment intended to link the waterfront to the central business district, Pioneer Square, and Belltown. This is the second time the project has come for Commission review; in October 2013 the Design Commission unanimously approved the 15% design.

Summary of Proposal

The Waterfront Seattle team proposes improvements to the Union Street right-of-way between Post Alley and Alaskan Way. The project begins just below the Four Seasons hotel and is flanked by Seattle Steam, Public Storage, Antiques Warehouse, 84 Union (a historic low-income residential building), and 1401 Western Ave. Improvements include refinements to the ground plane; two staircases connecting the Four Seasons *porte-cochère*/plaza to the east side of Western Ave and the west side to Alaskan Way,

respectively; two elevators; and a concrete pedestrian bridge/overlook above Western Ave accessible at-grade from 1st Ave and by stair from Western. The design is intended to connect seamlessly with the pedestrian promenade and dissolves the waterfront paving motif into a more city-like pattern as one travel eastward up to 1st Avenue.

The pedestrian bridge design has evolved substantially since the 15% design. Previously a steel truss structure, the bridge is now concrete, extends further to the west, and connects to grade via a thin, minimal concrete stair to Post Alley that, at its midpoint, connects to another stair to Western Ave, creating an “X” design. The proposed design offers three circulation paths: a direct route, a secondary stairway from the pedestrian bridge, and by elevator. The design intends to emphasize legibility and walking as an experience.

Middle Union, the segment between Post Alley and Western, is proposed as a curbsless woonerf. Due the light this space receives, there are more plantings here than elsewhere on Union St. The elevator brings pedestrians to the east side of Western Ave, its location governed by the grade at Post Alley and ADA accessibility. The team is exploring options for programming that would activate this space.

At Lower Union, the team proposes a wider elevated pathway near but set back slightly from the Public Storage building. This design preserves the building function but anticipates potential future redevelopment. Once again, the elevator location was constrained by the “spaghetti” of utilities below grade; only one Public Storage bay is affected. The team hopes most people will use the stairs.

Proposed lighting varies between the Middle and Lower Union zones. The former would have low, pedestrian-level, soft lighting underneath the pedestrian bridge. The elevator design is intended prioritize transparency and visibility to the water, be more whimsical “event” in itself, and serve as luminous beacons that act as a destination. Lighting is also proposed to be integrated into the handrails on the walkway. Lower Union would have more lighting overall; due to its width the “gracious” stair would be well lit. The artwork will be developed as the project moves to 60% design, and the artist, Norie Sato, is collaborating with the team.

Summary of Presentation

Marshall Foster introduced the team and explained the creation of the new Office of the Waterfront and the organization and goals for this new team. Steve Pearce introduced today’s presentation and noted that the “shared street” area between Post Alley and 1st Ave is outside the project scope; there is not funding to address this potentially expensive area. Instead, the team is considering wayfinding improvements to address this area.

Tatiana Choulika gave the presentation dated April 3, 2014, available on the [Design Commission website](#), and provided an overview of the Union St corridor. She stated that the purpose of the broader waterfront redevelopment is to reconnect the city to the waterfront; Union St is a primary pedestrian connection to that end and leads directly to the Union St Pier component of the Central Public Open Space. Ms. Choulika described how Union St passes through important cultural institutions, has a preexisting “edge” near the Four Seasons, and traverses through a functioning industrial area. It terminates at the proposed Union St Pier, one of the only places with an unimpeded view of the water.

Ms. Choulika then discussed the existing conditions at and around Union St, noting the challenge of maintaining the working waterfront and providing currently nonexistent ADA accessibility. Significant

Seattle City Light utilities are another constraint on the design. The team described extensive stakeholder outreach and is striving to move this project along quickly as an “early win” for the waterfront redevelopment.

Grace Kim described how the proposed design has evolved following previous Commission review in August 2013. Although the Commission had commended the truss structure design, other stakeholders were critical; accordingly, the team explored various other diagrams for potential structure design. The presentation showed how the team considered differentiating the treatments above and below 1st Ave and the thought process behind elevator design and location. Feedback led to a revised truss design in December, but persistent criticism prompted the team to study concrete structures. They have started with an engineered solution and worked backward, seeking to “sculpt” the concrete form. Ms. Kim showed precedence images for concrete pedestrian spans and stairways.

Ms. Chouluka then described how the ground plane has progressed given the revised structure. Allowing City Light to maintain access to its vaults is just one of the constraints imposed by the spaghetti of utilities in this area; truck access is a major challenge for the design.

Norie Sato described her experience with public art in Seattle and described her ideas for the work at Union St. She shared some of her previous work in Seattle and elsewhere and shared her inspirations for the present project, among them western light, shadowing, light playing on water, reflections from places unknown, atmosphere, nearby steam from Seattle Steam, and serendipity in urban nature.

Jill Cody briefly described the proposed lighting scheme for the Union St structures and the team’s overarching goal to create a clear, legible path and prioritize safety. Transportation during the day, lanterns at night, the elevators take inspiration from the Great Wheel and are intended to be a ride, an event. The team hopes to express through lighting the movement and kinetic nature of the elevator cab at night. Expressing movement and kinetic nature of elevator cab at night in an expressive and straightforward way.

Ms. Chouluka concluded with additional perspectives at day and night from upper Union St, Post Alley, Western Ave, and the promenade itself. The team continues to consider options for treatments of the west-facing windowless façade at Western Ave.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission was inspired to see an ambitious design for the Union St right-of-way, appreciated the quality and rigor of the presentation, and commended the team for integrating the artist, Norie Sato, into the process at such an early stage—something the Commission has long recommended and hopes to see continued in the future. Of particular interest to the Commissioners were refinement of the Lower Union zone and opportunities to integrate Western Ave more meaningfully into the project. They encouraged the design team to continue the current direction and maintain the thin, minimal profile of the structures currently proposed. There was also discussion of the rationale behind the number, location, and alignment of the elevators and stairs and the proposed paving scheme as it relates to the waterfront motif and city grid. Lastly, the Commission reiterated their concern about locating the kiosk in the centerline of the Union St ROW.

Agency Comments

none

Public Comments

Kate Martin, Park My Viaduct, wants to preserve the upper deck of the Alaskan Way Viaduct with Union St as the primary connection to downtown. She wants the proposed overlook to look less like a bridge for cars and have more “charm factor.” Concerned about how polished concrete will look after years of use and being torn up to access the utilities underneath, Ms. Martins suggested that other pavers would be easier to replace. She looks forward to harmonizing with this plan and wants the Union St bridge to extend all the way out to Viaduct.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the Waterfront Seattle team for the detail and quality of their presentation of the Union St 30% design. The Commission was excited about the ambitious design of the precipice above Western Ave. They commended the designers and artist for exemplary initiative in integrating the art in the overall design on multiple levels and at a point in time when it can be truly effective.

With a **vote of 8 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the 30% design of Union St with the following recommendations:

1. Continue to work towards more simplification and clear expression of the structure with an inspired level of engineering.
2. Work to develop the at-grade spaces on the east and west sides of Western Ave into an enticing place. Refine the integration and resolution as part of the experience of the waterfront. Explore the potential for an overlook on the west side of Western Ave.
3. Pursue opportunities for programming throughout Union St, especially in areas that can benefit from activity, such as between Western Ave and Post Alley. As the design develops, consider how the intersection of Union St and Western Ave can become a place or node.
4. Give attention to Post Alley and the area where the stair lands, particularly with regard to safety and activity.
5. Further articulate the relationship of the Lower and Upper Union structures and how they function as an overall concept.
6. Refine the elevator bay awnings, taking inspiration from the lightness and thinness that carry throughout the proposed design.
7. Consider the effect of the proposed planter box on the bridge deck with regard to the aforementioned thinness and lightness of the overall bridge design.
8. Explore ways to use gracious treads as opportunities for rest and repose as people walk up from the waterfront.
9. Pay particular attention to the treatment of the windowless façade at Western Ave and pursue opportunities for landscaping or art there.
10. Continue the integration of materials, lighting, and art within the overall concept keeping in mind the dynamic nature of art and lighting with elevator.
11. Resolve the detailing of the guardrails and other details at the 60% design review.
12. Balance the importance of the stair and elevator and strive to make the former more enticing and inviting.