

Seawall and Waterfront Review Panel July 26, 2011 MEETING NOTES

July 26, 2011 Panel Business

- Vote on 4-14-11 minutes. Unanimously approved with correction that Don Vehige is a member of the Seattle Design Commission; Amalia Leighton and Mark Johnson abstained; Tom Nelson asked that his disclosure be added.

Convened 3:00 pm / Adjourned 5:10 pm

Panel Members Present

Leslie Miller, Seattle Planning Commission, Co-chair
Julie Parrett, Seattle Design Commission, Co-chair
Kadie Bell, Seattle Planning Commission
Catherine Benotto, Seattle Planning Commission
Dan Corson, Arts Commission
David Cutler, Seattle Planning Commission
Colie Hough-Beck, Seattle Planning Commission
Mark Johnson, Seattle Planning Commission
Martin Henry Kaplan, Seattle Planning Commission
Malika Kirkling, Seattle Design Commission
Kay Knapton, Seattle Planning Commission
Jeanne Krikawa, Seattle Planning Commission
Laurel Kunkler, Seattle Design Commission
Amalia Leighton, Seattle Planning Commission
Tom Nelson, Seattle Design Commission
Osama Quotah, Seattle Design Commission
Matt Roewe, Seattle Planning Commission
Norie Sato, Seattle Design Commission
Donald Vehige, Seattle Design Commission

Panel Members Absent

Julie Bassuk, Seattle Design Commission, Josh Brower, Seattle Planning Commission, Bradley Khouri, Seattle Planning Commission, Kevin McDonald, Seattle Planning Commission, Christopher Persons, Seattle Planning Commission, Debbie Wick-Harris, Seattle Design Commission

Staff

Barbara Wilson, Katie Sheehy; Seattle Planning Commission
Valerie Kinast, Tom Iurino; Seattle Design Commission

Project Team Members

Hannah McIntosh, SDOT, Erin Taylor, field operations

Guests: Radhika Nair, DPD, David Graves, Parks, Lee Copeland, Mithun, Ruri Yampolsky, Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs

Update Briefing: Process

Presenters: Leslie Miller, Acting Co-Chair, Joint Planning and Design Commission Waterfront Panel; Marshall Foster, DPD

Leslie welcomed everyone, reviewed the day's agenda, and introduced Marshall. Marshall reminded the panel that the design team will make a presentation similar to the one in May, and that the project is still early in the design process. The purpose of today's review is to provide an opportunity to engage with the design team, frame issues that should get elevated, and suggest ways how best to roll out the project.

Update Briefing: Elliott Bay Seawall

Presenters: Jennifer Wieland, SDOT

Jennifer reported she made a presentation on April 25 to city council on the two bookend alternatives, one with the seawall more or less where it is now and one with a more dramatic pull back of 75 feet at the aquarium. She shared the findings of habitat fieldwork on migrating salmon and of outreach activities such as courting the federal delegation. In the next six months, her team will coordinate more with waterfront team, work with the Army Corps of Engineers to establish federal interest in project, refine the alternatives, draft an EIS for release in 2012, and do additional outreach. See her full presentation on the Design Commission website.

Update Briefing: Waterfront Seattle

Presenters: James Corner, field operations

James Corner gave the presentation of his early design ideas of three concepts at three scales: City Scale, Urban Framework, Waterfront Scale. This included the Bay and Green Ring ideas; the central waterfront framework; and Tidelines and Folds ideas, intended to express tectonic moves to connect the city to the waterfront in a bold way. He expressed the challenge of the long timeline for implementation, and the resulting need to keep the project and its progress fresh and compelling. See his full presentation on the Design Commission website.

Question & Answers/ Comments:

Q: One of the challenges is touching water. There is 12-18 feet of difference from the sidewalk or promenade. What opportunities do you foresee for touching the water?

A: With this project, there are so many constraints: ferries, piers, etc. It likely won't be gratifying to get between piers to access the water because it's shady, and the complications due to the tidal range. We propose to keep it upland at two significant areas: a beach at Pioneer Sq. and at Waterfront Park.

Q: At piers in Northwest cities, there are often activities like dropping a crab pot that occur but might not be mentioned at public meetings.

A: We want a great range of activities as that's what's best. We want spaces for all. Certainly there will be opportunities on big piers 62 and 48 for activities like that. We are aware of fishing for squid on northern part of waterfront.

- Q:** The activities you've listed are largely passive. What about active? For example, instead of strolling how about running? You'd need spaces for both. Also, what about planning and designing for non-humans, meaning the habitat?
- A:** Yes. We're calling it habitat. We're looking at habitat on land too. We're beginning programming in earnest.
- Q:** The city needs a strong hand in design and development of the street itself and the east side of ROW.
- Q:** The project will unfold over a long time. What are the early wins? What could be in place before the viaduct comes down? We need to keep the project foremost in people's minds. We need a plan for phasing.
- Q:** At the south end, Pier 48 and its connection to Pioneer Square is important because there's so little open space in an area where the city is trying to attract residents. We can think about Pier 48 in a variety of ways. As proposed, it seems conceptually similar to the ferry dock fold. Perhaps Pier 48 could be more left open, just a green plane, for things like soccer. Don't just create a park with a dead end; join it with a water taxi. Or on the other hand, perhaps Pier 48 goes away altogether to create the beach you propose. Love the beach idea. Or maybe Pier 48 is something else altogether, maybe a mixed use ringed with a walkway. Explore a wider range of activities, with more active use.
- A:** There are some contradictions there. It is an urban context with interesting adjacencies. We do want Pier 48 activated. We think green could be attractive. It could be a big piece of nature, the biggest on the waterfront. The arguments for keeping the pier are more than for getting rid of it. We need to design the space so that it is highly flexible.
- Q:** Can you integrate the Belltown balcony with the Bell Street project?
- A:** Yes, we're familiar with the Bell Street project. The real issue with the balcony is how to pay for it since it isn't so obviously connected to the waterfront. It could be an opportunity and rationale for earlier investment.
- Q:** At the first fold, the one connected to Steinbrueck Park, could you elaborate on the vision for underneath?
- A:** We're trying to develop the passageway as a place that's civic. It will have very high clearance and will be dimensioned broadly. It will be lit up at night and could be home to a restaurant to activate it. It also will be a great connection into Belltown; it will feature a wide sidewalk or path. It could be a beautiful gateway. The trick is in dimensioning.
- Q:** I question the sense of rationality. You had me with Elliott Bay ring but you lost me with the folds. I am intrigued by the ring and its sense of rationality. It says something about Seattle. Most of these spaces will be void of people because of the weather. How do folds relate to Seattle?
- A:** That's a big debate. You can reflect Seattle in a representational way or tectonic way. Folds are forms that connect city to waterfront. Sure, there are questions about their vibrancy. But the folds celebrate views and bring the bay into a higher level of consciousness. We think it's authentic to Seattle not in a representational way, but in a tectonic way; it creates a nexus and new focus. We're thinking about year round use and programming. We need to develop materials to support it.

- Q:** How will the project plan for climate change? Will the tide concept be affected?
- A:** We're looking at climate change in concert with the seawall team. Different groups argue about the different degree of rise. We're anticipating some rise in sea level, but not the worst case scenario.
- Q:** The folds imply crispness. I encourage more seepage and fuzzy edges, where you can't tell where it's x or y. For example, water may come in unexpectedly. Water is always going places we don't expect. It's coming from all sides in Seattle.
- A:** That is hard to do. We're drawing drawings that will be built. What you're describing could be wetlands, grasslands, beaches, something that is inherently hard to bound. We do have some constraints, though, such as public safety and dimensions. We want some rough edges, not something squeaky clean and corporate. But the poetics of softness are hard to draw.
- Q:** Please keep in mind programming spaces for small retail.
- A:** In the plan, we have provided space for small pavilions, for example to rent kayaks or bikes.
- Q:** The strong formal network of folding bears a strong relationship to the Olympic Sculpture Park. The Alaskan Way Viaduct's portals team references the sculpture park too. How will you transition from diagram to built form?
- A:** There is a certain pragmatism and reality to the folds. The Pike Place fold is significant. We have four or five of these folds. They might all look the same in plan because of what they have to do, but their character could be different.
- Q:** Other than the folds, do you have other design strategies?
- A:** We're not stylists. We're pragmatic. Topography creates challenges to physical connectivity. The challenge is to get from A to B in a seamless and pedestrian-friendly way. We want to avoid stairs, elevators. We want inclines, which leads to folds.
- Q:** The waterfront now attracts visitors not residents. We need a solution that encourages residents to visit the waterfront, not just tourists. Don't just look at topography and connections to the water for inspiration, but also look at neighborhoods to affect use of the waterfront and the configuration of its open space.
- Q:** Consider our weather. Take advantage of it and consider how it can be ingrained in the concept.
- Q:** You pay wonderful attention to the east west connections. Please bring attention to the north south connection. The idea of the ring is difficult to grasp. I am concerned there might not be small scale transit to make the waterfront an option for moving north or south in everyday movements. Removing the viaduct will not be enough to draw people down to the water to travel north south. Consider how people will get from 1st Ave. down to the waterfront to move north south?
- A:** We are thinking about mobility on the waterfront. We do not want a dedicated lane for transit because we are not sure there is demand and space is so valuable in this location. That's why we're looking at light transit. The aim is not to create a transit corridor on the waterfront though.
- Q:** I like the exposure of the living process underneath the piers in the water; to look from the waterside back to land; the intertidal public realm; the concept of framing and exploring views.

But is festival space on Pier 48 the right use? This area is close to the stadiums and Pioneer Square and is already congested. Perhaps festival space should be farther north.

Q: I like the reconnection to the Olmstead ring. The monumental gestures with the folds are so identifiable. On the east side, the city will front and intersect these folds. How are you anticipating the city will adapt, engage and build up to the folds? How will future development relate?

A: There are many constraints. When the viaduct comes down, the facades of the buildings facing west will obviously have a new view. This will happen not by design but by default.

Q: I applaud the folds. It is like origami. Simple and beautiful. You can use different materials in different ways. Messy and mossy.

Q: Everything we talked about was on land. Let's find a way to look back at the city from water and to experience the up and down in the tides. Perhaps go out in a tunnel.

A: The aquarium is exploring with us ways to improve interactivity with the seabed.

Panel's Summary Comments:

- The panel discussed the folds and the importance of their edges, materials, use, connections and forms.
- The panel discussed the important of the central pier.
- The panel discussed the importance of transportation along the waterfront, and how it served tourists and locals.
- The panel discussed the programming and users of the spaces, and the importance of creating active and passive space, and for humans and habitat. The panel also discussed the intensity of spaces and the prospect of leaving something out.

Closing

Presenter: Marshall Foster, DPD

Marshall described the next steps: the design team is looking at programming, habitat, and public art. The project will be presented to the public again in October, perhaps not a presentation at one large event but rather making presentations at many small ones. He noted that the waterfront consisted of a lot of non-city owned pieces -- Colman Dock, Market, etc. -- and that stakeholders are being drawn into the process. DPD is examining how Corner's waterfront work will intersect with the South Portal urban design.

Waterfront Seattle Review Panel Disclosures & Recusals

SPC Commissioners

Catherine Benotto - a member of Commissioner Benotto's firm, Weber Thompson, sits on the Central Waterfront Committee, Design Oversight Subcommittee, and the Stakeholder committee, all as a representative for Allied Arts.

David Cutler - works at GGLO, an integrated design and planning firm that advises clients and designs projects that may be impacted by work associated with the Seawall Replacement and Seattle Central Waterfront projects.

Colie Hough Beck - the firm she works for HBB has contracts with Community Groups, Seattle Parks, SDOT and SPU. HBB also works on multifamily and commercial projects in the city.

Mark Johnson - my firm, ESA, is currently assisting WSDOT Ferries with environmental planning for upgrades to Colman Dock, and Seattle Public Utilities with environmental planning for their combined sewer overflow plan, which includes facilities in the central waterfront. ESA also provide on-call environmental services to the Port of Seattle, although are not engaged in any work in the waterfront area for them at this time.

Bradley Khouri - b9 architects offices are located in Pioneer Square, a neighborhood directly affected by the work on the Seattle Waterfront. Commissioner Khouri is a co-Chair of AIA Seattle's Waterfront Committee.

Matt Roewe – Commissioner Roewe’s wife’s firm, EnviroIssues, is a consultant to the Seawall Project and the Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Project.

SDC Commissioners

Laurel Kunkler - the firm at which Commissioner Kunkler is employed is providing waterfront technical support to the city for projects unrelated to central waterfront visioning or design.

Julie Parrett – Commissioner Parrett formerly worked for James Corner Field Operations (1999-2002) however, not on the project under review by the Seattle Design Commission. She is a co-founder of the People’s Waterfront Coalition and continues to work with this organization.

Norie Sato – Commissioner Sato’s studio is right on Alaskan Way, but right up against the viaduct on the east side. It is a possible demolition candidate during the tunnel building process. The Viaduct has been her very close neighbor for the 30 years she has been in her studio.

Tom Nelson – Commissioner’s Nelson firm, Mithun, is part of the design team under contract with James Corner field operations. He is not working on the project and has no financial interest in the contract.