Seattle design Commission

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October 1, 2026

Convened – 9:00 am
Adjourned – 3:15 pm

Projects Reviewed
Commission Business
Light Rail Quarterly Update
410 Harrison Street alley vacation – public benefit package

Commissioners Present
Eric Alipio
Phoebe Bogert
Ray Gastil
Tatum Lau
Brian Markham (until 2:30 pm)
Shirin Masoudi (until Noon)
Kevin O'Neill
Zubin Rao
Tatum Lau
Kate Clark

Commissioners Excused

Staff Present
Valerie Kinast
Windy Bandekar
Robin Magonegil



Commission Business (9:00 – 10:00 am)

The Commission adopted the July 16, 2026, August 20, 2026, and September 3, 2026 minutes.

The Commission discussed the August 20, 2026 retreat. They noted these priority work items for follow-up:

1. Add expertise in the commission in the fields of urban ecology and community engagement. First steps: Create job description to define skill sets. Consider how current positions can be redesigned or repurposed to achieve this; aim for predictability that these areas of expertise will be represented while not expanding the number of commissioners.
2. Revise mission and other guiding documents to encompass the increased value of urban ecology and community engagement in design. Provide clear expectations for teams about reporting on ecology and community.
3. Gain knowledge in these fields from City staff and perhaps outside experts. First steps: Host roundtable of City staff who work to engage community in capital project development to facilitate exchange of best practices.

Commissioners also requested follow-up on the idea of future commission involvement in CIP related master plans and strategic plans.

West Seattle Link Extension (WSLE), Ballard Link Extension (BLE), and Graham Street Station Light Rail Quarterly Briefing (10:00 am to 12:00 pm)

The Commission received an update by ST staff and the City team on ST 3 program. The update is a quarterly briefing designed to keep the commission up to date on the overall project and the City's work.

The following people presented:

- Justin Clark, Sound Transit
- Brianna Holen, Sound Transit
- Julie Montgomery, Sound Transit
- Phoebe Wu, Sound Transit
- Gavin Schaefer, Sound Transit
- Molly Spetalnick, Sound Transit
- Saranya Gujuluva, Office of the Waterfront, Civic Projects, and Sound Transit (OWCPST)
- Sara Maxana, OWCPST
- Barbara Lee, OWCPST
- Lindsay King, SDCI
- Eric Trinh, OWCPST
- Jenny Meulenberg, SDOT
- Katy Haima, OPCD

The following people attended in person and virtually:

- Adela Mu, Sound Transit

- Maiko Winkler-Chin, Sound Transit
- Kay Yesuwan, OWCP
- Lorelei Williams, OWCP
- Russel Bennett, Community Member (virtual)
- Ken Hutchinson, Sound Transit
- CJ Holt, OWCP
- Ryan Packer, The Urbanist
- Hannah Snow, OWCP
- Vera Giampietro, OWCP
- Emily Perchlik, Sound Transit

The Sound Transit presentation covered the following topics:

- Programmatic
  ST Station Experience Design Guidelines (SEDG) Refresher
- Ballard Link Extension
  Schedule Update
  South Downtown Hub Project
  - Engagement Process and Feedback Received
  - Schedule Update
  - Ballard Link Extension
- West Seattle Link Extension
  Schedule and Process for 30% Design Review
- Graham Street Infill Station
  Schedule Update and Planned Upcoming Design Reviews
- Future SDC Touchpoints

The City presentation covered the following topics:

- ST3 Program Leadership Updates
- City Permitting Coordination with SDC
- WSLE and BLE Street Concept Plans Update
- ST3 Station Area Planning & TOD Coordination
- City Equity Work

The Commission made the following comments:

1. As the City and Sound Transit speak about stations and station areas in the quarterly updates and other briefings, consider joining together to present the work as a related and cohesive body of work. Tell the story of how you are building and catalyzing the future of the neighborhood.
2. Commissioners took note that West Seattle Street Concepts are evolving in response to the elimination of one entrance structure in the Alaska Junction station design. The City's capital project process will incorporate the necessary changes.
    a. Please provide an update to us with an opportunity for Q&A so that we understand it in time for 30% review.
    b. Please brief us on the BLE related Street Concept Plans as they are developed – Denny, Seattle Center, Dearborn. It is easier for us when we are brought along and do not need to get up to speed just before the station reviews.

3. Commissioners find the Station Area Framework graphic illustrating the areas of responsibility for planning around the stations very useful. They understand that modeling for station access extends beyond the Station Context and that topography and other factors play into the boundaries.
    a. Provide this Station Area Framework graphic for each station
    b. Consider how to express the guideways in the graphic. They will be new, impactful features in the neighborhood that require intentional planning.
4. The Commission greatly appreciates Sound Transit's work to optimize efficiency of design and right size new light rail facilities. This is something the SDC has commented on since the review of the Roosevelt Station in 2018.
    a. Guideway design efficiencies are of interest. Commissioners are particularly interested in how this could benefit the BLE project along Elliott Avenue.
5. Commissioners will be interested to see how project designs reflect the balancing act involved in creating a "seamless intuitive" experience for people with a great diversity of life experience and needs.
6. The BLE DEIS would benefit from a reader's guide of sorts to help community understand the relationship of the new document to the DEIS that was issued for WSBLE (when the BLE and WSLE projects were still combined).
7. Commissioners appreciate seeing enjoyment and pleasure as well as intergenerational comfort as values in the planning of the new system and station areas.
8. The Commission has noted the shorter timelines planned for station development and looks forward to collaborating in your ambitions to deliver transit faster.

There was not time for all commissioner questions, so plan the next quarterly updates accordingly.

Commission Business (12:45-1:00)

The Commission received a briefing for the 410 West Harrison Alley Vacation

410 W Harrison Street – Public Benefit – partially alley vacation (1:00 – 3:15 pm)

The Commission received a presentation on the Public Benefit package for the proposed partial alley vacation at 410 W Harrison. The team reviewed the prior Public Trust review and subcommittee recommendations, community engagement, and the proposed Public Benefit improvements around Elliott Avenue, West Harrison Street, 4th Avenue, the on-site hill-climb connection, and wayfinding.

Commissioners were generally supportive of the quality and direction of the design. The discussion focused on whether each proposed element met the more specific standard for Public Benefit, rather than simply being beneficial to the public. The Commission emphasized that the public should be able to understand, through the design itself, that the spaces and improvements are intended for public use.

Agency and Public Comment:
Amy Gray, SDOT, raised concerns about whether portions of the package were sufficiently oriented toward the public, including the legibility of the hill-climb entrance and portions of the 4th Avenue landscape that read as more closely associated with private residential areas.

Russell Bennett, a member of the public and wheelchair user, commented on accessibility and the experience of people who cannot use the hill-climb stairs. He encouraged the team to consider seating, weather protection, and an improved accessible experience along the route around the site.

Deliberation and Action:
The Commission did not vote on the Public Benefit package. Commissioners supported the overall direction but felt there were enough unresolved questions about how several elements read and function as Public Benefit that the revised package should return to the full Commission rather than a subcommittee. The Commission was clear that it was not asking the team to add more Public Benefit overall; the focus is on making the proposed benefits more clearly public in purpose and experience.

The following people presented:

- Christian Gunter, Alexandria Real Estate
- Brian Runberg and Jess Seung Yun Yu, Runberg Architects
- Katie Kendall, McCullough Hill

The following people attended:

- Amy Gray, SDOT
- Ciara Ortiz, SDOT
- Jason Tran, Runberg Architects
- Matt Porteous, Hewitt
- Rachel Miller, Hewitt
- Jeremy Febus, KPFF
- Juliet Nolan, KPFF
- Ginger Hutton, Alexandria Real Estate

Recommendations:

1. **Elliott Avenue Improvements**

The Commission strongly supported the overall design direction along Elliott Avenue, particularly the expanded planting, larger trees, stormwater features, and greater separation from traffic. Commissioners agreed these changes would significantly improve pedestrian comfort and safety along an inhospitable street. At the same time, they questioned whether the entire landscaped setback qualifies as Public Benefit, particularly where it reads as part of the residential stoop and entry experience and primarily serves adjacent residents.

Commission recommendation:

- If Elliott remains part of the Public Benefit package, reconsider how much of the frontage is being claimed and more clearly distinguish the elements that serve the broader public realm from those that primarily serve adjacent residences. Maintain and strengthen the landscape buffer from Elliott Avenue traffic, and consider whether a more continuous or boulevard-like landscape condition, integrated public art, or expressive stormwater infrastructure could make the frontage read more clearly as a public benefit.

2. West Harrison Street – Hill Climb / Pedestrian Connection

The Commission viewed the hill climb as one of the strongest elements of the Public Benefit package. The main concern was whether someone unfamiliar with the project would understand that the route is intended for public use, especially because it asks people to leave the sidewalk, cross what can read as private property, and pass beneath a private building.

Commission recommendations:

- Strengthen the gateway so it reads as an opening into public space rather than an edge of private development. Rework the planter and monument-sign area so the space reaches toward the sidewalk more like a "hug" or welcoming opening, and consider adding sidewalk-facing seating near the entrance.
- Use several design cues, such as paving, landscape, lighting, color, seating, and spatial form, to make the public invitation clear. Signage can reinforce this, but should not be expected to overcome a space that otherwise reads as private.
- Consider how to provide an enhanced experience for people who cannot use the hill-climb stairs, including wheelchair users. Because the hill climb itself cannot provide an accessible through-route, look for opportunities along the adjacent sidewalk and accessible route to offer a similarly welcoming and intentional public experience.

3. On-Site Enhancement – 4th Avenue / Upper Hill-Climb Node

The Commission generally supported the upper node and the diagonal path extending from 4th Avenue into the site, particularly the way the paving acts as a "welcome mat" and invites the public in. The main concern was that the public route becomes less clear as it transitions toward more private areas.

Commission recommendations:

- Continue to reinforce the diagonal connection as a public route, and clarify where the public path continues and where private building territory begins so people are not unintentionally led into a dead-end or private-feeling area.
- Strengthen the upper node as a place to pause as well as move through by adding more seating near the sidewalk and upper landing.
- Consider using ground-plane art, etching, sandblasted patterns, or a similar treatment to help communicate the public path and resting areas without relying solely on signage.

4. 4th Avenue – Terraced Landscape

The Commission's discussion of Public Benefit on 4th Avenue focused primarily on the terraced landscape between the sidewalk and the building. Commissioners acknowledged that the additional planting, space, and separation from the building improve the pedestrian environment. However, they questioned whether the terraced landscape should be counted in full as Public Benefit where it appears to function primarily as a buffer or amenity for the adjacent residential patios.

Commission recommendation:

- Reconsider how the terraced landscape is being claimed as Public Benefit. The Commission asked the design team to look more carefully at where the landscape is enhancing the public pedestrian experience and where it is primarily serving the adjacent residential patios. The question is not

whether the terraces are well designed or beneficial to the streetscape, but whether the full extent of the landscape should be credited as Public Benefit.

Separate note: During the discussion, Jackson Keenan-Koch reminded the team that the project is also moving the curb approximately seven feet, narrowing the roadway and converting that space into additional landscape and pedestrian realm. Commissioners responded positively and indicated that this is a meaningful part of the overall Public Benefit package that should be more clearly identified in the next presentation.

5. Wayfinding / Signage

During deliberation, commissioners were clear that signage whose primary purpose is to identify or provide access to the private building should not, by itself, be counted as Public Benefit.

The team explained that it intends to develop a broader public-facing component with Uptown Alliance, including neighborhood wayfinding and potentially history, culture, sustainability, or other place-based interpretation. The team also acknowledged that this concept has not yet been developed or presented in enough detail for the Commission to evaluate.

Commission recommendation:

- If signage remains part of the Public Benefit package, develop a clearly public-facing wayfinding and interpretive strategy. The signage should do more than identify the development or direct people to building functions. It should help people find and understand the public path, reinforce that the public spaces are intended for their use, and connect the site to the larger Uptown neighborhood. Continue working with Uptown Alliance to define the content, purpose, and character of this component before the next Commission review.