

**University District
Future Development and Urban Design Working Group Meeting #7
October 4, 2012**

Draft Meeting Notes

Members in attendance: Nancy Amidei, Rebecca Barnes, Chuck Broches, David Cohan, Mark Griffin, Ron Moe-Lobeda, Barbara Quinn, Ruedi Risler, Matt Roewe, Kyle Rowe, Alfred Mustey Shiga, Scott Soules, Roger Wagoner, Patty Whisler

Also in attendance: Kateri Schlessman, Suni Pak, Marty Curry, Matt Hoehnen, Jeffrey Linn, Max Blume

Staff in Attendance: Brian Scott (facilitator), Susan McLain (Seattle Department of Planning and Development-DPD), Dave LaClergue (DPD)

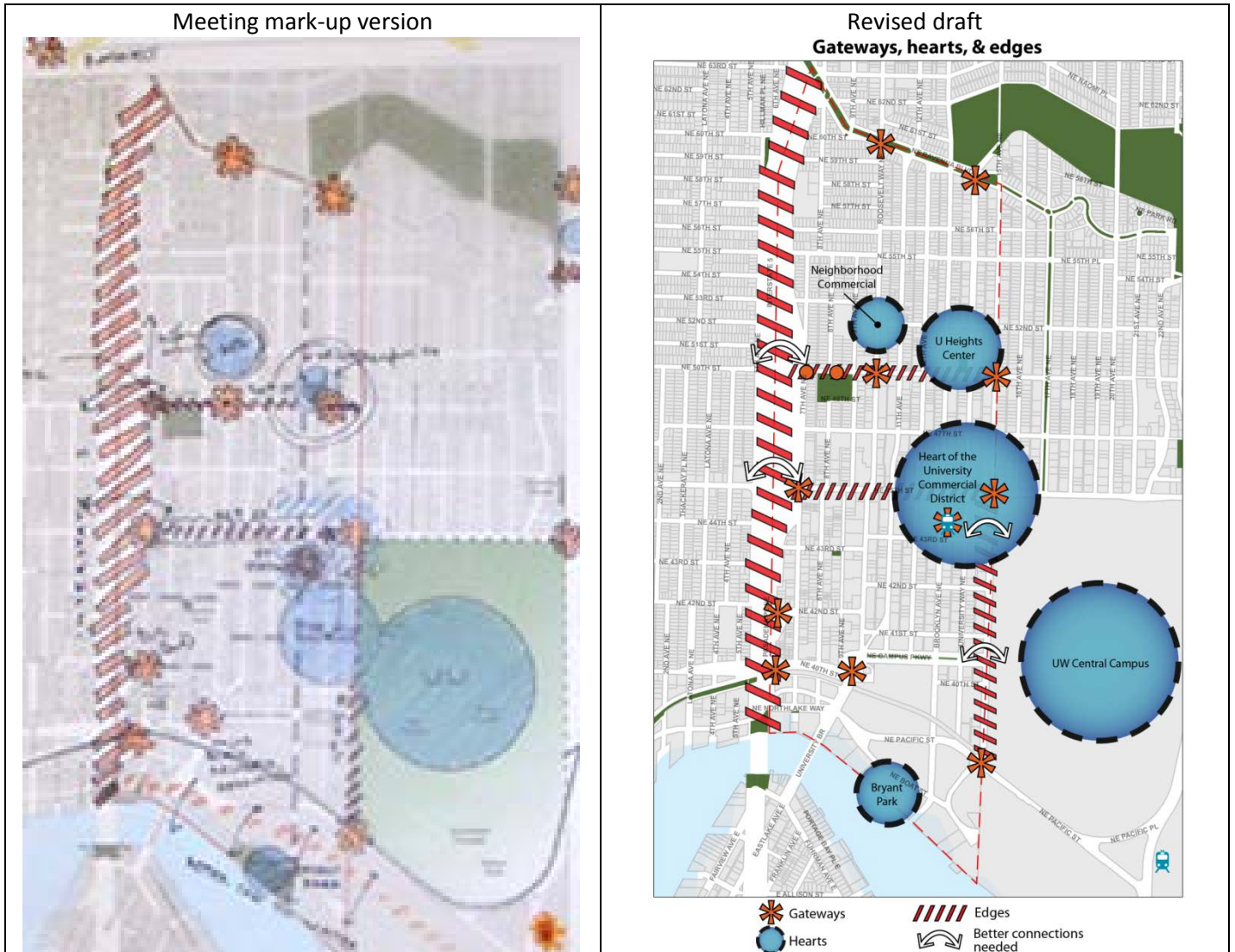
Overview

This meeting started with a detailed look forward to the remaining meetings and topics. Brian proposed a schedule through early 2013, focused on finalizing recommendations for the U District Commercial Revitalization Report and the Urban Design Framework.

Dave LaClergue led an exercise to discuss “gateways, hearts, and edges” in the U District. Gateways represent the major points of transition into the neighborhood, especially those that are worthy of special treatment (through architecture, art, or specific public realm improvements). Hearts are the centers of neighborhood activity, including social, commercial, educational, and recreational activity. Edges are the boundaries that tend to cut a neighborhood off from surrounding neighborhoods. All of these categories help organize and define the character of neighborhood areas, and help with navigation. There was discussion about differentiating between different levels of importance and categories of gateways.

The group started with a draft figure prepared by DPD, and made additions and revisions to that map. They also discussed some of the specific ways in which gateways should be treated, how hearts should be supported, and how connections across edges could be improved. Following a presentation on building heights, the group discussed what qualities are most important for midrise and highrise buildings in the U District, and conducted a sticker exercise to recommend increased heights for further analysis.

Summary of “What We Heard”



Gateways

- More gateways should be called out on the map, including
 - Ravenna intersections with the Ave and Roosevelt
 - Both light rail stations
 - Where Pacific enters the U District, both under the freeway and at 15th
 - 15th Ave & 45th St. intersection
- West gateway on 50th should be more of a “processional gateway” with special treatment starting at the freeway and building to the main entry at 50th and Roosevelt
- Think about uses at gateway locations, not just physical improvements.
- Traffic calming is a high priority where 50th and 45th enter the west edge of the U District – those are very auto-centric locations; aggressive driving has negative impacts on the feel of the sidewalks and also spills over onto side streets as people try to break away from the traffic.

- Cresting the top of the hill on 45th (coming from the east) feels like an entry well before you hit 15th. BUT gateway recommendations should focus on places where the group wants to recommend specific changes; locations outside of the planning area are less important.
- Gateways should announce the neighborhood, & also help with orientation for all modes.
- The north end of the University Bridge is a confusing tangle for pedestrians and bicycles. It's a freeway approach applied in a neighborhood context – it's worth studying a major reconfiguration, and having that study could help secure transportation dollars to make it happen.

Hearts

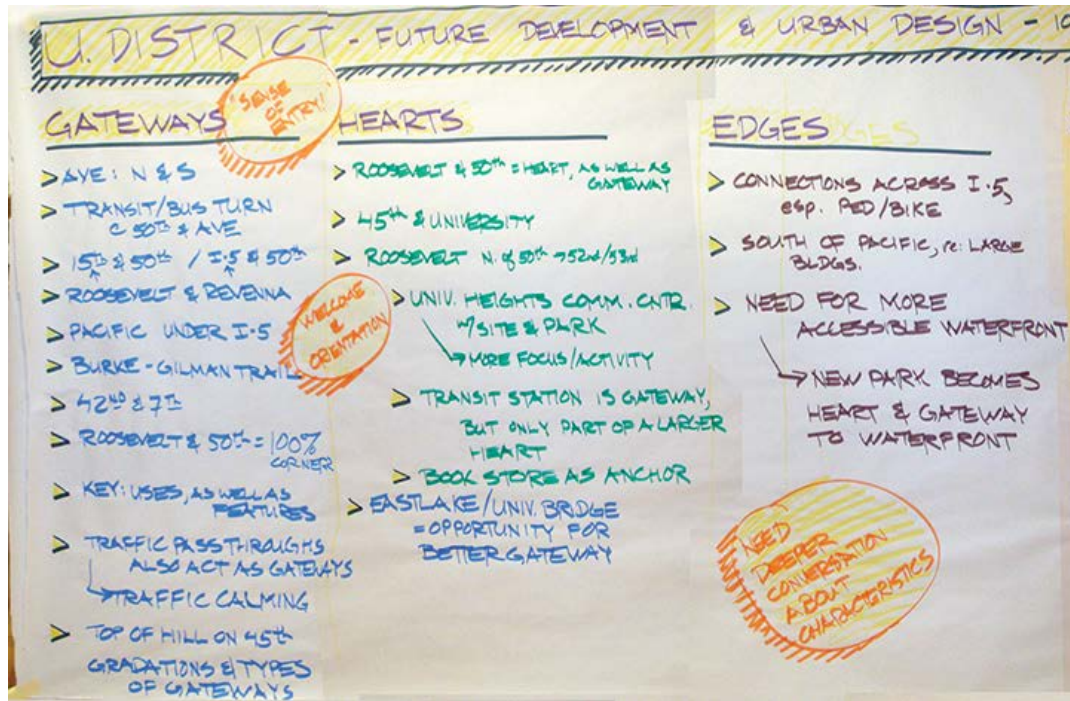
- Put more emphasis on U Heights Center. It's becoming a major hub of activity already, and will increase with the expanded park.
- Add a small "neighborhood commercial" heart at 52nd St and Roosevelt. That's where a lot of the neighbors go walking and conduct business.
- Move the Ave heart to be centered at 45th, not further down (think of bookstore as the epicenter). And make the Brooklyn station a gateway, not a heart.

Edges

- Safer ped/bike crossings over the freeway are the top priority
- We should do whatever possible to improve the pedestrian environment on 45th – wider sidewalks through street-level setbacks, provide more landscape separation...
- As discussed previously, opening the campus where feasible along 15th would be a major improvement.
- South of Pacific, you tend to feel separated from the water – seek to increase access. Counterpoint: don't disregard the working waterfront, which brings jobs and commercial diversity to the U District. The new Bryant Park will be a major improvement in this regard.

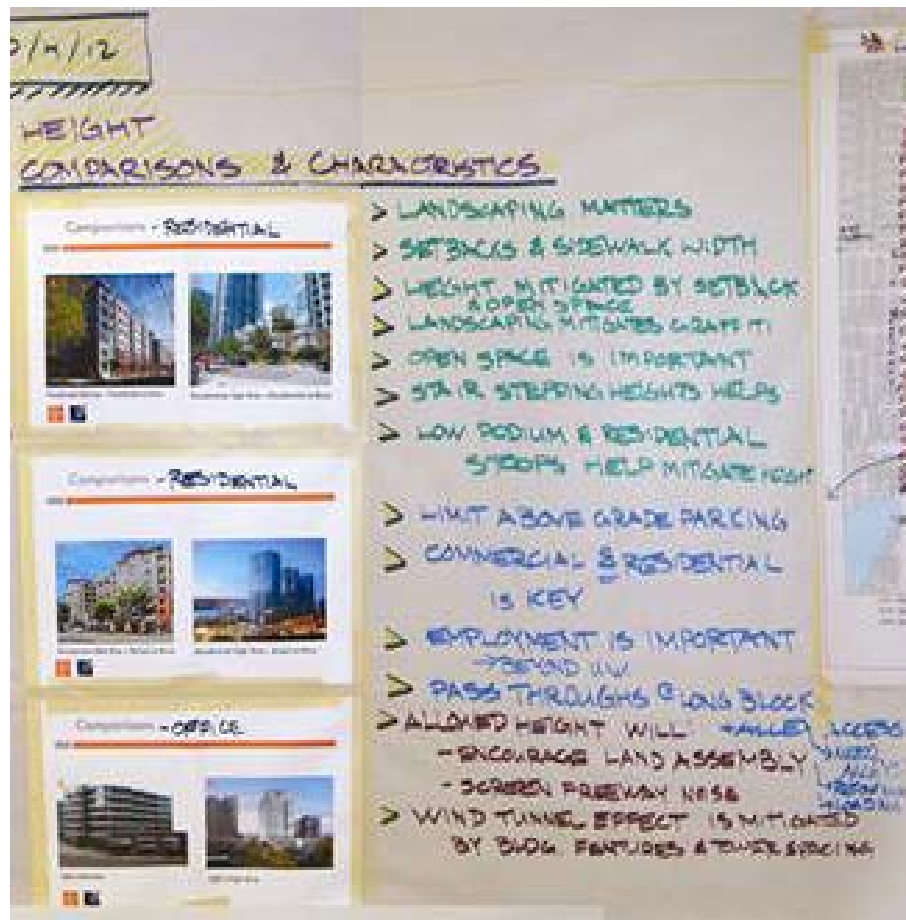
General

- This topic is worthy of much more discussion, possibly a full meeting – ideally we'd get further into questions of how to treat each gateway and heart through future zoning, capital improvements, etc.



Increased height discussion

- Landscaping at the street level plays an important role in determining what a building “feels like” at the street edge.
- Ensuring spacing between upper levels of buildings (tower spacing) could make a big difference in how dense a neighborhood feels.
- Wider sidewalks and some setback can help, no matter what the building height
- Open space on or near a building site helps create a sense of spaciousness in the public realm even with buildings that are taller
- Upper-level setbacks can also reduce the bulk of highrise at street level
- Discourage above-grade parking, and screen any of it that is allowed. Keep in mind that belowground parking is very expensive and affects building cost, particularly in locations where underground structures are limited by physical conditions
- It’s crucial that the zoning encourages a mix of both residential and commercial development.
- For the neighborhood to mature, there need to be large employers in addition to UW. To get this kind of development, higher height limits are necessary.
- Pedestrian pass-throughs on long blocks would make a huge improvement to U District’s walkability. Best way to get these is in exchange for a bonus program that allows increased height.
- Increased height will encourage land assembly, some larger-scale redevelopment.
- Greater heights by the freeway could help block freeway noise. Counterpoint: it’s tough to “solve” freeway noise, since blocking it from one place redirects it somewhere else.
- Are wind impacts likely to be a problem? LaClergue response: Probably not, since we’re talking about much lower heights and greater spacing than downtown. EIS will consider this – further steps to reduce impacts include upper level setbacks and canopies to disperse downward wind before it reaches the street.



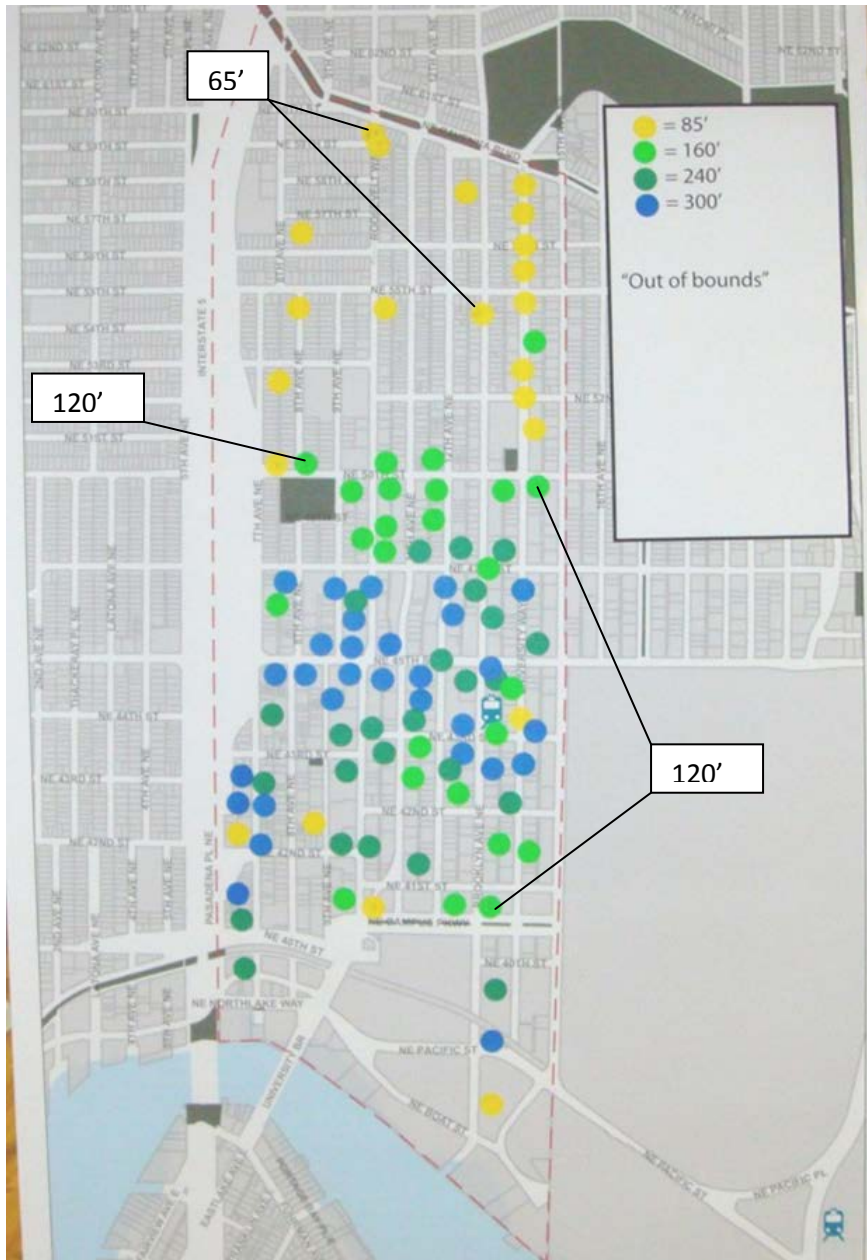
Height dot exercise

Working group members each received 12 stickers, divided into four colors representing different height classes:

- Yellow = 85'
- Green = 160'
- Dark green = 240'
- Blue = 300'

Participants were instructed to place these stickers in the locations they felt were most appropriate to evaluate greater heights as the planning process moves ahead. Any height class deemed to be too tall or too short could be put in the "out of bounds" box; participants also had the option to mark a different recommended maximum height on their stickers.

The figure below is annotated to show where participants labeled their stickers with a height other than what the color denotes.



Additional Feedback:

- Is there any way to push the whole planning and rezone process to be faster? It would be really good to get the changes in place ASAP to make the most of any development that is happening in the near term. Susan's responded that the current timeline is a realistic one based on how long environmental review and public input require, in addition to staffing resources for the project.
- Let's consider whatever economic information that emerges about development in this neighborhood and others like it. How is financing influencing which construction types will work? What kinds of spaces are the tech/R&D employers looking to lease?
- Make sure we plan ahead for underground utilities – if we're doing upgrades, scale them to handle future growth. This kind of evaluation should be recommended in the Commercial Revitalization plan.

Future meetings will be held at the University Heights Center (Room NB1, downstairs) at 7:30 a.m. on the following days:

Thursday, Oct 18th

Friday, Nov 2nd

Friday, Nov 30th