

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 13 May 2009

6PM-8PM, Seattle City Hall Boards and Commissions Room L280

1. Call to order and introductions (6:05)

SPAB members in attendance: Tom Williams (Chair), Mark Bandy, (Vice Chair), Howard Wu (Secretary), Leanne Do (Get Engaged), Christina Bollo, Celeste Gilman, Kristen Lohse, Vanessa Lund, Jon Morgan, Seth Schromen-Wawrin

Absent: T Frick McNamara, Lindsay Pesheck (SBAB liaison to SPAB)

SDOT staff liaison: Brian Dougherty

Presenter: Virginia Coffman, (SDOT); Liz Ellis (SDOT)

Public: Randy Earle

2. Meeting Minute Approval (6:06)

Tom made a call for the approval of the April Meeting Minutes. The Board made a voice vote approving the minutes.

3. Public Comments (6:04)

Tom asked the public for any comments. No comments were provided.

4. Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop Trail – Virginia Coffman, SDOT (6:08)

The Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop Master Plan project is wrapping up. The trail will use existing right-of-way (ROW), to connect trails and sidewalks to create a continuous 6.2 mile link around the lake. The plan identifies future projects, and some projects have already been installed. New sidewalks have been built along NE 40th Street at Peace Park in the University District and along Westlake Avenue south of the Fremont Bridge. Way finding signage has also been installed.

The master plan began with an inventory of the facilities around the lake. The plan developed a project list and criteria to review the list. The goal of the plan is to preserve the unique quality of each neighborhood around the lake and bring pedestrians in contact with the waterway and lakeshore. Most identified projects are for safety improvements. On the south end of the lake, along the Fairview Walkway adjacent to Chandler's Cove, accessibility is an issue.

Proposed major project include:

- Creation of multi-use trail along Fairview Avenue North under the City Light right-of-way (next to the Chandler's Cove).
- Creation of multi-use trail across Fairview Bridge.

- Conversion of Fairview Avenue E to the north to a “shared space” between East Newton and East Roanoke Streets.
- Closure the major missing link along Fairview Avenue East between East Roanoke and East Hamlin Streets with an over-water connection or viewpoint from East Edgar Street.
- Continuation of a path on the west side of Fairview Avenue East from East Hamlin to Fuhrman Avenue East.
- Creation of new curb ramps and other intersection improvements at the south end of the University Bridge, 7th Avenue NE and NE 40th Street, and 6th Avenue NE and NE Northlake Way.
- Creation of walkway along the south side of North Northlake Way by shifting the roadway to the north, using the old Burke Gilman Trail right-of-way at the toe of the slope. Pedestrians would be routed down from the University Bridge to the lake edge along Northlake.
- Widening and resurfacing of the Burke Gilman Trail to provide more room for pedestrians.
- Enhancing the east and west entries to Gas Works Park.
- Widening the south sidewalk on North 34th Street.
- Installing a lift at the Fremont Bridge.
- Making spot improvements and converting the frontage road along Westlake to a share space street.

Next steps: the plan is wrapping up and will be posted on the web in the next few weeks. SDOT will coordinate with the Ped Master Planning effort. \$1.5 million has already been identified for the project, and construction will start in the fall through 2010. Funds are through the City Council.

Vanessa wanted to know how much and how long would it take to do everything on the wish list, as well as how much of the trail has been completed.

Gina responded that preliminary cost estimates have been done, initial projects have been identified. Most of the trail is accessible and intact, but parts are in poor shape and not at all accessible.

Celeste brought up the topic of shared space projects and wanted to confirm that it is a walking space not just open space.

Gina added that a shared space is a place where it prioritizes pedestrians and force drivers to drive slower. Some of the proposed projects include finishing the edges of the street, reorganizing parking and improve drainage. Fairview Avenue residents want this quality for their space.

Randy had questions relating to accessibility. He also wanted to know if there was a better way to show topography on the map.

Gina noted that most places are level, but places around the bridge are going to be steep. Some on the board pointed to the City's bike map where arrows are placed on the map where the topography is steep.

Kristen added that there will be signage to point options around area for getting around steep areas, or at decision points for accessible routes.

Mark pointed out that the signed paths are not the most direct route for him.

Gina explained that the paths were chosen for reaching the water. Some have a marker for "Heels" and others for "Wheels," which are pathways for accessibility.

Randy followed with his experience in the Sculpture Park area where the sidewalk breaks are very annoying. He wanted the City to consider the "jug-jug" of the expansion joints.

Mark suggested various expansion joint length. He then wanted to know if there are specific projects identified for the Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop grant.

Gina responded that the grant would fund improvements to the Y-intersection at Eastlake Avenue Avenue, Fairview Avenue East and Fairview Avenue North. The proposal is to square out the intersection, narrow up the pedestrian crossing, put in curbing to define the parking and drainage. This would provide a pedestrian pathway to the water. The grants are through the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). For the grant decision process, PSRC scores projects higher if they are within in urban center, they have local matches, and detailed cost estimates. The grant writing deals with the importance of the connection to the businesses in the area as well as transit opportunities. Preliminary design is going ahead, which will be the match. The funding would go towards the construction.

Mark wanted to know how bikes are treated at this location.

Gina the project would create an alignment to the bridge and connect to the path along Eastlake Avenue.

Tom wanted to know the public's reaction.

Gina reported that the public had strong feelings since the 1980s due to the parking issues. The neighborhood has been involved in the plans, and they have used the neighborhood plans as part of their efforts. Local business do not want to lose parking or delivery access.

Vanessa wanted to know if there are opportunities for private funding.

Gina felt that there is a possibility in the future.

Seth wanted to know the initial plan's impact on local residents.

Gina reported that the public process is going to continue into the future. The current Eastlake plan maintains the existing parking. It will square out the intersection. Number of lanes would not change but the crossing would be shortened across Fairview Boulevard.

Randy wanted to know where the name for the trail originated.

Gina explained that it was named after the last Chief that lived on the lake.

Celeste remarked that the map makes you realize there are so many little parks around the lake.

Gina felt that this is the beauty of this project.

Christina wanted to know if there are the issues for the ROW and private property around E Edgar Street.

Gina confirmed that; this project always had trouble getting around that area.

5. Sidewalk Repair Program – Liz Ellis (SDOT) (6:50 PM)

Started in 2007, Liz was brought in to work on the sidewalk repair program from urban forestry to street maintenance. She worked with many neighborhood groups for sidewalk repairs and street tree neighborhood projects.

The estimate for all sidewalk projects would be \$600 million. She is tasked to identify 44,000 SF of sidewalk to be fixed per year. There is a website link to report sidewalk repair. She receives many reports on sidewalk issues. Issues include worn out asphalt, cracks, tree heaving, access to stairways, and adjacency to bus stops or public buildings. All these needs make it hard to prioritize the projects.

She needs to balance individual versus public needs, geographic equity, as well as overall usage. She needs to find the best way to spend the money to go as far as it can. She partners with other groups e.g. neighborhood matching funds (NMF), parks, and/or abutting property owners. She needs to spend the money in way that makes it as an infrastructure investment, not become a maintenance issue in a few years.

She looks at the root of the issue and not just patchwork of fixes e.g. poor storm drainage, parking problems, etc. Sidewalk repairs around street trees looks at improving it for both pedestrians and trees. The new designs take into account

for pedestrian needs. Many sidewalk problems are located in areas around the bus stops.

Liz feels the real challenge is the aging urban forest. Most street trees were planted between the 1960s through the 1980s in areas that only have 3' to 4' area. The reality is that they need at least 5' or greater. For larger trees, they need tree pits at 10 to 12' wide. There is a lot of competition for pedestrians and street trees, sidewalk cafes, street furniture, underground utility vault. A lot of these needs are not compatible.

Liz hopes that the Pedestrian Master Plan will give some guidance. She wants to know what the bottom line for how the sidewalk should be treated depending upon the local conditions. From all the projects that have been installed, very few trees have been taken out because there is lack of a clear guidance. Many corridors in the City have this problem. Work needs to be done to address the larger trees along the long sections of the streets e.g. 35th Avenue NE, Ballard Avenue NW. There are conditions where accessibility and street tree canopy conflicts. Don't want to bind fixing sidewalks if there's a conflict for preserving trees.

Street use has the authority to give notice to abutting property owner to fix broken sidewalks. They paint warning for broken sidewalks. However, only one person is available to investigate sidewalk complaints. A frequent complaint is vegetation overgrowth. Department of Planning and Development (DPD) follow up on those complaints on the vegetation. DPD also has only one person to investigate these complaints.

Christina wanted to know when does the City provide funding for sidewalk repairs.

Liz explains that only in the case if it abuts city property, places where it serves the public good, high pedestrian locations or areas where there are joint opportunities to fund projects.

Some cities have set aside a leverage program where they do a 50:50 cost share. If there are no money to help out, property owners are very reluctant to fix it. A program like this would help a lot. Another way to help is using the City's clout to vet out contractors to do sidewalk repairs for property owners.

Mark agree that an on call repair is the way to go. It would reduce the time and effort to do it.

Liz noted that the City doesn't like private shimming. Peg came up with an idea for a shimming project, similar to a composting kit and do shimming demonstrations. It's a great idea but need people to get behind the action.

Christina wanted to know the amount coordination between DPD and Liz on the complaint list.

Liz explains that she gets to comment on the list, but the City project manager of a particular project has the final call. She reviews plans where the street pits are not designed for trees to grow. She can see that in the future the sidewalk will need to be repaired in the future. People are designing to the minimum specifications. The green aspect looks good at the beginning, but no growth is built into it. That is where most of the problems stem from, the growth factor.

Ben cited the San Diego example where the Transit agency has equal say. The developer needs to address all concerns before the permitting is allowed.

Liz explained that the Street Use group started the “Street Improvement Process” to streamline the permitting. She wants more policy that has more teeth. There is an “Art Plan”. Sidewalks are a great medium for art. There is an example of a sidewalk where hop scotch is embedded in the sidewalk. Another location had artists come in to stamp in picture frames into the sidewalk for chalk art, located in West Seattle near the Junction.

Mark would like to see more examples of art in the sidewalk.

Kristen mentioned that the art plan has a list of places where examples are located.

Liz thought that the City can save some time and money if the sidewalk standard does not include 2' x 2' gridding. Some places have 5' expansion joints with broom finish. It can look good, also good for art.

Celeste noted that Jacob does not like a lot of scoring; it is bad for sight impaired.

Liz pointed out that one area in southeast Seattle, the sidewalk was stamped on the side with cobblestones so that it would be cue for sight impaired person where the curve in the sidewalk is located around the tree.

Celeste wanted to know how she was involved with the Pedestrian Master Plan.

Liz wanted from the Plan a clarification on gray areas to provide guidance for maintenance.

Celeste then suggested the use of the “walking box” concept.

Liz said that it applies to design but not for maintenance. However, it probably should in the future.

Celeste noticed a lot of problems at crosswalks. In the University District, huge potholes are at crossings.

Liz told of a story where she met up with a woman. Liz tried her a walker and felt the issues where the sidewalk had rough surfaces. Their program lost \$350,000 this year due to belt tightening, much if lost from REIT. There are a lot of sidewalk repair projects in Downtown.

Mark wanted to know who deals with stairwells.

Liz answered that the Bridges and Roadway Structures group deals with them, but she deals with the sidewalk approached to them.

Celeste wanted to know if the Master Plan will prioritize projects.

Liz responded that it does with the GIS information.

Jon wanted to know if it was possible to relocate a tree.

Liz pointed out that the problem is digging out the entire root system due to the surround the road and sidewalks. Small trees are possible, but not big trees. She has worked with Jim Neusom who turns urban tree wood into sculptures and other wood projects.

Jon wanted to know the pros and cons of rubber sidewalks.

Liz explained that one recycled tire equals one square foot of sidewalk. Each paver is 2.5 square feet. They are really dense rubber. Test locations include: 8th Avenue S in S Park, MLK Jr Way near Holly Park at a transit stop, and the south side on 39th at Phinney Avenue and Greenwood Avenue. The Parks department tried some in Queen Anne. The product is unpredictable in its dimensions. The pre-drill does not work as well. It costs twice as much compared to traditional construction. She can only justify it for certain tree locations. The manufacturer of rubber sidewalks has a new material that uses some plastic, so the thickness is more consistent. The paint finish does not last. The advantage of this material compared to asphalt is that it takes more effort for roots to push up the rubber sidewalk. But it has a high initial cost and maintenance costs.

6. Round Robin and Upcoming Agenda Items (7:55 PM)

Tom noted that next month's agenda includes the Pedestrian Master Plan with Barbara and Jennifer, and the NE 45th Viaduct project. He would like to write a letter in support for the Loop Trail and wanted the board's feedback for the letter. He suggested including language about geographic equity, as well as dealing with other trail gaps.

Celeste noted that the letter should be fully supportive, but there should be an e-mail that is sent to list our concerns.

Tom then talked about the Retreat. Everyone should try to get there as soon as possible, 12 noon. Barbara and Jennifer will speak first. The retreat will be from 12 until 4 PM at Mithun Architects.

Mark suggested that board members should bring their pedestrian master plan comments to the retreat.

Tom finally talked about his impressions of Helle Sohl presentation and how she offered to speak to the Board the next time she is in town, maybe between July 20 and August 4. We could have an informal meeting at night.

Celeste suggested that Liz provide a walking tour for the August meeting.

7. Adjourn Meeting (8:15)