

# Freeway Park Improvements

**Jenny A. Durkan**  
Mayor

**Samuel Assefa**  
Director, OPCD

**Brianna Holan**, Acting Chair

**Justin Clark**

**Mark Johnson**

**Rick Krochalis**

**Amalia Leighton**

**Vinita Sidhu**

**Lucas Whitesell**

**Elaine Wine**

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Strategic Advisor

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**Commissioners Present**  
Brianna Holan, Acting Chair

Justin Clark  
Mark Johnson  
Rick Krochalis  
Amalia Leighton  
Vinita Sidhu  
Lucas Whitesell  
Elaine Wine

**Commissioners Excused**

## Project Description

Opening in 1976, Freeway Park provides over 5 acres of open space within the Downtown area. The park also provides a connection between Downtown, First Hill, and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. Since its construction the park has continued to evolve with trees and vegetation having matured within the park boundaries while high rise development has occurred around the park's edge, creating several design and programmatic challenges. The Freeway Park Improvements project builds upon previous work conducted by Freeway Park Association to repair, restore, and enhance infrastructure and design elements within Freeway Park. The project will improve park wide elements such as wayfinding, park entrances, and lighting as well as design elements that are unique to specific areas within the park.

## Meeting Summary

This is the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the Freeway Park Improvements project. The Commission had reviewed the project on October 5th, 2017, as part of the public benefit package for the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Expansion. The Commission also received a briefing from the project team on December 19, 2019. The purpose of today's meeting was to review the concept design phase (30% design) for the Freeway Park Improvements project. The SDC voted, 8-0, to approve the concept design phase for the Freeway Park Improvements project with several recommendations.

## Recusals and Disclosures

**Vinita Sidhu**, disclosed that her firm worked on the Finding Freeway Park project, but that she was not involved in the project.

**April 2, 2020**

9:00 - 11:30 am

**Type**

CIP

**Phase**

Concept Design

**Previous Reviews**[12/19/19](#)**Presenters**

Katie Bang | SPR

Calder Gillin | Walker Macy

David Graves | SPR

Amy McHorse | Studio Matthews

Lara Rose | Walker Macy

Mark Smedley | Bassetti Architects

**Attendees**

Sam Assefa | OPCD

Suvidha Bandi | City of Houston

Mike Baskett | Seattle IT

Charles Birnbaum | TCLF

Fancis Cahill | City of Chicago

Steve Callcott | District of Columbia

Connie Combs | Seattle Planning Commission

Eric Dyrness | City of Seattle

Holly Golden | HCMP

Matt Gurrad | HDR

Analiese Hock | City of Denver

Alexandra Hooper | Bassetti Architects

Julianna Jackson | District of Columbia

Austin Keithler | City of Denver

Joel Lawson | District of Columbia

Andrew Lewis | District of Columbia

Emily Liu | City of Louisville

David Maloney | District of Columbia

Dan Miles | Bassetti Architects

Jeff Murdock | Historic Seattle

Genna Nashem | City of Seattle

Imania Price | District of Columbia

Ed Pottharst | SPR

Victoria Shoenburg | City of Seattle

Jennifer Steingasser | District of Columbia

Noah Szafranec | City of Chicago

Anders Turim | WPG Metro Region

Margaret Wallace Brown | City of Houston

Kim Williams | District of Columbia

Eugenia Woo | Historic Seattle

April 2, 2020

**Summary of Presentation**

Amy McHorse, of Studio Matthews, Mark Smedley, of Bassetti Architects, and Lara Rose and Calder Gillin, of Walker Macy, presented the concept design for the Freeway Park Improvements project. The project team provided background and historical information about the original design of the park as well as its location and the surrounding neighborhood context. The team also provided information on project budget and city landmark status. The project team clarified that although the total budget is \$10 million, \$9,250,000 is for the Freeway Park Improvements project while the remaining funds are allocated for the Freeway Park Association. \$6 million of the project budget is for construction, while the remaining portion is reserved for soft cost. The project team stated that up to \$1 million can be spent on improvements located outside of the Freeway Park property boundary and that they are currently working to identify potential area to use the allocated funding. The team also mentioned that Freeway Park is on the National Register of Historic Places and Washington State Heritage Register. While the park is not currently designated as a City Landmark, SPR is planning to submit an application for it to be considered for landmark status in the near future.



Image 1: Freeway Park Improvements Boundary

The team then provided information on the overarching goals to preserve, restore, and repair park elements while also updating elements to meet the current needs of park users. Key recommendations such as increasing the visibility of park entrances, strengthening the identify of the park, and providing programming were used to guide the concept design proposal.

The proposal included parkwide improvements as well as specific park area improvements. Park wide improvements included lighting, wayfinding, planting, irrigation, drainage, and power supply. The design proposal for lighting provided “layers of light” to highlight primary circulation pathways, landscape, water features, edges, underpasses, and hardscape materials and site furnishings. The wayfinding element provided a hierarchy of signage placed throughout the park to help with park access and circulation as well as providing a sense of place for users. Wayfinding signage included primary park entrance makers, interpretive signage with parkwide maps, secondary navigation signage, and smaller interpretation elements. The signage is being designed in coordination with the City’s Seamless Seattle wayfinding plan.

The project team then presented the following specific park area improvements (*see image 3*):

- Upper lawns – located adjacent to the WSCC property, the Upper Lawns include a series of pathways and open lawn areas with mature vegetation. The updated design included restoring and expanding the lawn area, activating the children’s area at the north end of the lawn, and providing a

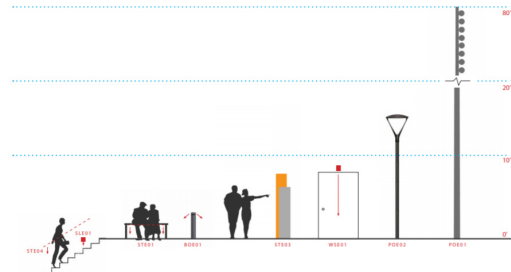


Image 2: Proposed lighting elements (left) & Wayfinding elements (right)

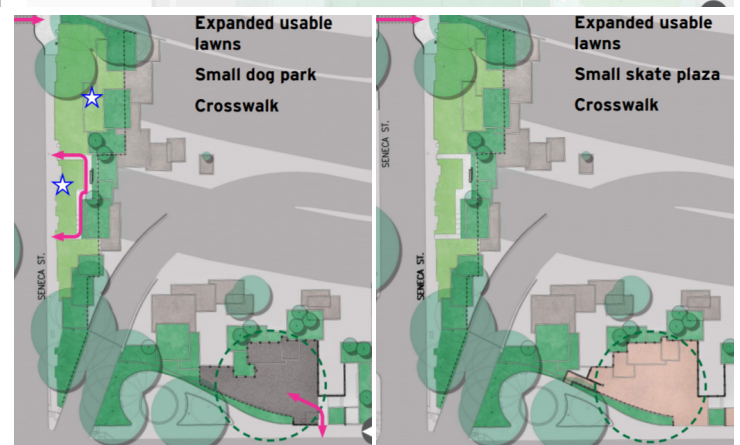
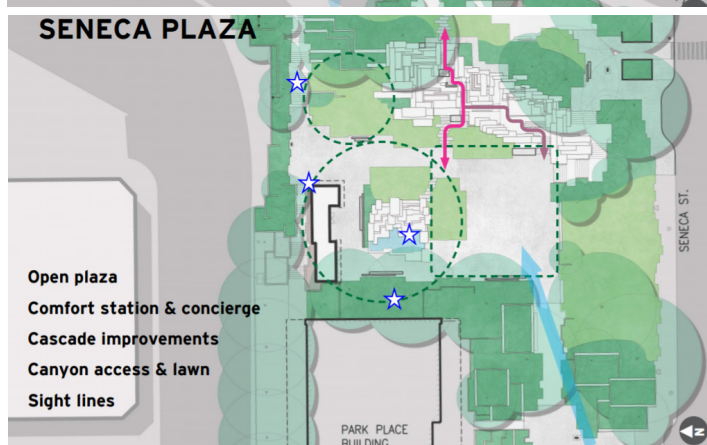
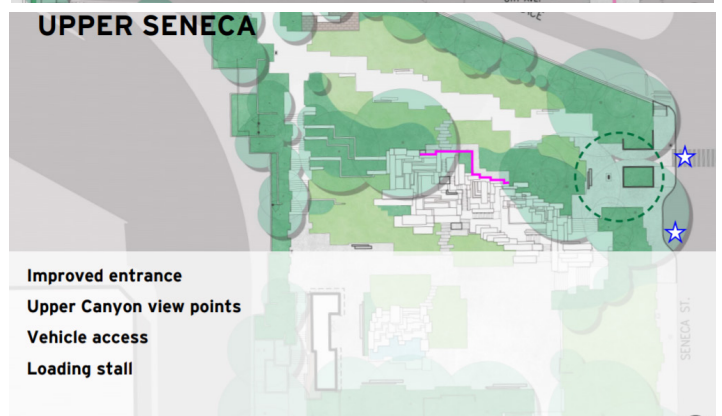
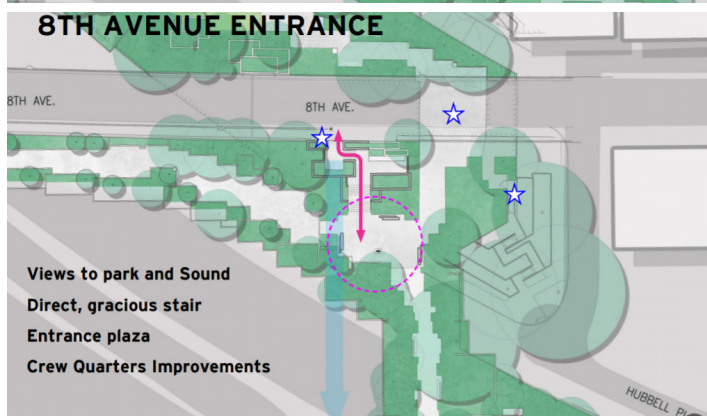
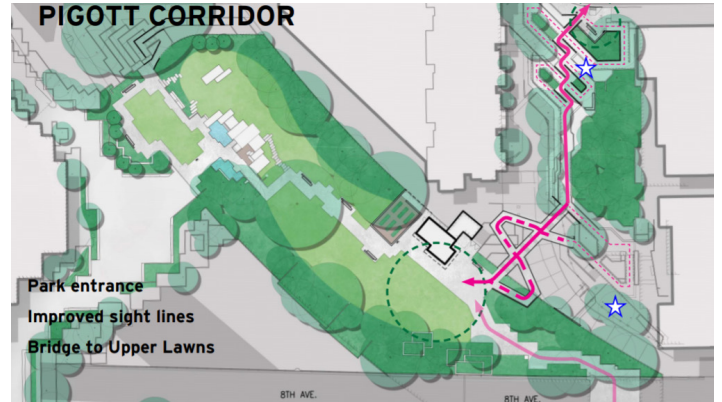
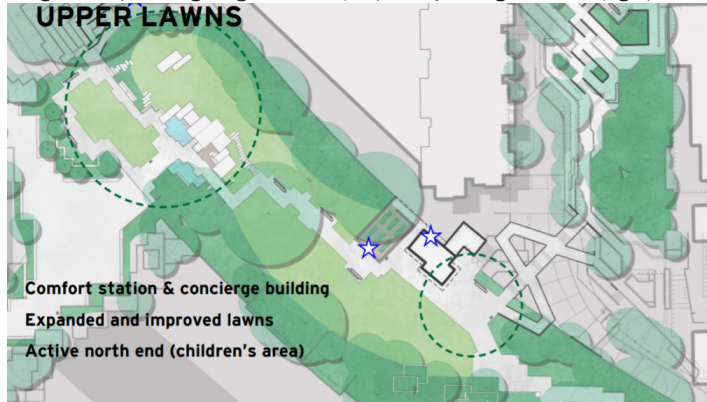


Image 3: Proposed specific area plans

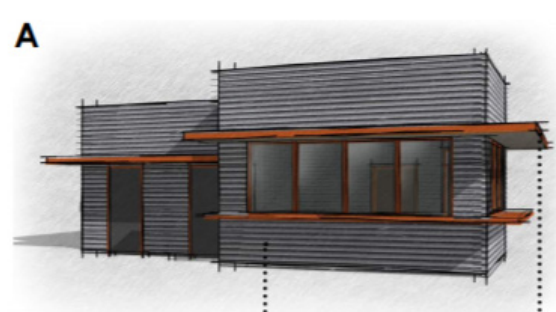


Image 4: Proposed option for comfort station on Seneca Plaza (left) and Upper Lawn (Right)

comfort station and concierge building at the south end of the lawn area. The proposed comfort station and concierge building (*see image 4*) was inspired by the original design of the park and included materials such as board form concrete, metal panels, and a steel canopy.

- Pigott Corridor- the Pigott Corridor connects the park with the First Hill Neighborhood. The updated design will increase the visibility of the 9th Ave park entrance, increase site lines, and improve the pathway by connecting the corridor with the upper lawns area.
- 8th Ave Entrance (Park Center) – the entrance connects 8th Ave with the central area of the park. Proposed improvements included the reorientation and widening of the stair from the street to the park below. The reorientation will increase visibility into and through the park while also directing users to a central gathering area within the park. The design also included improvements to the maintenance facility located below the 8th Ave underpass.
- Upper Seneca- improvements included updates to the Seneca St entrance, access along the upper portion of the Canyon fountain, and vehicle access for park maintenance.
- Seneca Plaza- Seneca Plaza is located near the southwest area of the park and currently serves as the main gathering space. The updated design included increasing the plaza and lawn for programming, providing additional access through the Canyon fountain, and providing a comfort station and concierge building (*see image 4*) along the northern edge of the plaza. The proposed comfort station and concierge building was inspired by the original design of the park and included materials such as board form concrete, metal panels, and a steel canopy.
- Box Gardens – the box gardens are located on the southern edge of the park along Seneca St and 6th Ave. Proposed design alternatives included an art walk, with additional pathway through the box gardens area, dog park, or skate park

### Agency Comments

None

### Public Comments

None

### Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Parkwide improvements
- Park areas
- Priorities & budget
- Equity & sustainability

#### *Parkwide improvements*

The SDC commended the project team for their overall approach to parkwide improvements. Specifically, commissioners appreciated the team's focus on implementing a hierarchy of wayfinding and circulation design elements as well as the team's approach to parkwide access, entrances, and their balancing of preservation and restoration of parkwide elements. The SDC acknowledged the drastic change in the surrounding urban context and encouraged the project team to continue to balance restoration and preservation of parkwide elements with meeting the changing needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

While the Commission appreciated the variety of proposed lighting elements, commissioners were concerned with the lack of detail provided to address the hierarchy of lighting elements, specifically with how lighting relates to circulation and access. The Commission recommended the team use the most prominent lighting element(s) to highlight main pathways through the park, while other lighting elements have a secondary, supportive role in the overall lighting plan. The SDC also recommended the project team provide a canopy plan to show how the tree canopy will evolve over time.

#### *Park areas*

The SDC commended the project team for the detailed design proposals for each park area. Specifically, commissioners commended the team for creating recognizable destinations, providing a space for park users to explore, and for improving access and circulation within and between park areas. Commissioners also appreciated the detail provided in enhancing specific entrances, specifically the entrance at 8th Ave as well as

improvements made to the Pigott Corridor. Although not located within the park, The Commission recognized the Pike St entrance as a main gateway into the park, specifically for the Capitol Hill Neighborhood. The Commission recommended the project team coordinate with the WSCC to explore ways to improve the Pike St entrance and corridor connecting it to the Upper Lawns and Convention Center Plaza area.

The SDC appreciated the design proposal for the Lower Seneca Plaza. The Commission agreed that the expansion of the plaza area would provide additional space for programming. Commissioners also appreciated the proposal to revitalize the Canyon Fountain and to increase access through the fountain between the Upper and Lower Seneca Plazas. The Commission then commended the project team for their proposal to provide a concierge and comfort station along the northern edge of Seneca Plaza as well as between the Upper Lawns and Pigott Corridor area.

Commissioners discussed the proposed materiality of the buildings as it relates to the existing landscape design. The Commission appreciated the similarity between proposed materials and materials used in the original park design but cautioned the project team from designing the building to make it appear as if it were a part of the original park design. The Commission recommended the team use architectural features and materials that would serve as an extension of the landscape design and take cue from the boldness of the original park materials while also distinguishing it from the original park design, especially if the team plans to apply for the park to be designated as a City Landmark. The SDC recognized the comfort stations as being integral to the overall programming and recommended the project team provide additional information about access and the hours of operation for the proposed comfort stations. The Commission encouraged the team to think about how partnering organizations, such as Freeway Park Association, can help with funding for the construction and ongoing operations of the comfort stations.

The Commission appreciated the project team's overall approach for the improvement of the Box Gardens, but recommended the project team think about the box gardens themselves as artistic elements, cautioning the project team from using art in a way that would reduce or compete with the experience and visibility of the Box Gardens. The SDC recommended the project team continue to think about where it would be appropriate to locate art within the park. The Commission then recommended the project team continue to explore programming around the Box Gardens that will meet the needs of the community while also serving as a way to attract new user groups to the park. Several commissioners thought that programming such as the proposed skate plaza could be used to draw additional user groups. The Commission then recommended the project team consider long term operation needs for proposed programming.

#### *Priorities in budget*

The SDC discussed parkwide and area specific elements that should be prioritized in the proposed budget. The Commission encouraged the project team to think about what elements are necessary for improvements and restoration. Commissioners then recommended the project team think about what elements could be improved through 3rd party funding opportunities and suggested that the existing project budget be used to implement elements that are less likely to receive additional funding.

The SDC recognized parkwide safety and access concerns and recommended the project team prioritize the following parkwide elements: lighting, wayfinding, and park entrances. The Commission also stressed the importance of prioritizing the restoration of planting and lawn areas throughout the park and recommended the team consider this as a baseline for the project. Commissioners felt that these parkwide elements are critical to the success of the restoration project. The Commission also encouraged the project team to prioritize the restoration of the Canyon Fountain as well as the construction of the concierge and comfort station in Seneca Plaza.

#### *Equity and sustainability*

The SDC appreciated the project team's explanation of their approach to sustainability, equity, and community outreach, but were concerned with the limited documentation. The Commission recommended the project team provide a summary of their outreach strategy and how it has influenced the overall design proposal as well as elements to be prioritized. Commissioners recommended the project team specifically talk about how equity and sustainability were addressed during the community engagement process. The SDC also reiterated their recommendation for the project team to continue to work with community members to think about potential programming for the Box Garden area.

**Action**

The Commission thanked the project team for their presentation of the concept design phase for Freeway Park Improvements Project. The SDC recognized the scale and complexity of the project and commended the project team for the level of thought and detailed approach to the proposed design. The Commission appreciated how the proposed design addressed, lighting, circulation, sightlines, and views, as well as the project team's consideration of equity through proposed programming and providing access for all ages and abilities. The SDC voted, 8-0, to approve the concept design phase for the Freeway Park Improvements project with the following recommendations:

1. Consider using the most prominent lighting element(s) to highlight main pathways through the park, while other lighting elements play a secondary, supportive role in the overall lighting plan
2. Consider providing a canopy plan to show how the tree canopy will evolve over time and overlay with lighting approach.
3. Coordinate with the WSCC to explore ways to improve the Pike St entrance and corridor connecting it to the Upper Lawns and Convention Center Plaza area
4. Consider architectural features and materials for the proposed concierge and comfort stations that will serve as an extension of the landscape design and take cue from the boldness of the original park materials while also distinguishing it from the original park design
5. Provide additional information about access and the hours of operation for the proposed comfort stations.
6. Consider viewing the box gardens themselves as artistic elements; refrain from using art in a way that would reduce or compete with the experience and visibility of the Box Gardens
7. Continue to think about where it would be appropriate to locate art within the park
8. Continue to work with community members to identify potential programming opportunities for Box Gardens area; consider programming that will meet the needs of the community while also serving as a way to attract new user groups to the park
9. Consider the long term operational needs of the proposed programming
10. Think about what elements could be improved through 3rd party funding opportunities and suggested that the existing project budget be used to implement elements that are less likely to receive additional funding
11. Provide a summary of their outreach strategy and how that has influenced the overall design proposal as well as elements to be prioritized. Specifically talk about how equity and sustainability were addressed during the community engagement process.