



APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Greg Nickels
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Mary Johnston
Chair

Andrew Barash

Graham Black

Brendan Connolly

John Hoffman

Julie Parrett

Nathan Polanski

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Guillermo Romano
Executive Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

January 15, 2009

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 4:30 pm

Projects Reviewed

SR 519 Phase II Grade Separation

Rapid Ride Passenger Facilities

Conner Homes West Seattle Junction

Madison Valley Stormwater Improvements

Swale on Yale

Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement

Commissioners Present

Mary Johnston, Chair

Andrew Barash

Graham Black

Brendan Connolly

John Hoffman

Julie Parrett

Nathan Polanski

Dennis Ryan

Norie Sato

Staff Present

Guillermo Romano

Valerie Kinast

Tom Iurino

Shannon Glass



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Celebrating 40 Years 1968-2008



January 15, 2009	Project:	Conner Homes West Seattle Junction
	Phase:	Public benefit review of an underground alley vacation
	Last Reviewed:	August 7, 2008
	Presenters:	Peter Greaves, Weber Thompson Joseph Hines, Weber Thompson
	Attendees:	Beverly Barnett, SDOT Michael Dorcy, DPD Scott Evan, Thomas Rengstorf Associates Nate French, RISD Gabe Hanson, Weber Thompson James Miller, Conner Homes Tracy Record, West Seattle Blog Tom Rengstorf, Thomas Rengstorf Associates
Time: 1.75 hours		(170)

ACTION

The Commission thanks the design team for their presentation of the Conner Homes West Seattle Junction subterranean alley vacation. In a four to five vote the Commission voted not to approve the public benefit package of the project and asks that the following items be addressed:

The public realm impacted by or created by this project include 1) the public streets, 2) nodes where entries or transitions to other passages or spaces occur, 3) the through block passages, 4) the alley.

The public streets

- The Commission would like the design team to focus more resources and energy on the public open space along the streets. It is more probable that the greatest pedestrian volumes will occur in the public right of way on Alaska and California streets than on the alley and through block passages.
- A balance must be achieved between the function of the garage entrance on 42nd Avenue SW and the pedestrian streetscape and safety. The entrance should be as narrow as permitted, the sidewalk should read as continuous and care should be taken to make the pedestrian experience on 42nd Avenue SW as pleasant as possible.
- The width of the sidewalks along the streets, especially in light of these being transit oriented streets in the hub of a lively neighborhood, should be appropriate to the volume of pedestrians and the capacity to support retail activities within the sidewalk. The project designers are encouraged to:
 - Examine successful streets in Seattle that provide for a lively street life, with retail activities extending into the sidewalk. Apply those characteristics and dimensions to this project.
 - Coordinate sidewalk/streetscape design with the Rapid Ride facilities being developed by King County Metro. These shelters, waiting areas and information signs should be considered as design influences to this project.

Nodes

- The Commissioners appreciate the idea of creating nodes and asks the designer to consider strengthening the nodes. The nodes should be legible as clear gateways or portals from one public area to another. Common wayfinding elements installed at each of the nodes will give clarity to the pedestrian ways as a comprehensive network.

Midblock passages

- **The Commission is concerned about the efficacy of the midblock passages and clarity of wayfinding. It asks the designers to think about how the message is imparted that the passageways continue on to the next street and do not just end at the alley. Perhaps art and/or signage offer a solution.**
- **Please refine the solutions proposed along the midblock passages to create congruence of design of the site and the property that abuts it. Clarify the differing character of the east and west midblock passages and the themes that are proposed there.**
- **The Commissioners point out that there is much potential in the midblock passages because they are removed from the street. They encourage the team to refine the design with this in mind. Consider placing the furniture and other elements in a way that takes advantage of this otherness to create spaces instead of just encouraging people to move through.**

Alley

The fact that the project borders both sides of the alley for only a portion of the alley poses a unique design challenge. The design must both tie into the segment where functions, pedestrian amenities and other features can not be controlled by the project proponents, and rise to the potential for setting a positive precedent for later development. To this end, clarity of the wayfinding system is crucial.

- **Commissioners understand that in West Seattle many alleys serve an unusual function, including being host to business entrances and encouraging pedestrian activity. At the same time there is residual concern about finding a balance in what is a working alley and also a pedestrian environment.**

Project Presentation

Project Background and Context

The area is 2900 square feet, the alley between the parcel on the corner of SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW, and SW Alaska Street and 42nd Avenue SW. The reason for the vacation is to minimize excavation depth for the parking garage. The ground level retail experience is optimized on both street fronts and the mid block connection, in keeping with the 1999 West Seattle plan. The vehicular and pedestrian access between the buildings will be maintained.

The residential level will be on top of the retail podium, stepped back to create an alley at mid block. As discussed at the last review, the Green Factor requirements are met on the east building, including all of the ground level and street front. On the west building, the requirements are exceeded.

The design refinements, based on the last review, focus on

- Increased sidewalk width on California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street
- Eddies and nodes for opportunities to step out of pedestrian flow
- Site lines from the mid block pedestrian pass toward the loading dock of the east building
- Duplication of accessible ADA ramps between the alley and 42nd Avenue SW
- Marking the continuation of the pedestrian portion of the alley from the point of intersection from California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street
- Continuity of the pedestrian experience at sidewalk and mid block connections
- Depth of residential entries on California Avenue SW

Increased Sidewalk Width

Because of the property depth, the residential portion is set back on SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW. The sidewalk width is increased, and there are islands of permeable paving between the street trees. The building cannot be shifted to the south because the proposed residential portion is fifteen feet from the property line.

However, the east building has been shifted one-and-a-half feet to the south to increase the north end sidewalk width. Most of this building is moved back from the property line on 42nd Avenue SW to allow the extra sidewalk width.

Eddies and Nodes

On all of the retail frontages, the columns are set back one foot from the property lines. Storefront glazing is set back one foot, and the doors set back another two feet. This allows crenellated edge and allows opportunities to step away from the sidewalk flow. There are recessed corners, as hollows with eighteen foot height to the soffit. There is a similar node at the middle of the alley, and the node at the top and bottom of the alley connection from 42nd Avenue SW.

Loading Dock

The loading dock is shifted thirty feet to the north. There is storefront glazing for both building's amenity spaces (exercise room, club room, and leasing space) to further activate the pedestrian experience in the alley.

Duplicate Handicap Ramp

The duplicate handicap ramp has been eliminated, following conversations with Harbor Properties. The plan uses their ramp on the other side of the property line to accommodate ADA passage. Planting bed take up the slope differential, including planted trees and steps to the sidewalk level.

Pedestrian Access to SW Alaska Street

There is differentiation in the pavement patterns, extending from the crosswalk in the alley to SW Alaska Street. The paving concept is similar to a basket weave, without overpowering the City of Seattle standard paving. It is envisioned as series of "runners" – warm color runs east west, with exposed aggregate. A darkened concrete border runs from north to south to connect those pieces. A similar move has been used to create "shadows" of building lines. There is an existing tow-by-two paving grid. Together, these define the pedestrian realm. The goal was to do something more playful than City of Seattle standard paving, without standing out as an anomaly in the neighborhood.

Activation of Retail Connection

On the corner, where the alley abuts SW Alaska Street, the area is recessed six feet. There are additional areas of continuous storefront glazing and entries mid block on California Avenue SW. The storefront wraps around the 42nd Avenue SW corner. Seventy-seven feet of storefront glazing marks the amenities for the residential apartments.

Recess at residential entry on California Avenue SW

A portion of the retail is at the one story level, in order to knit into the existing retail on California Avenue SW.

Area Calculations

The overall area calculation results in a 2,900 square foot subterranean alley vacation, which adds 6,450 square feet of public benefit space.

The area of landscape on the south side of the mid block pedestrian connection adds 670 square feet. The relative area calculation of the feature paving totals 8,150 square feet. The series of paving works together to create a collage. There is also a drainable joint in the alley, such as a grass strip. There is a series of four-foot benches, bollards to mark corners and edges of the pedestrian path along the alley, bike racks, trash bins and ash urns. There are glass and steel overhead canopies, and a crank-out fabric awning. The storefront line is continuous on the sidewalk sides of the project, along California Avenue SW and 42nd Avenue SW.

Public Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT

This is clearly a thoughtful and responsive design. However, SDOT is concerned that there is a lot of work to make the mid block crossing and alley, since it is a working alley. It is problematic that the mid block crossing is a disjointed alley connection; from one block to another the pass-through is not visible. SDOT is looking for a more signature element or gateway project. There is concern about other users and developments along the block.

Michael Dorcy, DPD

From the design review process, this has to go back to the Board. There have been significant changes. DPD recognizes that this alley will remain busy and must retain alley functions. Code requires access from the alley. Access from 42nd Avenue SE will require a design review or departure. The board's willingness to grant that departure will depend on the corner building on California Avenue SW.

Commissioners' Comments and Questions

The presentation is incredibly thorough and clear, with great graphics.

Is alley two-way or one-way?

Two-way.

There could be a lot of traffic in the alley that could conflict with pedestrians?

There is a differentiated pedestrian path outside of the designated twenty-foot alley width.

Are you aware of the rapid transit concepts for California Avenue SW?

Not aware of it yet. While there has been discussion that SW Alaska Street would be corridor, it has not progressed beyond street trees.

The benches along California Avenue SW look like they run perpendicular to street; it is not clear who will use those. Is there a bus stop?

Trying to create room between the planters to move out of pedestrian flow, or step out of parked car.

It seems like there is too much going on there; every notch has a trashcan or bench, which too much furniture for such a busy street.

On the corner, there seems to be a conflict of scale, bulk, and height. Would like the board to comment on whether energy should be focused on outside corners, or interior walkways.

Encourage opening up the corner as much as possible, for people waiting to cross; also reconcile the basket weave concept. It is an important spot in relation to the street.

Wonder about the discontinuity in the alley; for instance, the distance on 42nd Avenue SW and the alley. Could be something of interest at that end, besides a sign. Afraid that paving alone will not make it clear.

Tried to do that with marker and bollards and paving differentiation.

How high are the adjacent buildings?

One-story retail bases are eighteen-nineteen feet; and there are six residential stories above that. The majority of the retail on California Avenue SW is one- or two-story, with height varying fifteen to thirty-five feet.

Appreciate the landscape, but wonder how vibrant it will be.

The strategy employed is a stronger landscape at the midblock; along the north-south connection, it is possible to take in the building more to allow more generous planting.

It is thirty percent wider than the standard alley width

An interesting and important façade is the residential amenity along the mid block cut; its design as a beacon and marker will be important

That hollow is below the podium, and is lit behind the green element. It is a balancing act between the pedestrians and creating an interesting environment.

Wonder if that cutout could signal that the corner is a turning point

There is a screening element there. The design team can look at how to make that ninety degree bend stronger.

Might look at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm.

The marker might be an architectural element, such as an awning, to understand something is happening there. The mid block connection is readable in site plan, but it is not yet clear from the pedestrian experience.

Are the locations of the public benefits serving the project, or the public realm? Given the fact that the public realm is more important on the right-of-way, it is inside out. The street sidewalk widths on those rights-of-ways are not commensurate with the arterials. The augmentation of the alley at the expense of the wider sidewalks on the public streets is the wrong choice. The public benefits are good, but misplaced.

Recommend a series of canopies that wrap around corner retail space. Would be nice to have secondary retail entries on retail sides.

There is a grade change there and the thirteen-foot minimum is rapidly approaching.

There is a tradition of alley life in West Seattle. Understand the concerns about wayfinding, but believe that the residents will understand what is going on. Look at these spaces as alternative eddies. Believe that variety of experience is a good thing, and is not necessarily detrimental to street life.

Like the connection from California Avenue SW. Recommend echoing that theme to create a sense that the path continues, with some kind of visual cues.

Would like to see the pass through as more space-like than street-like. Consider how the benches are aligned or how to include sculptural elements.

Want to encourage options, depending on what retail is there, rather than dictating one option. The same level of detail and energy goes into both the alley and California Avenue SW. Considering how the alley functions like Post Alley or Alley 24.

Perhaps the alley arcade is where the variety or counterbalance can come in.

At each end of the alley there is a portal, with skeletal remnants of that portal in the alley, and opportunities for planting vines.

The setbacks on SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW are not a problem; do not see how the width can be increased

More emphasis has been placed on the bollards in order to provide access to the future park.

Think that the public will get the most benefit on California Avenue SW, SW Alaska Street, and 42nd Avenue SW.

There might be opportunities in the ramp to join other circulation routes. The ramp is long and narrow. Perhaps there could be a series of fewer steps, with landings or sitting spaces.

Wonder if the ramp could have more sophistication, such as carved spaces for seating.

One issue with that is meeting the Green Factor requirements.

One of the listed public benefits is exceeding standard landscape requirements.

That applies to the east building.

Recommends coordinating with the Rapid Ride program.