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Commissioners Present

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

Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging
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 Design Commission took two separate actions:

I. Compliance with condition from urban design merit approval

The petitioner presented updated drawings to show compliance with the following condition that the Commission adopted March 5, 2015, in its approval of the urban design merit of the vacation:

“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.”

At the May 7, 2015, meeting, the petitioner presented initial designs to comply with the condition. The Commission voted 2 to 3 against the initial proposal. At the June 4, 2015, meeting, the petitioner presented an updated design including the following features:

1. Revised and narrowed curb cuts on 8th Ave
2. Widened sidewalk on 8th Ave

June 4, 2015
9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Type
Alley Vacation

Phase
Urban Design Merit review of conditions
Public Benefit

Previous Reviews
March 5, 2015
May 7, 2015

Project Team Present

- Brian Bishop**
Site Workshop
- Mark Brands**
Site Workshop
- Patrick DiStefano**
Graphite Design Group
- Lindy Gaylord**
Seneca Group
- David Hudacek**
Seneca Group
- 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 Association
- Beverly Barnett**
SDOT
- Lyle Bicknell**
DPD
- Frank Cifuentes**
SEIU Local 6
- Sam Finkelstein**
SEIU International
- Matt Haney**
SEIU Local 6
- Beth Hartwick**
DPD
- John Marek**
SDOT
- Susan McLaughlin**
SDOT
- Michele Sarlitto**
EA Engineering, Science, and Technology
- Lish Whitson**
City Council Central Staff

3. Revised streetscape on Bell St, including design elements incorporated from Bell Street Park
4. Widened sidewalk and reduced parking on Blanchard St

Following their deliberation, the Commissioners voted 8 to 0 to approve the updated design. The Commission also indicated that they appreciated the team’s efforts to make substantial improvements to the public realm design in a short period of time.

II. Public benefit package

The Commission voted 8 to 0 to approve the public benefit package consisting of the following items:

1. 8th Ave Hillclimb
2. Bell St setback
3. Blanchard St setback
4. 7th Ave improvements and protected bike lane
5. 8th Ave improvements
6. Blanchard St improvements
7. Bell St improvements
8. 8th Ave & Bell St raised intersection
9. Bell St protected bike lane
10. Bell Street Concept Plan

Recusals and Disclosures

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

Urban Design Merit — review of conditions

Summary of Presentation

John Schoettler described Amazon’s goals to develop a neighborhood that is inclusive and welcoming to all people, not just Amazon employees.

Peter Krech introduced the outline for the presentation, which is available on the [Design Commission website](#). First, Mr. Krech addressed the outstanding condition from the Commission’s March 5 approval of urban design merit. Mr. Krech showed an update to the proposed curb cuts for vehicle and loading access on 8th Ave, as shown in Figure 1. The two 24-foot-wide curb cuts proposed on May 7 were narrowed to 20 feet for vehicles and 18 feet for loading. Mr. Krech explained that the automobile access is located away from the property line to improve the pedestrian experience, as shown in Figure 3.

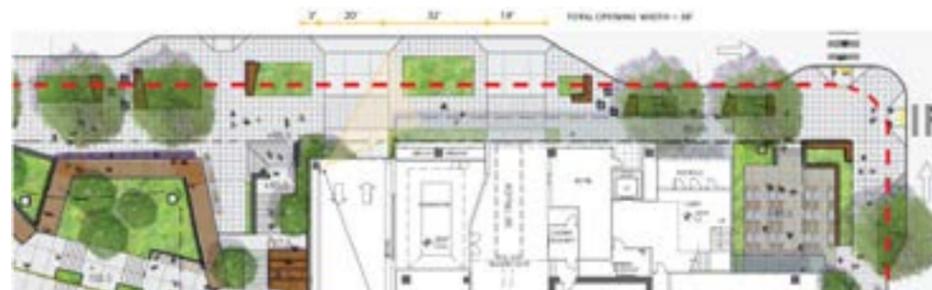


Figure 1. Updated plan for the 8th Ave streetscape, including narrower curb cuts for vehicle and loading access.

Mark Brands showed changes to the proposed curb line compared to the May 7 presentation. Mr. Brands described how narrowing 8th Ave to one lane

north- and southbound allows for the improvements to pedestrian safety near the vehicle and loading access. Mr. Brands also described changes to Bell St and Blanchard St and the petitioner’s coordination with DPD and SDOT on the design of these streets.

Agency Comments

Lyle Bicknell stated that the proposal was a vast improvement from the previous design. Mr. Bicknell saw clear and substantial public realm improvements in the plan, particularly in the right-of-way. He said the improvements to Bell St are more consistent with the aspirations of the City and public. Mr. Bicknell then stated that the onus is now on the City to fully permit the innovative and nonstandard design shown in the presentation and requested the Commission’s support.

John Marek stated that he liked the petitioner’s approach to 8th Ave and Bell St. However, he acknowledged that some uncertainty remained about traffic operations in this area. Mr. Marek explained that King County Metro’s proposed changes to Westlake Ave could push traffic to 9th Ave and alter traffic circulation near the project site. Mr. Marek said that, while he likes the concept of additional pedestrian and green space along 8th Ave, SDOT has not yet determined if one lane north- and southbound on 8th Ave is feasible.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the petitioner for addressing the condition of its March 5, 2015, approval of urban design merit. The Commission saw substantial improvement to the public realm design.

With a **vote of 8 to 0**, the Design Commission determined that the petitioner had fulfilled the outstanding condition. This constitutes final approval of the urban design merit phase of the Commission’s review of the petition to vacate the alley in the block bounded by 8th Ave, Bell St, 7th Ave, and Blanchard St.

The Commission emphasized its support of the proposed curb line on 8th Ave, as shown in Figure 2, and encouraged SDOT to follow through with permitting this design.



Figure 2. Revised curb line, previously proposed curb line (blue dashed line), and existing curb line (red dashed line) on 8th Ave.



Figure 3. Revised curb cuts for vehicle and loading access on 8th Ave.



- ON-SITE**
- 1 8th Avenue Hillclimb
 - 2 Blanchard Street Setback
 - 3 Bell Street Setback
- PUBLIC R.O.W.**
- 4 7th Avenue Improvements & Cycle Track
 - 5 8th Avenue Improvements
 - 6 Blanchard Street Improvements
 - 7 Bell Street Improvements
- OFF-SITE**
- 8 8th & Bell Intersection
 - 9 Bell Street Cycle Track
 - 10 Bell Street Concept Plan

Figure 4. Proposed public benefit package. Refer to the action for the full description of each public benefit item.

Public Benefit

Summary of Presentation

Mr. Krech introduced three categories of proposed public benefit items, as shown in Figure 4.

Mr. Brands described the proposed materials for the 8th Ave Hillclimb. Sketches and renderings illustrated the 8th Ave streetscape and showed the proposed overhead weather protection at the vehicle and loading access points. Mr. Brands described how the 10-foot-wide voluntary building setback on Blanchard St allows for retail spaces that engage the public realm despite the street’s seven percent grade.

Mr. Brands then presented the revised design of Bell St, incorporated the geometry, curb and gutter, finishes, furnishings, and other elements from Bell Street Park. However, he noted that the roadway would retain an orthogonal grid as a signal that pedestrians should not cross mid-block as they can at Bell Street Park.

Mr. Brands also described the proposed planting for the site, which includes a range of native plants that will also complement the landscape at the adjacent Rufus 2.0 development.

Finally, Mr. Brands described several off-site public benefits, including a raised intersection at 8th Ave and Bell St, a protected bike lane on Bell St between 7th Ave and Denny, and a final draft Bell Street Concept Plan.

Agency Comments

Susan McLaughlin praised the petitioner’s response to previous City comments. Ms. McLaughlin stated that the proposed concept plan complements the Bell Street Park while meeting the operational needs for Bell St in the Denny Triangle. She appreciated that the proposal incorporates the design vocabulary from Bell Street Park and said extending the scoring pattern into private property helps to blur the boundaries between the public and private realm. Ms. McLaughlin acknowledged that SDOT is still reviewing some aspects of the proposal, such as raised intersections but supports the draft concept plan at this stage. She explained that, eventually, the concept plan will be adopted into the Right-of-Way Improvements Manual, but implementation will remain voluntary.

Beverly Barnett echoed the comments of Lyle Bicknell and Susan McLaughlin. She appreciated that the project evolved substantially in response to comments from the Commission and members of the public. Ms. Barnett em-

phasized the distinction between 1) elements that enliven a space and make the project successful and 2) true public benefit that serves all people, even those without some other reason to be there or not looking to spend money. She stated that she saw clearer definition in this proposal and commended the petitioner’s approach to dealing with grade changes. Ms. Barnett said an outstanding concern was the 8th Ave Hillclimb, since that public benefit space is covered, but acknowledged that it seemed to work due to its proximity to the right-of-way. Lastly, Ms. Barnett encouraged the Commission to consider on- versus off-site public benefit.

Beth Hartwick explained that she brings this project through the City’s Design Review process. Ms. Hartwick said the last meeting was in January; she was unsure if the Design Review Board (DRB) members were following project updates. Given previous DRB feedback at the Early Design Guidance phase, Ms. Hartwick said the DRB was likely to be pleased with the new direction. However, she acknowledged that the Board may have comments about some of the on-site public benefits where the Board has purview.

Public Comments

Howard Anderson said the Denny Triangle Neighborhood Association was very excited about the project and happy with the progress in the public realm design. Mr. Anderson particularly liked the mid-block connection because, in his view, large blocks with alleys do not work. He stated that the connection shown in the presentation will make this area available to all people, now and in the future, during the day and at night. He thanked Amazon for going the extra distance and praised the protected bike lane and expansion of the pedestrian environment.

Matt Haney stated that his organization, SEIU Local 6, has heard previous guidance to focus comments on the elements over which the Design Commission has purview; Mr. Haney said that was his intent. However, since the presentation materials were not available until two days prior to the meeting, he was not prepared to make comments. Mr. Haney stated that previous concerns about how the project might cast shadows on Denny Park were not addressed today. He also inquired about whether the 8th Ave Hillclimb provided ADA access; the petitioner confirmed that it does.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission discussed each category of public benefit. The Commissioners were supportive of the 8th Ave Hillclimb, particularly the proposed ramps that provide an accessible route to the 7th Ave plaza. They encouraged the design team to explore other opportunities along this route to accommodate additional standing or seating areas, provided that it does not affect ADA compliance. The Commission identified the landscaping in the mid-block connection as an area for further attention to ensure members of the public feel invited into and through this space.



Figure 5. The proposed 8th Ave Hillclimb would provide ADA access from 8th Ave and Bell St to the mid-block connection and 7th Ave plaza.

The Commissioners also supported the proposed public benefits in the right-of-way and appreciated the petitioner’s responsiveness to previous comments about the design of the Bell St Green Street. They appreciated that the protected bike lane on Bell St would extend from 7th Ave past the project site to Denny Way and commended the inclusion of a planted buffer. The Commissioners also discussed opportunities for the proposed display window on 8th Ave and encouraged the team to explore programming or design enhancements for this space.

Finally, the Commission was pleased with the development of the Bell Street Concept Plan and encouraged the team to develop as bold a vision as possible in order to encourage continuity along Bell St from 1st Ave to Denny. The Commissioners praised the petitioner for coordinating with relevant agencies to enhance these concept designs. However, the Commissioners noted that the concept plan did not address stormwater management. The Commis-

sion encouraged the petitioner to consider using the street grade to express stormwater and incorporate it into the proposed plantings.

Action

The Design Commission thanked the petitioner again for presenting the public benefit package for the Block 21 alley vacation petition. The Commission commended the petitioner for working closely with DPD and SDOT on the Bell Street Concept Plan. The Commission also appreciated the petitioner’s consistent responsiveness to previous recommendations regarding the public spaces throughout the project site.

With a **vote of 8 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the public benefit package for the petitioner to vacate the alley in the block bounded by 8th Ave, Bell St, 7th Ave, and Blanchard St. The Commission recognized the following public benefit items:

Public benefit item	Description	Area (sq ft)
8th Ave Hillclimb	Provide accessible ramp from corner of 8th Ave and Bell St to mid-block plaza, native landscape, seating elements, lighting, and overhead soffit element.	12,000
Blanchard St Setback	Provide 10-foot-wide building setback along Green Street for landscaping and seating elements.	1,162
Bell St Setback	Provide 10-foot-wide building setback along Green Street for landscaping and seating elements.	1,090
7th Ave improvements and protected bike lane	Provide expanded pedestrian streetscape, including landscaping, lighting, elevated two-way protected bike lane, double allée of street trees, seating elements, bus stop, and enhanced curb bulbs at corners of Bell St and Blanchard St.	4,750
8th Ave improvements	Provide expanded pedestrian streetscape through curb alignment and bulb-outs at intersections, enhanced landscaping, lighting, and seating elements.	4,060
Blanchard St improvements	Provide expanded pedestrian streetscape through curb alignment and bulb-outs at intersections, enhanced landscaping, lighting, and seating elements.	755
Bell St improvements	Provide expanded pedestrian streetscape through curb alignment and bulb-outs at intersections, enhanced landscaping, lighting, and seating elements.	1,829
8th Ave & Bell St intersection	Provide raised intersection and crosswalks to enhance pedestrian safety. Improve curb bulbs on adjacent lots.	5,372
Bell St protected bike lane	Provide in-street, separated two-way protected bike lane from 7th Ave to Denny Way.	4,503
Bell Street Concept Plan	Provide conceptual street plan from 5th Ave to Denny Way to continue Bell Street Park design character.	n/a

The Commission offered the following comments concerning the public benefit package:

1. The Commission encourages SDOT and King County Metro to eliminate bus layovers on Bell St. The Commission recommends the City explore storing buses on City land, not on public right-of-way.
2. The Commission recommends that the DRB consider and encourage the integration and continuation of the landscape plan throughout the site, particularly as a way to welcome the public into and through the internalized public spaces and mid-block connection (see Figure 6).
3. The Commission asks that the petitioner and SDOT explore ways to retain the proposed curb line on 8th Ave as shown in the presentation (see Figure 2).



Figure 6. The Commission recommended the DRB consider how the landscape continues into and through the mid-block connection to welcome members of the general public.

4. The Commission encourages the petitioner to be as forward-thinking as possible with the Bell Street Concept Plan, shown in Figure 7 below, so that it integrates the frontages of future development projects towards a facility as successful for pedestrians and bicycles as Bell Street Park. Consider opportunities to include raised intersections beyond 7th Ave and 8th Ave, narrow the roadway to one travel lane, and use the topography of the street to integrate stormwater into the proposed plantings.



Figure 7. Proposed Bell Street Concept Plan from 5th Ave to Denny Way.

This is the final time the Commission expects to review the Block 21 alley vacation petition. Approval of both urban design merit and public benefit constitutes the Commission’s recommendation to SDOT that the vacation be granted. Ultimate the City Council makes the final decision whether to vacate the right-of-way.