

# Willow Crossing Street Vacation

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Mayor

**Samuel Asefa**  
Director, OPCD

**Ben de Rubertis**, Chair

**Brianna Holan**, Vice Chair

**Justin Clark**

**Laura Haddad**

**Mark Johnson**

**Rick Krochalis**

**Amalia Leighton**

**Vinita Sidhu**

**Elaine Wine**

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## Commissioners Present

Ben de Rubertis, Chair  
Brianna Holan, Vice Chair  
Justin Clark  
Laura Haddad  
Rick Krochalis  
Elaine Wine  
Vinita Sidhu

## Commissioners Excused

Mark Johnson  
Amalia Leighton

## Project Description

The applicant is proposing to vacate an unimproved segment of 39th Ave S, south of its intersection with S Willow St, in the Othello Neighborhood. If the vacation is approved, a 7-story mixed use building would be constructed. The development would include ground floor commercial spaces along ML King Jr Way S, 211 residential units, amenities for residents and the public, and below grade parking with 42 parking stalls. All of the residential units planned for the development will be for individuals earning 60% of area median income (AMI) or less.

## Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) second review of the Willow Crossing Street Vacation project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the public benefit proposal for the project. The SDC did not take an action during today's meeting. The SDC provided several recommendations to be addressed prior to the next meeting on September 19th, 2019.

## Recusals and Disclosures

None

**September 5, 2019**

1:30 - 3:00 pm

**Type**

Street Vacation

**Phase**

Public benefit

**Previous Reviews**[6/6/19](#)**Presenters**Emily Thompson  
GMD DevelopmentJeff Wall  
Studio 19 Architects**Attendees**

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Dick Burkhardt

OSCAT

Moiria Gray

SDOT

Genevieve Hale-Case

GMD Development

Tom Mack

Office of Housing

Emily Scali

Neighborhood Resident

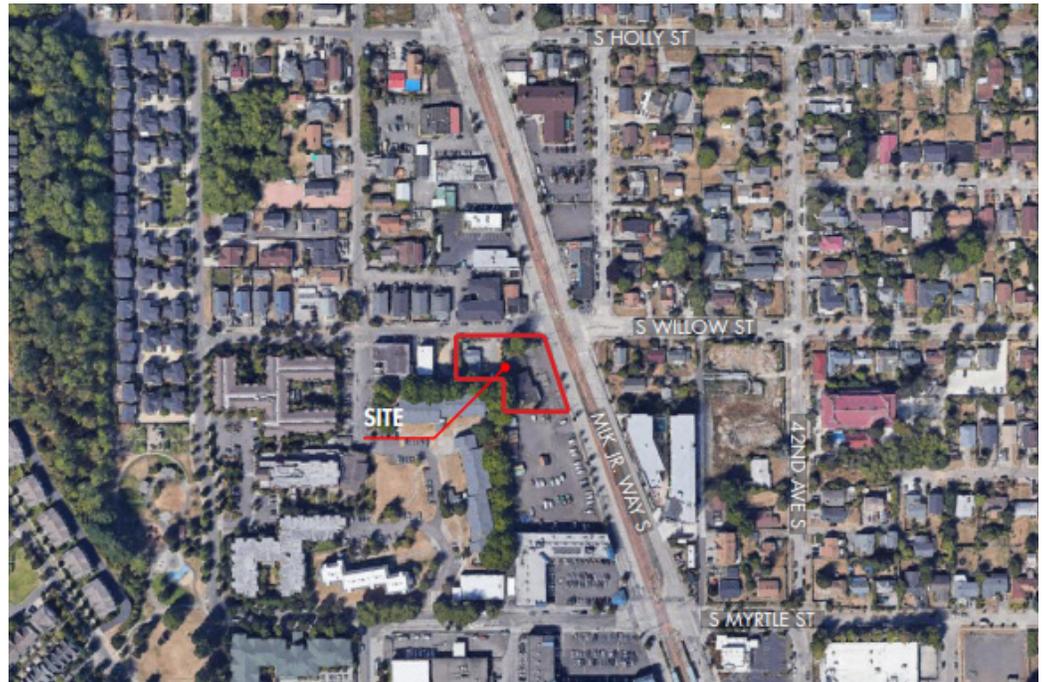


Figure 1: Project location

**Summary of Presentation**

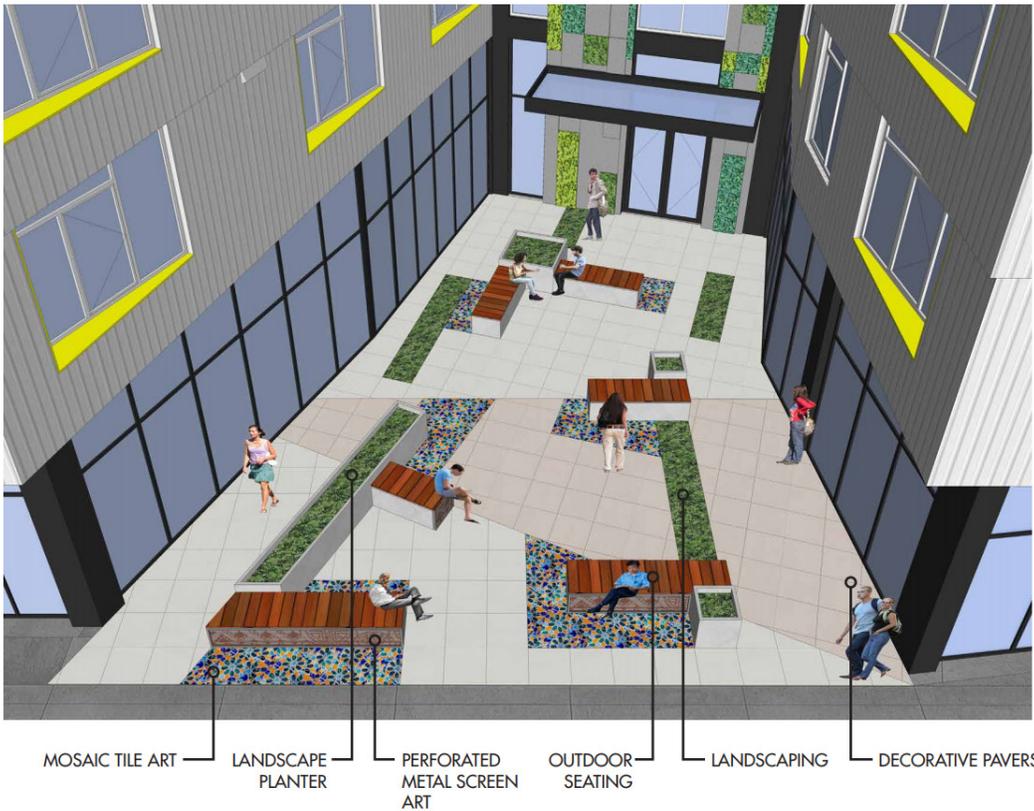
Emily Thompson, of GMD Development, and Jeff Walls, of Studio 19 Architects, presented the public benefit proposal for the Willow Crossing Street Vacation project. The project team began by providing background information, site context, and an update on the design and development process. The team then reviewed information provided at the subcommittee meeting held on August 5th, 2019 as well as recommendations from the June 6th, 2019 SDC meeting.

The project team then presented the public benefit proposal for the project. The proposal includes plazas along Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Willow St, right-of-way (ROW) improvements, gateway artwork, and offsite donations. The MLK Plaza has been redesigned to be more accessible to the public rather than serving as an extension of the building and adjacent commercial space. While residential access from the plaza will remain, the updated design removes access from the plaza to adjacent commercial spaces. The commercial spaces will have access to outdoor space adjacent to Martin Luther King Jr. Way. The updated plaza design also includes several benches, mosaic tile, and lawn strips as well as decorative metal screens and pavers. The Willow plaza is located adjacent to the building façade along Willow Street and will include elements such as benches, landscape planters, bike racks, mosaic tile, decorative metal screens, street lights, and an expanded sidewalk. *See figures 2 & 3 for more detail.*

The proposed gateway art element includes replicating the proposed artwork design located on the northeast corner of the building on metal screens, tile mosaics located on benches throughout the site. The proposal also includes a continuous landscape planter along Martin Luther King Jr. Way as well as two street lights along Willow St.

**Agency Comments**

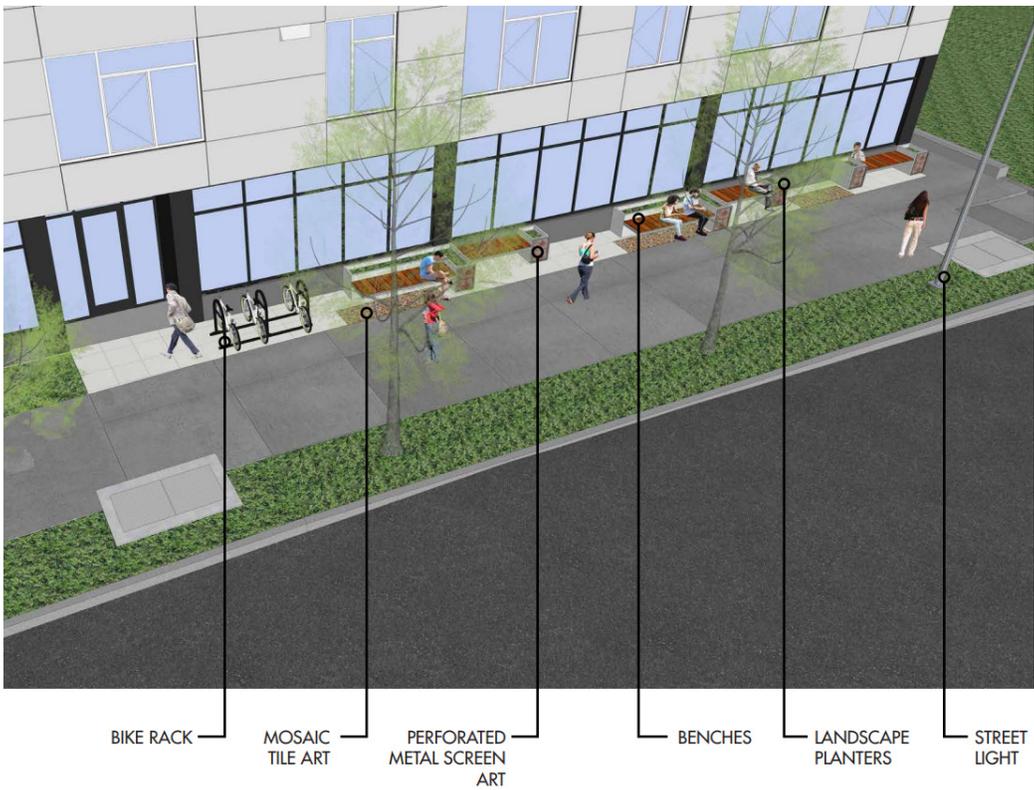
**Beverly Barnett**, SDOT, agreed with the comments made by the Office of Housing. Beverly Barnett then mentioned that after having an early briefing with City Council it was clear they were very supportive of the project. They then stated that, while there are no major issues with the project, there is a lot



**DESIGN REVISIONS BASED ON SDC COMMENTS**

- Remove all commercial doors in MLK Plaza.
- Reorient plaza space and seating to open up to the Right of Way and allow public better access to plaza.
- Add additional seating to plaza.
- Add additional landscaping to plaza.
- Integrate mosaic tiles and perforated metal screen artwork into plaza. Artwork will be consistent with corner gateway element at NE corner of site.
- Paving has been revised to have different colors/textures.

Figure 2: MLK Plaza design proposal



**DESIGN REVISIONS BASED ON SDC COMMENTS**

- Revised design of benches and landscaping.
- Revised location of decorative paving to be only within property boundary.
- Integrate mosaic tiles and perforated metal screen artwork into plaza. Artwork will be consistent with corner gateway element at NE corner of site.
- Added two street lights along S Willow Street.

Figure 3: Willow Walkway design proposal

of work that still needs to be done such as continuing through the Street Improvement Permit (SIP) Process, providing a traffic analysis, and working with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) to figure out curbside management as well as starting the administrative review process. Beverly Barnett mentioned that the project design has not been finalized and that things are subject to change as a result of the SIP and administrative review processes. They then stated that they are still unsure if the public benefit proposal is adequate enough and that project team should provide an overall vision for the public benefit proposal, explaining how the proposal will accomplish community goals.

**Tom Mack**, Office of Housing, stated that the City's Office of Housing has worked with the project team for a while and explained that they had provided the original loan for the project team to purchase property and the office of housing. Tom Mack then said that they are very supportive of the project which will allow for a denser project within the neighborhood. Tom Mack also mentioned that the amount of units proposed allows for the project team to build the project without permanent support from the City. With funding from the City, the project is now fully funded, but the City funding is only good if used prior to the end of the year. Tom Mack then explained that, if the project is delayed past the end of this year, the project team would lose the allotted funding from the City and would have to reapply next year.

### Public Comments

**Emily Scali**, Neighborhood resident, voiced their support for project, specifically public benefit proposal. Emily Scali stated that the project and related public benefit appear to be a continuation of work to activate spaces in the neighborhood, and that the proposed MLK plaza will work well as a gathering space. They then mentioned that providing additional planting material, benches, and lighting along Willow St will better activate the street and will serve as a benefit to the community.

### Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Onsite public space
- Onsite art
- ROW improvements
- Offsite donation
- Social equity program
- Commensurate value of project

#### *Onsite public space*

While the SDC appreciated the project team's effort in orienting the MLK plaza to better connect with the street and voiced their support for including the plaza as a public benefit element, Commissioners agreed the proposed design needs several improvements. The commission is concerned with several of the design elements such as the narrow pathways, mosaic tile, and grass strips. Commissioners are worried the proposed design is overly complicated and limits circulation within and through the plaza. The SDC strongly recommended the project team revisit the proposed design of MLK plaza to consider circulation within the space as well as circulation into the adjacent building.

Commissioners also recommended the project consider the durability and long term maintenance of the MLK Plaza. The SDC then recommended the project team simplify the materiality and number of objects located within the MLK Plaza. Commissioners also questioned the use of tile on the ground plane and recommended the project team not use the tile as paving. Commissioners mentioned that it would have been beneficial for the landscape architect to have attended the meeting.

The Commission then discussed access and use of the plaza for the adjacent commercial spaces. While commissioners agreed that any outdoor seating associated with the commercial uses should occur on Martin Luther King Jr. Way, they also agreed that the project should provide access to directly connect the commercial space with the plaza.

The SDC then discussed the Willow St public space. Commissioners acknowledged the community support for providing amenities along Willow St. Although commissioners supported the use of mosaic tiles, the reiterated their concern for using tile as a paving material. The Commission also questioned the location of the bike racks and encouraged the project team to relocate them closer to the main public plaza and

commercial space along Martin Luther King Jr. Way

#### *Onsite art*

The SDC recommended the project team remove the gateway art integration category from the public benefit proposal, moving the perforated metal screen and mosaic tile elements to other categories so that they are not considered as an art element.

#### *ROW improvements*

The SDC liked the project team's proposal for ROW improvements along Martin Luther King Jr. Way, but recommended the team provide more information on the types of material and planting being proposed. The SDC then recommended the project team explore moving improvements along Willow St into the adjacent ROW, as long as it doesn't require an annual fee to do so.

The Commission then discussed the street lighting element and recommended the project team remove street lighting from the public benefit package.

#### *Offsite donation*

The SDC agreed with providing funding for a portion of improvements to Inflorescence Park, stating the importance of the project to the surrounding community. Commissioners were also encouraged to hear that the project was fully funded, but recommended the project team provide information on the total funding allocation for the project

#### *Social equity program*

The SDC recognized the importance of social equity that is provided through this project. Commissioners also recognized the importance this project which will provide affordable housing onsite. The Commission encouraged the project team to show how they are addressing social equity, anti-displacement, and affordability issues. Commissioners also encouraged the project team to explain how they are implementing the community marketing plan for this project.

#### *Commensurate value of project*

The SDC commended the project team for providing affordable housing and recognized that this is something the City is advocating for. The Commission strongly recommended the project team quantify the value of the project so it is documented through this review process.

### **Action**

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation of the public benefit package for the Willow Crossing Street Vacation. The commission commended the project team for providing affordable housing in the Othello neighborhood. Commissioners also appreciated the inclusion of onsite public spaces and a continuous planter along Martin Luther King Jr. Way. The SDC did not take an action during today's meeting. Rather, the commission provided the following recommendations to be addressed prior to the next SDC meeting:

1. Revisit the design of MLK plaza with circulation in mind. Specifically think about circulation into the building and through the spaces within the plaza
2. Simplify materiality and number of objects within the MLK plaza
3. Consider maintenance, durability and ADA access of the MLK plaza
4. Reconsider mosaic tile as paving due to the non-tactile nature of the material
5. Remove the Gateway art Integration category from the public benefit matrix and move the perforated metal screen and mosaic tile elements to other categories.
6. Provide more detail on the benches, plants, and paving materials
7. Explore moving improvements along Willow St into the ROW, as long as it doesn't require ROW fees
8. Remove street lights from the public benefit package
9. Provide more information on the total funding allocation of Inflorescence Park
10. Quantify value of the project
11. Ensure the cost of materials specified in the matrix is sufficient to build with high quality materials