

# Block 21 – 2200 7th Ave

**Ed Murray**  
Mayor

**Diane Sugimura**  
Director, DPD

**Shannon Loew**, Chair

**Ellen Sollod**, Vice Chair

**Brodie Bain**

**Lee Copeland**

**Thaddeus Egging**

**Grant Hromas**

**Martin Regge**

**John Savo**

**Ross Tilghman**

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## Commissioners Present

Shannon Loew, Chair  
Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair  
Brodie Bain  
Lee Copeland  
Grant Hromas  
Martin Regge  
John Savo  
Ross Tilghman

## Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging

## Project Description

The applicant proposes to vacate the alley in the block bounded by 8th Avenue, Bell Street, 7th Avenue, Blanchard Street to facilitate a full-block commercial development. The 77,000-square-foot site is zoned DMC 340/290-400. In three buildings, the proposed development would include:

- 835,200 gross square feet of office space
- 23,000 square feet of street-level retail
- Below-grade parking for 835 vehicles

In the vacation proposal, building services would be located below grade, with primary access from 8th Ave and a second parking egress on Bell St.

The subject alley is 16 feet wide and 5,700 square feet in area and runs roughly northwest-southeast through the site between Bell St and Blanchard St, both of which are Green Streets. The alley network terminates at the block to the northwest; the alley network to the south was vacated as part of the adjacent Amazon Rufus 2.0 project.

## Meeting Summary

The Design Commission approved the urban design merit of the proposed vacation. There were two dissenting votes. The approval was conditional on the project team further addressing the characteristics of the public realm at the site, specifically the open spaces that the vacation facilitates and the project's relationship to Green Streets. The condition must be fulfilled prior to a public benefit review.

## Recusals and Disclosures

John Savo disclosed that he has previously worked on adjacent projects for the applicant, but neither he nor his firm is involved with the Block 21 project.

**March 5, 2015**  
9:00 – 11:30 am

**Type** Alley Vacation

**Phase** Urban Design Merit

**Previous Reviews** none

### Project Team Present

**Mark Brands**

Site Workshop

**Patrick DiStefano**

Graphite Design Group

**Ryan Durkan**

Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson

**Lindy Gaylord**

Seneca Group

**Holly Golden**

Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson

**Ian Kell**

Seneca Group

**Marni Heffron**

Heffron Transportation

**Kristie Hollinger**

EA Engineering

**Peter Krech**

Graphite Design Group

**Erin Osberg**

Graphite Design Group

**John Schoettler**

Amazon

**Anton Toth**

Graphite Design Group

### Attendees

**Tim Allen** SEIU Local 6

**Howard Anderson** Denny Triangle  
Neighborhood Assoc.

**Richard Aramburu** resident

**Beverly Barnett** SDOT

**Lyle Bicknell** DPD

**Liz Campbell** Belltown Community  
Council

**Lauren Craig** Puget Sound Sage

**Nataliya Dalacia** SEIU Local 6

**Levon Dunn** SEIU Local 6

**Tammy Frederick** SDOT

**Moira Gray** SDOT

**Matt Haney** SEIU Local 6

**Beth Hartwick** DPD

**Vincent Meadowbrook** SEIU Local 6

**Stefan Moritz** UNITE HERE Local 8

**Elsa Ogbe** SEIU Local 6

**Greg Ramirez** SEIU Local 6

**Michelle Sarlitto** EA Engineering

**Gavin Smith** Perkins Will

**Alex Tsimerman** StandUP-America

**Lish Whitson** Council Central Staff

**Yasmin** SEIU Local 6

March 5, 2015

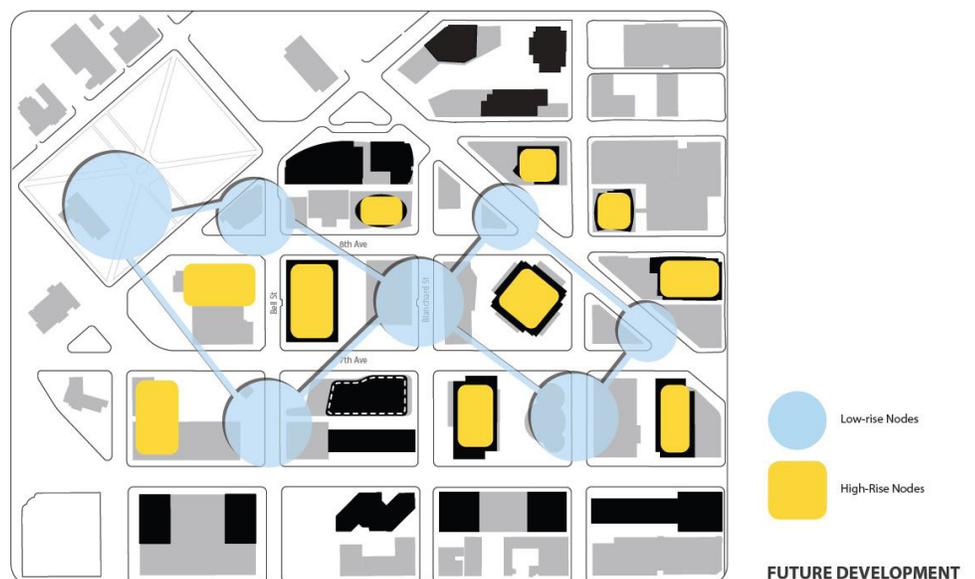
## Summary of Presentation

Peter Krech summarized the details of the proposed commercial project and listed the relevant codes and planning documents that have guided the design. Mr. Krech briefly described the team's community outreach and stated that the Design Review Board (DRB) has approved the Early Design Guidance (EDG) phase of the project. The full presentation is available on the [Design Commission website](#).

A series of slides showed nearby development in planning or under construction and the existing low-rise structures on the site. A site survey and zoning map provided context for the project site and surrounding blocks. Additional slides identified existing alleys, Green Streets, and bicycle routes in the Denny Triangle, including the protected bike lane on 7th Avenue being implemented by the adjacent Amazon Rufus 2.0 project. Several diagrams illustrated observed current volumes and an estimate of future volumes for pedestrian and vehicle traffic in both the no alley vacation and full alley vacation scenarios.

Mark Brands discussed the developing open space network in the neighborhood and identified privately owned public open space, public open space, and Green Streets. Mr. Krech showed a comparison of Bell Street in Belltown, where it is relatively flat, and in the Denny Triangle, where significant grade change arises. The programmatic requirements for Bell St (bus stops, layovers, parking, etc.) between 5th Ave and Denny Way differ from those in the Belltown segment. Mr. Brands noted the importance of the connection between Bell St across Denny Way to 9th Avenue and referred to the recently approved 8th Ave woonerf between Thomas and Harrison Streets.

Mr. Krech presented the diagram below (Figure 1) to illustrate the emerging syncopated pattern of low- and high-rise nodes in the Denny Triangle: According to Mr. Krech, the alley vacation proposal would continue this "tapesty" to the northwest and across Denny Way. An [animation](#) reinforced this notion by comparing how the site would likely develop without an alley vacation (under separate and single ownership) and with the proposed alley vacation.



**Figure 1.** This figure-ground shows the emerging pattern of low- and high-rise nodes in the Denny Triangle.



**Figure 2.** The no alley vacation (left) and full alley vacation (right) alternatives in plan view. Note that the vacation scheme includes an aerial connection between the two buildings at the third and fourth floors as illustrated by the dashed line.

Several perspectives and site plans helped to distinguish the no vacation and vacation proposals. While both proposals include two buildings of similar height, the vacation alternative reorients the building masses from north-south to east-west.

According to Mr. Brands, the open spaces have a clear orientation to the street in response to feedback at the first EDG meeting with the DRB. A site plan (Figure 3) showed that 15,000 square feet of the open space is required for the project's floor-area (FAR) bonus and the other 12,000 square is project open space. Mr. Brands said the team made a conscious decision not to pursue any of the open space in the block as public benefit.

A series of diagrams compared the no vacation and vacation schemes on program elements including open space, vehicle access, loading and service access, ground-level uses, tower massing, and solar access. Finally, Mr. Krech summarized with a series of observations about how the vacation proposal affects circulation; access; utilities; light, air, and open space; and views.



**Figure 3.** A site plan shows the open space required for the FAR bonus.

### Agency Comments

**Beverly Barnett** stated that SDOT is in the early stages of its review of the vacation petition. According to Ms. Barnett, SDOT has not raised any substantive concerns at this point. SDOT has identified that the alley is not part of a larger network of alleys, and SDOT is considering individual impacts of the proposed vacation accordingly. As she completes her review, Ms. Barnett stated that she is particularly interested in Bell St given the strong community interest there. She will also look closely to ensure that the vacation does not allow the project to turn itself inside out by drawing activity away from the street edges and into the interior of the site.

**Lyle Bicknell** stated that he appreciated the comprehensiveness of the team's urban design merit analysis. He underscored the importance of Bell Street as a critical connection between South Lake Union and Elliott Bay. For that reason, Mr. Bicknell expects the highest level of pedestrian comfort and amenity along this frontage. Grade changes notwithstanding, he challenged the design team to explore other examples in this city of hills of active, pedestrian-oriented uses.

### Public Comments

Because of the large number of attendees, many from the same organization, public comment was limited to 15 minutes. Individuals were called in the order they signed up on the sign-in sheet. All those in attendance were encouraged to send in written comments as well.

**Howard Anderson** stated that the Denny Triangle Neighborhood Associated received a similar presentation on February 24, 2015. The Association strongly supported the vacation alternative, specifically because of the large open spaces and 10-foot setbacks on Bell and Blanchard Streets included in that proposal. Mr. Anderson also advocated for a future couplet of one-way protected bike lanes on Bell Street. He said the Denny Triangle community's vision is to function as a business employment center and a diverse residential community.

On behalf of Puget Sound Sage, **Lauren Craig** made the following comments, which she subsequently submitted to the Commission in writing:

- We see Amazon's project as an opportunity for them to become a partner in realizing a sustainable downtown for all. We all know that Amazon is attracting high-tech talent and helping transform downtown neighborhoods to provide new workers an opportunity to live near their jobs. However, we urge you to consider how Amazon's project addresses the needs of Seattle's bottom 20 percent as well as the top 20 percent.
- One way Amazon can demonstrate it cares about lower-wage workers is to invest above and beyond incentive zoning requirements for affordable housing, employer-sponsored housing, or by supporting Seattle's proposed linkage fee for new development. Approximately 40 percent of Seattle residents are low income. There would be widespread community support for job creators like Amazon should it demonstrate that it cares about low-wage workers.

**Stefan Moritz** spoke on behalf of UNITE HERE Local 8, a union of hotel workers and food service workers. Mr. Moritz is also a member of the Alliance for a Livable Denny Triangle. Mr. Moritz stated that this is his first opportunity to look at this project. He wants to ensure the project is designed to the benefit of the community at large, including folks who live in and pass through the area; this includes many of his organization's members. He is curious to hear the Commission's thoughts as the project evolves and looks forward to the discussion on public benefit. He has not yet identified the important points but will be following closely.

**Levon Dunn** spoke on behalf of several SEIU Local 6 members in attendance, which represents janitors and security officers who maintain and protect Seattle's commercial real estate market. Amazon has again come asking for a handout of public benefit. The Commission is charged with assessing the vacation proposal. Public benefit means more than public art or a private or public space of which Amazon will maintain control, including limiting free speech rights. Any public benefit package that does not ensure good jobs for all workers at Amazon should be rejected. The public benefits most from good jobs with benefits and job security and free from employer harassment. Amazon's current security contractor, Security Industry Specialists, Inc. (SIS), is a known violator of workers' rights, including labor board and OSHA violations. The Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) has filed a charge against SIS for violations of sick leave law. Google and Apple have already dumped SIS. Amazon is aware of our concern about using SIS. The Human Rights Commission and City Council have also raised this issue. Amazon doesn't care.

**Alex Tsimerman** apologized for directing profanity at the Commissioners at a previous meeting. Mr. Tsimerman stated that he is an idiot, not the Commissioners. However, according to Mr. Tsimerman, the Commission has forgotten its responsibility. He stated that they are acting in their own personal interests, not for the city. New York City and Los Angeles had crime. The Commissioners are, by definition, slaves. This is more dangerous than Russia, China, or ISIS. We need to build houses for people. It's time to change the rules. This has happened before for 5,000 years of human history.

**Richard Aramburu**, a Belltown resident, made two points. First, he believes the treatment of Bell and Blanchard Streets is insufficient to meet the legal standard for providing public benefit. He argued that that space needs to be expanded significantly. Second, the interior space offered as open space is essentially internalized to Amazon's uses. Mr. Aramburu referred to a similar situation at the 2101 4th Avenue building where public open space has been walled off by the developer without consequence. He recommended the Commission question whether internalized open space is really a public benefit or whether the perimeter of the project is a better location for new open space.

**Liz Campbell** stated that both versions of the proposed Amazon development at Block 21 have been presented to the Belltown Housing and Land Use Subcommittee (BHLUS). Ms. Campbell made the following comments which she subsequently submitted to the Commission in writing:

- Of the two proposals, BHLUS prefers the design with the alley vacation to the design without. However, Bell and Blanchard Streets deserve more public realm space. BHLUS recommends the developer increase the setback on both streets, with Bell Street, slated to become a Park Boulevard, the priority street for pedestrian experience including large groupings for programming.

- The setback can be increased by reducing the internal space between the two towers—a solution that allows ample internal space and provides proper attention to public benefit. The solution honors the special designations for each street.
- If the no vacation alternate proceeds, BHLUS remains concerned about the massing on Bell Street.

### Summary of Discussion

The Commission was impressed by the team’s detailed presentation of the impacts of closing the alley. The Commissioners particularly appreciated that the team’s analysis expanded beyond the immediate nine-block area to include South Lake Union, the Denny Triangle, and Belltown.

However, the Commissioners struggled to understand the public realm from a pedestrian’s experience. This was especially problematic for the Bell and Blanchard façades given those streets designations as Green Streets. The Commission determined that additional detail would be necessary prior to moving onto the public benefit phase.

The proposed building massing and open spaces resulting from the vacation received a mixed response. While the Commissioners recognized the value in creating a through-block connection between Downtown and Denny Park and the merit in creating larger and more inviting open spaces than possible under the no vacation scenario, the Commissioners cautioned that this approach should not diminish the ability to create an active and engaging street edge.

Accordingly, the Commissioners focused whether the public realm was improved as a result of the vacation. The Commission recognized that Block 21 continues a massing pattern begun to the south at the Amazon Rufus 2.0 project and the related alley vacations. Though they recognized the logic in this continuity, the Commissioners were nevertheless concerned about the impacts of continuing to reorient buildings away from the Avenues. There was also concern that the building overhang and curb cuts along 8th Ave detracted from the pedestrian experience.

### Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for the presentation of the urban design merit for the Block 21 alley vacation petition. The Commission greatly appreciated the clear and comprehensive comparison between the no alley vacation and full alley vacation proposals and commended the level of detail in the analysis.

In particular, the Commission recognized the through-block pedestrian connection as an important gesture toward improving the urban fabric at a point where several neighborhoods coalesce (see Figure 4). The Commission acknowledged the effort to improve connections to and from Denny Park.

The Commission also recognized that the building placement under the alley vacation alternative creates more open and inviting spaces specifically at the northern and southern corners of the site. Providing open spaces along the street edges enhances the public realm, though the design of these spaces along 8th Avenue and the Green Streets warrants further attention. The Commission supported the 10-foot setback on Bell and Blanchard Streets and believed a larger setback could limit opportunities for successful retail.

With a **vote of 6 to 2**, the Design Commission approved the urban design merit for the petition to vacate the alley in block bounded by Bell St, 7th Ave, Blanchard St, and 8th Ave with the following condition:

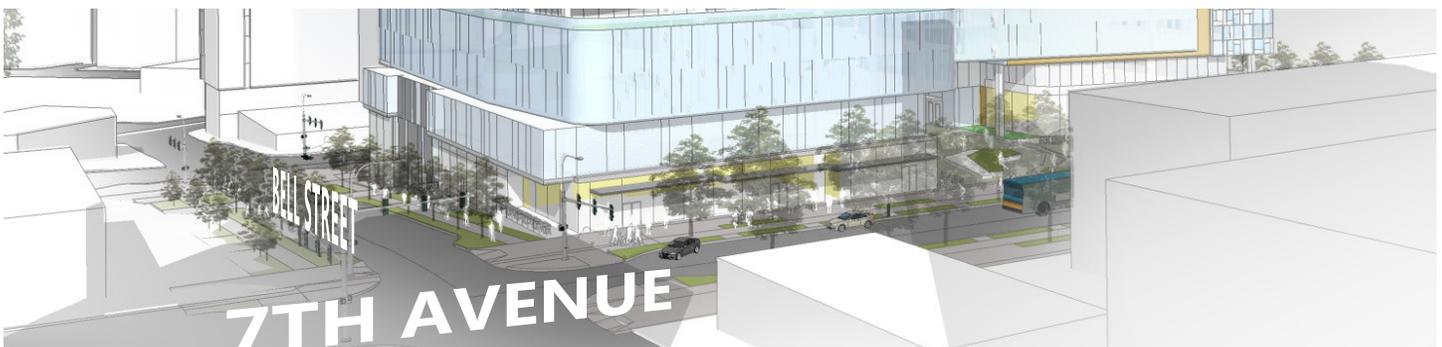


*Figure 4. Looking north at the plaza along 7th Ave and the diagonal through-block connection to the corner of 8th Ave and Bell St. Denny Park is visible at left in the distance.*

1. Prior to a review of public benefit, the petitioner shall return for a detailed examination of the characteristics of the public realm on 8th Ave, Bell St, and Blanchard St, independent of any public benefit discussion.

The Commission made the following recommendations to guide the design of the public realm:

1. Continue to develop all edges of the site within the public realm with an eye to creating a usable and inviting experience for pedestrians. The diagonal connection through the site and towards Denny Park is an improvement to the urban fabric provided it does not come at the detriment of the street-facing edges of the project.
2. Given their Green Street designation, look particularly closely at the pedestrian experience on Bell and Blanchard Streets, grade challenges notwithstanding. Examine how transparency requirements create opportunities to engage pedestrians on these streets.



**Figure 5.** The Commission asked for greater detail of the pedestrian experience at the several public spaces in the proposed development and along the two Green Streets.

3. More clearly define the quality and vocabulary of the public spaces created, especially at the corner of 8th Ave and Bell St (Figure 6). The Commission struggled to understand its relationship to the public and private portions of the site. Continue to include ADA accessibility as part of the solution to the grade change.
4. Given the grade change from north to south, ensure that sightlines make it obvious to a pedestrian that the diagonal through-block connection is a continuous and publicly accessible connection through the site.

The reasons for the votes against were as follows:

**Ross Tilghman:** While I appreciate the scope of the proposed condition, I nevertheless feel there are consequences to the decisions we make as a Commission and issues we need to understand more fully as we make those decisions. I’m concerned that 8th Ave becomes the de facto service side of this project, and throughout Downtown we generally have service from Streets, not Avenues. I don’t want to further the practice of service occurring along an Avenue.

**Ellen Sollod:** I agree with Ross.



**Figure 6.** The Commission was especially concerned with the corner of 8th Ave and Bell St, outlined in black.