Seattle design Commission

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES
April 16, 2015

Seattle Arena

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Shannon Loew, Chair

Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Grant Hromas

Martin Regge

John Savo

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

Shannon Loew, Chair
Brodie Bain
Lee Copeland
Thaddeus Egging
Grant Hromas
John Savo
Ross Tilghman

Commissioners Excused

Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair
Martin Regge

Project Description

The petitioner proposes to vacate Occidental Ave S between S Massachusetts St and S Holgate St in the SoDo neighborhood to facilitate development of a 750,000-square-foot, 18,000-20,000-seat multi-purpose arena for NBA basketball, NHL hockey, other sporting events, concerts, and shows.

The project site is bounded by S Massachusetts St to the north, 1st Ave S to the west, S Holgate St to the south, and the BNSF Railway right-of-way to the east. The vacation of Occidental Ave S would increase the developable area of the project site by roughly 17.5%. The proposed development includes a plaza space at the northwest corner of the site and widened sidewalks along 1st Ave S and S Holgate St.

Meeting Summary

The Commission did not vote on urban design merit at this meeting because the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the project had not yet been published. The petitioner's presentation focused on specific project features that the Commission had identified at previous review as outstanding issues.

Recognizing the FEIS is outstanding, the Commission expressed general support for the urban design merit of the proposed vacation of Occidental Ave S. However, the Commission requested additional information from the petitioner at the next review, primarily concerning pedestrian, vehicle, and freight circulation; the location of required parking; and details on the proposed design of pedestrian facilities at and around the site, including a proposed pedestrian bridge at S Holgate St over the BNSF Railway right-of-way.

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

April 16, 2015
9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Type
Street Vacation

Phase
Urban Design Merit

Location
Full block bounded by S Massachusetts St, 1st Ave S, S Holgate St, and the BNSF Railway right-of-way

Previous Reviews
12/6/12, 1/17/13, 4/4/13, 5/2/13, 11/7/13

Project Team Present

Mark Brands
Site Workshop

Jessica Clawson
McCullough Hill, PS

Cale Doornbos
HOK

Rollin Fatland
Rollin Fatland & Associates

Anton Foss
HOK

Brook Jacksha
Magnusson Klemencic Associates

Jack McCullough
McCullough Hill Leary, PS

Zach Mednelsohn
Magnusson Klemencic Associates

Dave Perez
ArenaCo

Fong Wu
Site Workshop

Attendees

Katy Chaney URS Corporation

Chris Daniels KING5

Chris Eaves SDOT

Kurt Gahnberg Transpo Group

Joseph Gellings Port of Seattle

Melody McCutcheon Hillis, Clark, Martin, and Peterson, PS

Mike Merritt Port of Seattle

Garry Papers DPD

Susan Ranf Seattle Mariners

John Shaw DPD

Mike Swenson Transpo Group

Cristina VanValkenburgh SDOT

Lish Whitson Council Central Staff

Summary of Presentation

Jack McCullough introduced the presentation and stated that the presentation would address five outstanding issues that the Commission identified at previous reviews:

1. The impacts resulting from the loss of Occidental Ave S
2. The location of Arena access and parking for all modes
3. An overview of pedestrian flows to and from the facility
4. S Holgate St improvements
5. The transportation management program (TMP) for the facility

Anton Foss showed several perspectives of the proposed Arena. The presentation is available on the Design Commission website.

As shown in Figure 1, Mark Brands identified the proposed changes to the curb line around the perimeter of the site. Mr. Brands noted that the proposal to widen the sidewalk approximately nine feet by removing existing on-street parking along the east side of 1st Ave S is consistent with the recently released draft of the Street Concept Plan for 1st Ave S. A series of slides showed current and proposed sidewalk widths along 1st Ave S both adjacent to the project site and for blocks north and south of the facility.

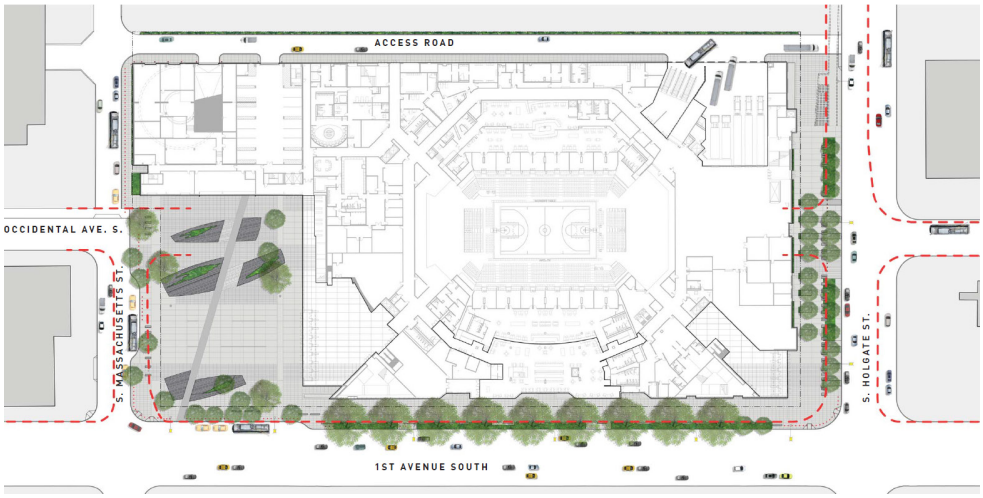

Figure 1. *Illustrative site plan*

Mr. Brands then identified the potential locations the team is considering to meet the parking requirements for the facility. Mr. McCullough reaffirmed that team's goal is to use existing parking supply in the vicinity but indicated that one option includes construction of a 1750-space parking facility south of the project site across S Holgate St. Mr. Brands described how the FEIS analyzes pedestrian traffic from various zones around the project site.

The presentation also included an analysis that compared a no vacation alternative with the proposed street vacation. The no vacation alternative would include a commercial development with street-level retail and below-grade parking; an arena facility is not feasible under the no vacation alternative. Aside from the preservation of Occidental Ave S, there would be no publicly accessible open space in the no vacation alternative. By comparison, the full street vacation alternative would include roughly 36,000 square feet of open space primarily in the form of the plaza at the corner of 1st Ave S and S Massachusetts St. Mr. Brands showed four scenarios illustrating how people could use the plaza for various events and throughout the day.

Several diagrams showed access and circulation for automobiles, service vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. Brook Jacksha explained various options for relocating utilities under the full street vacation alternative. Mr. Jacksha indicated the team's preference to underground utilities wherever possible.

Finally, the presentation showed the following three options for a pedestrian bridge over the BNSF Railway right-of-way at S Holgate St. According to the petitioner, if the arena opens prior to completion of the pedestrian bridge, the petitioner would provide a shuttle service to take event attendees to transit locations like King Street Station. The shuttle service would be an interim measure; the petitioner did not specify a date when it would be terminated. Mr. McCullough stated that the petitioner has committed to paying for the construction of the pedestrian bridge and coordinating with SDOT on its alignment and design.

Mr. Brands concluded with a brief preview of the potential public benefit package, listed below, which the team will present in more detail at a later meeting:

- Publicly accessible open space
- Enhanced right-of-way improvements
- Pedestrian access and safety improvements
- Public art program
- Utility improvements
- Sustainability measures
- Contribution to SoDo Transportation Infrastructure Fund

Agency Comments

Garry Papers stated that this project has had four Early Design Guidance (EDG) meetings and two Recommendation meetings with the Design Review Board (DRB) and that at least one more Recommendation meeting is forthcoming. According to Mr. Papers, most of the outstanding issues are refinements to the building materials and ground-floor details. Mr. Papers noted that the DRB will comment on the building interface of the newly added and committed pedestrian bridge and how the bridge transitions to the S Holgate St setback. The DRB will also make recommendations on the large private plaza, which partly overlaps with the Design Commission's review of the project.

Public Comments

Melody McCutcheon spoke as a representative of the Mariners. Ms. McCutcheon believed that the issues of circulation and access had not advanced much in presentation materials since the last review 18 months ago when the Commission said critical information was lacking. Ms. McCutcheon made the following four primary comments on the proposed vacation:

1. Ms. McCutcheon stated Occidental Ave S is a working street with critical transportation function that provides access to Safeco Field for cars, trucks, buses, emergency vehicles. If vacated, its function must be mitigated. According to Ms. McCutcheon, while the petitioner is attempting to partially mitigate the vacation with an access road on the east side of the project site, the Mariners' comments on the EIS indicate that this requires the access road be available at all times to maintain access to the Mariners' garage and service road. Ms. McCutcheon said there has been no commitment from the petitioner.
2. Ms. McCutcheon said she was unclear whether the petitioner was assuming use of the Mariners property. She stated that the presentation materials indicate that truck access (the primary truck route) for the Arena is across the Mariners' property, which would require an agreement.
3. Ms. McCutcheon expressed surprise that the vacation proposal includes changes to the Mariners' property without discussion with her client; these changes include eliminating a row of trees, adding a sidewalk, and undergrounding power.
4. Ms. McCutcheon noted that, after two years, the petitioner has finally indicated that code-required parking would be provided in a garage south of S Holgate St. Ms. McCutcheon stated that, by code, the Arena cannot be constructed without 1,700 parking spaces. She stated that a decision on the parking location is critical to evaluating pedestrian flows, proposed street improvements, and the design and size of the plaza.

Mike Merritt spoke on behalf of the Port of Seattle. Mr. Merritt said the Port wants to welcome NHL and NBA to Seattle but continues to believe this is wrong site. Mr. Merritt asserted the Commission cannot recommend approval of the vacation petition without determining that the impacts of vacation are balanced by the proposed public benefits. Mr. Merritt expressed a desire for a site that does not have impacts on Seattle's industrial sector, which employs

many people in the city. He emphasized the Port's concerns about the loss of Occidental Ave S and cautioned that current levels of congestion in SoDo would only worsen with the Arena. Finally, Mr. Merritt stated that the City made promises to the Port as part of this project proposal, including protections, but the Port has not seen anything for over a year. While he commended the contribution to the transportation benefit fund, Mr. Merritt stated that this contribution has no structure or definition.

Summary of Discussion

The Commissioners were pleased to see a greater level of clarity from the project team on several key elements of the urban design merit component of the street vacation petition. Since any action on the urban design merit phase of review will occur at a subsequent meeting, the Commissioners primarily identified project elements needing further detail.

The Commission continued to highlight access and circulation as a critical part of the urban design merit review. The Commissioners appreciated the petitioner's commitment to pay for construction of a pedestrian bridge over the BNSF Railway right-of-way at S Holgate St, which they believed was critical infrastructure for safely accommodating the pedestrian volumes the Arena will generate. They asked that the team explain the performance criteria for the bridge, including its capacity, alignment, and intended modes, at the next meeting.

The Commissioners also identified the design of 1st Ave S streetscape as an area for further detail, particularly given the recently released final draft of the Stadium District Study Street Concept Plan, shown in Figure 2. The Commission was excited to see that the project would include a restaurant open year round in a prominent location along 1st Ave S. The Commissioners encouraged the petitioner find other opportunities for activating the project site, particularly 1st Ave S and the plaza at the corner of 1st Ave S and S Massachusetts St, on non-event days and in the off season. There was also a desire to understand the realignment of S Holgate St and S Massachusetts St not just at the project site but beyond the property line as well.

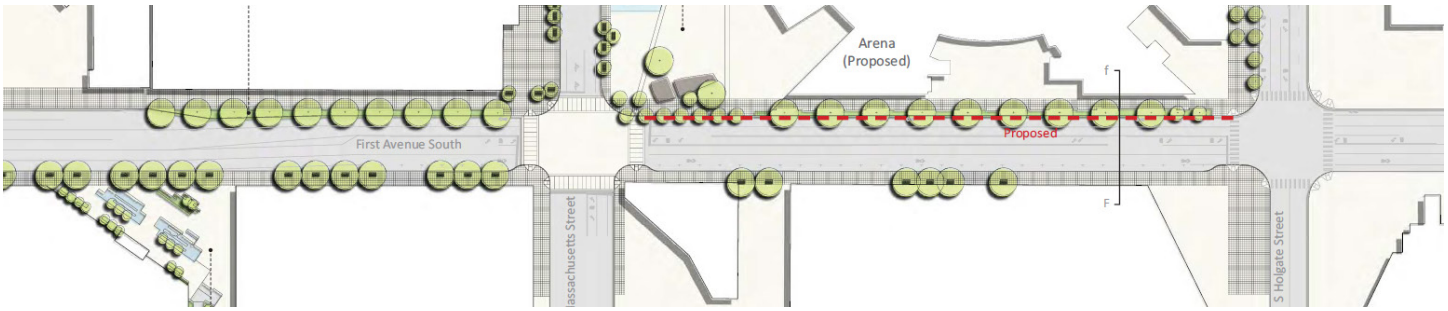

Figure 2. *Excerpt from Stadium District Study Street Concept Plan for 1st Ave S between S Massachusetts St and S Holgate St*

Lastly, the Commissioners provided some initial recommendations based on the preview of the public benefit package associated with the street vacation. Recognizing that any improvements proposed as public benefit must exceed code and mitigation requirements, the Commissioners encouraged the team to explore enhancements of the public realm along 1st Ave S and in the plaza at the northwest corner of the site. They also expressed support for off-site improvements and the contribution to the SoDo Transportation Benefit Fund given the pedestrian and vehicle volumes the Arena will generate in the neighborhood.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the team for the presentation concerning the urban design merit review phase of the proposed vacation of Occidental Ave S between S Holgate St and S Massachusetts St. The Commission recognized substantial improvement in the clarity and thoroughness of the presentation compared to previous reviews. The additional diagrams and clearer analysis helped the Commission understand the proposal in greater depth.

In particular, the Commission appreciated the team's effort to integrate the facility and streetscape design with the final draft of the Street Concept Plan for the Stadium District and encouraged the team to continue exploring opportunities to implement this plan.

The Commission did not vote on urban design merit because the Final Environmental Impact Statement has not been published. Instead, the Commission offered comments and recommendations to identify outstanding issues and to guide the next urban design merit presentation.

The Commission expressed general support for the urban design merit of the proposed vacation. However, the Commission emphasized that any approval of urban design merit hinges on a greater understanding of the impacts of the vacation on circulation in the immediate area, the location and extent of parking for the Arena, and how the project siting affects the public realm. The Commission's decision-making would benefit from clarity on the following specific items, each of which the team should address at the next review:

Circulation

1. The circulation needs of the Mariners and the Port of Seattle.
2. The current function of Occidental Ave S for pedestrians and vehicles at the end of events at CenturyLink and Safeco Fields.
3. Coordination between the petitioner and SDOT regarding freight circulation in this area.
4. A commitment to where the petitioner will provide parking for the facility (see Figure 3). The Commission believes an agreement to allow use of the Mariners' garage, if feasible given the project's parking requirement, is a better urban design solution because it uses existing facilities more efficiently and allows for additional development in the area.

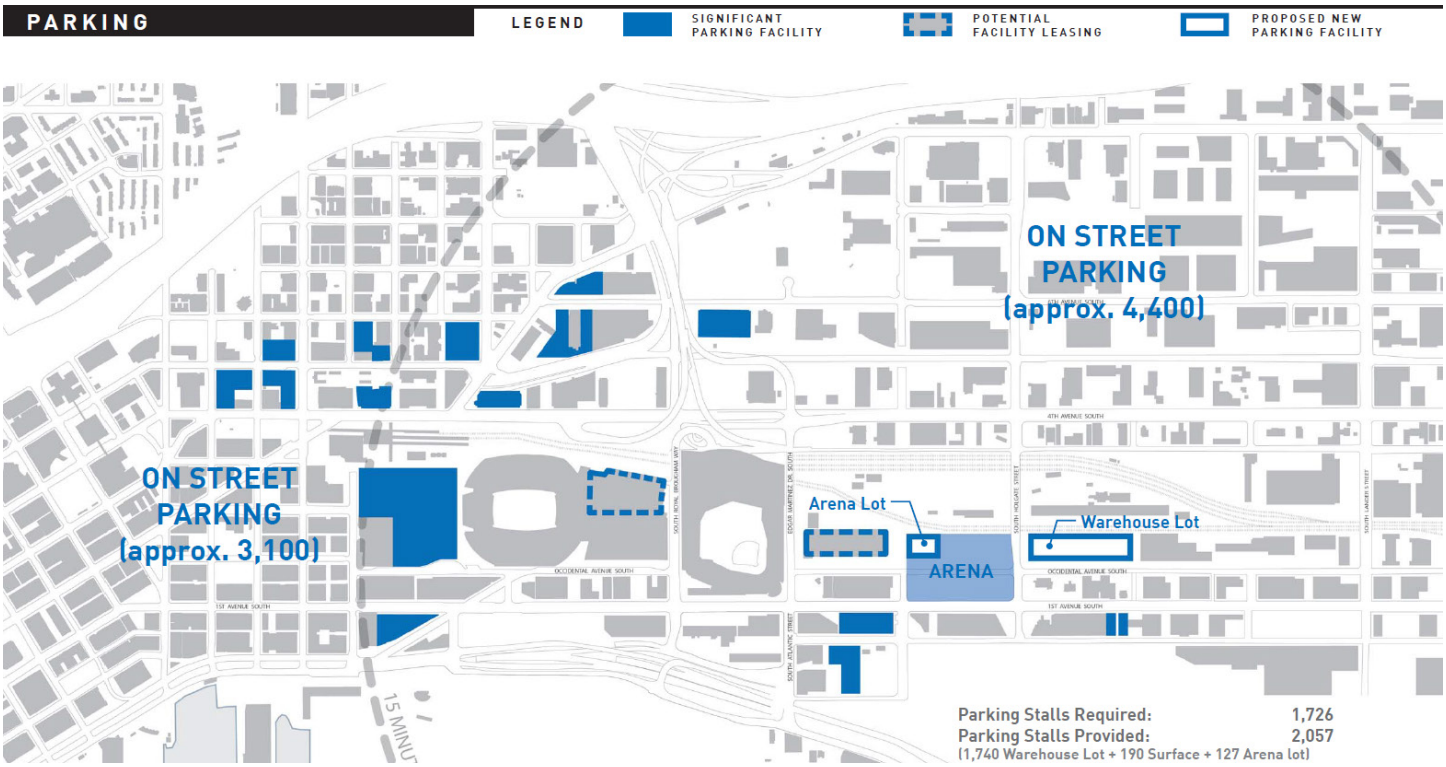

Figure 3. The Commission emphasized that any approval of urban design merit would require a greater understanding of project elements, including the location and extent of Arena parking.

5. Diagrams showing the project's relationship to the 1st Ave S Street Concept Plan beyond the site itself.
6. Diagrams illustrating how pedestrians use Occidental Ave S from Pioneer Square to the project site, currently and as anticipated in the future.
7. A diagram showing the existing and proposed S Holgate St cross section between 1st Ave S and the BNSF right-of-way so the Commission understands how the proposed realignment of S Holgate St would transition to the east and west of the project site.
8. Performance criteria for the proposed pedestrian bridge, including its width, capacity, and intended modes (i.e., would cyclists use the bridge).
9. Performance criteria for the proposed interim shuttle, including its capacity, frequency, routing, and stops.

Site and ground plane

10. Explanation of what happens at the project site in general, and the proposed plaza in particular, on non-event days.
11. Further study of how the plaza design can take advantage of the sun in all seasons.
12. Additional detail on pedestrian features at surrounding intersections, particularly where 1st Ave S intersects S Massachusetts St and S Holgate St.
13. Additional discussion of how the sidewalk on the east side of 1st Ave S between S Holgate St and S Massachusetts St would be managed given its 24-foot width, particularly on non-event days.
14. Information about how Property Use and Development Agreement would ensure that the restaurant on 1st Ave S is open to the public on non-event days and throughout the year.
15. Confirmation of the building setback on 1st Ave S.

The Commission also offered initial thoughts on the preview of the public benefit package for the proposed vacation:

- Explore opportunities to program the plaza for various gathering sizes, times of year, and times of day, as shown in Figure 4. The Commission sees the large screen is one of several potential strategies for activating the plaza.
- Given the pedestrian volumes this project will generate, continue to explore off-site pedestrian improvements, such as lighting, wayfinding, and other opportunities for enhancing the public realm in the immediate surroundings of the arena.
- The proposed sustainability improvements are encouraging as public benefit inasmuch as they pursue aggressive goals, educate the public, and/or relieve pressure on utilities.

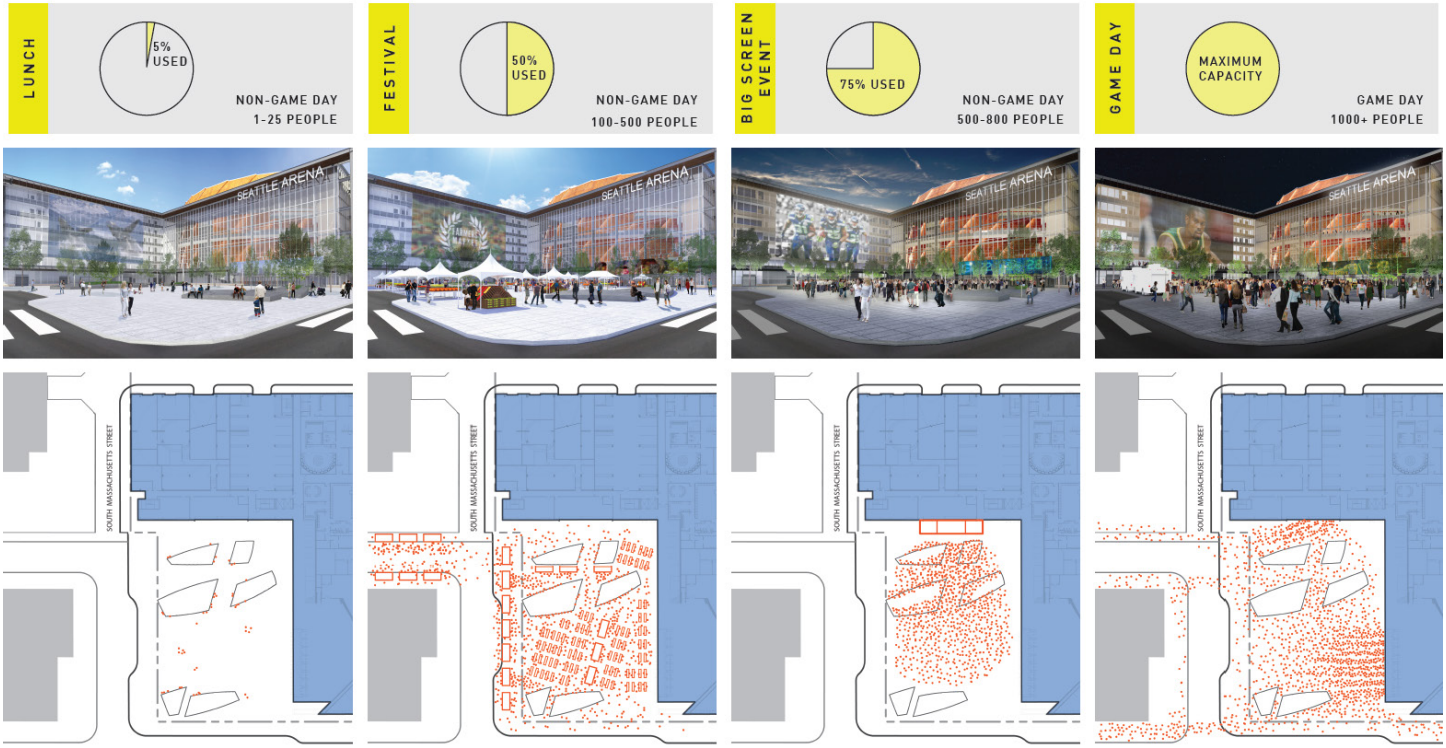

Figure 4. *The Commission recommended the petitioner continue to explore opportunities both on- and off-site public benefits, including strategies for activating the proposed plaza at the northwest corner of the site.*