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**Theo Lim**

**Martin Regge**

**John Savo**

**Ross Tilghman**

**Michael Jenkins**  
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**Valerie Kinast**  
Coordinator

**Aaron Hursey**  
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**Commissioners Present**

Shannon Loew, Chair  
Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair  
Lee Copeland  
Thaddeus Egging  
Rachel Gleeson  
Theo Lim  
Martin Regge  
Ross Tilghman

**Commissioners Excused**

Brodie Bain  
John Savo

**Project Description**

Seattle Opera is located in McCaw Hall, on the Seattle Center campus, and includes a 2,900 seat auditorium with interior and exterior public spaces. McCaw Hall was constructed in 2003 and shares a wall with the former Mercer Arena. Mercer Arena currently provides storage and related services for McCaw Hall. Both McCaw Hall and Mercer Arena are located along Mercer Street

In 2008, Seattle Center and Seattle Opera proposed a 141,369 square foot (sf) expansion onto the Mercer Arena site. The proposal was designed to consolidate offsite activities at their Renton shop and storage facility with McCaw Hall. Due to an economic downturn, the project was put on hold; no substantive commission reviews occurred.

The current proposal revives the original 2008 concept with changes to the size and program. The current proposal includes a 4-story, 105,000 sf expansion at the Mercer Arena site. Unlike the initial proposal, which would have consolidated operations from both Seattle and Renton facilities, the current proposal will relocate retail, offices, costume shops, studios, and rehearsal space from its facility in South Lake Union. The Opera will continue to operate its shop and studio facility in Renton.

**Meeting Summary**

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the proposed concept design. Following the presentation, SDC review and deliberation, the SDC voted, 8-0, in favor of the concept design, with several conditions and recommendations.

**Recusals and Disclosures**

**John Savo** recused himself because his firm, NBBJ, is working on the project.

February 18, 2016

9:00 - 11:00 am

**Type**

CIP

**Phase**

Concept Design

**Previous Reviews**

None

**Project Team Present**

Jill Crary

Seattle Center

Ken Johnsen

SOJ

Aidan Lang

Seattle Opera

Matthew Somerton

NBBJ

**Attendees**

Angela Battazzo

SOJ

Jae Lee

Seattle Center

Chris DeGracia

Citizen

Heidi Hughes

Friends of the Waterfront - Seattle

February 18, 2016

**Summary of Presentation**

The project was presented by Aidan Lang, of Seattle Opera, Jill Crary, of Seattle Center, Ken Johnsen, of SOJ, and Mathew Somerton, of NBBJ. Mr. Lang provided an overview of the Seattle Opera, its goals for programming and their emphasis on community engagement. Ms. Crary briefly spoke about the history and future goals of Seattle Center. She described how the Seattle Center 2008 master plan included a scheme to redevelop the former Mercer Arena site into additional facility space for the Seattle Opera.

Mr. Somerton presented the site context for the project

followed by the proposed design (see figure 1). The site is located on the north side of the Seattle Center campus, next to McCaw Hall, at the intersection of Mercer St. and 4th Ave. N (Speight Jenkins Way). The proposed facility will connect with existing McCaw Hall along its western façade. The project design was influenced by Seattle Center's design guidelines for its Theatre District, Seattle Center, and Lower Queen Anne. The facility is designed to serve as a catalyst for activating the street front along Mercer St. Early site design iterations brought facility programming, including costume shops, retail, rehearsal studios, offices, community and educational space, to the edges of the building, providing a heightened sense of transparency along the street and creating a strong connection along Mercer St and 4th Ave N. The Mercer St. façade will include offices for the opera, retail space, and a box office, while community and educational space, which will also serve as a concert and rehearsal space, will anchor the corner of the facility at the intersection of Mercer St. and 4th Ave. N (see figure 2). Costume shops and rehearsal space will be located partially below grade along 4th Ave. N.

The expansion would be connected architecturally to McCaw Hall through the use of a metal scrim that extends the length of both building façades along Mercer St. and 4th

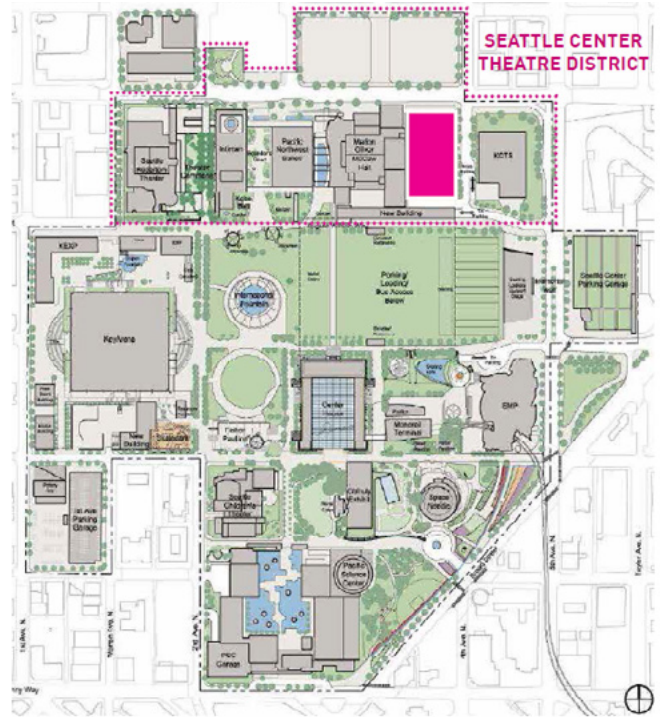


Figure 1: Project site location



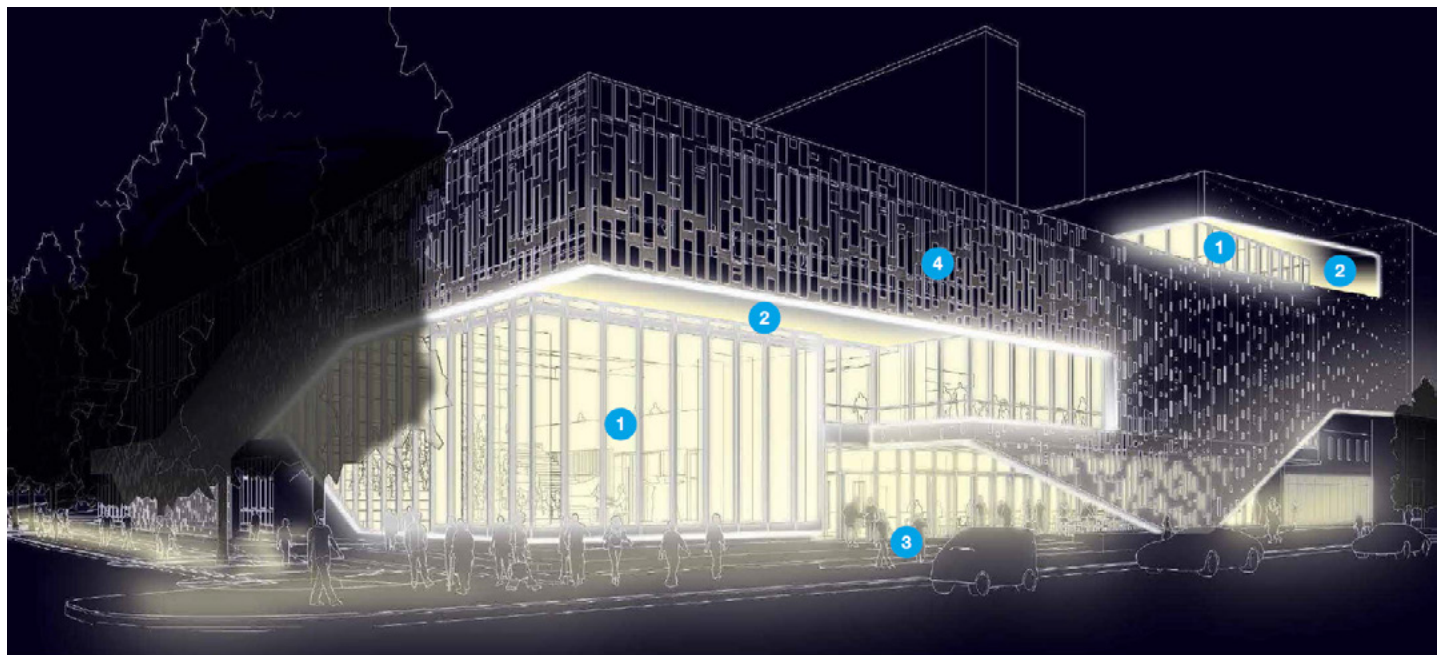
Figure 2: Proposed programming





- 1. Blue-Gray metal siding to match McCaw Hall exterior.
- 2. Blue-Gray metal siding 'scrim'. Pattern under study. Micro-perforation accented with composition of larger openings.
- 3. Glass and aluminum window system, clear anodized.
- 4. Clear anodized metal panel with, glass and aluminum window system.
- 5. Painted soffit.
- 6. Concrete or clear anodized metal panel.

Figure 3: Proposed facade treatment



- 1. Strong lighting emphasis at civic corner and interior "craft" spaces to showcase stagecraft and reinforce "Connect Public to Craft" concept.
- 2. Uplight at soffit to reinforce the architecture expression and provide inviting entry point and safe walkway at night time.
- 3. High illumination at retail space/street level promenade area to promote activity and safety.
- 4. Façade lighting at metal siding to highlight identity of building.

Figure 4: Proposed lighting

Ave. N. As the scrim transitions from McCaw Hall east to the expanded facility, the scrim's design will transition from solid to a design marked by a series of square and rectangular openings. The openings will either screen a wall and window system or be incorporated with that window system and facade. The scrim will include a significant footing in front of the proposed retail and box office spaces (see figure 3). 26 foot deep building setbacks along Mercer provide a significant plaza area for pedestrians to view into the expanded facility and its practice and performance spaces.

To preserve an existing stand of mature trees, the project will retain existing setbacks along 4th Ave. N established by the existing Mercer Arena. The 4th Avenue façade will include a barrier free access point and allow pedestrian to the building façade for viewing into the facility. The design team has proposed a vehicle loading dock along the

south façade of the facility, which currently serves as a loading area for McCaw Hall. The loading dock design will be incorporated into the existing loading pattern in order to minimize the need for additional curb cuts along 4th Ave. N

Several of the lighting features will occur from inside the facility's programmable space in an attempt to create a unique pedestrian experience (see *figure 4*). If funding is available, the design team would like to incorporate dynamic lighting features within the scrim wrapping.

### Agency Comments

**None**

### Public Comments

**None**

### Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Building design
- Entries and edges
- Walkability and pedestrian scale design (local and neighborhood context)
- Programming, art & sustainability

#### *Building design*

The SDC appreciated the design team's attempt to use building design to reveal public performance spaces along Mercer St. and 4th Ave. N for pedestrians. The Commission is concerned with the overall placement and features of the scrim. Commissioners feel the scrim's size, location and treatment limit the transparency along important areas of the building façade, including the retail and opera box office from Mercer St. They recommended the design team rethink where, if at all, the scrim must touch the ground plane in order to create as much transparency as possible along the street level.

#### *Entries & edges*

The SDC is concerned with the limited involvement of a landscape architect. Although the surrounding landscape between the facility and street is limited, Commissioners encouraged the design team to think critically about how a well-developed landscape design will increase and enhance the pedestrian experience. The SDC is also concerned with the limited amount of interaction between programmed spaces within the building and pedestrians along 4th Ave N. They recommended the design team continue to think about how to bring pedestrians closer to the building's edge along 4th Ave so that more portions of the building, like the scene shops, can be accessible to the public.

The Commission also expressed concern with the design team's lack of detail or solutions to address the south and southeast facing façades. Although it currently serves as a back of house function for the Opera, an increased amount of pedestrian circulation will occur once redevelopment occurs to the south of the expansion site. They recommended the design team continue to develop a design for the south façade.

#### *Local & neighborhood context*

The Commission commended the efforts made by Seattle Center to create a vibrant pedestrian zone along the center's edges. Although outside of the scope of this project, the SDC encouraged Seattle Center to think about the long term effects the expansion will have on activating Seattle Center as a whole and not just the northwest corner along Mercer St. The SDC agreed the expansion would have a great influence in reactivating pedestrian oriented space Mercer St.

Commissioners are concerned with the effect ongoing construction will have on the alley of mature street trees along 4th Ave N. If not already done so, they recommended the project team coordinate with an arborist in checking the health of the trees.

#### *Programming, art & sustainability*

The Commission commended the design team for revitalizing the project. The SDC agreed with the project team's decision to continue operating its Renton facility. Commissioners applauded the level of transparency provided by the design team in an attempt to increasing community participation within arts programming.

The SDC would have liked the design team to have engaged an artist earlier on. They recommended the team engage with an artist before coming back to the full commission for schematic design review.

### Action

The Commission appreciated the level of transparency regarding facility programming along Mercer St. More specifically, Commissioners appreciated the detail related to providing community engagement and education opportunities. The SDC approved, 8-0, the concept design for the Seattle Opera with the following condition:

1. Prior to review of the schematic design phase, return for a subcommittee review of the design of the south façade and loading dock; focus specifically on how the façade will relate to future development south of the project site

The SDC also included the following recommendations:

1. Continue thinking about the long-term potential for enhancing pedestrian experience along the project site edges as well as throughout Seattle Center
2. Consider how the design of the scrim negatively affects the facility's relationship with the pedestrian realm, specifically as it hits the ground plane along Mercer St, and McCaw Hall
3. Provide a strategy for engaging with an artist prior to schematic design review
4. Expand opportunities to view and interact with programming along 4th Ave. N, including the costume shop and rehearsal space.