

Block 21 – 2200 7th Ave

Ed Murray
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Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Shannon Loew, Chair

Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Rachel Gleeson

Grant Hromas

Martin Regge

John Savo

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Commissioners Present

Ellen Sollod, Vice Chair
Lee Copeland
Thaddeus Egging
Grant Hromas
John Savo

Incoming Non-Voting Commissioners

Rachel Gleeson

Commissioners Excused

Shannon Loew, Chair
Brodie Bain
Martin Regge
Ross Tilghman

Project Description

The petitioner 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 880 vehicles

In the vacation proposal, building services would be located below grade, with primary automobile and truck access provided via two 24-foot-wide curb cuts on 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 approximately 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 purpose of this meeting was to review how the project had addressed the condition adopted as part of the Design Commission's March 5, 2015, approval of urban design merit. That condition stated that "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 Design Commission determined that the condition had not been fulfilled. The Commission remained concerned about the impact on the pedestrian environment of the two 24-foot-wide curb cuts proposed on 8th Ave.

Recusals and Disclosures

John Savo disclosed that he has worked on projects for the petitioner but is not involved in this project.

March 5, 2015
9:00 – 11:00 am

Type Alley Vacation

Phase Urban Design Merit

Previous Reviews March 5, 2015

Project Team Present

Mark Brands

Site Workshop

Patrick DiStefano

Graphite Design Group

Lindy Gaylord

Seneca Group

Holly Golden

Hillis Clark Martin & Peterson

Marni Heffron

Heffron Transportation

Ian Kell

Seneca Group

Peter Krech

Graphite Design Group

Andrew Lacko

Graphite Design Group

John Schoettler

Amazon

Pieter Van Remoortere

Site Workshop

Attendees

Howard Anderson

Denny Triangle Neighborhood Assoc.

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Lyle Bicknell

DPD

Liz Campbell

Belltown Community Council

Sam Finkelstein

SEIU

Matt Haney S

SEIU Local 6

Beth Hartwick

DPD

Gary Johnson

DPD

Susan McLaughlin

SDOT

Susan Meardon

Transit Riders Union

John Pehrson

resident

Greg Ramirez

SEIU Local 6

Val Sporenza

SEIU Local 6

Katie Wilson

Transit Riders Union

Summary of Presentation

Mark Brands introduced the outline for the presentation, which is available on the [Design Commission website](#). Peter Krech reviewed the details of the proposed alley vacation and described the site context. A series of diagrams identified the proposed street level uses, paving and planting, circulation, and access.

Mr. Brands and Mr. Krech then showed each frontage of the project in greater detail, including the proposed protected bike lane on 7th Ave, the mid-block pedestrian connection through the site, and a hillclimb on 8th Ave. Several images focused on the two 24-foot-wide curb cuts proposed on 8th Ave for service and vehicle access given the Commission's concerns about their impact on the pedestrian realm. Mr. Krech and Mr. Brands also described the design of Bell St and Blanchard in greater detail given their Green Street designation.

Mr. Brands presented a draft street concept plan for Bell St; he indicated this would be proposed as part of the public benefit package that the Commission will review at a subsequent meeting. A series of perspectives compared the character and geometry of Bell St in Belltown and Denny Triangle.

Agency Comments

Lyle Bicknell, DPD, stated that the challenge that an alley vacation presents is relocating access to the streets. He offered three comments:

1. First, Mr. Bicknell recommended reducing the width and height of the garage openings on 8th Ave.
2. Second, he emphasized that successful public open space requires clear and unobstructed sightlines so that an average person can determine that it is possible to move through the space. He also cautioned that open space that is not open to the sky is problematic, especially if proposed as public benefit.
3. Third, Mr. Bicknell expressed disappointment that the Bell St design as shown in the presentation incorporated none of the geometries or design vocabulary from the Bell Street Park. He found it difficult to differentiate Bell St from Blanchard St even though Bell St has a distinct vocabulary and the project offers opportunities to continue that design through the seating, lighting, geometry, and landscape palette.

Mr. Bicknell commended how the Bell St design had evolved to be more pedestrian oriented. Finally, he suggested that the petitioner consider wrapping the design vocabulary of Bell St around the corner onto 8th Ave.

Susan McLaughlin offered comments on both the project design as presented and the proposed concept plan for Bell St. Regarding the project design, Ms. McLaughlin stated that the quantity of on-street parking proposed on Bell St and Blanchard St seemed excessive and recommended the petitioner look to how the Bell Street Park design accommodates on-street parking. She also stated that Bell St at the project's frontage could function with only one travel lane. Regarding the proposed Bell St concept plan, Ms. McLaughlin said she has encouraged the petitioner to consider an option that assumes that buses will not use Bell St in the future.

Beverly Barnett echoed Mr. Bicknell's and Ms. McLaughlin's comments. She particularly emphasized the concern about relocating back-of-house functions to the street as a result of the alley vacation. She also agreed that, as the first designated Green Street in Seattle, Bell St is a special street that warrants greater design attention than shown in the presentation.

Public Comments

John Pehrson endorsed Mr. Bicknell’s and Ms. McLaughlin’s comments. Mr. Pehrson referred to the Council Street Vacation Policies, which state that vacations shall not be approved if the development would result in additional shadowing of parks and other public spaces. Mr. Pehrson stated that the proposed vacation would result in more shadows of Denny Park, the oldest park in Seattle, whereas the no vacation alternative includes a setback that reduces shadowing.

Matt Haney spoke on behalf of SEIU Local 6, a union that represents janitors and service employees. Mr. Haney said his organization wants to hear how the Design Commission interprets public benefit. In Mr. Haney’s eyes, the proposed public benefit appears to be an investment in Amazon’s own infrastructure, instead of affordable housing, transportation, or worker’s rights — which Mr. Haney believes are true public benefits. He stated that he hopes the petitioner offers more as public benefit.¹

Howard Anderson referred to the letter that he submitted to the Commission prior to today’s meeting. He noted that the density of the Denny Triangle neighborhood is the second highest in the city. Mr. Anderson stated that the Denny Triangle Neighborhood Association wants to see development that provides public amenities and supports an 18-hour type of neighborhood rather than merely a commercial tower. For those reasons, the Association remains strong in support of the petition to vacate the alley at Block 21. Specifically, the Association appreciates the proposed setbacks and protected bike lane. Mr. Anderson was critical of the notion of reducing Bell St to one travel lane similar to the current condition between 1st Ave and 5th Ave. He argued that the City must preserve roadway width to allow for transit and the traffic this and other projects will generate and that the square footage for public amenity space should come from the project site, not the right-of-way.

Liz Campbell, a member of the Belltown Community Council, stated that she supports Mr. Bicknell’s points about the Bell St design.

Summary of Discussion

Following the presentation, the Commissioners discussed the project’s impacts on each of the abutting rights-of-way. They acknowledged that the portion of Bell St abutting the site has more significant grade changes than the portion of Bell St in Belltown, including Bell Street Park, and agreed that the proposed terraces on Bell St were a good solution to these conditions. That said, the Commissioners also concluded that the project should interpret and incorporate features of the Bell Street Park design into this portion of the Bell St Green Street. The Commissioners also agreed that the quantity of on-street parking shown in the presentation on both Bell St and Blanchard St appeared detrimental to the pedestrian environment and Green Street design.

On 7th Ave, the Commissioners appreciated the removal of steps between the corner of 7th Ave and Blanchard St and the mid-block connection and believed the diagonal connection through the site via the 8th Ave hillclimb would be inviting to people.

However, the Commission remained concerned about the two curb cuts proposed on 8th Ave. The Commissioners believed the presentation had not contained enough information to support this solution over a different approach with less impact on the pedestrian realm, and based on the previous presentation from March 5, 2015, there was some confusion about the proposed turn movements in and out of the garage. The Commission recommended fur-



Figure 1. Proposed design for 8th Ave. The Commission was concerned about the stair and recessed bike entry outlined in orange.

¹ Following this comment, the Director recommended that Mr. Haney refer to the [City Council’s Street Vacation Policies](#), which outline acceptable public benefits.

ther study of options for access that would minimize the impact on the public realm. The Commissioners were also concerned about the recessed entry to the bicycle storage, outlined in Figure 1, and recommended the petitioner explore creating a more generous stair at mid-block.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the petitioner for the presentation. The Commission particularly appreciated additional detail about the proposed treatment of Bell St and Blanchard St, the proposed open spaces, the plaza space at the corner of 8th Ave and Blanchard St, and the accessible route through the 8th Ave Hillclimb, as shown in Figure 2.

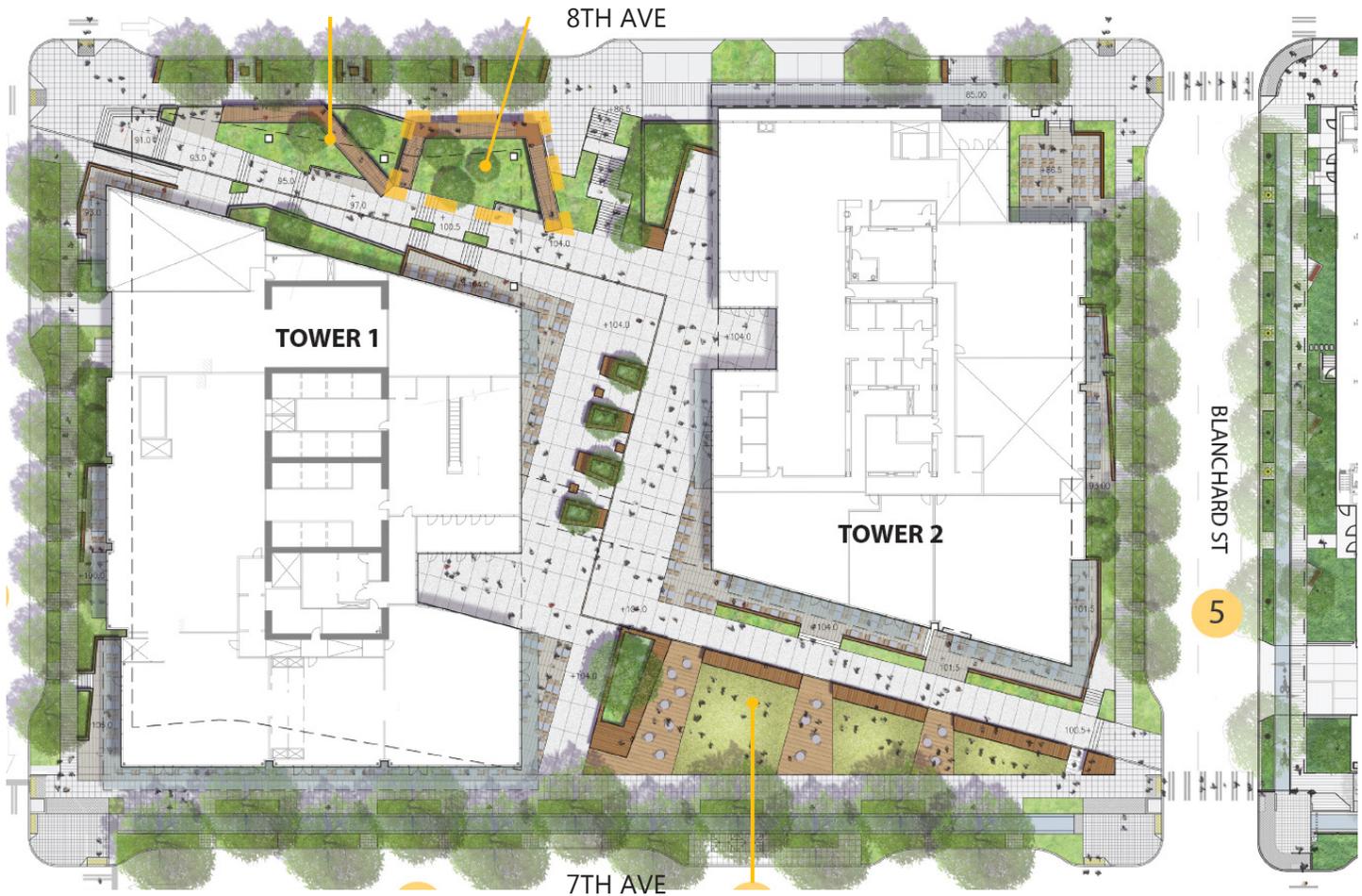


Figure 2. Illustrative site plan showing the proposed plaza spaces and 8th Ave Hillclimb.

With a **vote of 2 to 3**, the Design Commission determined that the petitioner had not met the condition from the March 5, 2015, review. As a result, the Commission requested that the petitioner return to the Design Commission prior to a review of public benefit to fulfill the condition as part of the urban design merit phase of review.

The Commission provided the following comments to guide the design of the public realm:

1. The Commission remains concerned about the impact on the pedestrian environment of the two 24-foot-wide curb cuts on 8th Ave. The Commission requests further exploration of options to consolidate, narrow, reduce the height of, and/or otherwise minimize the impact of the curb cuts on the public realm. The Commission also requests additional information on how a unified or reduced access point on 8th Ave would affect traffic operations in relation to the secondary egress on Bell St.

The Commission also requested that the petitioner address the following issues related to Bell and Blanchard streets:

2. Further develop the Bell St design, including how reducing the travel lanes from two to one would result in green street design improvements.
3. Interpret and incorporate attributes of Bell Street Park that occur west of 5th Ave onto this portion of the Bell St Green Street, including open space, seating, landscape, lighting, and the relationship between retail frontage and the public realm.

4. Incorporate additional landscape and seating and reduce the quantity of on-street parking on Blanchard St.

The reasons for the votes against were as follows:

Thaddues Egging: I'm not comfortable with how the garage entrances have been resolved. Before we consider public benefit, there needs to be additional information and evaluation of this aspect of the project.

Grant Hromas: I share Thaddeus's concerns. I also believe that the designs of Bell St and Blanchard St warrant further attention given their role as important Green Streets.

Ellen Sollod: I concur with Thaddeus and Grant. I am also concerned that, if the condition before us today were approved and subsequently Bell St is not included as a public benefit item, the approach we saw today is what would go forward.

Director's note: Following this meeting, the petitioner provided staff a copy of a DPD permit decision from February 2015 that authorizes two curb cuts on 8th Ave. The details regarding this decision were not discussed as part of the presentation. When the petitioner returns for the next meeting, the focus will be 1) resolution of items 2-4 above and 2) a briefing and potential vote on public benefit. While the permitting decision approving two curb cuts was issued prior to the Commission's recommendations and direction on the issue, the Commission may still make recommendations to the Council on the advisability of a two-curb-cut solution on 8th Ave.