

APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

Michael Jenkins
Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

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September 18, 2014

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 5:00 pm

Projects Reviewed

Yesler Park

9th & Lenora Alley Vacation

Waterfront – Main Corridor North of Union St

Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain (arrived at 1:00 pm)

Lee Copeland

Megan Groth

Ellen Sollod

Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging

Martin Regge

Ross Tilghman

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Nicolas Welch

Joan Nieman



September 18, 2014 11:15 am – 12:25 pm	Project:	9th & Lenora Alley Vacation	
	Phase:	Urban Design Merit	
	Previous reviews:	none	
	Presenters:	Kim Baldwin	Seattle Parks and Recreation
		Mark Brands	Site Workshop
		Brian Steinburg	Weber Thompson
	Attendees:	Beverly Barnett	SDOT
		Brian Bishop	Site Workshop
		Andrea Fitch	Site Workshop
		Donald Harris	Seattle Parks and Recreation
		Courtney Kaylor	McCullough Hill Leary, PS
		Jeff Lowenberg	GID
		Jack McCullough	McCullough Hill Leary, PS
		Dan McKinney	Transpo Group
		Chip Nevins	Seattle Parks and Recreation
		Garry Papers	DPD

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this meeting was to review the urban design merit of the joint petition from Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) and GID, a private developer, to vacate the alley between Westlake Avenue and Lenora Street in the Denny Triangle neighborhood. The vacation would facilitate Parks' development of Westlake & Lenora Park, a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project that the Design Commission expects to review at concept design in late 2014 or early 2015. Today's review only covered the urban design merit of the proposed vacation.

Summary of Proposal

Parks and GID are jointly petitioning to vacate the alley between Westlake Ave and Lenora St. This is an unusual situation where two different owners request to vacate the alley abutting both properties. By statute, a vacated alley is divided down its centerline and each half transferred to the adjacent property owner. The vacation petition is submitted with Parks and GID as co-applicants.

GID and Parks own the northern and southern parcels, respectively, of the block in the Denny Triangle bounded by 9th Ave, Lenora St, and Westlake Ave. On its parcel at 9th Ave and Lenora St, GID is currently going through permitting for a 400-foot residential tower with ground-floor retail. Parks proposes to develop Westlake & Lenora Park on the former Enterprise car rental site. Vacating the 16-foot-wide alley would allow for a larger park and prevent public vehicular use between the park and the adjacent building. The GID project would not gain additional square footage as a result of the vacation and does not require use of the alley for construction.

Summary of Presentation

Jack McCullough introduced the GID team and described the Master Use Permit (MUP) process for their project. He stated that one reason both GID and Parks want a vacation is that the Land Use Code requires access and loading from the alley.

Kim Baldwin stated that Parks acquired the 9,000-square-foot site in 2008 with the intention vacate the alley and create a new neighborhood park in the Denny Triangle. Ms. Baldwin described the team's outreach and communication in the community. The project at schematic design level, the funding for which was a public benefit item from a nearby street vacation. She noted that there is currently no funding for final design and construction but said the Seattle Park District might provide funding. While by law the vacation would allocate half of the alley to each abutting property owner, Ms. Baldwin stated that Parks and GID are discussing options for long-term ownership of the vacated land.

Mark Brands presented the rationale for the alley vacation; his presentation is dated September 18, 2014, and available on the [Design Commission website](#). An aerial view showed the site in relation to other nearby projects current in design or under construction. A slide illustrated six justifications for the vacation:

1. The alley is disconnected at the adjacent blocks to the northwest and southeast.
2. Turning radii onto or from the alley are difficult, particularly from Westlake Ave.
3. Vehicles leaving the alley onto Westlake Ave and Lenora St would create conflicts with pedestrians.
4. There are currently no utilities in the alley. All utilities for the GID project will use 9th Ave and Lenora St.
5. There is no service or parking access from the alley currently or expected in the future. The GID project will take access from 9th Ave, per approval from the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).
6. The alley vacation would allow for a larger park.

Mr. Brands briefly described the park design, which would include seating, play areas, plantings, art, and space for events. The team is working with SDOT on potentially pushing the boundary of the park in the Lenora St right-of-way. He acknowledged that its full Design Commission review as a CIP project will occur at a later date. Mr. Brands also mentioned two public meeting the Parks team has organized.

Brian Steinburg of GID described the 9th & Lenora project, which was approved by the Downtown Design Review Board (DRB) on August 19, 2014. He stated that the DRB supported the alley vacation petition and the proposal for the GID project to take with access from 9th Ave. Mr. Steinburg mentioned that GID project does not require the vacation for construction and would not gain square footage from it. He described the retail, residential, and office uses in the 9th & Lenora project that would overlook and help activate the park at all times of day. Of particular note, the team indicated on a site plan where a storage facility in the GID development would be available for Parks use.

A series of slides showed the proposed park design with the vacated alley and compared the vacation and no vacation scenarios. According to Mr. Brands, the images illustrated how the alley would separate the park and retail, present a challenging turning radius for vehicles northbound on Westlake Ave, create conflicts between cars and pedestrians, and introduce vehicles in the park environment. An

overview of the surrounding street network showed that the alley does not continue on either adjacent block and identified Green Streets and future bike infrastructure in the vicinity. Traffic flow data indicated a level of service (LOS) C on 9th Ave.

Mr. Brands concluded with a preview of the proposed public benefit package, which the team will present in full in a separate meeting.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission supported the alley vacation proposal and applauded the project teams on their collaboration and clear presentation. The Commissioners were encouraged by Parks' approach to coordinating with private development and hoped this establishes a new paradigm for how the department activates an urban park.

They found the arguments in support of urban design merit compelling. In the Commission's views, the lack of current and expected future utility or transportation functions in the alley suggested the vacation would be an improvement over existing conditions. That DPD and SDOT recognize the merit in locating loading and service functions on 9th Ave instead of the alley further strengthened the proposal. The Commissioners believed the alley vacation would facilitate a successful new park in a neighborhood replete with new development.

The discussion centered on the how the existing right-of-way connects to and functions within the urban fabric and the relationship of the park to the adjacent private development. The Commissioners saw great potential for the vacation to improve pedestrian circulation at this block and encouraged softening the hard edge between the GID project and the park. They emphasized, however, that the park must retain a clear public quality distinct from the GID project and cautioned that the park must not appear to serve primarily as an entry to the private development.

While a complete review of the park design will be the focus of a separate meeting, Commissioners gave some initial reactions and suggestions. They recommended that Parks explore how artwork can most effectively support the dynamic character of the place and cautioned against placing an iconic piece of art on the southern corner of the site solely because of the blade signs of its former tenants. As the design develops, the Commission hopes to see an integrated approach to lighting the tower and park and encouraged Parks to consider opportunities for large-caliper trees wherever possible.

Agency Comments

Garry Papers described the DRB process for the 9th & Lenora project and expanded on the issue of access from 9th Ave, which is a Green Street. He stated that the DRB saw a superior level of resolution with regard to the proposed curb cuts on 9th Ave, which the applicant made as minimal and interesting for pedestrians as possible. He noted that the applicant proposed additional planting in the right-of-way beyond normal Green Street standards. Mr. Papers stated that John Shaw at DPD also evaluated the proposed access on 9th Ave in consultation with SDOT and found the volume of traffic insignificant and predominantly residential. In sum, he said DPD is comfortable with design and operations on 9th Ave.

Donald Harris said even at initial negotiations for acquisition of the Westlake & Lenora site Parks recognized an opportunity for a new approach to activating an downtown park. According to Mr. Harris, Parks has historically been very parochial in its relationship to private development, insisting on hard lines between public and private space. Given the challenges downtown parks face as gathering places

for inappropriate activities, Parks now sees an opportunity for integrating private development with public space to activate parks. Commissioner Quotah asked Mr. Harris if the department has identified other downtown sites for park development now or in the future. Mr. Harris responded that Parks' ability to work in the current market is very limited. He is distressed to see nearby Denny Playfield go away as a result of a proposed development on that site and sees no other opportunities in the vicinity to create a public open space.

Beverly Barnett stated that SDOT has not identified any impacts from the loss of this alley segment. Overall, she finds the proposal strong and is supportive of Parks taking a somewhat different approach to public space. According to Ms. Barnette, this is the first vacation petition that is truly a partnership. Her only concern was the proposed edge of the park on Lenora St, which might encroach into a right-turn lane for freight movements.

Public Comments

none

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for the presentation of urban design merit for the joint petition from GID and Seattle Parks and Recreation to vacate the alley between Westlake Ave and Lenora St in the Denny Triangle. The Commission appreciated the clarity with which the team explained the context of and rationale for the proposed vacation. The level of coordination between the co-applicants and its potential to yield a vibrant new urban park was particularly encouraging.

The Commission agreed that the fundamental function of the alley is limited and recognized that the vacation will be an improvement over existing conditions. The Commission believed the proposals from GID and Parks warrant vacating the alley and, above all, saw merit in developing a stronger pedestrian connection between Lenora St and Westlake Ave.

With a **vote of 7 to 0**, the Design Commission approved the urban design merit for the alley vacation at 9th Ave and Lenora St with the following comments and recommendations:

- The Westlake & Lenora Park will create a valuable neighborhood open space and play an important role in the larger context of new development in South Lake Union and Denny Triangle.
- Maintain a high level of coordination between Parks and the private development to activate the park and strengthen its design. We commend the project teams on their collaboration and recognize its value in details like the proposed Parks storage space in the GID development.
- Continue to activate all three edges of the site. The attention given to Lenora St in the proposed design is encouraging.
- Ensure that visitors will understand the public nature of the park through its design relative to the adjacent residential tower. Westlake & Lenora Park should not set a precedent of public parks serving primarily as a foyer for private development.
- The retail is well placed given the grade change between Lenora St and Westlake Ave.

Urban design merit is the first of two phases that the Design Commission considers in its evaluation of a proposed alley vacation. The second is public benefit, which the Commission anticipates reviewing in the near future. Approval of both urban design merit and public benefit constitutes a recommendation from

the Design Commission to the Seattle Department of Transportation to approve the vacation petition. The ultimate decision to vacate the alley lies with the City Council. The Commission will also review Westlake & Lenora Park separately as a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project.