



APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Mike McGinn
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Julie Bassuk
Chair

Mary Fialko

Laurel Kunkler

Shannon Loew

Tom Nelson

Julie Parrett

Osama Quotah

Norie Sato

Donald Vehige

Debbie Harris

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

June 21, 2012

Convened 8:00am
Adjourned 4:30pm

Projects Reviewed

Amazon Alley Vacations at Lenora and Westlake
Broad Street IRIS Holdings Street Vacation
Block 93 Alley Vacation

Commissioners Present

Julie Bassuk, Chair
Shannon Loew (excused from 8:00-8:30am)
Osama Quotah (excused from 8:00-8:30am and 10:30am-12:30pm)
Debbie Harris (excused from 8:00-8:30am)
Laurel Kunkler
Tom Nelson
Norie Sato
Julie Parrett (excused from 8:00-8:30am and from 1:00-4:00pm)
Mary Fialko (excused from 8:00-8:30am)
Don Vehige (excused from 8:00-9:15am)

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino



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June 21, 2012

Project: **Block 93 Alley Vacation**

Phase: Alley Vacation

Last Reviewed: N/A

Presenters: Sharon Colman, Vulcan
Patrick Gordon, ZGF
Dan Simpson, ZGF
Allyn Stellmacher, ZGF
Kris Snider, Hewitt

Attendees: Beverly Barnett, SDOT
Lance Hayes, ZGF
Marni Heffron, Heffron Transportation
Masaye Harrison, ZGF
Matthew Curry, South Lake Union Chamber of Commerce
Phil Fujii, Vulcan
Rachel Ben-Shmuel, Vulcan
Randal Bennett, ZGF
Shelley DaRonche, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research
Whitney Hall, ZGF

Time: 2:00pm-4:30pm

Summary of Project Presentation

The design team presented Vulcan's plans to develop two six-story buildings on the block bordered by Mercer, 9th Ave., Westlake Ave., and Republican St. The buildings, separated by a mid-block pedestrian connection, would include 375,000 square feet of office space and 15,000 square feet of retail space, 546 parking stalls below grade, and pedestrian connections above the first floor. The development is targeted for LEED Gold. To enable this building configuration, Vulcan was requesting to vacate the northern section of the alley that runs parallel to 9th Ave N and Westlake Ave N just south of Mercer, and to dedicate a new leg of alley extending east to Westlake Ave.

The team presented designs with and without the alley vacation. They explained that the design that requires a vacation does not allow for more FAR than the scheme that retains the alley, but that there was the advantage of being able to better connect the parking below grade. They explained three advantages, from the public standpoint, of the design that requires a vacation: Improved traffic circulation, improved pedestrian connection, and a reduction in bulk/scale. The alley connects to Mercer, and the increase in vehicle trips in the no-vacation alternative would lead to complications in the flow of Mercer. The design with the vacation would eliminate the alley's intersection with Mercer, and move vehicles to Westlake. Although diverting the alley to Westlake is less than optimal because the streetcar is there, the transportation consultant explained it is a better solution than either Mercer, or 9th Ave. The designers explained that the development with the vacation also has the advantage of being able to connect pedestrians east west through a mid block crossing. They also described how removing the alley breaks down the scale of the development visually, shifting it from long north south buildings to smaller east-west buildings, on an unusually long, 400 foot block.

In the question and answer discussion, the proponents explained that there are few utilities in the alley and that it is possible to relocate these. The floorplate size of the building along Mercer was also given: 71,000 square feet, 140 ft. by 120 ft. on the second floor, the largest level. And it was clarified that the connecting structures, above the mid block crossing were to be used as walkways, not usable space. The use of the ground level space along Mercer toward the west was explained. It would likely be conference center space but will depend on tenant needs. The elevation change along Mercer was discussed as was how the building responds to that. The site slopes up 8 feet from east to west, and the ground floor of the building would be below grade where it meets 9th Ave. The issue of how the north building would receive deliveries was discussed, given the alley would terminate further south. Deliveries would be taken down through parking garage and over to north building, or through the midblock crossing. There was a discussion about shifting the space from alley use to an internal pedestrian connection and open space, and whether this was to the detriment of the public realm of the streets, especially Mercer. Commissioners were of differing opinion, but agreed the public realm along Mercer was very important and needed to be addressed.

The team also introduced its public benefit package which included: the mid-block connection, conceived of as a partially covered pedestrian galleria divided into three spaces, one with food carts, and designed in conjunction with an artist; and enhanced streetscape improvements and green stormwater infrastructure along Westlake, 9th, Republican and Mercer.

Department comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, explained that the petition to vacate the alley was only recently received and hadn't been circulated for comment from the utilities, other departments, etc.

Representatives from the South Lake Union Chamber of Commerce and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center stated their support of the development.

ACTION (by Quotah)

The Seattle Design Commission did not approve, by a vote of 4-5, the Urban Design Merit of the Block 93 Alley Vacation. This is the first of two approvals needed before the Design Commission will recommend approval of the vacation to the SDOT Director.

The commission appreciated the presentation, graphics, and project's retention of some portion of the alley. They found the breaking down of the buildings' scale a positive, and appreciated the idea of bike improvements on 9th Ave, and increased areas for pedestrians. The commission made the following recommendations:

- **Do not turn the project's back to Mercer, given that Mercer is currently being re-constructed as an urban boulevard at great cost to the City. Provide information on how you're integrating with the design of Mercer; show elevations on Mercer. Contribute to the public realm of Mercer as a boulevard and consider both it and the mid-block crossing together as you refine your strategy for activation.**
- **Consider the project's impact on the life of all adjoining streets – Westlake, Mercer, 9th Ave. and Republican. Be strategic about activation on each street.**
- **Think holistically about parking under consideration of all the new traffic that will be generated.**
- **Provide information on utilities, including stormwater flow in the alley and midblock connection.**
- **Develop flexible solutions to improve service access to the north building.**

Commissioner Fialko voted no because the team should look at the design at a greater scale, bigger than one that focused just on the project's spaces.

Commissioner Sato voted no because the project took life off the streets by focusing activities and entrances inward to the mid block crossing. While the new L-shaped alley makes sense for the cars and trucks, perhaps, the strategy for the plaza/mid block crossing needs further study as the strategy for the development.

Commissioner Harris voted no because the project took life off the streets. While she understood the concept of the new mid-block crossing, it's private and not public, and she would like to see emphasis of activity on the public streets.

Commissioner Vehige voted no because, while there is a lot to like about the design and an alley vacation is necessary, the project turned its back to Mercer St, an urban boulevard. This is not yet the solution.

Commissioner Nelson voted no because he wasn't confident that the design diagram presented could be altered sufficiently to create one that would be considered to provide urban merit, due to taking focus away from Mercer St.

The commission also offered the following recommendations for the team's proposed public benefit package:

- **Propose items that are a true public benefit, such as design elements like building setbacks that expand the public realm, connections to the neighborhood, and landscaping beyond what is required. Providing spaces for retail, even though they may activate the public realm, do not count as public benefit. Do not count as public benefit, design elements that primarily benefit the tenant.**
- **Fully explain the sustainability features. Think beyond the goal of LEED Gold toward a more integrated sustainability strategy, such as with stormwater solutions. Elevate and make more visible the sustainability story, and incorporate it into the public realm.**
- **Further think through and refine the design of the food carts and spaces. They need to be pleasant spaces and have access to utilities.**
- **Consider developing aggressive programs to support alternatives to single occupancy vehicle commutes.**
- **Expand on ideas for bike infrastructure, both for parking on-site and for passing along the edges of the site.**
- **Provide information on the private benefits and value of a development where the alley is vacated.**