



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649, Seattle WA 98124-4649  
Street Address: 600 4th Avenue, 4th Floor

### Landmark NOMINATION Application

Name Freeway Park Year Built 1976  
(Common, present or historic)

Street and Number 700 Seneca Street

Assessor's File No. 197670PUBL; 1976700245; 1978200055

Legal Description See Next Page

Plat Name: See Next Page Block See Next Page Lot See Next Page

Present Owner: Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, City of Seattle

Present Use: Public Park Address: 100 Dexter Avenue N, Seattle

Original Owner: Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, City of Seattle

Original Use: Public Park

Architect: Lawrence Halprin & Associates, Angela Danadjieva, project manager

Builder: Peter Kiewit and Sons; David A. Mowat

## **Legal Description**

According to Seattle's Parks and Recreation Department, due to the park's complex history of ownership, a revised legal description is being prepared but is not presently available. The following is based on a previously prepared legal description (Maryman and Birkholz 2005).

### **West and Central Plaza**

Beginning at the most southerly corner of Block 62 of Addition to the Town of Seattle, as laid out by A. A. Denny (commonly known as A. A. Denny's Fifth Addition to the City of Seattle) according to plat thereof recorded in Volume 1 of Plats, page 89, records of King County, Washington; thence north  $30^{\circ} 37'20''$  west along the westerly line of said Block 62 a distance of 118.67 feet; thence north  $59^{\circ}22'40''$  east 109.87 feet to a point on a curve concave to the east having a radius of 2039.66 feet, a radial at said point bearing north  $80^{\circ}30'35''$  east; thence southerly along said curve 125.80 feet to the south line of said Block 62; thence south  $59^{\circ}23'00''$  west along said south line 68.16 feet to the point of beginning.

### **East Plaza, south of University Street**

Dennys A A Fifth Addition portion of Lots 2 and 3 Block 63 in A A Denny's Fifth Addition lying easterly of easterly line created by City of Seattle Ordinance No. 102552 together with portion Lot 1 Block 105 in A A Denny's Broadway Addition lying northwesterly of northwesterly line created by City of Seattle Ordinance No. 104768 together with south half of vacated University Street adjacent said Lot 2 Block 63 and said Lot 1 Block 105 and all of that portion of vacated 8th Avenue lying southerly of center line of said University Street extended across said 8th Avenue as vacated by City of Seattle Ordinance No. 113984.

### **East Plaza, north of University Street**

Dennys A A Broadway Addition portion of lots 2-3, 6-7 and 9 and 12 Block 106 lying westerly of the following described line: beginning at a point on the northwesterly line of said Lot 6 north  $30^{\circ}35'33''$  west 10.65 feet distance from southeast corner of said Lot 6 thence along a curve to left radius of 999 feet radial bearing south  $67^{\circ}26'31''$  east center on angle of  $12^{\circ}26'01''$  arc a distance of 216.79 feet thence south  $80^{\circ}40'$  east 19 feet thence south  $09^{\circ}20'$  west 0.37 feet thence south  $79^{\circ}32'28''$  east 9.86 feet thence south  $30^{\circ}37'35''$  east 23.88 feet to point on northwesterly margin of University Street and terminus of said line less portion for State Route 5 and for Hubbell Place together with vacated portions of 9th Avenue and of alley within Block 106 as vacated by City of Seattle Ordinance No. 113984 and together with portion said Block 106 and of alley and street adjacent and of portion of Block 63 in A.A. Denny's Fifth Addition as described in Parcel "A" of City of Seattle Ordinance No. 111838.

Seattle Landmarks Nomination  
**Freeway Park**

Submitted to:  
Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board,  
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

Submitted by:  
Seattle Parks and Recreation Department



Prepared by:  
Historical Research Associates, Inc.  
Chrisanne Beckner, MS

Seattle, Washington  
September 2021



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## 1. Introduction

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Freeway Park is located at 700 Seneca Street (St.) in downtown Seattle, Washington. Completed in 1976, it is an innovative city park built atop a lid spanning Interstate-5 (I-5). Supported by concrete piers and bridges, as well as a multistory parking garage, the park provides a raised pedestrian pathway through a landscaped park over freeway traffic. This nomination covers the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department-owned park landscape only, which encompasses 5 acres and stretches northeast over I-5 from the corner of Seneca St. and 6th Avenue (Ave.) downtown to the corner of 9th Ave. and Hubbell Place (Pl.) in the neighborhood known as First Hill.<sup>1</sup> The park's irregular footprint is 1,300 feet (ft) long with varying widths from approximately 250 ft to as narrow as 60 ft across. The park incorporates lawns, plantings, pathways, large planting boxes, and dramatic water features. Plant species have evolved over time in support of a vibrant, sustainable living landscape. Structural materials, including concrete, have weathered and show some signs of repair. Structures are constructed primarily of concrete left raw and unfinished with evidence of staggered board forms—a treatment common to Brutalism, a midcentury architectural style emphasizing monolithic concrete construction. The park's topography varies, gaining 90 ft between its lowest point at the southern end and its highest point above freeway traffic.<sup>2</sup> Freeway Park was designed by the firm Lawrence Halprin & Associates. Architect Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin (now Angela Danadjieva) was the project designer. Danadjieva Tzvetin and Halprin designed the park to connect three sites now known as the Great Box Garden, south of Seneca St.; Central Plaza, north of Seneca St.; and East Plaza, northeast of Central Plaza on the east side of 8th Ave. While Freeway Park sits on top of a freeway bridge and garage, these resources are owned and operated by separate entities and are excluded from the nomination, along with additions constructed along Freeway Park's boundaries in the 1980s and beyond.

### 1.1 Data for Freeway Park

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Historic Name:              | Freeway Park   |
| Year Completed:             | 1976   |
| Address:                    | 700 Seneca St., Seattle, Washington 98101  |
| Assessor's Parcel Numbers.: | 197670PUBL; 1976700245; 1978200055   |
| Present and Historic Owner: | Seattle Parks and Recreation Department, City of Seattle   |
| Present and Historic Use:   | Public park  |
| Designer:                   | Lawrence Halprin & Associates (Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin)  |
| Builder:                    | Kiewit, Peter Son's, Inc. (Contractor); Mowat, David A. Company (Contractor); MacLeod, Edward & Associates (Landscape Architect) |

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<sup>1</sup> In 1983, the Pigott Memorial Corridor was added. In 1988, the newly constructed grounds of the Washington State Convention Center were attached. Both landscapes were designed by Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin, at that time a principal in Danadjieva & Koenig Associates. Neither is included in the nomination.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Tate and Marcella Eaton, *Great City Parks*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 24.

## 1.2 Research Methods

Principal investigator Chrisanne Beckner, MS, conducted field research, documenting Freeway Park in digital photographs and field notes. Beckner and historian Lindsey Weaver, MA, reviewed archival collections held by the Seattle Municipal Archives, Seattle Public Library, University of Washington, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, as well as HRA's in-house libraries, and online collections of essays, maps, photographs, and newspapers. Additionally, HRA reviewed archival records held by the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, which included historic plans and plant surveys.

HRA completed a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination for Freeway Park in 2019, and the Secretary of the Interior accepted the nomination in 2020. The NRHP nomination for Freeway Park has informed the Seattle Landmarks nomination.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chrisanne Beckner, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Freeway Park, September 2019, on file with the National Park Service and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.



## 2. Description

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### 2.1 Setting

Freeway Park is an urban park surrounded by high-rise buildings. It is constructed above a parking garage and on piers and bridges above a busy freeway. While the park landscape is nominated as a Seattle Landmark, associated resources, including the Freeway Park Garage, I-5, and the supporting lid over I-5 are excluded from the nomination. Only the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation-owned Freeway Park landscape is included in this nomination.

Freeway Park was designed to provide a landscaped park experience atop a structure of concrete integrated into a highly developed, heavily trafficked section of the central city. The park is bisected by a freeway exit ramp (6th Ave.) and wraps around a 20-story office tower known as the Park Place Building at its southwest corner (1200 6th Ave.). It is bordered to the northwest by the Washington State Convention Center (705 Pike St.), to the northeast by the Cambridge Apartments (903 Union St.), and to the east by Horizon House (900 University St.) and the Exeter Apartments (720 Seneca St.), two multistory apartment towers (Figures 1 and 2).

Freeway Park's site spans three parcels (197670PUBL; 1976700245; 1978200055), which together form an irregular 5-acre footprint. The park begins on the southwest end with the Great Box Garden, constructed of board-formed planter boxes in the oddly shaped block between the I-5 corridor and 6th Ave. North of the Great Box Garden are the Park Place Building and Freeway Park's Central Plaza, with dramatic water features. North and east of these elements is Freeway Park's East Plaza, a peaceful destination located atop the excluded Freeway Park Garage (Figure 3). The park's boundaries are defined by the city's irregular street grid. The Great Box Garden extends to the southwest of Seneca St. between 6th Ave. and Hubbell Pl. Central Plaza extends northwest of Seneca St. between 6th Ave. and 8th Ave. East Plaza is located northeast of 8th Ave. between Hubbell Pl. to the west and 9th Ave., which wraps the park's northwest corner. Two additions were constructed in the 1980s to bind the park to surrounding developments including the Washington State Convention Center and Horizon House. These two additions are excluded from the nomination, as they were not part of the park's original design (Figure 4).

Freeway Park was designed to screen users from the traffic sounds and smells of the surrounding city—a design that succeeds by leading pedestrians through lushly landscaped spaces with paths and water features constructed of board-formed concrete. It was also designed with its site conditions in mind. Betty Miller, who served as horticultural consultant for Freeway Park during the design phase, described how the plantings for the park were chosen with an understanding that the park's urban location would subject them to unusual levels of stress: “dehydration of foliage from wind funneled by adjacent structures; general abuse by pedestrians, automobiles, and animals; glare from cement or glass; and soil and maintenance problems.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Freeway Park's designers relied on hardy species, avoiding more delicate species until they could be planted in combination with mature plants that could provide them some shelter.<sup>5</sup>

Freeway Park is owned by the City of Seattle and managed by the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, which maintains its infrastructure and plantings. The park continues to provide a natural

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<sup>4</sup> Betty Miller, “Seattle's Freeway Park,” *American Forests* 85, no. 10 (October 1979): 29–46, quotation on 29.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, “Seattle's Freeway Park,” 29.

oasis within the heart of the city, where it is surrounded by high-rise development and an expansive traffic grid bisected by the deep canyon that carries I-5 traffic through central Seattle.

## 2.2 Section 1. Great Box Garden<sup>6</sup>

At its south end, Freeway Park includes a partial city block between 6th Ave. and I-5 and between Seneca and Spring Sts., where Exit 165 draws northbound traffic off the freeway and into central Seattle (Figure 5). While the majority of Freeway Park is located north of Seneca St., this small section south of Seneca St.—which was christened the “Great Box Garden” in a *Sunset Magazine* article—is L-shaped in plan and sits above northbound and southbound I-5, making it partially visible to freeway traffic below (Photos 1 and 2).<sup>7</sup> This section of Freeway Park includes character-defining features like concrete pathways and planter boxes with board-formed finishes and some variation in concrete color and aggregate. According to the park’s original planting plan, the Great Box Garden was designed to include a variety of familiar Northwest plants, including rhododendrons, sweetgums, magnolias, cedars, laurels, and photinia.<sup>8</sup> A 2020 tree survey found a mix of these species remain in the Great Box Garden, with the exception of the Japanese photinia. Cypress, pine, and cherry were also present (Table 1).<sup>9</sup>

Along 6th Ave., the Great Box Garden approaches and then wraps around a city park known as Naramore Fountain Park.<sup>10</sup> Completed 10 years prior to Freeway Park, Naramore Fountain was gifted to the city by the architect Floyd A. Naramore, a founding principal of Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johnson (NBBJ), one of the world’s largest architecture firms.<sup>11</sup> The fountain, designed by artist and University of Washington professor George Tsutakawa, was one of Seattle’s first attempts to soften the edges between the city and the freeway. A tall, scalloped tower of bronze, the fountain is located at the center of a circular concrete splash pad surrounded by seating and plantings, making up Naramore Fountain Park. This park, while not within the Freeway Park boundary, is surrounded by the Great Box Garden.

South of the fountain, the Great Box Garden features a wide park strip with a series of concrete planter boxes. Although the sizes of the boxes vary, they are generally rectangular with widths between 15 and 30 ft. Originally filled with sweetgum and Japanese photinia, as well as some waldestinia, the garden’s plants, particularly around the fountain, were later replaced with herbs like rosemary, lavender, thyme, and sage, as well as colorful camellia, rock rose, heather, and fuchsia.<sup>12</sup> South of the fountain, the visitor either stays on a concrete sidewalk alongside 6th Ave. or strolls through the unimproved garden paths, encountering a series of concrete planter boxes and a small plaza with concrete bench seating built into the wall of the surrounding planter box. As the 6th Ave.

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<sup>6</sup> Photos 1 through 28, referenced in the text and included in Section 6, were taken within Freeway Park and are indicated by directional arrows on Figures 6–10 in Section 7.

<sup>7</sup> “Seattle’s ‘Tomorrow Park’ Opens July 4,” *Sunset Magazine* 157, nos. 1–6 (July–December 1976): 52–63.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Halprin & Associates, South Elements, Existing Conditions and Loading, Drainage, and Planting Plan, July 13, 1975, on file with City of Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle, Washington (hereafter Seattle Parks).

<sup>9</sup> Holly Iosso and Josh Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory for Seattle Parks and Recreation,” August 6, 2020, on file with Seattle Parks.

<sup>10</sup> The fountain, located near the middle of the block on 6th Ave., is excluded from the boundaries of the Freeway Park nomination due partly to its age (constructed in 1967, nearly a decade before Freeway Park).

<sup>11</sup> Heather M. MacIntosh, “Naramore, Floyd A. (1879–1970),” HistoryLink.org Essay 120, November 20, 1998, <http://www.historylink.org/File/120>.

<sup>12</sup> Brice Maryman and Liz Birkholz, “Freeway Park,” draft City of Seattle Landmark Nomination, n.d., on file with Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Olympia. Maryman and Birkholz relied on Jason Morse for plant identification assistance.

leg of the park approaches Spring St., lower plantings, including perennial spring-blooming hyacinth become common (Photo 3).

From 6th Ave., Spring St. rises to the northeast with the slope of the landscape and then bridges a portion of I-5. As one moves northeast alongside Spring St. on a wide sidewalk with metal rail, one can stop midspan and see the freeway traffic pass below the Great Box Garden (See previous Photos 1 and 2). This vantage point provides views of the planter boxes as they march along Seneca St. and cascade down from above to land between freeway traffic lanes, providing drivers a view of some of the park landscape. Boxes include a small number of deciduous trees, identified in original plans as sweetgum, deodar cedar, laurel, Lebanon cedar, and juniper, although some now overflow with English ivy that dangles over the sides, providing freeway drivers a glimpse of the natural world before they enter into the short tunnel under Freeway Park.

From Spring St., the visitor walks along Hubbell Pl., returning to the Great Box Garden at the corner of Hubbell Pl. and Seneca St. A concrete wall encloses the garden’s east end on Hubbell Pl.<sup>13</sup> The park slopes down toward 6th Ave. along Seneca St. The sidewalk is made up of connected concrete pads with varied southern edges, creating a staggered, stepping-stone-like pattern bordered by planting boxes and grass lawns (Photo 4). Concrete walls set into the slope create rectangular and square planter boxes that vary in size, height, and depth. Low boxes are planted with flowering spring bulbs including daffodils and violets or pansies. These are backed by flowering shrubs and deciduous trees and spreading blackberry vines. At the corner of Seneca St. and 6th Ave., the park corner is covered in English ivy that surrounds the trunks of large sweetgum and cedar.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1. Plants Found in the Great Box Garden.**

| Common Name     | Latin name                           |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Rhododendron    | <i>Rhododendron</i> spp.             |
| Sweetgum        | <i>Liquidamber styraciflua</i>       |
| Lebanon cedar   | <i>Cedrus libani stenscoma</i>       |
| Deodar cedar    | <i>Cedrus deodara</i>                |
| Saucer magnolia | <i>Magnolia x soulangeana</i>        |
| Azalea          | <i>Rhododendron</i> “Nakabari”       |
| Zabel’s laurel  | <i>Prunus laurocerasus zabeliana</i> |
| Viburnum        | <i>Viburnum davidii</i>              |
| English ivy     | <i>Hedera</i> spp.                   |
| Hinoki cypress  | <i>Chamaecyparis obtuse</i>          |
| Scots pine      | <i>Pinus sylvestris</i>              |
| Incense cedar   | <i>Calocedrus decurrens</i>          |
| Cherry          | <i>Prunus</i> spp.                   |

<sup>13</sup> Iosso and Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory.”

<sup>14</sup> Iosso and Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory.”

|                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Waldestinia     | <i>Waldestinia trifolia</i>  |
| Heavenly bamboo | <i>Nandina domestica</i>     |
| Rosemary        | <i>Rosmarinus</i> spp.       |
| Lavender        | <i>Lavandula</i> spp.        |
| Sage            | <i>Salvia</i> spp.           |
| Camelia         | <i>Camellia japonica</i>     |
| Meadowsweets    | <i>Spiraea</i> spp.          |
| Santolina       | <i>Santolina</i> spp.        |
| Rock rose       | <i>Cistus</i> spp.           |
| Thyme           | <i>Thymus</i> spp.           |
| Scotch heather  | <i>Calluna vulgaris</i>      |
| Japanese holly  | <i>Ilex crenata</i>          |
| Privet          | <i>Ligustrum japonica</i>    |
| Fuchsia         | <i>Fuchsia</i> spp.          |
| Hyacinth        | <i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i> |

### 2.3 Section 2. Central Plaza

North of Seneca St. is Freeway Park’s Central Plaza, which takes up most of a city block and includes many of the park’s character-defining features, including both the Canyon and Cascades waterfalls, and three of the five original light standards, which are 100 ft tall (Figure 6). Additionally, this section includes a portion of the park’s concrete pathway, as well as concrete benches, concrete planters, and trash receptacles, all featuring the park’s distinctive board-formed concrete finish with some variations in color and texture. This section also includes new amenities: a kiosk near the intersection of Seneca St. and 6th Ave., blade signs near the 8th Ave. overpass, round planters, and 20 ft light standards along the pathways, all added to support wayfinding and public safety. Additionally, Central Plaza is planted with numerous varieties of shrubs and deciduous and evergreen trees (Table 2).

Central Plaza bumps up against the Park Place Building at 1200 6th Ave., which was already in development when the City of Seattle decided to build Freeway Park. In a cooperative agreement, the private developer agreed to site his building at the park’s northwest corner in order to preserve additional square footage for the park landscape (Photo 5). The building’s developer also agreed to design and fund the construction of Park Place Plaza above the building’s underground garage.<sup>15</sup> The private project was completed in 1972, roughly four years ahead of the completion of Freeway

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<sup>15</sup> Park Place Plaza was privately developed and is not within the square footage of Freeway Park.

Park.<sup>16</sup> Today, it remains on parcel 1976700185 along 6th Ave. and is owned by URG Park Place, LLC.<sup>17</sup>

Because Park Place Plaza is privately held, Seattle's Freeway Park begins slightly east of 6th Ave. with an entrance from Seneca St. that consists of a wide concrete walk approaching the Park Place Building and then leading east and north through the park (Photo 6). Near the entrance, the path is punctured by four small, square, recessed planters with low, ornamental grasses. Planter boxes filled with mature maple and spring bulbs like daffodils and hyacinth are located north of the path. This entrance also includes varieties of low shrubs and ferns.<sup>18</sup> Trees include sweetgums and various maples.<sup>19</sup> While a larger number of maples were originally designed for the park's entrance, overgrowth led to their thinning in recent years.

As it approaches the building entrance, Freeway Park's concrete path faces a network of connected planter boxes. Set into the ground in squares, or slightly raised with a small concrete curb, these boxes step down toward the Park Place Building entrance and are filled with rows of varied, bright, ornamental grasses. Just east of these boxes is the original boundary between Park Place Plaza and Freeway Park. The connection between the two is virtually seamless, indicated only by slight variations in concrete color along the wall of a planter box (Photo 7).

One branch of Freeway Park's path turns north to hug the Park Place Building, running around its eastern wall, past planter boxes filled with azalea. The path passes one of the park's original character-defining 100-foot-tall light standards and descends a concrete stair to meet a covered walkway along the building's northern facade. The light standard is a tall, steel pole hung with arms that can hold dozens of individual lights facing numerous directions, high enough to provide only a diffuse glow through the trees at night (See Photo 17 for an example).

The second branch of the path heads east toward Central Plaza with irregularly set concrete pads bordered on the north and south by lawns and plantings of grasses, spring bulbs, and deciduous trees. Paths are lit by recently installed 20 ft light poles with two arms and suspended, pendant-like fixtures. The lights are found throughout the park on the edges of the primary concrete path.<sup>20</sup> At Central Plaza, the path widens into a large concrete court with irregular edges and enough room for mobile metal furniture and a coffee or food cart (Photo 8). Northeast of the plaza, a hillside slopes up toward Hubbell Pl. and is planted with a combination of lawns and spring bulbs, including daffodil, crocus, violets or pansies, and shrubs and ground cover.<sup>21</sup> A second original light fixture is located near the plaza.

North of the plaza is one of the park's primary water features, known as the Cascades waterfall. Wide, shallow stairs lead down toward a pool that gives rise to a series of varied, concrete blocks with rough board-formed surfaces (Photo 9). When active, water spills over the Cascades, providing

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<sup>16</sup> The western end of the plaza was designed by Park Place architects in association with Freeway Park architects and includes a series of concrete planter boxes of varying heights and sizes. The planting plan, materials, and design differentiate Park Place Plaza from the city-owned Freeway Park.

<sup>17</sup> King County Assessor, eReal Property database, parcel 1976700185, accessed January 18, 2021. <https://blue.kingcounty.com/Assessor/eRealProperty/default.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> Seattle Parks and Recreation, "Freeway Park 2008–2010 Renovation Project," September 23, 2008, on file with Seattle Parks.

<sup>19</sup> Iosso and Petter, "Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory."

<sup>20</sup> Originally, the park was designed with five 100-foot-tall light standards meant to provide a soft and dappled light for those in the park at night. However, these have been augmented with 20-foot-tall poles to improve safety.

<sup>21</sup> Maryman and Birkholz, "Freeway Park."

a peaceful, low-elevation waterfall. Mature deciduous trees, including maple and oak, shade the waterfall. A deteriorating plaque alongside the Cascades reads:

*Surfaces near the small cascade water feature are wet and may be slippery... Use caution.  
Children must be attended by parent or responsible adult.  
Although water is filtered, material thrown into pools can plug drains, injure waders and disrupt operations.  
Park features are intended to create a variety of interesting experiences and should be enjoyed with the kind of appreciation one would bring to a natural cascade of similar dimensions.*

North of the Cascades is a wide set of stairs over sloping grades along the park's northern edge. The park's northern boundary is constructed of concrete planter boxes visible from University Ave. to the north and topped by a metal fence. Screening the park from University Ave. are planters that drip blackberry vines and ivy and provide a dense screen of huckleberry and hemlock with an understory that masks traffic noise inside the park.<sup>22</sup> The interior of the northern border, south of the stairway, is also planted with a dense screen of trees and shrubs including hazelnut and serviceberry (Photo 10).<sup>23</sup> Here, as throughout the park, large sweetgums and maples have been replaced with trees of smaller stature, like bitter cherry. Hemlock has replaced the large deodar cedars that once shaded much of the park from the city along its borders.<sup>24</sup>

From the Cascades or Central Plaza, the most spectacular feature of Freeway Park lies directly east. The park's primary water feature, the Canyon, is a 90-foot-tall concrete sculpture, a manmade waterfall descending from the bridge above I-5 to the city below (Photo 11). The Canyon is interactive and includes a series of narrow and wide stairways that lead between the monolithic concrete forms over which the water thunders. Intentionally designed to mask the sound of the freeway, the Canyon's waterfall breaks over blocks and ledges and splashes into a narrow pool at the bottom. At pool level is one additional feature—a window, long screened with heavy wire mesh, through which one could once watch the northbound traffic of I-5 behind a curtain of water. Today, this “window” has been permanently covered.

The Canyon is impressive not only for its size and approachability, but also for its aesthetic character. Its monoliths are constructed of the same rough, board-formed concrete found throughout the park, striated like rock, with bold vertical and horizontal bands approximately 3 to 12 inches wide. Unlike much of the park, views southwest of the Canyon are kept nearly free of plantings to allow for its appreciation. Surrounded primarily by concrete and grass, along with a small number of rhododendrons, its surfaces are either bare or covered in a layer of small river rocks. A deteriorating plaque alongside the Canyon reads:

*The Canyon was designed to be viewed and to muffle the noise of nearby street and freeway traffic. 27,000 gallons of water are recirculated each minute through the concrete structures.  
You are invited to view and explore the Canyon safely by walking along the stairway-path, but you must stay out of the water.*

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<sup>22</sup> Seattle Parks and Recreation, “Freeway Park 2008–2010 Renovation Project.”

<sup>23</sup> Iosso and Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory.”

<sup>24</sup> Iain M. Robertson, “Replanting Freeway Park: Preserving a Masterpiece,” *Landscape Journal* 31, no. 1–2 (2012): 77–99.

*Park features are intended to create a variety of exciting vistas and experiences and should be enjoyed with the kind of appreciation one would bring to a natural canyon of similar dimensions.*

Along with the path from Central Plaza is another from the Seneca St. sidewalk. At the corner of Seneca St. and Hubble Pl. is a canopy of maple and hemlock.<sup>25</sup> From Seneca St. and Hubble Pl., one walks between at-grade planting areas with no borders or boxes, filled with ornamental grasses and some spring flowers, along with a small number of shrubs (laurel and sword ferns) to the top of the Canyon. Above the Canyon, paths and lawns are bordered by trees, including maple, larch, and cherry, surrounded by beds of winter jasmine, salal, and mahonia.<sup>26</sup> The irregular concrete path continues to the northeast, winding through grassy areas bordered by maple and hemlock, along with some low plantings that are either in bare soil or in slightly raised planter boxes of board-formed concrete.

The path is lined with additional structures, including minimalist benches constructed as rectangular blocks of concrete topped by thick wood-block armrests on the ends and in the centers (Photo 12). These benches are backed, in some cases, by off-center concrete walls acting as backrests. Fixed concrete boxes with rough board-formed finishes and removable interior trashcans also dot the path. The park, altered over the years, also includes some obvious additions, most notably a series of noncontributing, round concrete planters with decorative friezes that have been placed along the path and planted with spring annuals—perhaps the only rounded structures in the park.

**Table 2. Plants Found in Central Plaza.**

| <b>Plants</b>     | <b>Latin name</b>               |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sierra laurel     | <i>Leucothoe davisiae</i>       |
| Barrenwort        | <i>Epimedium</i> spp.           |
| Barren strawberry | <i>Waldsteinia fragarioides</i> |
| Sword ferns       | <i>Polystichum</i> spp.         |
| American sweetgum | <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>  |
| Saucer magnolia   | <i>Manolia × soulangiana</i>    |
| Red maple         | <i>Acer rubrum</i>              |
| Norway maple      | <i>Acer platanoides</i>         |
| Japanese maple    | <i>Acer palmatum</i>            |
| Winter jasmine    | <i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i>      |
| Longleaf mahonia  | <i>Mahonia nervosa</i>          |
| Salal             | <i>Gaultheria shallon</i>       |
| Bur oak           | <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>       |
| Huckleberry       | <i>Vaccinium ovatum</i>         |

<sup>25</sup> Iosso and Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory.”

<sup>26</sup> Iosso and Petter, “Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory.”

|                        |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Western hemlock        | <i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>            |
| Mountain hemlock       | <i>Tsuga mertensiana</i>             |
| Prickly heath          | <i>Pernettya murconata</i>           |
| Witch hazel            | <i>Hamamelis</i> spp.                |
| Sierra laurel          | <i>Leucothoe davisiae</i>            |
| Shadbrush              | <i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>        |
| Sweet box              | <i>Sarcococca bookeriana humilis</i> |
| Beaked hazelnut        | <i>Carylus cornuta</i>               |
| Allegheny serviceberry | <i>Amelanchier laevis</i>            |
| Bitter cherry          | <i>Prunus emarginata</i>             |
| Sugar maple            | <i>Acer saccharum</i>                |
| Vine maples            | <i>Acer circinatum</i>               |
| Golden larch           | <i>Pseudolarix amabilis</i>          |
| Lily turf              | <i>Liriope muscari</i>               |

#### 2.4 Section 3. East Plaza

East Plaza was constructed atop excluded resources, including I-5, Hubble Pl. and the Freeway Park Garage, and includes a comfort station with a much-altered interior (Figures 7 and 8).<sup>27</sup> It also includes one character-defining water feature (East Plaza Water Display), and benches, square planters, and garbage receptacles all finished in the park’s distinctive rough concrete, now with some variation in color and texture. It also includes two character-defining light standards along its eastern edge. Relatively new features in East Plaza include the renovated comfort station interior, additional blade signs (poles with directional signs) round planters, and 20 ft light standards along the pathway.

As it heads northeast toward East Plaza from the top of the Canyon, Freeway Park’s concrete path is edged by lawns and a mix of hemlock, larch, and cedar bordered by early blooming winter jasmine and bishop’s hat. As the path crosses over I-5 and Hubbell Pl., it narrows, with a small number of larch, cherry, and maple to the southeast, and a dense mix of larch, hemlock, and dogwood to the northwest (Table 3).

While the park is high above the freeway in the open air, below the park are fast moving lanes of traffic. Alongside the northbound lanes of I-5, Hubbell Pl. is a freeway frontage road. A sidewalk along Hubbell Pl. meets a stairway at University St. that climbs through switchbacks and square and rectangular planter boxes full of low-growing plants like sword ferns and salal to enter Freeway Park’s East Plaza. New blade signs point the way to the Convention Center, downtown Seattle, and Freeway Park’s Central Plaza.

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<sup>27</sup> The comfort station is an original feature of Freeway Park, although its interior has been heavily altered and does not include original features.



High above Hubbell Pl., Freeway Park's path splits as it heads northeast toward 8th Ave.—the only roadway that passes over a portion of Freeway Park instead of under it. One branch leads north following 8th Ave. as it crosses over I-5 again, and toward the Washington State Convention Center. Also constructed as a concrete path bound by grass, planting boxes, and concrete walls, this branch dates to the late 1980s, when the Convention Center grounds were constructed. The path alongside 8th Ave. was designed to connect Freeway Park to the Convention Center's wide plaza. A seam in the concrete is still visible near one of the park's remaining deodar cedars where the two landscapes were joined (Photo 13).

The second branch of Freeway Park's path glides under the 8th Ave. overpass and beside a square, plain, single-story, concrete maintenance shed that was constructed under the overpass in 1995 (Photo 14). Once under the overpass, the path leads to the foot of the Pigott Memorial Corridor, another branch of Freeway Park that dates to the 1980s. Pigott Memorial Corridor was completed in 1984, but was constructed with a zigzag pattern of concrete stairs, ramps, and a watercourse up from Freeway Park, through a steep change in grade, to the intersection of University St. and 9th Ave. in Seattle's First Hill neighborhood. Completed nearly a decade after Freeway Park and not part of the original park design, the Pigott Memorial Corridor, like the grounds of the convention center, was designed to improve upon pedestrian traffic patterns and improve connectivity over I-5.

Freeway Park's path passes by the foot of Pigott Memorial Corridor and continues north, bordered by concrete planter boxes as it approaches the comfort station constructed of both poured concrete and concrete block (Photo 15). The comfort station's walls are smooth concrete and not striped or striated with evidence of board forms like the finishes of character-defining features. A plain, one-story, square building, the comfort station includes two recessed entries for men's and women's restrooms, one on the building's northwest corner and one on its southwest corner. To the east, attached to the rear wall of the comfort station, is an elevator tower. Also square and constructed of concrete, it connects to the Freeway Park Garage below (Photo 16). Recently, the Freeway Park Association helped install a temporary chalkboard on the building's west-facing wall. In 2020, it includes space for people to finish the following sentence: "Freeway Park could be my place to . . ." The topic sentence changes periodically. A brick path partially encircles the building, which is located directly east of the Park's main path.

North past the comfort station, the path continues as staggered, irregularly placed concrete pads between lawns that expand to the northeast. Two of the original 100 ft light standards are located along East Plaza's eastern boundary but are nearly invisible above the canopy (Photo 17). Along the park's perimeters are additional plantings that provide visual, auditory, and wind screens. East Plaza was designed with maple, cedar, and magnolia, along with azalea, viburnum, rhododendron, and laurel.<sup>28</sup> When overgrowth began to crowd lawns and shade the understory, thinning and the use of smaller tree species helped restore East Plaza's open, airy character. Trees now include golden larch, colorful redbud, western crabapple, and fragrant snowbell. A small number of larger Douglas fir, maple, and magnolia also remain.<sup>29</sup> These are generally fronted by beds and concrete planter boxes of smaller shrubs and ground covers. Planting beds are edged with smooth, rounded borders. The path continues to the end of East Plaza and then narrows to a walkway bound by concrete walls (Photo 18). The narrow path leads to a third water feature known as the children's wading pool (Photo 19). Fronted by a shallow, irregularly shaped basin of small river rocks, the pool includes a

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Halprin & Associates, "East Plaza, Planting and Irrigation," January 13, 1975, on file with Seattle Parks.

<sup>29</sup> Iosso and Petter, "Tree Solutions. Project No. TS – 7250. Arborist Report: Freeway Park Tree Inventory."

shallow waterfall, a three-tiered structure of board-formed concrete. The wading pool is surrounded by grasses and planter boxes with sword ferns, serviceberry, and flowering annuals (Photo 19).<sup>30</sup> While the primary path leads north from the wading pool, an additional branch leads west and connects again to the wide, concrete plaza of the Washington State Convention Center, completed in 1988 and also partially located on a lid above I-5.

The north branch of the path leads to a shallow ramp with pipe railing, up a slight incline, and toward a small concrete square known as Freedom Plaza, which includes a plaque flanked by two concrete benches inscribed with: “For God and Country—to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy” (Photo 20). The plaque between the benches reads: “Freedom Plaza. Donated by Seattle Post 1, The American Legion, July 4, 1976.” Near the benches, a small portion of the path branches off and leads northwest, where it connects with the grounds of the Washington State Convention Center. The Convention Center’s grounds include viewpoints for visitors to look back over the 8th Ave. overpass at the Freeway Park Garage and East Plaza (Photo 21).

From Freedom Plaza, the path leads north to the end of Freeway Park, where it meets a descending stair to 9th Ave. The stair curves around the edge of the Freeway Park Garage and terminates at grade.

**Table 3. Plants Found in East Plaza.**

| <b>Plants</b>     | <b>Latin name</b>                                 |
|-------------------|---|
| Deodar cedar      | <i>Cedrus deodara</i>                             |
| Winter jasmine    | <i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i>                        |
| Bishop’s hat      | <i>Epimedium</i> × <i>versicolor</i> 'Sulphureum' |
| Dogwood           | <i>Cornus kousa</i>                               |
| Vine maple        | <i>Acer circinatum</i>                            |
| Sugar maple       | <i>Acer saccharum</i>                             |
| Azalea            | <i>Rhododendron</i> spp.                          |
| Magnolia          | <i>Cotoneaster</i> spp.                           |
| Viburnum          | <i>Viburnum davidii</i>                           |
| Rhododendron      | <i>Rhododendron</i> spp.                          |
| Laurel            | <i>Laurus</i> spp.                                |
| Golden larch      | <i>Pseudolarix amabilis</i>                       |
| Redbud            | <i>Cercis canadensis</i>                          |
| Red lotus         | <i>Magnolia insignis</i>                          |
| Western crabapple | <i>Malus fusca</i>                                |

<sup>30</sup> Seattle Parks and Recreation, “Freeway Park 2008–2010 Renovation Project.”

|                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Paperbark maple        | <i>Acer griseum</i>           |
| Allegheny serviceberry | <i>Amelanchier laevis</i>     |
| Fragrant snowbell      | <i>Styrax obassia</i>         |
| Western hemlock        | <i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>     |
| Mountain hemlock       | <i>Tsuga mertensiana</i>      |
| Douglas fir            | <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>  |
| Saucer magnolia        | <i>Magnolia x soulangiana</i> |
| Aureola                | <i>Hakonechloa macra</i>      |
| Sedge                  | <i>Carex</i> spp.             |

### 3. History of Alteration

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Naturalistic parks are living landscapes and undergo continuous evolution and change. It is impossible to maintain the original plantings or permanently preserve them at their original shapes and sizes. In the case of Freeway Park, alteration to the living landscape is inevitable. However, apart from this natural evolution, Freeway Park has been altered in three additional ways. First, its original borders have been obscured, as noted above, by construction associated with the Washington State Convention Center and the Pigott Memorial Corridor. Second, its original planting plan has been altered by replacements, thinning, seasonal plantings, and the switch from large tree species to more compact or slower-growing species. Third, a small amount of new construction has taken place within the park.

Alterations are generally compatible, and many were made with the original designers' goals in mind and for the benefit of the park's continuing health, preserving the park's character while also protecting it from, for instance, overgrowth that might stress concrete forms and damage park construction. Collectively, the alterations have had little impact on the park's integrity, as evidenced by the integrity of its primary character-defining features: the majority of its original footprint, only slightly altered by new construction; its water features, including the children's wading pool and the Cascade and Canyon waterfalls; its open airy plazas bordered by trees; its location above I-5 and Hubble Pl.; its concrete structures, including comfort station, paths, benches, monoliths, and planter boxes; and the board-formed concrete finish that defines nearly every original structure in the park landscape.

#### 3.1 Alterations to Original Freeway Park Plan

In 1983, Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin, the project designer for Lawrence Halprin & Associates, was asked to design and manage construction of the Paul Pigott Memorial Corridor, an expansion of the Freeway Park concept that connected the existing park to a series of ramps, stairs, and water features climbing uphill alongside the Benaroya Research Institute and connecting to the intersection of 9th Ave. and University Ave. on First Hill. The corridor was named after local entrepreneur Paul Pigott and has received mixed reviews since its completion in 1984. According to Allison P. Hirsch, a researcher from the University of Pennsylvania, the corridor:

...accommodated the change of grade in a series of switchback ramps, as well as short flights of corresponding stairs, with a watercourse flowing along one side. Continuous concrete walls line the ramps and tall trees emerge from the hillside below. The corridor was constructed as a handicapped-accessible amenity that made the park more manageable for the substantial nearby elderly population. Though designed and constructed with good intentions, the corridor is somewhat dizzying, owing to blind corners resulting from excess concrete and tall dense vegetation.<sup>31</sup>

A second alteration to the Park's plan, associated with construction of the Washington State Convention Center in 1988, blurred the original park boundaries in two locations, pulling pedestrians across 8th Ave. to the Convention Center with walkways and planters consistent with Freeway Park in design and scale.

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<sup>31</sup> Alison B. Hirsch, "The Fate of Lawrence Halprin's Public Spaces: Three Case Studies," master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2005, 91, [https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=hp\\_theses](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=hp_theses).

In both cases, new construction has somewhat obscured the boundaries of the original park footprint but has otherwise had no significant impact on the original park plan. Both the Pigott Memorial Corridor and Washington State Convention Center grounds are excluded from the nomination.

### 3.2 Alterations to Original Freeway Park Planting Plan

Parks are living landscapes that inevitably grow and evolve over time, undergoing unavoidable change. In the case of Freeway Park, constructed above a bed of concrete, conditions were expected to be harsh enough to stall growth. In response, the designers chose hardy species that could survive in spite of pollution from freeway traffic, poor sunlight, winds, and confining, concrete planters. However, the original park species thrived. With diligent soil conditioning and fertilization, small, immature trees grew to crowd out lower plantings, shade lawns, and screen corners of the park, inviting illegal activity. Eventually, the park's overgrowth discouraged visitors, including neighbors on First Hill. In 2005, University of Washington professor Iain Robertson, in consultation with Lawrence Halprin, devised a plan for replacing some of the overgrowth. In his article "Replanting Freeway Park," in which he referred to the park as a "city-scaled window box," Robertson wrote:

Over four years, beginning in 2007, Ted Holden, Senior Landscape Architect with Seattle Parks and Recreation, and the author made large changes to the plant palette based on analysis of Freeway Park's growing conditions. Relatively few changes were made to the arrangement and distribution of the park's plant masses. Plant selection during restoration acknowledged contemporary design sensibility that, because of modern influences, tended to favor greater effusiveness than in the 1970s. Rather than summarily remove plants that had been added over the years, they were assessed for retention: Do they "fit in"? Do they contribute to a welcoming and cheerful Freeway Park without being overly "pretty" or obtrusive? This approach preserved and continued the essence of the original design intent but adapted it based on changes in the park and city in the intervening years. It also accommodated contemporary sensibilities with the goal of drawing users back into the park. Activating the park was important because the success of the restoration would not be judged by the growth of plants, but by the use and appreciation of the park.<sup>32</sup>

According to Robertson, the species most responsible for the overgrowth was the deodar cedar, a common type that had thrived, leaving threadbare ground below each tree. The designers had originally included these large trees as a way to enclose the central park with a planted perimeter, but the cedars had eventually obscured the open, airy plazas and sunny lawns that Halprin and Danatjjeva had envisioned. The cedars and original Douglas firs had also dropped their lower branches, as is common, leaving a bare landscape at eye level.

Deciduous trees also posed a problem. According to Robertson, "Callery pears (*Pyrus calleryana*), red maples (*Acer rubrum*), sweetgums (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), smaller Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* vars.), and Magnolias . . . had been planted in groves and all had flourished."<sup>33</sup> In some cases, these too had outgrown their original footprint, crowding paths and other plantings. Finally, the park had also been designed with few shrubs, as they could obscure sightlines, and original

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<sup>32</sup> Robertson, "Replanting Freeway Park," 78.

<sup>33</sup> Robertson, "Replanting Freeway Park," 85.

ground covers had been muscled aside by some of Seattle's common English ivy, English laurel, and viburnum.<sup>34</sup>

In response, Robertson and Holden prepared a set of guidelines for replanting that focused on the original designers' intentions and was responsive to actual growing conditions. To return the park plantings to their original scale, Robertson and Holden recommended that the overgrown maples and sweetgums be replaced with varieties that would be smaller at maturity, like the Japanese maples that were left intact or moved to more visible locations.<sup>35</sup> Large conifers like the deodar cedar were replaced with smaller varieties like northern and mountain hemlocks. Bitter cherry replaced the large sweetgums and maples in the deciduous groves surrounding the water features. Callery pear groves were removed, and serviceberry and redbud were planted. For variety and to help provide the park with early spring color, a dozen species of small shrubs and ground coverings were added. "Four flower in mid-winter and four in the early spring. None have overly obtrusive flowers and their textures tend toward fine and medium."<sup>36</sup>

While the guidelines for replanting Freeway Park may be implemented over a long period of time and continue to evolve, planted landscapes are living things and cannot be held to the same standards of integrity as, for instance, a building. The planting plan for Freeway Park has been altered over the years and may likely be altered again.

While alterations may have affected the park's original planting plan, they restored the open, airy lawns, provided beautiful foliage at eye level, and exposed hidden corners. By removing overgrowth and choosing species appropriate to the scale of the park, plant managers brought back some of the character of the original park that had been lost over decades of unchecked growth.

### **3.3 New Construction, Plaques, and Improvements in Freeway Park**

Construction in the park has been limited to the maintenance shed tucked under the 8th Ave. overpass in 1995 and small additions designed to improve safety and wayfinding. Grouped by type, they include: 20 ft light standards along major paths; round concrete planters; a kiosk with map installed along Seneca St. near 6th Ave.; and blade signs pointing the way to the Convention Center and other locations.

Freeway Park also includes a few plaques in addition to those already described. Along the western boundary of the Canyon is a dedication plaque attributed to Mayor Wes C. Uhlman that reads: "To Commemorate Our Nation's 200th Birthday the Citizens of Seattle and King County Dedicated and Opened This the Freeway Park as the Opening Event of the Official Bicentennial Independence Day Observance, July 4, 1976." A second plaque at the same location reads: "In Honor of James Reed Ellis, (1921–) Dedicated Advocate and Organizer of Major Civic Improvements in Seattle and King County Including Freeway Park, the Metro Agency and the Forward Thrust and Open Space Concepts; Lawyer, First Citizen, and Inspiration and Exemplar to All."

Other alterations mainly fall under the category of maintenance and repair and are minimally visible. For instance, variations in concrete color are the result of ongoing repair related to water damage, overall weathering, and human use. In all cases, these alterations are minor.

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<sup>34</sup> Robertson, "Replanting Freeway Park," 87.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson, "Replanting Freeway Park," 83–85.

<sup>36</sup> Robertson, "Replanting Freeway Park," 94.

## 4. Statement of Significance

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### 4.1 Seattle's Early Parks

Seattle's development dates to the 1850s, when the Denny, Boren, and Bell families formed the small Euroamerican community that would grow into Washington's so-called Queen City. In the following decades, as Seattle's population grew, excursions to the undeveloped lands east of the city and along the banks of Lake Washington became popular pastimes, early evidence of Seattle residents' love affair with the terrain right outside its borders. These recreation areas would become the site of Seattle's first private parks.

As early as 1892, ahead of the Progressive Era and City Beautiful Movement in Seattle, the city's second park superintendent, E. O. Schwagerl, began to promote a citywide and city-owned park system. Instead of relying on private parks established by real-estate developers, Schwagerl suggested the City of Seattle take responsibility for preserving undeveloped lands and establishing a planned park system for public enjoyment.<sup>37</sup> Seattle's progressive Board of Park Commissioners, along with Schwagerl, acquired the authority to acquire privately owned lands and raise the city's debt ceiling so they could begin acquiring more parklands. As early as the 1890s, Schwagerl warned that the "Puget Sound country, sooner than many anticipated, will draw to its shores the wealthy of the entire Union to enjoy the wonderfully healthy climate and attractive home conditions."<sup>38</sup>

In 1902, as park commissioners continued to pursue a citywide park system, James D. Blackwell of the Seattle Electric Company reached out to the well-known firm, the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, of Massachusetts. The brother inherited the firm from their father, Frederick Law Olmsted, co-designer of Central Park and Prospect Park in New York and popularly considered the father of landscape architecture in the United States. By the early 1900s, Olmsted Sr. had turned the work of the firm over to stepson John Charles Olmsted, who had been his business partner for many years, and John Charles's younger half-brother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. John Charles and his associate, Percy Jones, visited Seattle in 1902, and in 1903, produced the Olmsted Brothers' park plan for Seattle, which would guide the acquisition, construction, and design of Seattle's parks and boulevards throughout the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the Olmstedian ideals found in the Olmsted Brothers' plans for Seattle echoed the work of Olmsted Sr., who died in 1903.<sup>40</sup> His aesthetic steered away from traditional garden designs, which he considered overly managed, fussy, and distracting, and toward designed landscapes that appeared naturalistic, uninterrupted, and bucolic. Appearing untouched, even if they were very carefully designed, his parks had the power to "evoke a poetic mood lifting one out of everyday care and ennobling the spirit with intimations of the divine."<sup>41</sup> Since the early twentieth century, public parks

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<sup>37</sup> E. O. Schwagerl, "Superintendent's Advisory Letter," *Second Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners, to the Honorable Mayor and City Council of the City of Seattle for the Year Ending November 30, 1892* (Seattle: Koch & Oakley, 1892), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Schwagerl, "Superintendent's Advisory Letter," 11.

<sup>39</sup> An in-depth history of the Olmsted's involvement with Seattle, the details of its various parks plans, and the developmental history of the citywide park system are all detailed in the associated multiple property document, "Seattle's Olmsted Parks and Boulevards (1903–1968)," prepared by Natalie Perrin and Chrisanne Beckner of Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), in 2016 and on file with Seattle Parks.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 347.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, *Landscape Design*, 339.

in Seattle have been designed to free residents and visitors alike from the city confines to experience naturalistic landscapes, open spaces, and views of the city's surrounding wild lands.

Examples of parks developed in Seattle in association with the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects include some of the city's most popular landscape parks and boulevards. Designed to take in surrounding views of mountains and water, they include, for instance, Volunteer Park, Green Lake Park, Seward Park, and a series of parks along Lake Washington Boulevard, which hugs the lake's western bank. All of these parks were either recommended or designed by the Olmsted Brothers as part of their 1903 plan for Seattle's parks and boulevards. Seattle also developed a number of innovative parks with specific amenities, like Woodland Park with its zoological collection and Washington Park with its world-class arboretum. In the modern era, as landscape design evolved to include elements of city planning, Seattle gained Gas Works Park, designed not only to take in views of Lake Union, as the Olmsteds originally recommended for the site, but to convert the remnants of the former Seattle Gas Light Company's works into an interactive relic.

While Seattle has enjoyed a long history of innovative park development and maintenance designed to emphasize its exceptional geographic setting, no park in Seattle was quite like Freeway Park. Freeway Park, while it met the original ideals set forth by the Olmsteds, providing a respite from the city, incorporating views, and relying on local foliage, was responsive to its period of construction and the evolving challenges of urban life, including increased traffic, most evident on the new freeway constructed through the central city and completed in the 1960s. The nation's post-World War II interstate highway program was so dramatic and without precedent that it inspired designers like Halprin to rethink park concepts and develop innovative approaches, including Freeway Park's freeway lid, in response to the new nationwide network of high-speed roadways.

## 4.2 The Public Process Behind Freeway Park

### 4.2.1 Interstate 5

In the early twentieth century, parks and boulevards were designed for pedestrians, sometimes bicycles, and even carriages. The automobile was in its infancy. By the 1950s, however, cars had grown into a nationwide obsession, and many cities, counties, and states lagged behind in the development of safe and efficient roadways. In 1956, the federal government passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, offering to fund up to 90 percent of an interconnected network of high-speed roadways.<sup>42</sup> In Washington alone, over 630 construction contracts worth a total of \$143 million were awarded over the next two years.<sup>43</sup> By 1960, with freeway construction well underway, the first section of I-5 opened for traffic in Tacoma. However, not until 1969 would Washington complete the final section of I-5 from the southern end of Marysville to the northern edge of Everett. Once it was completed, the freeway stretched from the Canadian border south through California to Mexico. It became known as the backbone of the West Coast.

I-5 was just one of many multilane freeways designed to crisscross the United States and serve a combination of domestic and military defense needs during the mid-twentieth century, which was considered a period of deterioration in central cities, as many families, and particularly White families, headed for the suburbs after World War II. Across the United States, freeway projects

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<sup>42</sup> Phil Dougherty, "Interstate 5 Is Completed in Washington on May 14, 1969," HistoryLink Essay 9393, March 24, 2008, <http://www.historylink.org/File/9393>.

<sup>43</sup> Harold R. Garrett, *A History of Highways and Transportation, Washington State Department of Transportation, Olympia, Washington*, 1994, <https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/5AA959D8-AD8A-43FA-87AF->



plowed through existing landscapes, sometimes demolishing historic neighborhoods and town centers, leading to the establishment of tools like the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, designed to fend off ill-considered demolition.

While freeways were under construction, urban renewal programs were underway as well, offering to restore aging urban areas, many of which had historic building stock, long histories, and cohesive residential communities of color that were forced to give way to new construction. In Seattle, urban renewal threatened to eliminate well-loved destinations like the Pike Place Market and Pioneer Square. Although urban renewal funds were not ultimately used to construct I-5, the freeway and urban renewal movements progressed simultaneously in Seattle. While the freeway route was under consideration, Seattle's planning commission ordered studies and considered urban renewal projects to eliminate "blight, which if not retarded or controlled, can lead to residential, commercial and industrial slums."<sup>44</sup> Describing Seattle's own "blight," the commission "cited 'obsolescence and ugliness' in some older parts of the city, blighted areas along hills 'where residential and industrial developments intermingle' and along arterials 'overzoned for business in the past.'"<sup>45</sup>

Against this backdrop, planning for the proposed freeway route continued through the 1950s. In Seattle, the freeway was designed through dense, urban areas of the city, following an earlier plan for a toll road floated in 1951 as a way to capture revenue while pulling people directly into downtown. A swath two to three blocks wide was planned through "small houses, apartment buildings, light industrial areas, and small businesses accessed by steep stairways, following a natural valley."<sup>46</sup> The proposed freeway was designed to cut through neighborhoods, including neighborhoods with large populations of people of color, like Seattle's International District and other sections of North Beacon Hill, close-in neighborhoods south of Seattle's wealthy families.<sup>47</sup>

As freeway planning continued in Seattle, the public protested.<sup>48</sup> Planners envisioned a deep canyon through downtown that would separate residents of the First Hill community from the commercial core. In response to the proposed freeway, protesters from First Hill warned of potential landslides, loss of parking spaces, increased traffic, and isolation from downtown.<sup>49</sup> When these arguments were unsuccessful, homeowners in the path of the freeway were approached by Washington State Highway Department agents who offered them market rate for their buildings. Approximately 10 percent of building owners refused, leading to condemnation proceedings. Homes bought by the state were considered nuisance properties and were then sold at auction, either to be picked up and moved or stripped for salvage—if vandals and thieves did not destroy wood floors, built-ins, and window frames before the new owner could collect them. In this way, the state acquired the roughly 4,500 parcels needed for the proposed freeway route.<sup>50</sup> In 1961, with protest growing, local architect

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<sup>44</sup> "Commission Urges Broader Use of Urban-Renewal Plan," *Seattle Times*, September 12, 1958.

<sup>45</sup> "Commission Urges Broader Use of Urban-Renewal Plan."

<sup>46</sup> Paula Becker, "First Part of Seattle Freeway (Interstate 5) Route Receives Federal Funding on October 1, 1957," HistoryLink Essay 4166, April 30, 2003, <https://www.historylink.org/File/4166>.

<sup>47</sup> Anna Yoon, Brian Lam, Gihoon Du, Jiang Wu, and Yurika Harada, "Interactive Map of Race Seattle/King County 1940–2010," Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, University of Washington, 2017 <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/maps-race-seattle.shtml>

<sup>48</sup> Paula Becker, "First Hill Neighborhood Objects to the Seattle Freeway Route at a Public Hearing on September 13, 1961," HistoryLink Essay 4167, April 30, 2003, <http://www.historylink.org/File/4167>.

<sup>49</sup> David Wilma, "Seattle Residents State Protest Against Interstate 5 Freeway on June 1, 1961," HistoryLink.org Essay 3944, September 6, 2002, <https://www.historylink.org/File/3944>.

<sup>50</sup> Paula Becker, "Washington Establishes an Office for Clearing the Route of the Seattle Freeway (Interstate 5) on April 1, 1957," HistoryLink Essay 4168, December 1, 2002, <https://www.historylink.org/File/4168>.

Paul Thiry joined the First Hill Improvement Club in calling for park lids over portions of the freeway, one between Madison and University Sts. and another between Pike St. and Olive Way “for aesthetic reasons and to further economic development.”<sup>51</sup> This appears to be the first time anyone proposed lidding a freeway with a public park in Seattle. In the local press, the debate for or against focused on practical issues. A lidded freeway, argued park proponents, would add to property values and restore improve connectivity to downtown. Opponents’ main argument was that adding a park to the plan would slow freeway construction by at least a year and add such cost increases that the federal government would likely not agree to continue funding 90 percent of the project.<sup>52</sup> Heated debate raged during meetings between city representatives, state representatives, and the public, but no compromise emerged. Meanwhile, the construction of I-5 moved forward.

By 1962, the innovative idea of a freeway lid had inspired others to propose parks to fill the airspace above I-5 through downtown Seattle. The Women’s University Club was in favor of a small park near their own club between Spring and Seneca Sts., for instance. As the *Seattle Times* reported, “landscape architects have drawn plans for a park bounded by Columbia and Cherry Sts. and by Fifty and Sixth Aves. and for a tentative park between Pike and Pine Sts. on either side of Boren Ave. The city and state are cooperating in the plans.”<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.2.2 *Seattle’s Century 21 Exposition*

In the dynamic post-war period, boosters were also revisiting previous successes like Seattle’s 1909 World’s Fair, known as the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific (AYP) Exposition. In the 1950s, Seattle city councilman Al Rochester suggested commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the AYP with a new world’s fair. Over an informal lunch, he convinced members of the Chamber of Commerce to support the idea, and with the chamber’s help, convinced the State of Washington to fund a World’s Fair Commission. The commission chose to use a 28-acre site at the foot of Queen Anne Hill for the fair and bumped the date out to 1962. On April 21, Seattle’s second World’s Fair, known as the Century 21 Exposition, opened with exhibits celebrating the sciences and promising a bright future, drawing almost 10 million visitors before closing on October 21, 1962.<sup>54</sup> While numerous architects, including the fair’s principal architect, Paul Thiry, and the Space Needle’s designer, John Graham, contributed to the fair’s design, San Francisco-based landscape architect Lawrence Halprin helped prepare the master landscape plan, establishing a lucrative relationship with the City of Seattle and designing the plazas for today’s Pacific Science Center. Halprin would go on to collaborate on designing the landscape for the Seattle Center after the expo, along with fountains and other amenities, some of which have since been replaced.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4.2.3 *Forward Thrust*

The Century 21 Exposition seemed to inspire a rebirth of Seattle’s early twentieth-century progressivism. Active, young Seattle professionals became increasingly involved in city planning, calling on leaders to fund significant city improvements. One of the most ambitious proposals, dubbed Forward Thrust by its architect, James Ellis, bundled together a number of the most popular

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<sup>51</sup> Becker, “First Hill Neighborhood.”

<sup>52</sup> “Questions and Answers on Rival Freeway Plans—Open or Covered?” *Seattle Times*, April 30, 1961.

<sup>53</sup> “Freeway Park,” *Seattle Times*, October 28, 1962.

<sup>54</sup> Alan J. Stein, “Century 21—The 1962 Seattle World's Fair, Part 1,” HistoryLink.org Essay 2290, April 18, 2000, <http://www.historylink.org/File/2290>.

<sup>55</sup> Marga Rose Hancock, “Thiry, Paul Albert (1904–1993),” HistoryLink.org Essay 9383, April 10, 2010, <http://www.historylink.org/File/9383>.

ideas for Seattle and surrounding King County and proposed to fund them with an array of voter-approved bond issues paid off through property taxes. Ellis, a local attorney who considered the construction of I-5 and the success of the Century 21 Exposition early evidence of a coming boom, proposed organizing a citizens group to push sluggish projects forward, including those bound up by a lack of initiative or funding or both. In a speech to the Rotary Club and in later writings, he called for a rapid transit system, more open space, more parks, and greater public waterfront access. He wanted to bury utility wires, widen and beautify urban arterials, renovate deteriorated housing, and preserve undeveloped land.<sup>56</sup>

Forward Thrust's citizen's group included 200 people, business leaders, people from both political parties, government officials, and some professors, bankers, service providers, and "housewives." The committee broke up into seven subcommittees that began meeting in autumn 1966 to determine the region's greatest needs and to craft the measures that would satisfy voters. While the committee considered itself progressive, the group was not particularly diverse. Committee members generally lived or worked in Seattle, were primarily male, and almost exclusively white. Furthermore, not all committee members attended all meetings, leaving the design of Forward Thrust in the hands of a dedicated few.<sup>57</sup>

In 1968, the first of Ellis's Forward Thrust capital improvement bond initiatives came up for a vote. Voters agreed to fund a multipurpose stadium (the Kingdome, completed in 1976 and demolished in 2000), a youth services center, arterial highways in King County, and fire-protection and sewer bonds in Seattle. Other proposals, including funding for a rapid transit system and low-income housing, failed to attract the required 60 percent of votes.<sup>58</sup>

Among the successful initiatives was a \$118 million bond for the purchase, creation, and improvement of parks and open space throughout King County.<sup>59</sup> Within three years of its passage, the King County parks department added 130 new parks, 16 new swimming pools, and doubled the facilities at 55 existing park sites.<sup>60</sup> Seattle gained the Seattle Aquarium, the International District's Hing Hay Park, the 534-acre Discovery Park (located on the former site of Fort Lawton), and the innovative Gas Works Park, designed by landscape architect Richard Haag to reuse the machinery, buildings, and waterfront property of the former gas plant. Perhaps the most famous of the Forward Thrust parks, however, was Freeway Park, the first park to lid an interstate.

### 4.3 Freeway Park's Construction

With funds secured, the City of Seattle could begin to implement its freeway park plan. In 1966, an anonymous donor offered to build a fountain at 6th Ave. and Seneca St. near the Women's University Club, one of the original sites proposed for a freeway lid. The donor, later revealed to be architect Floyd A. Naramore, provided \$50,000 for design, construction, and installation of a

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<sup>56</sup> William H. Mullins, "The Persistence of Progressivism: James Ellis and the Forward Thrust Campaign," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (Spring 2014), <http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Articles/Mullins/ForwardThrust.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Mullins, "Persistence of Progressivism."

<sup>58</sup> Patrick McRoberts, "King County Voters on Forward Thrust Bonds Approve Stadium and Aquarium and Nix Transit on February 13, 1968," HistoryLink Essay 2168, January 1, 1999, <http://www.historylink.org/File/2168>.

<sup>59</sup> Alyssa Burrows, "King County Voters Approve Proposition 6, a Forward Thrust Parks and Recreation bond, on February 13, 1968," HistoryLink Essay 4116, January 3, 2003, <http://historylink.org/File/4116>.

<sup>60</sup> Alan J. Stein, "King County Parks," HistoryLink Essay 10700, December 30, 2013, <http://www.historylink.org/File/10700>.

fountain sculpted by George Tsutakawa and later named Naramore Fountain.<sup>61</sup> It was presented to the City of Seattle in 1967, predating Freeway Park by almost a decade, but establishing a small public space downtown, an anchor for a public park.<sup>62</sup>

With Naramore Fountain in place, the city proposed to use Forward Thrust funds to build a small park around it. However, a Seattle parks commissioner had come across Halprin's 1966 book, *Freeways*, which suggested that the roadways themselves could be seen as akin to sculptures, vibrant new structures with innate potential to change urban design.<sup>63</sup> City leaders realized they could acquire more land from the adjoining odd lots of property left over from freeway construction. With those odd lots knit together by a bridge over the freeway, the city could add a striking new park to the downtown core. Additionally, the city could slide a multistory parking garage under the proposed park's East Plaza, both to support the park and to raise revenue.

However, private developers were simultaneously eyeing the same undeveloped parcels downtown. Richard Hedreen had already acquired rights to the southeast corner of the intersection of 6th Ave. and University St. to construct a large office block. Rather than let the private development stall the park plan, Hedreen and the City decided to cooperate on the development of Freeway Park and locate it adjacent to Hedreen's new Park Place building. Hedreen reoriented his proposed building to face away from the park and toward University St., freeing land south and east of the new building for park development. He also agreed to construct his parking garage under the proposed park's Park Place Plaza. Additionally, he agreed to help fund and maintain Park Place Plaza, as it would benefit his new building. The 21-story Park Place Building, designed by Van Slyk, Callison, and Nelson, cost \$9.6 million to build and was under construction by 1970, six years before Freeway Park was completed.<sup>64</sup>

From the City's point of view, the proposed Freeway Park could accomplish a number of goals: turn the largest available undeveloped area in downtown into a park; provide large numbers of parking stalls; encourage separation between pedestrian and vehicular traffic; reconnect First Hill to downtown; complement the Naramore Fountain Park; provide an enjoyable space for people downtown; suppress freeway noise in the central city; and provide an innovative cover for the yawning cavern excavated for I-5.<sup>65</sup> The project, however, required funding.

A 1976 *Seattle Times* article claimed that the cost of the entire project came to \$23.5 million. The first \$2.7 million came from Forward Thrust bonds; \$208,633 came from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) open-space grants; \$340,000 from a HUD block grant; \$424,655 from State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation; \$60,000 in federal urban-arterial improvement funds; \$18,900 from Metro for the 8th Ave. stairway; \$155,000 from federal interstate highway funds; \$70,000 from city garage bonds, and \$35,000 from the American Legion. Another \$2.5 million built the Great Box Garden south of Seneca St.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "Fountain for Freeway Park Approved," *Seattle Times*, July 22, 1966.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Sherrard, "Seattle Now & Then: The Naramore Fountain," DorpatSherrardLomont website, December 5, 2009, <https://pauldorpat.com/2009/12/05/seattle-now-then-the-naramore-fountain>.

<sup>63</sup> Maryman and Birkholz, "Freeway Park," 19.

<sup>64</sup> City of Seattle, "Central Freeway Park Project," September 27, 1972, Freeway Park Project Description, 1969–1972, Seattle Municipal Archives, Seattle, Washington (SMA).

<sup>65</sup> City of Seattle, "Downtown Freeway Park," October 7, 1969, Freeway Park Project Description, 1969–1972, SMA.

<sup>66</sup> Polly Lane, "More Park for Less," *Seattle Times*, May 30, 1976.

The City of Seattle began to look for a designer. Lawrence Halprin & Associates (1949–2009), the San Francisco landscape firm, had already proven successful in the Pacific Northwest, not only collaborating on Seattle’s Century 21 Exposition but also designing the Open Space Sequence in Portland, an eight-block series of parks, plazas, and water features integrated into a 54-acre urban renewal project.<sup>67</sup>

Constructed between 1965 and 1987, the Open Space Sequence has been described by the Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) as “three linked outdoor rooms.”<sup>68</sup> The development knitted together the South Auditorium Redevelopment District and the central city with parks and numerous fountains culminating in the massive Ira Keller Fountain, designed by Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin. The Ira Keller Fountain (known as “Forecourt Fountain” until 1978) encompassed an entire city block, and was designed to reference a Sierra Mountains watershed, a landscape that inspired both Halprin and Danadjieva Tzvetin. Monumental, battered concrete blocks rose from a large pool of water. Concrete slabs cantilevered over the water allowed visitors to climb around these forms. A massive waterfall cascaded over the blocks, inviting interaction and play.<sup>69</sup>

Water, Halprin believed, was a tool for bringing an experience of the natural world into a manmade landscape. Keller Fountain, and later Freeway Park, both relied on the drama of thundering water to draw visitors into the experience. Like Freeway Park, the Open Space Sequence proved to be more than just a park; it was an art installation in concrete.

While urban landscapes by designers Lawrence Halprin and Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin were using manmade materials, they were still relying on some of the earliest ideas for parks developed by two generations of Olmsted designers. As discussed in a 2016 article in the *New York Times*, Olmsted also designed parks to “imitate nature” by creating varied walks, meadows, copses, and vistas into urbanized cities. Charles Birnbaum, president of TCLF, was quoted in the *New York Times* as say, “Halprin is abstracting nature... [he] had a bas-relief of Olmsted in his office; he was a big fan. Halprin was creating passages of scenery in the same way, creating narrative in his own language.”<sup>70</sup>

By the early 1970s, Halprin had also designed Spokane’s 28-acre Water Power (Avista Utilities) complex with architects Kenneth Brooks and Bruce Walker.<sup>71</sup> Halprin & Associates was also working on a new water feature for Washington’s state capitol campus in Olympia. Water Garden, completed in 1972, was, like parts of Freeway Park, constructed on top of a parking garage. It was designed to break up the wide expanse of the garage’s rooftop lawns. Like Freeway Park and Keller Fountain, it relied on board-formed concrete monoliths and walls to create a choreographed movement around and through a multitiered fountain that spilled over concrete forms and pooled at the visitor’s feet. As with other notable examples, Danadjieva Tzvetin was Halprin’s designer for the project.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth I. Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, Library of American Landscape History (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 129.

<sup>68</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Portland Open Space Sequence,” accessed June 26, 2018, <https://tclf.org/landscapes/portland-open-space-sequence>.

<sup>69</sup> Portland Parks and Recreation, “Keller Fountain Park,” accessed June 26, 2018, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/finder/index.cfm?&action=ViewPark&propertyid=194>.

<sup>70</sup> Alexandra Lange, “Celebrating a Rugged Vision of Landscape Architecture,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 129.

<sup>72</sup> Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Washington State Arts Commission, “Water Garden: Lawrence Halprin and the East Capitol Campus,” October 2004,

With such high visibility and success, it is not surprising that Halprin's firm emerged as a possible designer for Freeway Park. However, he competed with many other well-known designers, including Sasaki Dawson DeMay Associates, Sakuma & James and Paul Thiry, Richard Haag, and Paul Friedberg. In November 1970, however, the *Seattle Times* announced that Halprin & Associates had been chosen to design the innovative park, the first to be located high above an active freeway.<sup>73</sup>

To complete the design for the nation's first fully lidded freeway, Halprin compiled a project team including Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin (project designer), Byron McCulley (project manager), Dai Williams (job captain), Robert Mendelsohn (project administrator), and others, including Jean Walton (horticulturalist), Sakuma & James of Seattle (associate landscape architects), Edward McCleod & Associates (associate landscape architects), and Pendleton Miller (horticultural consultant).<sup>74</sup> Along with these team members, others from a variety of interconnected fields played a part, including many from California, where Lawrence Halprin & Associates was founded: Gilbert Forsberg, Diekmann & Schmidt (GFDS; structural engineers from San Francisco), Beamer Wilkinson and Associates (mechanical and electrical engineers from San Francisco), Richard Chaix (mechanical engineer and consultant for the Freeway Park fountains from Oakland), and Engineering Enterprise (a lighting consultant and electrical designer of the fountains and site lighting from Berkeley).<sup>75</sup>

Of the members of his initial team, many were longtime collaborators. Jean Walton (1910–1994), for instance, became Halprin's first employee when she was hired part-time in 1949, joining the firm full-time in 1950 after completing her bachelor's in landscape architecture at the University of Berkeley. Walton was the firm's plant expert until she retired in 1975. Byron McCulley and Dai Williams were also regular collaborators who had both worked on high-profile Halprin projects, including Skyline Park in Denver, Colorado, which has since been demolished.<sup>76</sup> Danadjieva Tzvetin (1931–) was a project designer for Halprin from 1967 to 1976 and led over 20 design and city-planning projects, including the Jewish Home of San Francisco and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.<sup>77</sup>

While Halprin's team designed the park, others worked on its structural supports. In March 1972, the plan for the garage under the park's East Plaza was approved, with "tree pockets" sunk low into the garage's roof to provide room for tree roots and irrigation. According to the *Seattle Times*, "the garage is designed so the structural load on the top will be equal to the combined load on all of the rest of the levels so it can support the park."<sup>78</sup>

In April 1973, the Seattle Design Commission approved Danadjieva Tzvetin's initial plans for Freeway Park's most dramatic feature, the Canyon waterfall, which would begin above the freeway and cascade over a series of concrete pillars and down into a pool level with the freeway 90 ft below.<sup>79</sup>

<https://dahp.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Halprin%20Report%202010-04FINAL.pdf>. It is worth noting that the water in Water Garden was permanently turned off in 1992.

<sup>73</sup> Polly Lane, "Freeway Lid: Halprin to Do the Project," *Seattle Times*, November 22, 1970.

<sup>74</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, "The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin," accessed April 9, 2019, <https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/freeway-park.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Hirsch, "Fate of Lawrence Halprin's Public Spaces," 76.

<sup>76</sup> Hirsch, "Fate of Lawrence Halprin's Public Spaces," 33–60.

<sup>77</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin."

<sup>78</sup> "Freeway Park Garage Approved," *Seattle Times*, March 26, 1972.

<sup>79</sup> "Freeway Park Design OK'd," *Seattle Times*, April 8, 1973.

Construction of the park was planned for early 1974, although some unexpected issues slowed progress, including the need to acquire and demolish the 113-unit Normandie Apartments and an unforeseen strike by the construction trades in 1974. There were four basic phases of construction. The first phase was the central plaza next to the Park Place Building, which was on existing land and completed relatively quickly. Second was the Great Box Garden south of Seneca St., which included construction of planter boxes between the city's street level and the floor of the freeway canyon below. Third was construction of a massive bridge to carry the park over I-5 traffic and support the park landscape. Fourth was construction of the city's East Plaza garage and the park's East Plaza above it.<sup>80</sup>

In August 1974, with strike settlements underway, contractors were completing underground work in preparation for phases 2 and 3.<sup>81</sup> In November 1974, Peter Kiewit Sons', Inc., of Omaha won the contract for the construction of the Great Box Garden, and later, the contract to construct the city's new garage.<sup>82</sup> In December 1974, David A. Mowat Company of Bellevue began constructing the bridge over I-5 by lifting, dangling, and then placing precast concrete girders made by Tacoma's Concrete Technology Corporation over north and southbound traffic lanes. Working between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., when traffic was light and could be rerouted, Mowat's team laid a total of 23 girders, some up to 133 ft long and weighing up to 80 tons, during one week in December, working the last stubborn girder into place at 7 a.m. on December 21.<sup>83</sup>

In May 1975, Mowat was also chosen to complete the central and east plazas of Freeway Park, providing supplementary trees and shrubs, and constructing a complex system of waterproofing, drainage, irrigations systems, paving, and benches—all required to complete a living landscape on a bed of concrete.<sup>84</sup> In June 1975, Danadjieva Tzvetin visited the construction site, meeting with Mowat, who also built the park's striking concrete water features. As *Seattle Times* real estate editor Polly Lane noted, the I-5 lid was no ordinary bridge. The contractor had to install tree wells in the bridge to handle tree roots and had to prepare the bridge to accept several feet of soil for planting.<sup>85</sup>

Angela wants the park to be natural and three-dimensional to match the city. She's planned a variety of projections so traditional park benches will be unnecessary. There will be ramps and steps and sloping paths to offer variety and accommodate all pedestrians as well as handicapped persons. She wants people to be able to touch the water in the canyon and also in a cascade she has planned to be directly in front of the Park Place building at the west side of the park.<sup>86</sup>

The designer was apparently thrilled by one feature at the foot of the park's roaring Canyon waterfall. Behind the falls, at grade with the freeway, was a window built into the concrete wall, providing a glimpse of passing traffic.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Contract Let for Phase 2 of Freeway Park," *Seattle Times*, November 7, 1974.

<sup>81</sup> Polly Lane, "Freeway Park Soon to Be More Visible," *Seattle Times*, August 18, 1974.

<sup>82</sup> "Contract Let for Phase 2 of Freeway Park."

<sup>83</sup> "Park Work Stalls Traffic on Freeway," *Seattle Times*, December 21, 1974.

<sup>84</sup> "Freeway Park Contract Given," *Seattle Times*, May 22, 1975.

<sup>85</sup> Polly Lane, "Designer Pleased by Progress," *Seattle Times*, June 22, 1975.

<sup>86</sup> Lane, "Designer Pleased by Progress."

<sup>87</sup> Lane, "Designer Pleased by Progress."

By October 1975, contractors were removing the staging and additional material associated with constructing the bridge, causing additional closures of northbound freeway lanes over one night.<sup>88</sup> By February 1976, contractors had planted more than 100 trees atop the newly constructed garage.<sup>89</sup> Today, scholars consider the rooftop East Plaza “a technical tour de force: there is an intricate irrigation system, and much of the planting used a lightweight soil mix with trees in large container pots. Just before passing through the tunnel beneath the park, drivers have a flashing glimpse of a hanging garden.”<sup>90</sup>

As the park neared completion, Lane broke down the remarkable process that built the park, pointing out that since the freeway right-of-way was already publicly owned, the cost of property acquisition was minimal. Designing and building the park was roughly the cost of acquiring a similar amount of property in the city without the park improvements. Moreover, because the park was a benefit to the neighboring Park Place Building, the City would receive additional tax revenue from that development. Finally, because the East Plaza Garage was constructed concurrently, the City would receive additional revenue from those paying to park.<sup>91</sup> In April 1976, a nonprofit known as Friends of the Freeway Park began to finance a series of four plantings per year for the park, ensuring that flowers and foliage would match the season.<sup>92</sup>

In June 1976, as the park neared completion, Seattle mayor Wes Uhlman sent out invitations to its grand opening on the Fourth of July: “The Park itself will be the featured attraction, and the highlight of the program will be the turning on of the water cascades. The Seattle Public Schools All-City High School Marching Band will furnish music, both nostalgic and stirring.”<sup>93</sup>

The park was an immediate hit both with the local population and the local press, which raved that on sunny afternoons “hundreds of office workers pour into the park, brown bags in hand, covering almost every available inch.”<sup>94</sup> A unique solution to the problem of the urban freeway, the park was praised as an urban oasis. As one local leader mused, “in some respects, the created environment in Freeway Park resembles the natural environment. Its geography offers people the experience of sights, sounds and colors from many vistas and angles. The park is filled with contrasts in terrain and mood. In its water displays, one finds water behaving as it does in nature, and the concrete elements simulate natural formations.”<sup>95</sup> Praise for the park also came from as far away as New York, where the *New York Times* described the visitor’s experience of the park’s most dynamic feature, the Canyon:

Terraces and irregular stairs and passageways bring the visitor into what feels like a deep crevasse. The view of the city disappears, the planting of the park’s upper levels falls away, and the visitor is left in a concrete chasm, with water tumbling powerfully down all around him. . . . It is a striking place, far removed from the feeling of the surrounding city. But Mr. Halprin skillfully brings back the sense of the city when one splendid gesture—at the bottom of the canyon, behind the largest of the several

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<sup>88</sup> “Freeway Lanes to be Closed,” *Seattle Times*, October 7, 1975.

<sup>89</sup> “Start of Freeway Forest,” *Seattle Times*, February 22, 1976.

<sup>90</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 143–44.

<sup>91</sup> Lane, “More Park for Less.”

<sup>92</sup> “Private Contributions to Help Out Public Eye,” *Seattle Times*, April 10, 1976.

<sup>93</sup> Wes Uhlman to unknown recipient, June 16, 1976, Freeway Park 1976–1988, SMA.

<sup>94</sup> John Arthur Wilson, “Pack Up that Lunch in Your Old Brown Bag,” *Seattle Times*, August 14, 1976.

<sup>95</sup> David L. Towne to Dick Moody, August 18, 1976, Freeway Park 1976–1988, SMA.



waterfalls, is a vast window onto the freeway. The cars glide by, their sound hidden by the water, their movement framed by the windows. Suddenly, the freeway becomes like a segment of an abstract movie. . . . Freeway Park recalls the very finest attempts to integrate urban highways into neighborhoods; it deserves to rank with such pioneering efforts as the Brooklyn Heights Esplanade over the Brooklyn Queens Expressway or the integration of Carl Schurz Park into the F.D.R. Drive on the Upper East Side.<sup>96</sup>

Articles about the new park began appearing in newspapers in places like St. Louis as early as 1972, but once the park opened, it was heralded nationwide for treating the freeway as an element of Modern Art, recalling “the very finest attempts to integrate urban highways into neighborhoods,” according to the *New York Times*. “It deserves to rank with such pioneering efforts as the Brooklyn Heights Esplanade over the Brooklyn Queens Expressway or the integration of Carl Schurz Park into the FDR Drive on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.”<sup>97</sup> Press coverage continued into the 1980s, when the *Los Angeles Times* called Freeway Park “the most extensive freeway air rights development in the nation,” and claimed that as a consequence of “development above and/or along the freeway corridor in the last 12 years, downtown Seattle has gained 1,254 new hotel rooms, 160 residential units, 1.9 million square feet of office space, 128,000 square feet of retail space, 3,300 garage spaces, an eight-acre park and a 370,000-square foot convention and trade center.”<sup>98</sup> The journalist went on to propose that the park was an inspiration to other large cities, including Los Angeles, which would prove prophetic.

In 1980, the *Seattle Times* ran a thank you to Jim Ellis, who had made Seattle one of the most livable places in the United States, according to the newspaper, and had left his imprint everywhere as “he ‘fathered’ Metro, Forward Thrust, the Freeway Park and the farmland preservation movement.”<sup>99</sup>

However, by the 1980s, Freeway Park was already losing some of its shine as its shadowy corners attracted and concealed crimes, including a series of rapes in 1982.<sup>100</sup> By that time, the foliage had grown at a surprising rate, leading one journalist to state that “at the rate the vegetation there is growing, passing under the park in another decade should approximate the sensation of driving through a cave under a forest.”<sup>101</sup> By 1989, the City was thinning the trees to avoid overloading the park’s structure and to allow for lights to penetrate the foliage at night.<sup>102</sup> By 1992, the public was calling for even more lights and patrols because the park had become increasingly frightening.

In the twenty-first century, Freeway Park has seen a resurgence. With a new planting plan in place that eliminates shadowy corners, new events in the park, added entrance points from First Hill and the Washington State Convention Center, and new wayfinding opportunities, the park has attracted a new generation of admirers. It is recognized as a unique natural landscape designed to lid, transform, and transcend the I-5 corridor at its very heart. It remains a unique example of its type.

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Goldberger, “Seattle Park Sensible Response to Freeway,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1977.

<sup>97</sup> Paul Goldberger, “The Freeway As a Modern Art Form,” *New York Times*, reprinted in the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, March 20, 1977.

<sup>98</sup> Evelyn De Wolfe, “Seattle Solves ‘Freeway Canyon’ Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1987.

<sup>99</sup> “A Big ‘Thank You’ to James R. Ellis,” *Seattle Times*, May 15, 1980.

<sup>100</sup> Duff Wilson, “Seclusion Has Its Price in Seattle’s Urban Oasis,” *Seattle Times*, July 28, 1982.

<sup>101</sup> Dennis Ryan, “Freeway Forests Add Drama, Beauty,” *Seattle Times*, September 19, 1982.

<sup>102</sup> “Freeway Park Must Lose Some Trees,” *Seattle Times*, January 26, 1989.

#### 4.4 Lawrence Halprin & Associates

Lawrence Halprin is now heralded as one of the twentieth century's greatest landscape architects and not just for the work he undertook in the Pacific Northwest, although Washington State is believed to have the most extensive range of intact Halprin works from 1950 through the 1970s.<sup>103</sup> "Halprin has been singled out for embracing the essential aspects of his legacy—the importance of promoting a reform agenda and championing nature as an uplifting moral force through the artistry of landscape design."<sup>104</sup> Collaborating throughout his career with his wife, Anna Halprin, an icon of Modern and Contemporary dance, exploring Jungian psychology, Zionism, and developing deep relationships with places including Israel, the Sierra Nevada, and his chosen home, the San Francisco Bay Area, Halprin was avant-garde in his thinking and driven to unlock people's innate creativity.<sup>105</sup>

Halprin received a Master of Science in horticulture from the University of Wisconsin in 1941 and then joined Harvard's Landscape Architecture program in the Graduate School of Design in 1942. His work was briefly interrupted by service in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He then began his career in San Francisco in 1945 by apprenticing with Thomas Church. He launched his own firm in 1949, hiring lifetime collaborators Jean Walton, Donald Carter, Satoru Nishita, and Richard Vignolo. Beginning first with typical postwar projects, including residential gardens, he soon began preparing campus master plans and suburban shopping malls.<sup>106</sup> He developed a reputation as an innovative and collaborative designer and spent much of his career working closely not only with Modern architects but also with dancers like his wife, for whom he designed performance spaces.<sup>107</sup> TCLF notes that among his innovations was a process for integrating the public into the design process.<sup>108</sup> To manage public involvement, he developed what was known as the RSVP Cycles (resources, scoring, valuation, performance). The RSVP Cycle, as Halprin conceived of it, was a process of identifying the "resources" one has to work with (cultural, biological, ecological, and geographic); choreographing or "scoring" the design process for stakeholders; "valuation," Halprin's made-up word for the process of bringing people to consensus; and "performance," or setting the plans in motion. TCLF notes that Halprin's methods were "marked by attention to human scale, user experience, and the social impact of design . . . simultaneously, he was able to attend to environmental concerns and to incorporate community participation in the design process."<sup>109</sup>

Halprin is also credited with amplifying the role landscape architects played in urban planning. By the 1970s, Halprin's firm was heralded as an example of how the landscape architecture field was changing to embrace historic preservation and the reuse of underutilized urban spaces. As described by TCLF, Halprin and his contemporaries "reasserted the landscape architect's role in regenerating the American city, made vital social and pedestrian spaces out of formerly marginal sites such as historic industrial complexes or the spaces over or under freeways. In doing so, they re-imagined a

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<sup>103</sup> Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Washington State Arts Commission, "Water Garden."

<sup>104</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 5–12.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth K. Meyer, "Lawrence Halprin, 1916–2009," accessed July 25, 2018, <https://tclf.org/pioneer/lawrence-halprin>.

<sup>107</sup> Katy Muldoon, "Landscape Legend Lawrence Halprin Dies at 93," *OregonLive*, October 26, 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Meyer, "Lawrence Halprin."

<sup>109</sup> "Lawrence Halprin on Design: RSVP Cycles," interviewed by Charles A. Birnbaum, March 2003, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbLi966lOLs>.

public realm for American cities that had been cleared by federal urban renewal programs and abandoned for new suburban developments.”<sup>110</sup>

One of Halprin’s early examples of urban redesign was Ghirardelli Square on the waterfront in San Francisco, where Halprin designed a public space around preserved nineteenth-century buildings, including the Ghirardelli chocolate factory. The project began in 1964. “The hillside mélange of nineteenth century commercial buildings, clustered around a chocolate plant and its ornate Second Empire tower, was exactly the sort of ‘un-useful,’ old, dilapidated building previously seen as ripe for replacement,” wrote architect Leland Roth.<sup>111</sup> “Under the direction of Lawrence Halprin and Associates, the architects Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons retained nearly all of the nineteenth century buildings, refurbished them, and added a low arcade on the waterside enclosing a courtyard. There are several levels, dotted with kiosks and fountains, that offer varied prospects of San Francisco Bay.”<sup>112</sup>

High-profile successes like Ghirardelli Square and California’s Sea Ranch, an artist community on the California coast, led to greater creative freedom for Halprin’s team, resulting in much admired landscape features like those in Portland, Olympia, and Seattle. Within the Northwest, his designs are similar in form, materials, style, and execution. Like Water Garden in Olympia and the Open Space Sequence in Portland, Freeway Park pairs large dynamic fountains with plants and trees to guide an interactive experience, create interior spaces, and replicate natural forms. What holds Freeway Park apart from these other works is not its success and popularity. The Open Space sequence has been listed on the NRHP, and Water Garden continues to attract visitors in spite of the fact that the water has not flowed as intended since 1992. The difference, and what elevates Freeway Park, rests specifically in its innovative approach to capturing space and creating something brand new out of thin air. Both Water Garden and the Open Space Sequence are earth-bound, existing at grade. Freeway Park is suspended above the ground, held aloft by concrete forms even more massive than those that create its tallest waterfall. It is not only innovative, but also it is ingenious in its approach to both screening users from the freeway and embracing the freeway so that the park and the freeway cohabitate, collaborating to create a singular experience.

According to scholars, Halprin was the choreographer on his projects, the one “activating” spaces, while he worked closely with others who could “give physical form to his dance scores”: “Halprin has been compared with Frederick Law Olmsted in that ‘his singular achievements rest on his unusual skill at harnessing the efforts of others.’”<sup>113</sup> In Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin, Halprin found a designer who could embrace his vision and bring it to life.

Born in Bulgaria, Danadjieva Tzvetin graduated with a degree in architecture from Bulgaria’s State University in Sofia in 1960. She began her career as a set designer for the Bulgarian film industry and received several international film festival awards for her work. After entering international competitions with her partner, Ivan Tzvetin, Danadjieva Tzvetin studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts from 1964 to 1966. In 1965, the pair won a design competition for San Francisco Civic Center, although the project was never built. Danadjieva Tzvetin joined Halprin’s firm in San Francisco in 1965. Her design for Portland’s Forecourt Fountain has been described as “equaling in its exuberance the great fountains of Baroque Rome. . . . It is not a literal copy but an evocation of the

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<sup>110</sup> Meyer, “Lawrence Halprin.”

<sup>111</sup> Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2001), 469.

<sup>112</sup> Roth, *American Architecture*, 469.

<sup>113</sup> Tate and Eaton, *Great City Parks*, 20.

tumbling streams in the nearby Cascade Mountains.”<sup>114</sup> According to Roth, the Forecourt Fountain, a precursor to Freeway Park, reminded the public that a city is a community and “reasserted the basic human pleasure of playing in the water and the absolute functional and psychological necessity of such frivolous pleasure. . . . At the fountain’s dedication, to make the message clear, having said a few words, Halprin kicked off his shoes, rolled up his trousers, and went wading—the shallow pools of the fountain have been full of waders of all ages ever since.”<sup>115</sup>

After leaving Halprin’s firm in 1976, Danadjieva Tzvetin formed, in partnership with Thomas Koenig, the design firm Danadjieva & Koenig Associates in California. She was later hired to design two additional landscape projects for Freeway Park. The first was the Paul Pigott Memorial Corridor, constructed in 1984 to connect the park to 9th Ave.; the second connected Freeway Park to the grounds of the Washington State Convention Center in 1988.<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.5 Freeway Park’s Legacy

As one scholar noted, Freeway Park was designed to incorporate some of Halprin’s most innovative and enduring ideas. It separated pedestrians from motor vehicles; condensed development using “air rights” above the freeway; masked the audio and visual effects of the freeway while knitting together the communities separated by it; and drew people through a choreographed experience, relying on paths, plantings, and water features to inspire an emotional and aesthetic experience.<sup>117</sup> Most importantly, the park provided a space for people and the landscape to interact. As one academic noted, “Halprin’s Seattle Freeway Park appears as a carefully choreographed performance-space; a jungle of concrete, vegetation and waterfalls to be encountered and traversed by people-in-movement.”<sup>118</sup>

In an essay about the park, Alan Tate quoted critics who were driven to poetics to describe the effect of such an innovative park type:

[Yukio] Futagawa summarized Freeway Park as “a sculpture for people to move in and through” and as a “stage set for people’s creative involvement.” [Sutherland] Lyall described the park as “an episodic design” noting that this is inevitable given “the way the whole design evolved as a process of taking opportunities as the possibilities of using more pieces of land emerged.” Both these comments reflect Danadjieva’s intention of creating a park that might provide an unfolding series of experiences to people walking through it. [Peter] Walker and [Melanie] Simo described the park as “more refined and complex” than Ira’s Fountain and “perhaps overly melodramatic” with planting that is “opulent, recalling the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest.” They describe it as “a place of great beauty . . . tinged with terror—the sublime” where “the concrete forms are heroic.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Roth, *American Architecture*, 469.

<sup>115</sup> Roth, *American Architecture*, 471.

<sup>116</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Angela Danadjieva,” accessed June 26, 2018, <https://tclf.org/pioneer/angela-danadjieva>.

<sup>117</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell, *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 112.

<sup>119</sup> Alan Tate, *Great City Parks*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 23.

Freeway Park won numerous awards for its innovative design. In 1977, Freeway Park won an award from the Washington Precast Concrete Industry in the transportation-structures category for its “difficulty and uniqueness of design,” as it was constructed with the largest prestressed concrete girders in Washington at the time.<sup>120</sup> The park also won the 1976 Award of Excellence from *Design and Environment* magazine, the 1976 First Place Award from the Association of Landscape Contractors, and the 1977 Merit Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects.<sup>121</sup>

While earlier construction projects had built apartments and even government buildings over freeways (Bridge Apartments, completed over I-95 in New York in 1964; and the Fall River Government Center, completed over I-195 in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1976), Halprin is believed to be the first to have lidded a freeway with a public park in a downtown.<sup>122</sup> Halprin claimed that the design for Freeway Park was an innovation inspired by an earlier freeway projects from across the country, the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, a park constructed in the 1950s to cantilever over a section of a multilane freeway where it runs along the banks of the East River.<sup>123</sup> While the Promenade did not fully lid the freeway, it proved an inspiration. Similarly, Freeway Park inspired many other cities to reclaim some of the public spaces once lost to the nation’s expanding freeway system.

Beginning in the late 1980s, lids were constructed over portions of I-90, which runs east from I-5 in Seattle to Mercer Island and the east bank of Lake Washington. In Seattle, the I-90 lid supports a portion of Sam Smith Park.<sup>124</sup> On Mercer Island, Aubrey Davis Park, the “largest existing freeway lid in the country,” includes a half-mile-long lid over I-90.<sup>125</sup> Finally, in 2015, the Washington Department of Transportation completed three lids above portions of State Route 520 east of Seattle. All three are enlarged overpasses topped with unprogrammed green space and located within residential communities.<sup>126</sup>

Outside Seattle are other examples. In 1990, a project in Phoenix, Arizona, lidded a portion of I-10 with 10 side-by-side bridges topped by the 32-acre Margaret T. Hance Park.<sup>127</sup> In 2008, Boston relocated some of its freeways underground, constructing above them the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway, a 1.5-mile, linear series of gardens and parks designed to reconnect some of the city’s oldest neighborhoods.<sup>128</sup> In 2012, Dallas completed the 5.2-acre Klyde Warren Park above a portion of the Woodall Rodgers Freeway, bridging uptown and downtown Dallas.<sup>129</sup> In 2015, St. Louis opened the Luther Ely Smith Park, a block-wide lid over I-70 that provides pedestrian access from

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<sup>120</sup> “Freeway Park, State Building Lauded,” *Seattle Times*, July 3, 1977.

<sup>121</sup> Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Washington State Arts Commission, “Water Garden.”

<sup>122</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 141.

<sup>123</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 140.

<sup>124</sup> Knute Berger, “How Seattle’s Activist Past Shaped the Future of Transportation in the Region,” *Seattle Magazine*, May 2017, <https://www.seattlemag.com/news-and-features/how-seattles-activist-past-shaped-future-transportation-region>.

<sup>125</sup> Lid I-5, “Local Freeway Lid History,” accessed April 3, 2019, <https://lidi5.org/history>. Lid I-5 is an advocacy group sponsored by the Seattle Parks Foundation that is promoting additional lids on the Freeway Park model over I-5 in Seattle.

<sup>126</sup> Lid I-5, “Local Freeway Lid History.”

<sup>127</sup> City of Phoenix, Arizona, “Margaret T. Hance Park,” accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.phoenix.gov/parks/parks/alphabetical/h-parks/hance>.

<sup>128</sup> Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, “The Greenway, History,” accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/about-us/greenway-history/>.

<sup>129</sup> Highline Network, “Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX,” accessed April 4, 2019, <https://network.thehighline.org/projects/klyde-warren-park/>.

the Gateway Arch National Park to downtown and the Old Courthouse and Kiener Plaza.<sup>130</sup> Other freeway-topping parks are either proposed or under construction in Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles.<sup>131</sup> As scholars have noted, “Freeway Park was the beginning.”<sup>132</sup>

## 4.6 Evolution of Type

Freeway Park is Seattle’s first freeway lidding park. It is also one of the best examples of Halprin’s work remaining in Seattle. Additionally, while there are other examples of Brutalist architecture in the city, none define city parks or replicate natural forms like waterfalls and canyons. Freeway Park remains a unique example of its type in Seattle.

### 4.6.1 Lawrence Halprin’s Comparable Landscapes

Some examples of Lawrence Halprin’s work remain in Seattle but differ in character from Freeway Park. Drumheller Fountain on the University of Washington campus is a large circular pool designed by the Olmsted Brothers as part of Rainier Vista but renovated by Halprin in 1968, who added to the inner pond “a lighted fountain, surrounded by a concrete base, with three banks of jets surrounding a center jet capable of reaching 100 feet.”<sup>133</sup> Surveyors have recommended Drumheller Fountain eligible for listing in the NRHP, although no formal determination has been made. The fountain has not been listed as a Seattle City Landmark.

Halprin became a consulting landscape architect for the University of Washington after completing a campus master plan in 1960 with Paul Thiry. He is credited with designing the grounds around dormitories McMahon Hall and Haggett Hall, although it appears that Halprin’s plans were revised before construction began.<sup>134</sup> Both buildings were determined eligible for listing in the NRHP, in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Neither building has been listed as a Seattle City Landmark.<sup>135</sup> Surveyors have attributed additional landscape features on the University of Washington campus to Halprin’s influence, including revisions made to the Liberal Arts Quad, although none of these landscape features are comparable in scale or scope to Freeway Park.<sup>136</sup>

Halprin also contributed to the design of the Federal Science Pavilion, now known as the Pacific Science Center, part of Seattle’s 1962 Century 21 Exposition. The pavilion was designed by Minoru Yamasaki and Associates, with NBBJ, to provide an oasis from the busy fairgrounds, with buildings arranged around a raised courtyard. Within the courtyard, Halprin designed “two shallow, rectangular pools, concrete platforms, and a handful of concrete, petal-shaped fountains, which were

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<sup>130</sup> Veneta Rizvic, “New Walkway to Gateway Arch Grounds Opens,” *St. Louis Business Journal*, March 26, 2018.

<sup>131</sup> John Ruch, “Buckhead’s Plan for a Park over a Highway Joins a National Trend,” *Reporter-Newsletters, Buckhead*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.reporternewsletters.net/2016/09/30/buckheads-plan-park-highway-joins-national-trend>.

<sup>132</sup> Helphand, *Lawrence Halprin*, 147.

<sup>133</sup> Ellen F. C. Mirro, “Rainier Vista,” SAH Archipedia, Society of Architectural Historians, accessed January 13, 2021, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/WA-01-033-0085-06>.

<sup>134</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 490.

<sup>135</sup> In 2018, Haggett Hall was the subject of a Seattle Landmarks Nomination prepared by Katie Pratt and Spencer Howard of Northwest Vernacular. However, the building does not appear on Seattle Department of Neighborhood’s Landmarks List.

<sup>136</sup> Connie Walker Gray, Susan Boyle, Soja Molchany, Mimi Sheridan, and Rachel Gleeson, “Historic Resources Survey and Inventory of the University of Washington Seattle Campus: Historic Resources Report,” prepared for the City of Seattle, the University of Washington, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, August 2017, on file with the City of Seattle.

illuminated at night and elevated slightly above the surface of the pools.”<sup>137</sup> While changes have occurred within the pavilion, the pools and fountains remain. Surveyors have recommended the Pacific Science Center eligible for listing in the NRHP, although no formal determination has been made. The Pacific Science Center, along with its Halprin landscape, was listed as a Seattle City Landmark in 2010.<sup>138</sup>

Other extant Halprin projects in the northwest include Water Garden in Olympia, constructed in 1972, and the Open Space Sequence with Keller Fountain in Portland. Water Garden has not been evaluated for listing in the NRHP. The Open Space Sequence was listed in 2013.

Danadjieva Tzvetin, who was Halprin’s designer for Freeway Park, was also responsible for designing the two landscapes that link to Freeway Park, the Paul Pigott Memorial Corridor, constructed in 1984 with the same emphasis on concrete forms but with a distinctive surface treatment and a new approach to incorporating water into the landscape. She also designed the connection between the grounds of the Washington State Convention Center and Freeway Park in 1988.<sup>139</sup> Both of these landscape features remain in place today, although neither has been evaluated for listing in the NRHP.

#### 4.6.2 *The Evolution of Brutalism in Seattle*

While Freeway Park is admired for its innovative approach to park planning and construction, it is also an example of the creative use of concrete, a characteristic of Brutalist architecture. Brutalism was a distinct architectural style and movement influenced by the work of a British husband-and-wife team inspired by Le Corbusier. Beginning in the 1950s, Alison and Peter Smithson designed with raw concrete, replacing the smooth and even surfaces popular in the 1920s and 1930s with a finish that “left the structure and materials deliberately exposed, highlighting the qualities of their crude, apparently unfinished state.”<sup>140</sup> Brutalism emerged in a scarred post–World War II Europe in which architects like the Smithsons were responding to the slab construction of Modern buildings being thrown up in response to a dire need for housing. The style was characterized as inherently honest because it embraced and elevated the structural material and eschewed the unnecessary ornament and veneers designed to cover it. Structural concrete was praised for its innate flexibility and the ways in which creative designers could produce forms of seemingly infinite variety. Brutalist buildings took on bold and varied shapes, often with deep recesses and dramatic projections, that celebrated the geometry of construction.

That same creative spirit inspired Halprin and his team to sculpt natural forms from concrete, to use slabs and blocks of varied sizes to imitate the form, if not the living veneer, of landscapes like canyons and waterfalls. Like many brutalist buildings, Freeway Park’s water features are uniform in color and finish, leading them to emerge like rock outcroppings from a lush, living landscape.

The monolithic, unadorned, and “cold” nature of raw concrete eventually rendered Brutalism relatively unpopular with residents. Neglect left many Brutalist buildings in poor condition soon

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<sup>137</sup> Ellen F. C. Mirro, “Pacific Science Center,” SAH Archipedia, Society of Architectural Historians, accessed January 13, 2021, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/WA-01-033-0080-09>.

<sup>138</sup> Karen Gordon, “Report on Designation: Pacific Science Center, 200 Second Ave. N,” accessed January 13, 2021, <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation/landmarks/landmark-list>.

<sup>139</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Angela Danadjieva.”

<sup>140</sup> Owen Hopkins, *Architectural Styles: A Visual Guide* (London: Laurence King, 2014), 182.

after they were built.<sup>141</sup> However, Brutalist park structures like the waterfalls in Freeway Park—which did not need to be habitable or comfortable—remain rough but starkly beautiful expressions of concrete’s inherently flexible design potential.

No examples of Brutalist parks or park structures, apart from those designed by Halprin, are known to exist in Seattle or be listed as city landmarks, although good examples of Brutalist buildings can be found at the University of Washington, including McMahon Hall (1965), which Halprin partnered on, as well as the Oceanography Teaching Building (1976), the Marine Sciences Building (1969), Loew Hall (1969), and Schmitz Hall (1970). Each of these Brutalist examples has been found architecturally significant and either recommended or determined eligible for listing in the NRHP based on the creative, dramatic, and sometimes whimsical ways their designers created innovative building forms out of structural concrete.<sup>142</sup>

#### 4.6.3 *Landmark Parks in Seattle*

Seattle has, since hiring the Olmsted Brothers in 1903, developed its most significant parks and boulevards in association with their plans and recommendations. Seattle’s early twentieth century parks and boulevards are beautiful, natural, and designed to provide a respite for city dwellers, as in Kinnear Park, first donated to the City in 1887, Licton Springs Park, redesigned in 1975, and Volunteer Park, redesigned by the Olmsteds in 1903. All are listed as Seattle City Landmarks.<sup>143</sup> By the 1960s, however, park planning was changing, as the public appreciation for environmental planning and environmental remediation took center stage. In this context, the Seattle Landmark most similar to Freeway Park in approach and design is Seattle’s Gas Works Park, designed by landscape architect Richard Haag and opened to the public beginning in 1973. Gas Works Park sits on the site of the Seattle Lighting Company’s former Lake Station, a gas works that functioned from 1906 to 1956. In redesigning the former industrial site into a park with industrial ruins reimaged as park structures, the park responded to the late twentieth century interest in environmental repair and bioremediation. Haag took the polluted site of a former manufacturing plant, detoxified the soil, and reused the remaining industrial remnants as interactive and aesthetic features of the park.<sup>144</sup> Gas Works Park was listed in the NRHP for its exceptional importance in 2012.<sup>145</sup>

Freeway Park, also designed to respond to the evolution of the central city, as well as the growth of the interstate freeway system, was listed in the NRHP for its exceptional importance in 2020.

#### 4.6.4 *Conclusion*

Designers like Haag, Halprin, and Danadjieva Tzvetin responded to the changing conditions of modern city life with ingenuity and enthusiasm. These designers worked with evolving cityscapes and modern freeways to create something wholly new. Freeway Park (and other innovative designs like Gas Works Park) became expressions of a Modern sensibility in landscape design: embracing

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<sup>141</sup> Hopkins, *Architectural Styles*, 184.

<sup>142</sup> Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Washington Information System for Architectural and Archaeological Records Data (WISAARD), accessed January 13, 2021, <https://wisaard.dahp.wa.gov/>.

<sup>143</sup> Seattle Department of Neighborhoods. “Landmarks List,” accessed January 13, 2021, <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation/landmarks/landmark-list>.

<sup>144</sup> Karen Gordon, “Report on Designation: Gas Works Park,” May 5, 1999, <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/historic-preservation/landmarks/landmark-list>.

<sup>145</sup> Patricia Tusa Fels and Christy Edstrom O’Hara, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Gas Works Park,” accessed January 13, 2021, <https://wisaard.dahp.wa.gov/>.



minimalism, rationally employing new materials, focusing on function over ornament, and responding to an evolving cityscape with creativity. However, these designers also remained firmly rooted in the earliest goals of Seattle city parks, as espoused by the Olmsted Brothers. Their creations improved the quality of life for city dwellers by calling their attention to the beauty of the natural world, even when surrounded by a bustling city like Seattle.

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## 6. Photographs

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All photographs of Freeway Park were taken by HRA staff in October 2020, with the exception of Photos 5, 21, 25, and 28, which were taken by HRA staff in 2019 in support of the Freeway Park National Register of Historic Places nomination. All are on file with the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department and HRA, Seattle, Washington.

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Photo 1. Freeway Park's Great Box Garden over I-5, view north.





Photo 2. Freeway Park's Great Box Garden over I-5, view northwest.



Photo 3. Freeway Park's Great Box Garden along 6th Ave., view southeast.



Photo 4. Freeway Park's Great Box Garden along Seneca St., view northeast.



Photo 5. Freeway Park's Central Plaza's northern border, as seen from the I-5 onramp north of the Park Place Building, view northeast.



Photo 6. Freeway Park's Central Plaza and the Park Place Building, view southwest.



Photo 7. The Park Place Plaza (1971) where it connects to Freeway Park (1976). Seams in the concrete are minimally visible.



Photo 8. Freeway Park's Central Plaza with example of recently added light fixture, view north.



Photo 9. Freeway's Parks Cascades with the Canyon to the rear, view northeast (waterfall temporarily inactive).





Photo 10. Freeway Park's northern boundary, view southwest toward Park Place Building.



Photo 11. Interior of Freeway Park Canyon, view southeast (waterfall temporarily inactive).



Photo 12. Examples of Freeway Park seating, with recently added light fixtures, view northwest.



Photo 13. Freeway Park where it connects to newer development associated with the Washington State Convention Center, view north. Note the visible seam in the concrete.



Photo 14. Freeway Park as it passes under the 8th Ave. overpass, with maintenance sheds on either side of the breezeway, view northeast.



Photo 15. Freeway Park's approach to East Plaza with example of recently added round planters and comfort station, view northeast.



Photo 16. Freeway Park comfort station with elevator to the excluded Freeway Park Garage to the rear, view east.



Photo 17. The edge of Freeway Park's East Plaza, with example of original 100 ft light standard, view northeast.





Photo 18. Freeway Park's path through pools and water features on East Plaza near the northern border, view north.



Photo 19. Freeway Park's East Plaza Water Display, also known as the children's wading pool (waterfall temporarily inactive).



Photo 20. Freeway Park bench at Freedom Plaza, view northeast.



Photo 21. Freeway Park's East Plaza above the excluded Freeway Park Garage, as viewed from the Washington State Convention Center grounds near the 8th Ave. overpass, view south.

## 7. Figures

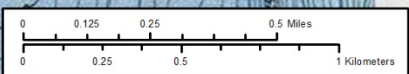
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UTM Coordinates:  
 1. 550336 m E, 5273332 m N  
 2. 550341 m E, 5273167 m N  
 3. 550258 m E, 5272933 m N  
 4. 550216 m E, 5273103 m N



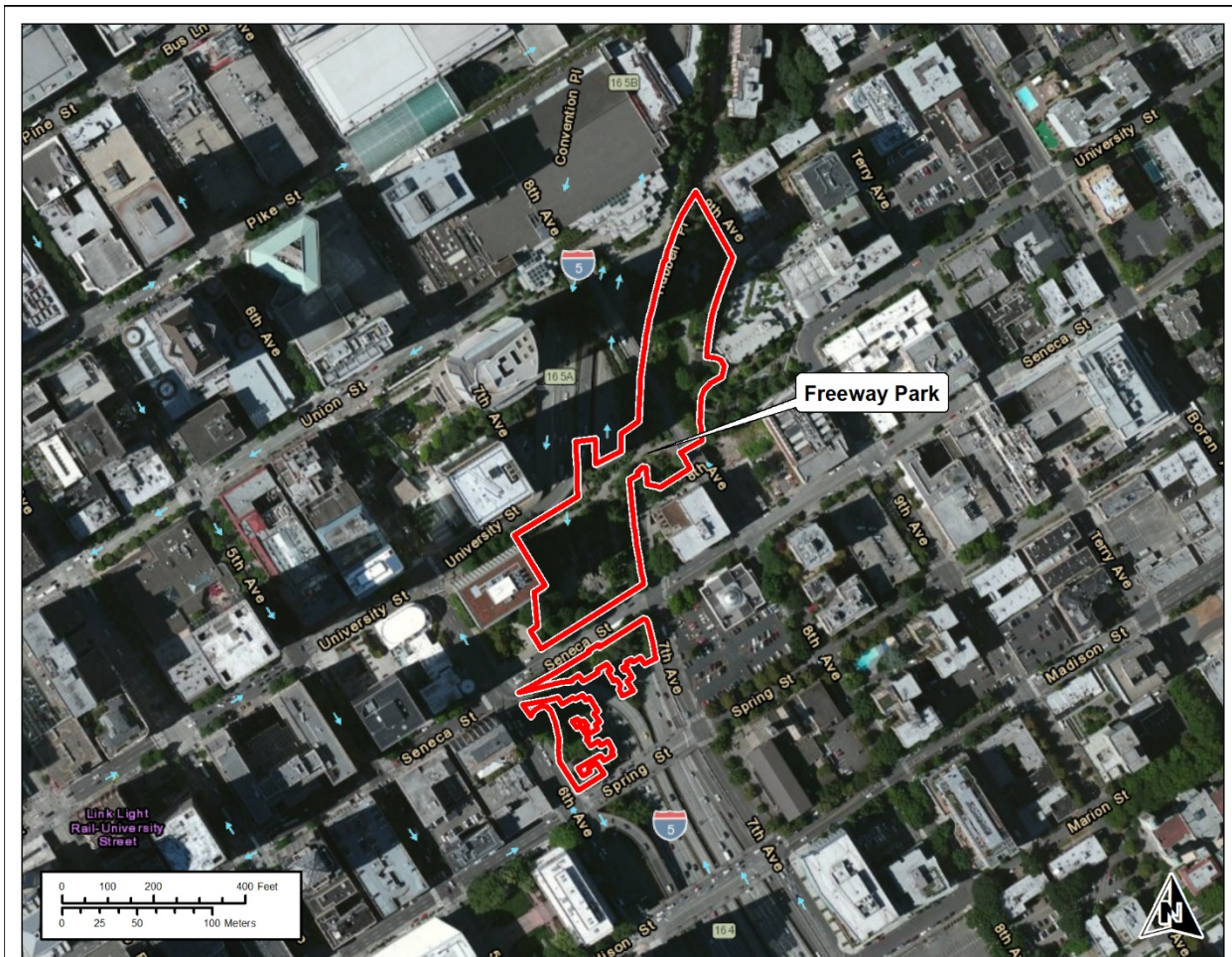
Boundary of Freeway Park


*Freeway Park Location*



|  |                      |                 |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Date: 1/25/2021</b>   |                      |                 |
| Coord./Project   | Datum                | Scale           |
| <b>NAD 1983 UTM Zone 10N<br/>Transverse Mercator</b>   | <b>NAD83</b>         | <b>1:24,000</b> |
| Township/Range   | Quadrangle           |                 |
| <b>T25N-R04E</b>   | <b>SEATTLE SOUTH</b> |                 |
| <b>Historical Research Associates, Inc., Seattle, WA</b><br>Service Layer Credits: Copyright:© 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed |                      |                 |

Figure 1. Map of Freeway Park with proposed landmark boundary, Seattle.



 Boundary of Freeway Park

*Freeway Park*



Date: 1/25/2021

|   |                      |                |
|---|----------------------|----------------|
| Coord./Project  | Datum                | Scale          |
| <b>NAD 1983 UTM Zone 10N<br/>Transverse Mercator</b>  | <b>NAD83</b>         | <b>1:5,000</b> |
| Township/Range  | Quadrangle           |                |
| <b>T25N-R04E</b>  | <b>SEATTLE SOUTH</b> |                |
| Historical Research Associates, Inc., Seattle, WA<br>Service Layer Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors<br>Copyright:© 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed |                      |                |

Figure 2. Aerial of Freeway Park with proposed landmark boundary and urban setting, Seattle.



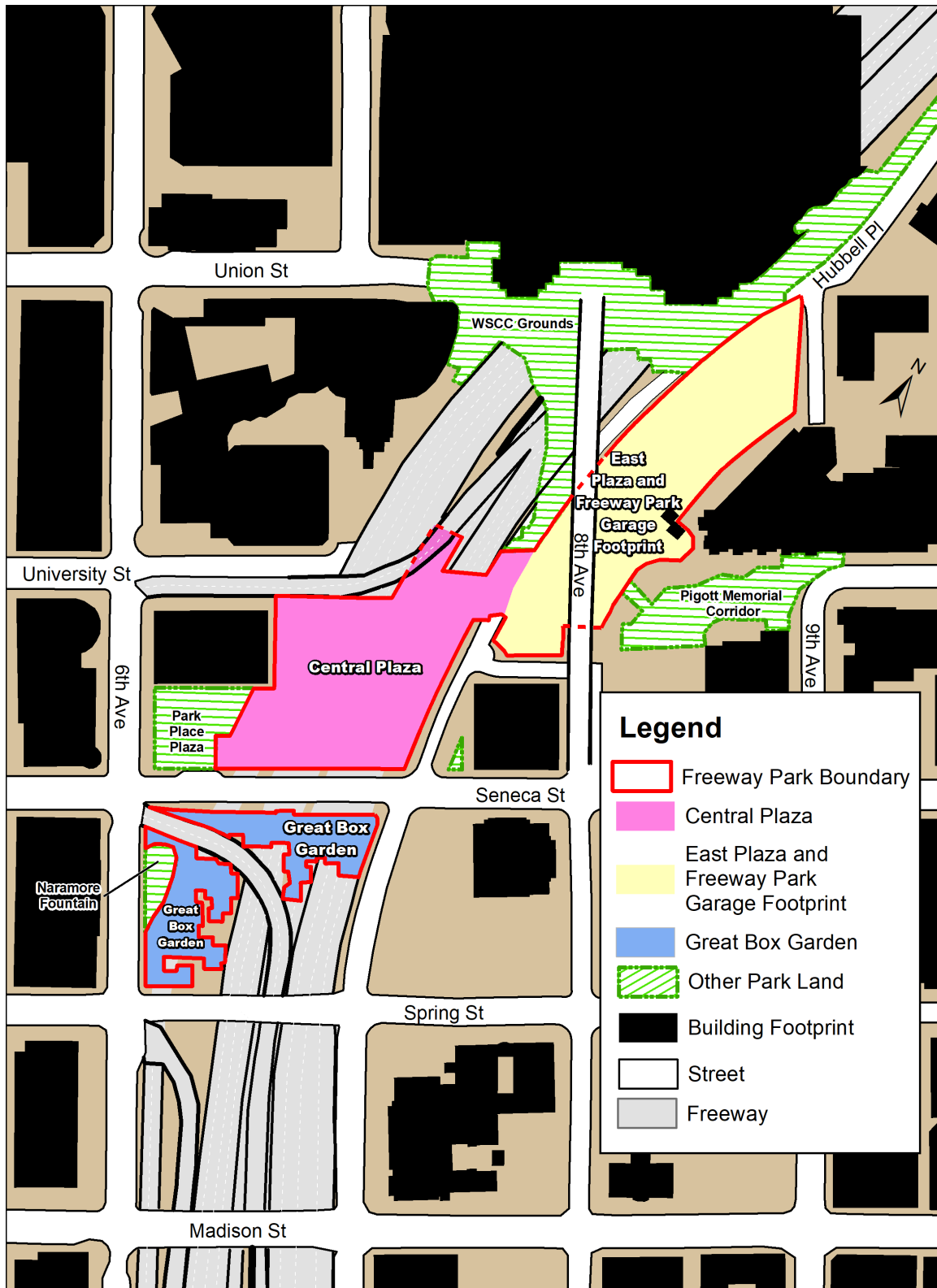


Figure 3. Freeway Park's distinct gardens and plazas within the proposed landmark boundary (Freeway Park Garage, roadways, and other park lands excluded from nomination, as described in Section 2).

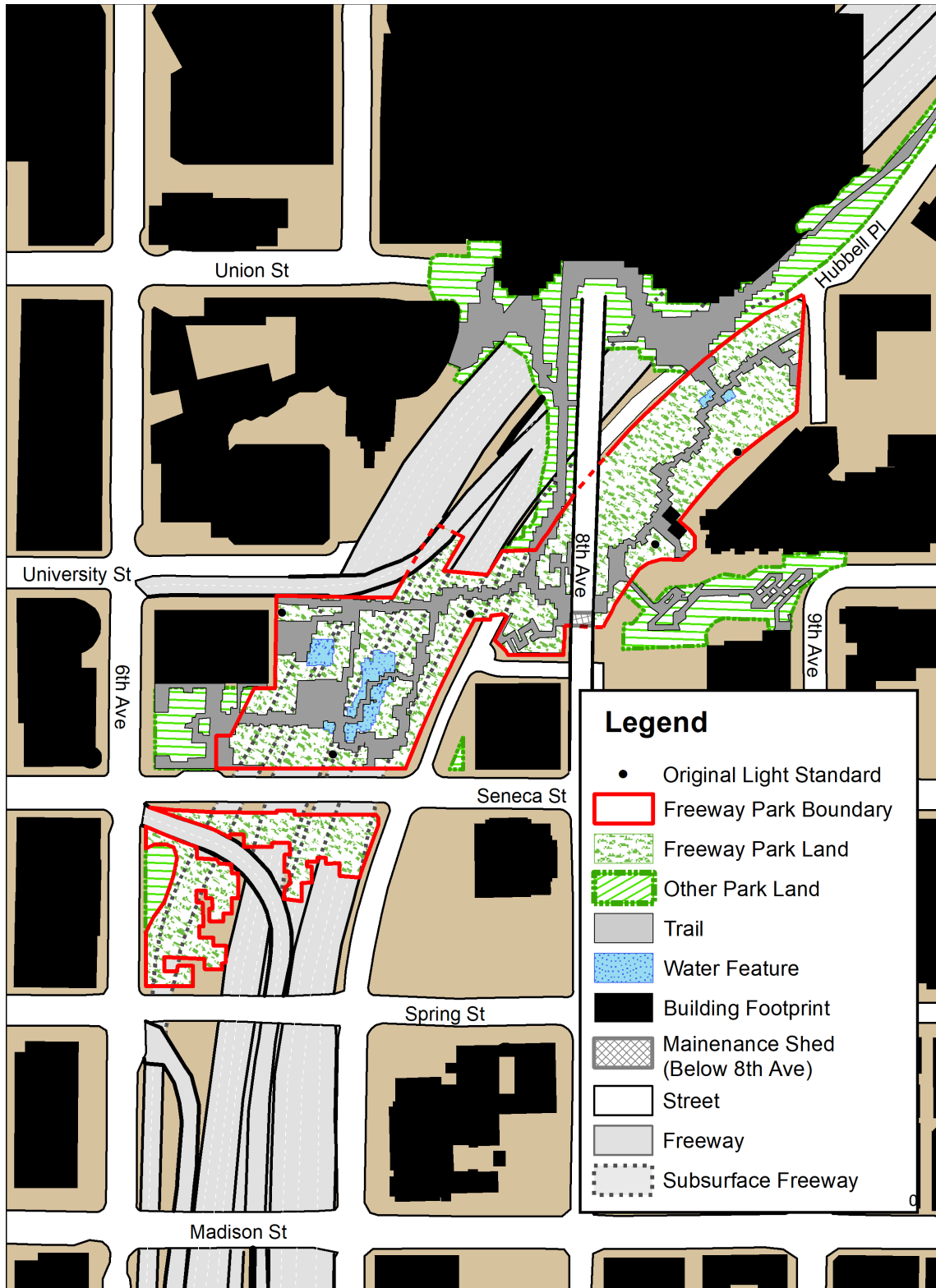


Figure 4. Freeway Park plan, including paths and water features, within the proposed landmark boundary.

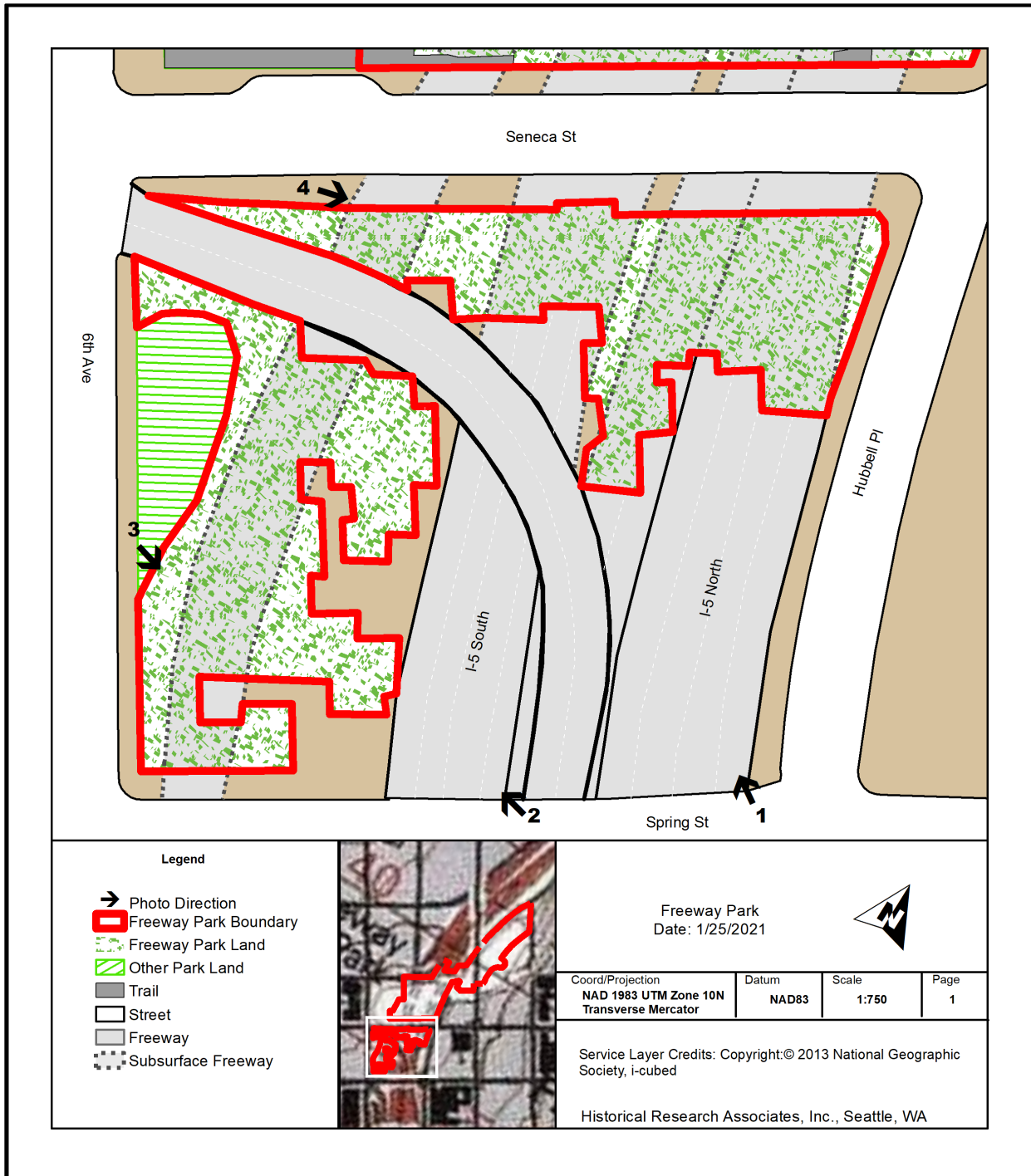


Figure 5. Freeway Park, Great Box Garden with photo callouts.

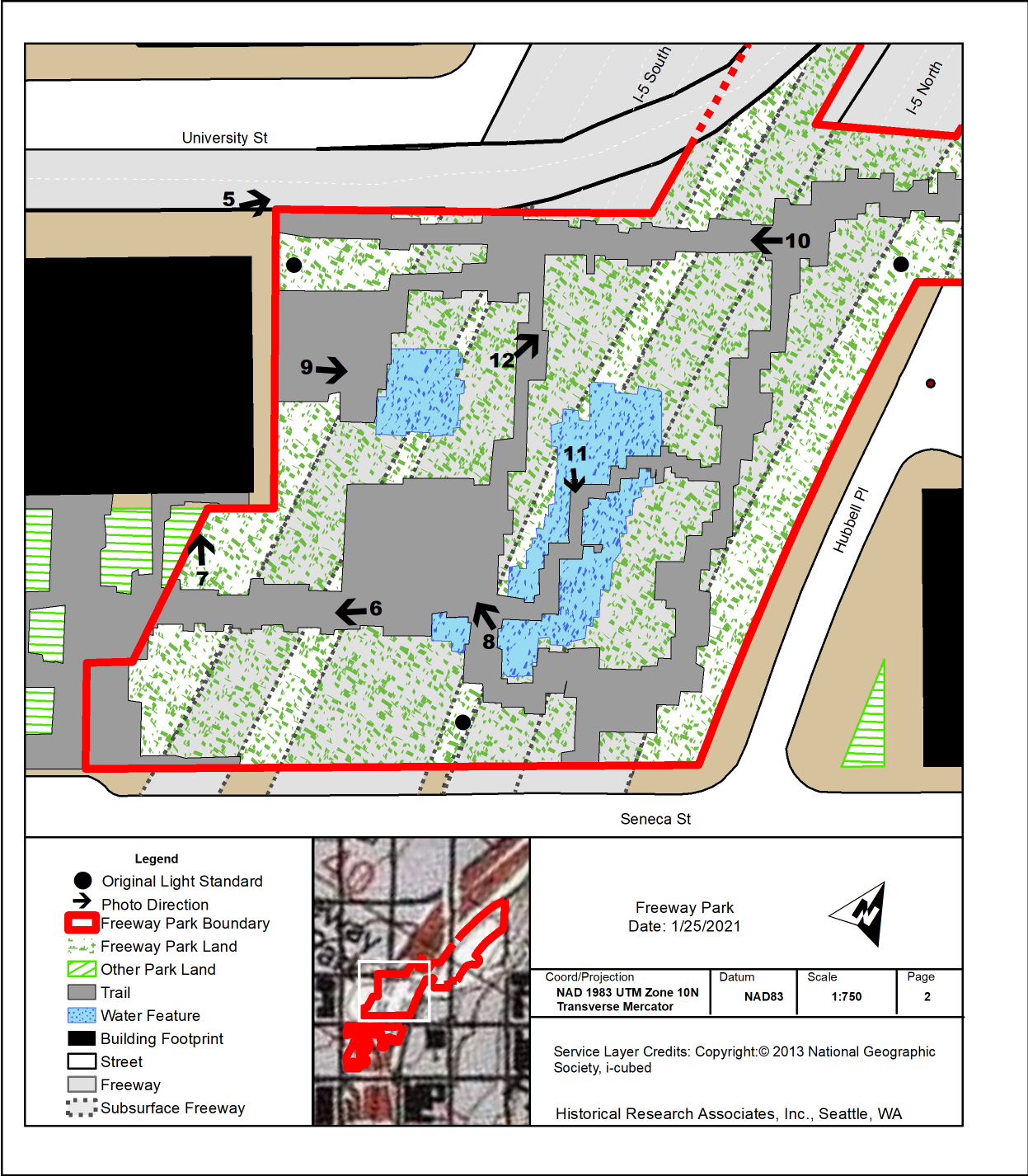


Figure 6. Freeway Park, Central Plaza, with photo callouts.

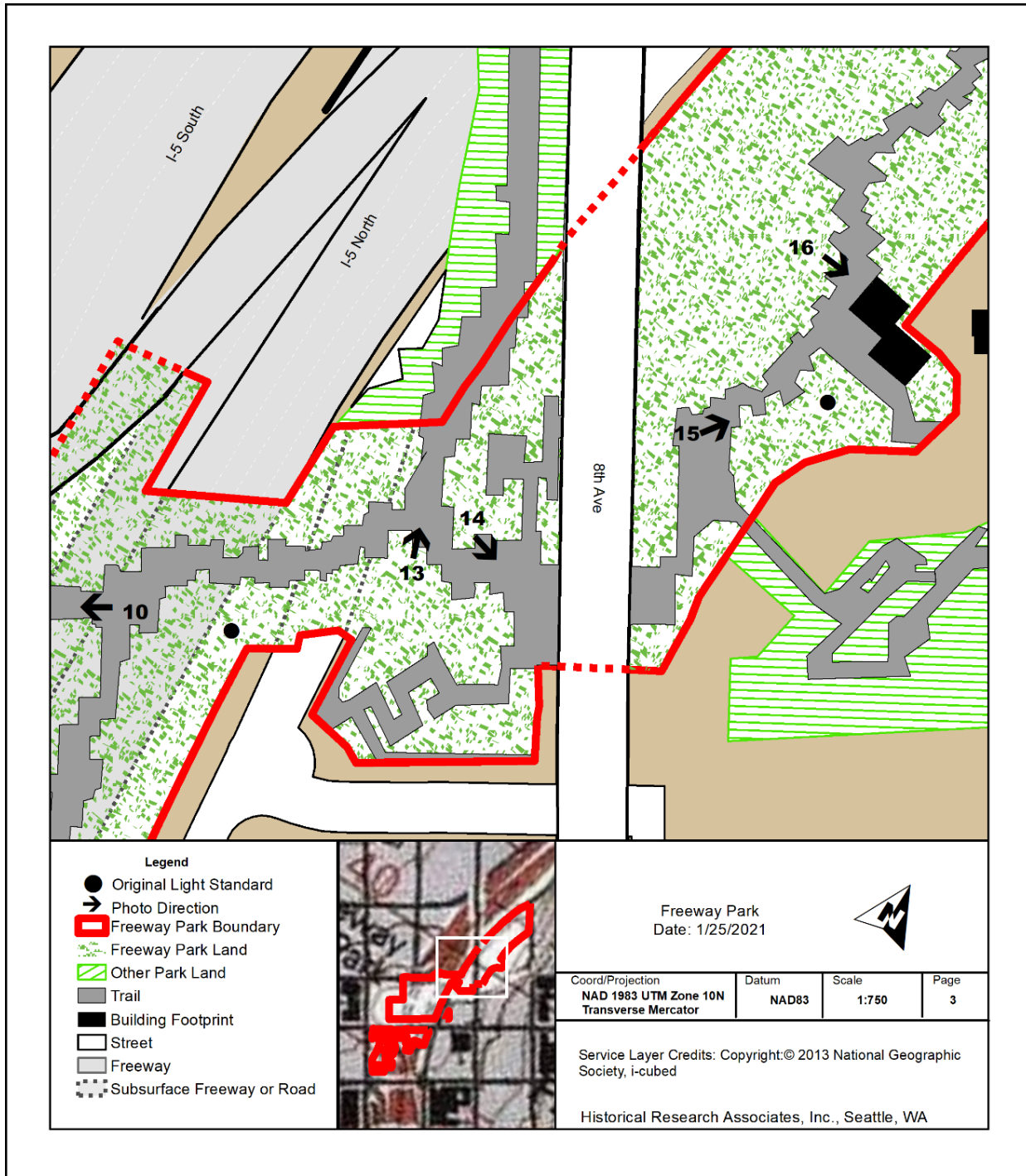


Figure 7. Freeway Park, East Plaza and 8th Ave. overpass, with photo callouts.

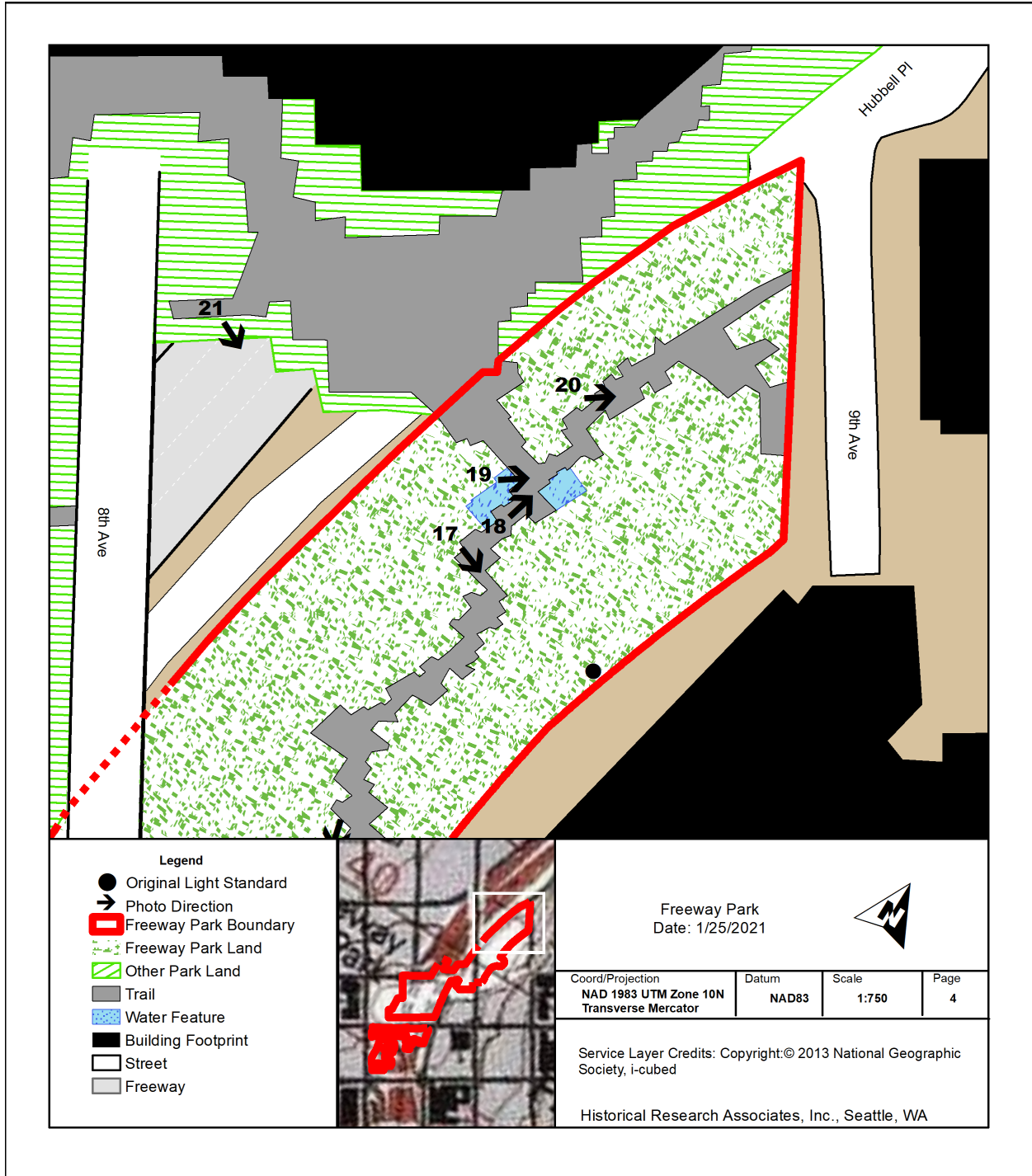
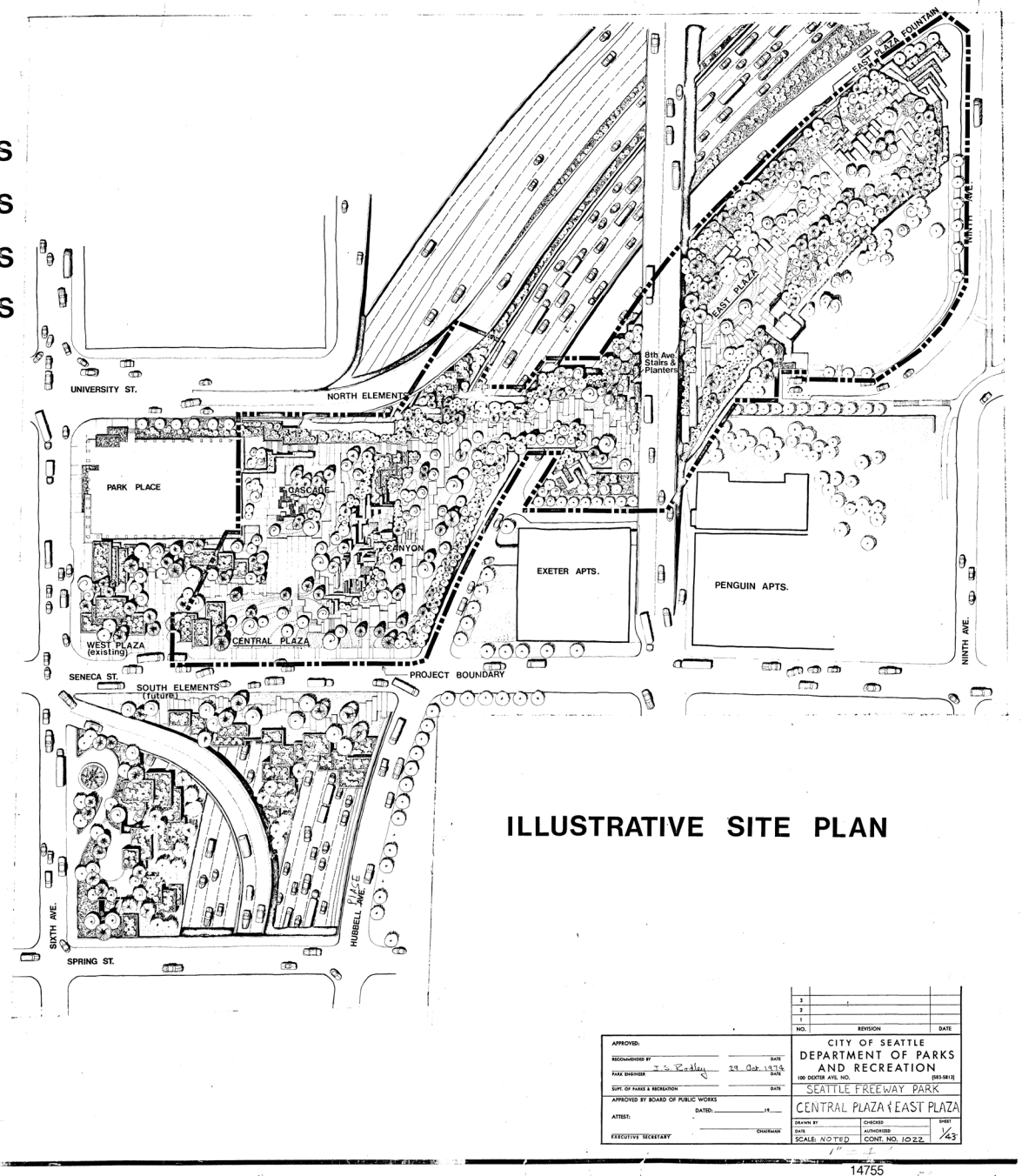


Figure 8. Freeway Park, East Plaza, with photo callouts.

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**ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN**

|                                    |                  |             |  |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|--|
| APPROVED:                          |                  |             |  |
| RECOMMENDED BY:                    |                  | DATE:       |  |
| PAK ENGINEER:                      | <i>W. S. ...</i> | 29 Oct 1974 |  |
| DPT. OF PARKS & RECREATION:        |                  | DATE:       |  |
| APPROVED BY BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS: |                  | DATE:       |  |
| ATTORNEY:                          |                  | DATE:       |  |
| EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:               |                  | DATE:       |  |

|   |          |      |
|---|----------|------|
|   | REVISION | DATE |
| 1 |          |      |
| 2 |          |      |
| 3 |          |      |

CITY OF SEATTLE  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS  
AND RECREATION  
1600 DECKER AVE. NO. 36130812  
SEATTLE FREEWAY PARK  
CENTRAL PLAZA & EAST PLAZA  
SCALE NOTED CONT. NO. 1022 1/43

14755

Figure 9. Freeway Park, Illustrative City Plan, 1974.

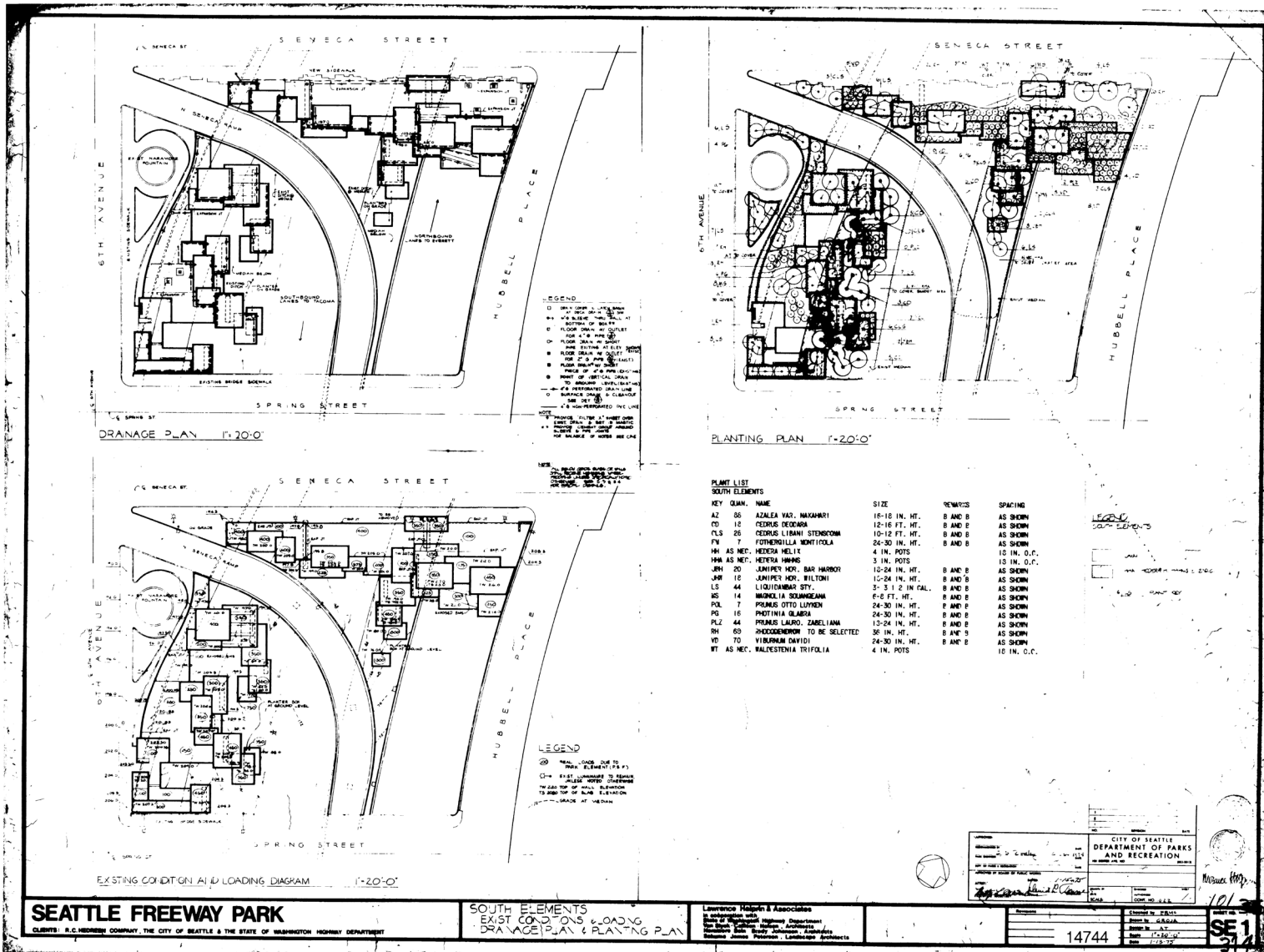


Figure 10. Drainage and Planting Plan for Freeway Park's Great Box Garden, 1975.



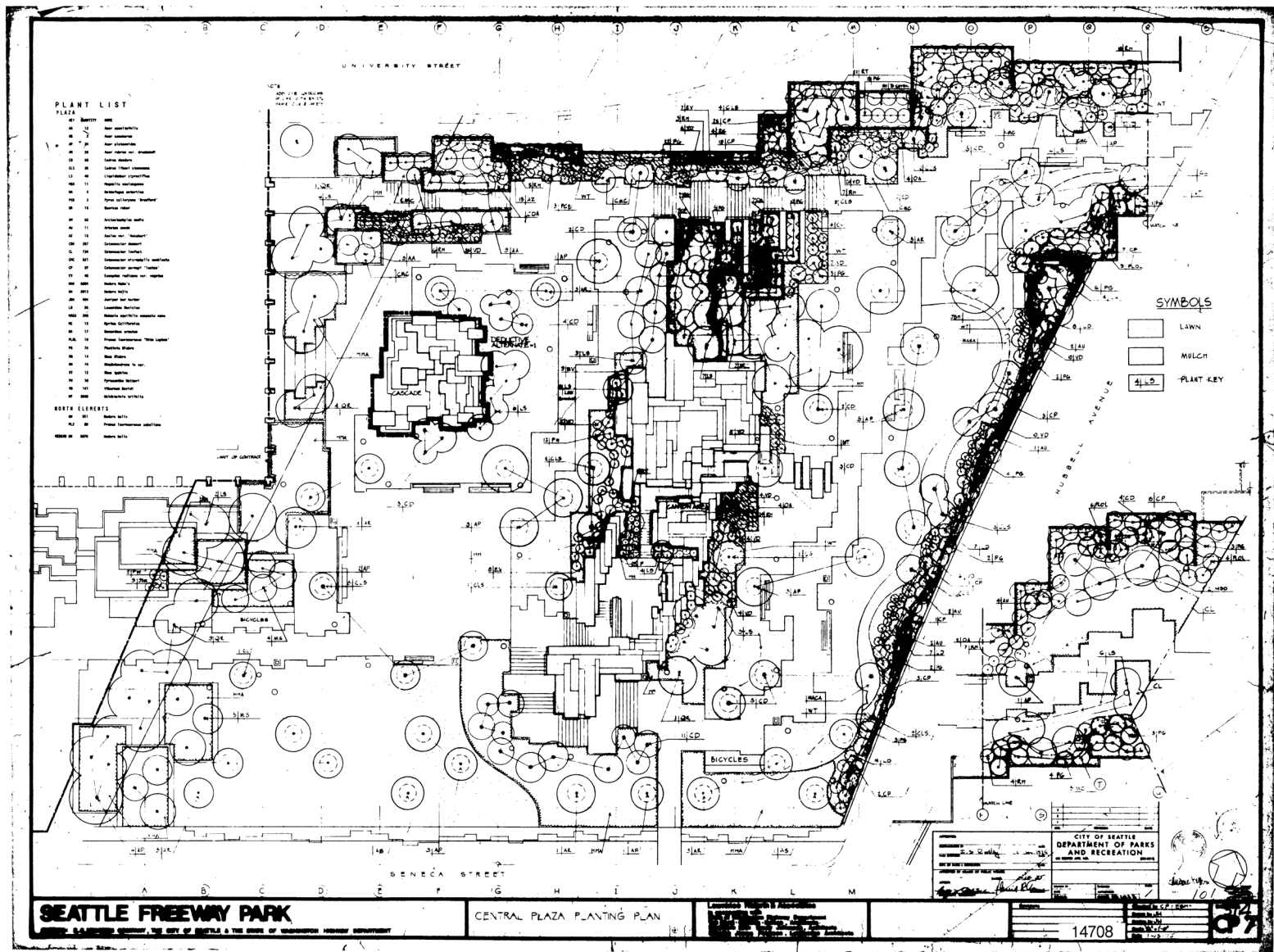


Figure 11. Freeway Park's Central Plaza Planting Plan, 1975.

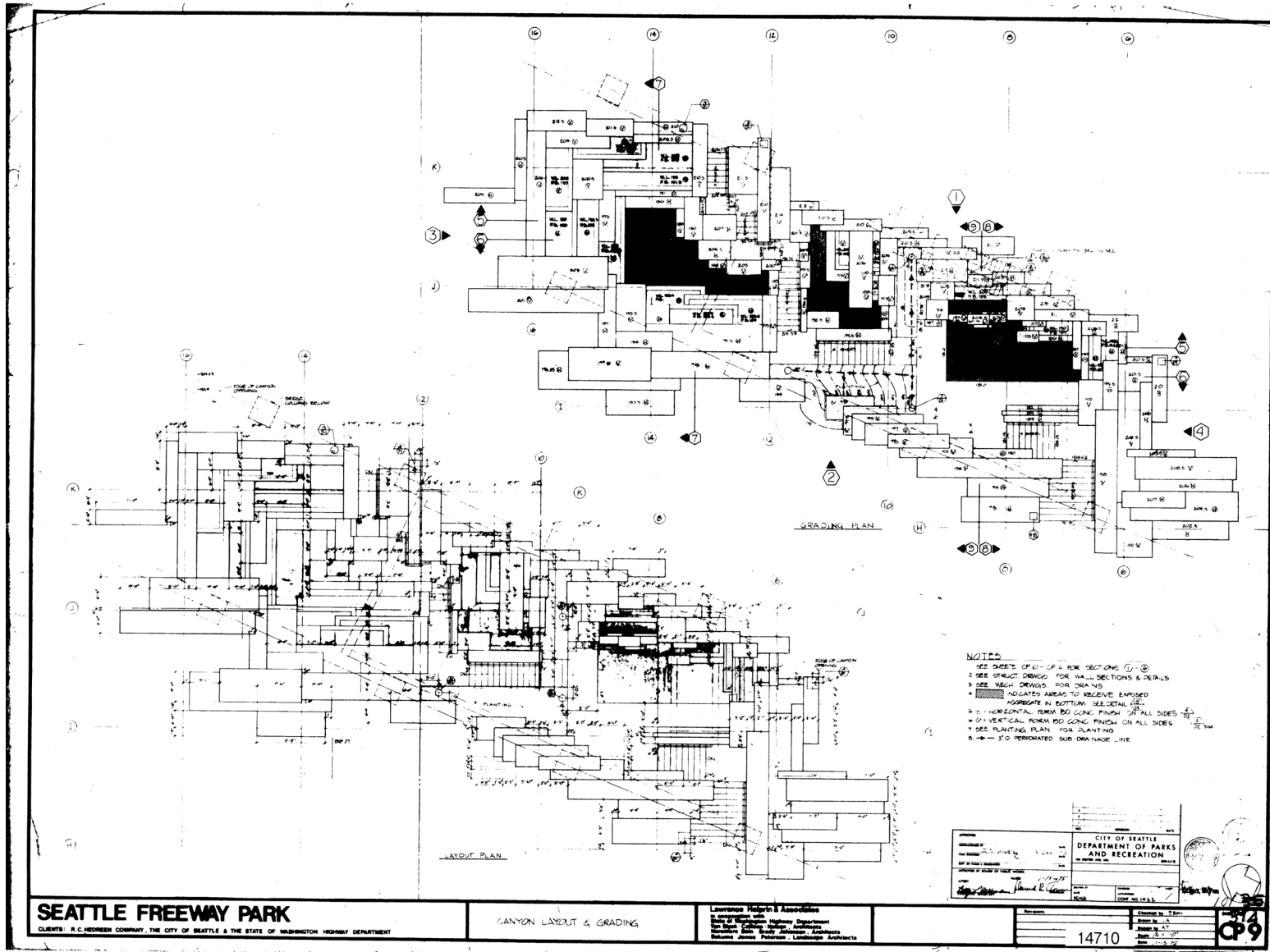


Figure 12. Freeway Park's Canyon Layout and Grading Plan, 1975.

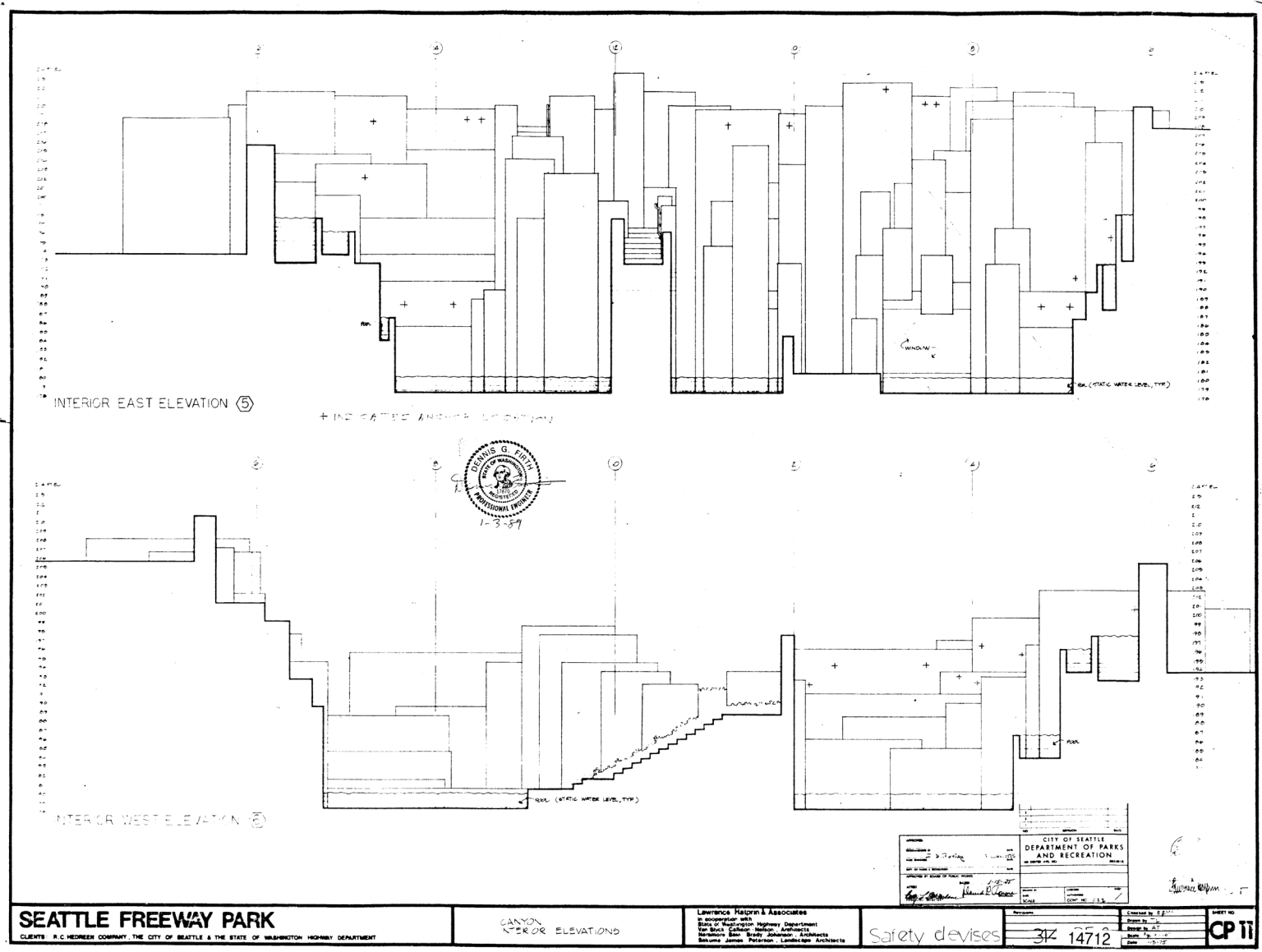


Figure 13. Freeway Park's Canyon, Interior Elevations, Sheet 1, 1975.

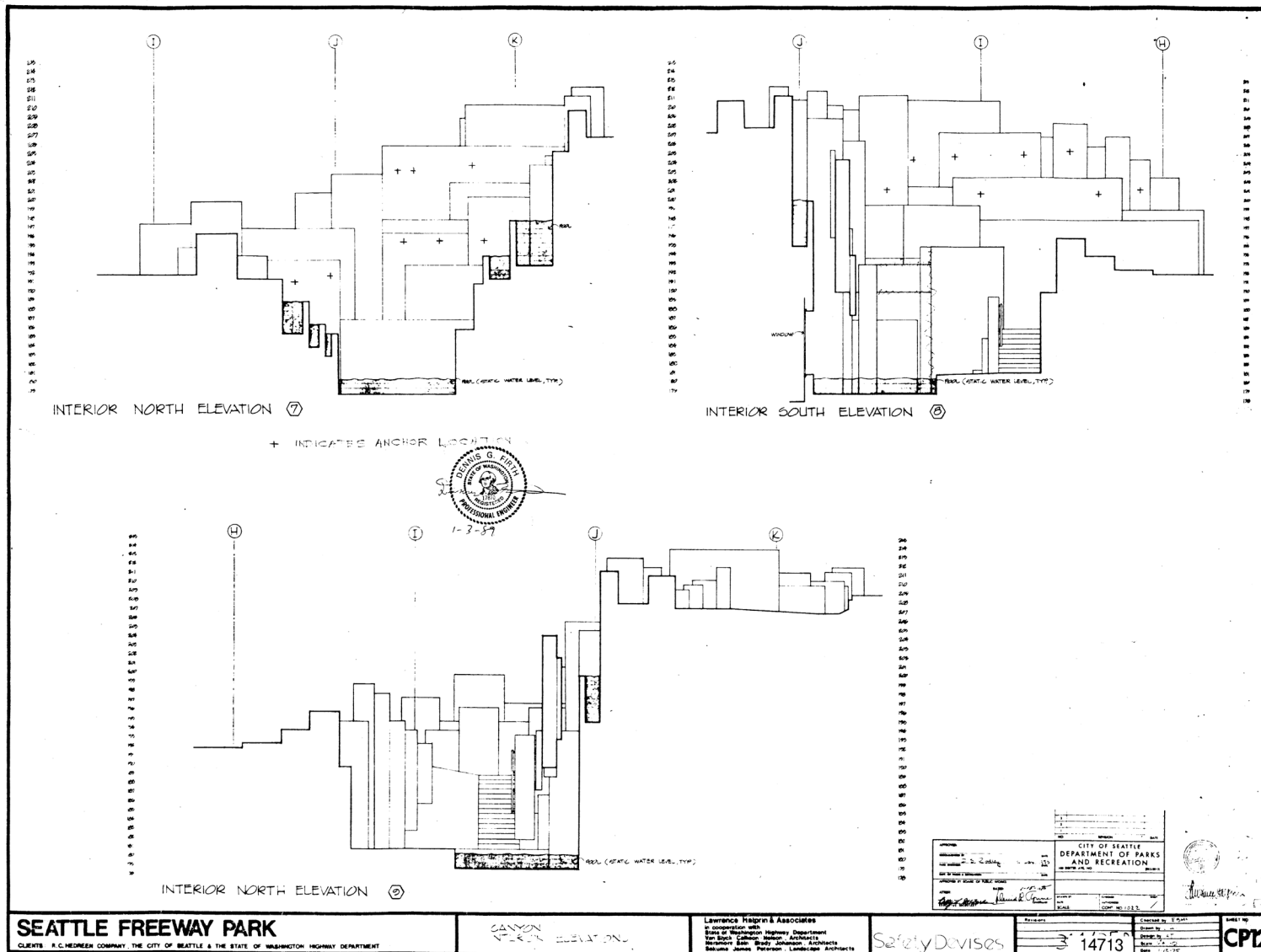


Figure 14. Freeway Park's Canyon, Interior Elevations, Sheet 2, 1975.

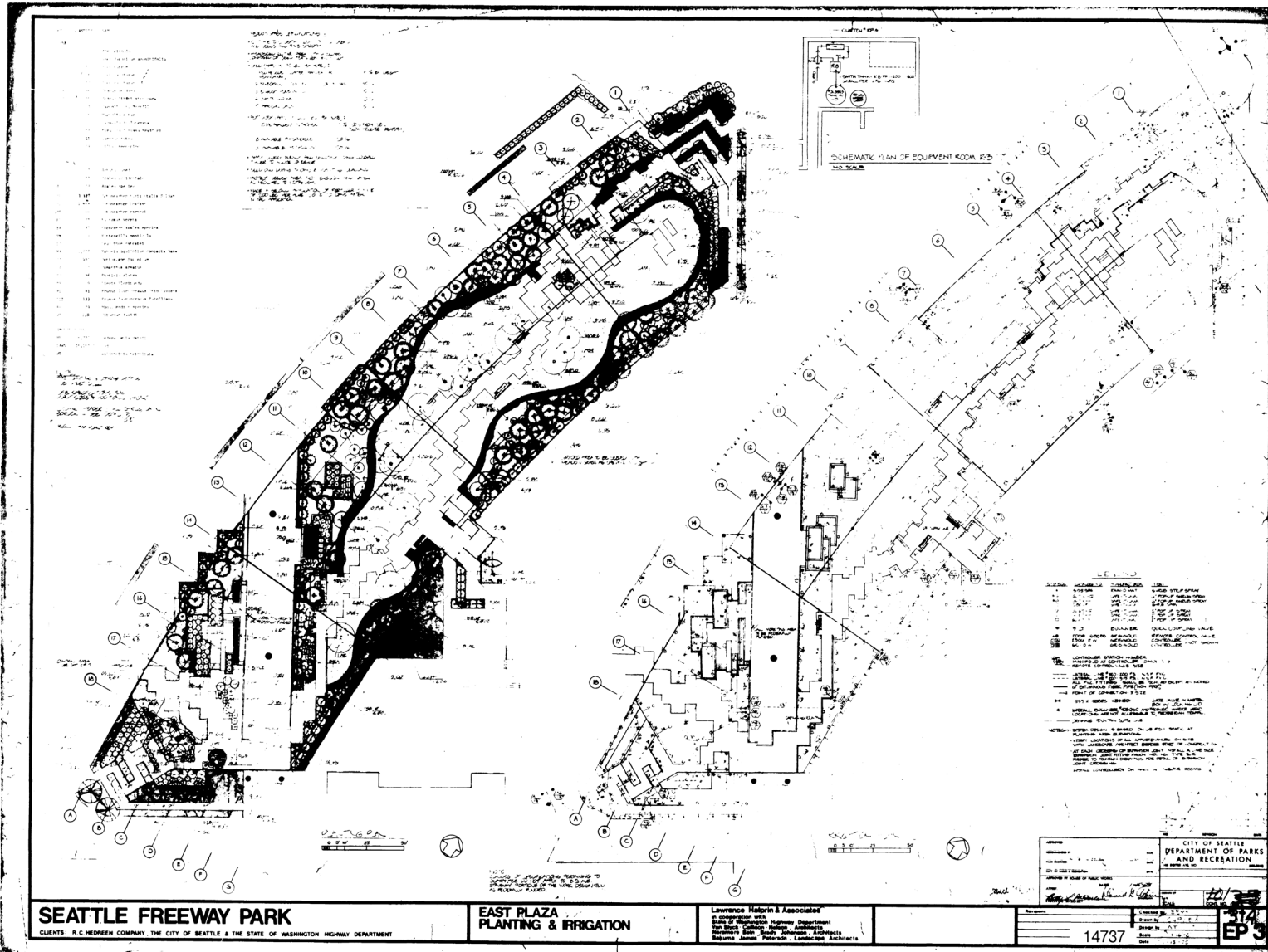


Figure 15. Freeway Park's East Plaza Planting and Grading Plan, 1975.



Figure 16. Freeway Park Site, 1969, ahead of construction, view northwest, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives. Note the existing 8th Ave. overpass over I-5.



Figure 17. Model of Freeway Park's Central Plaza, with Canyon and Cascades water features, 1970, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.

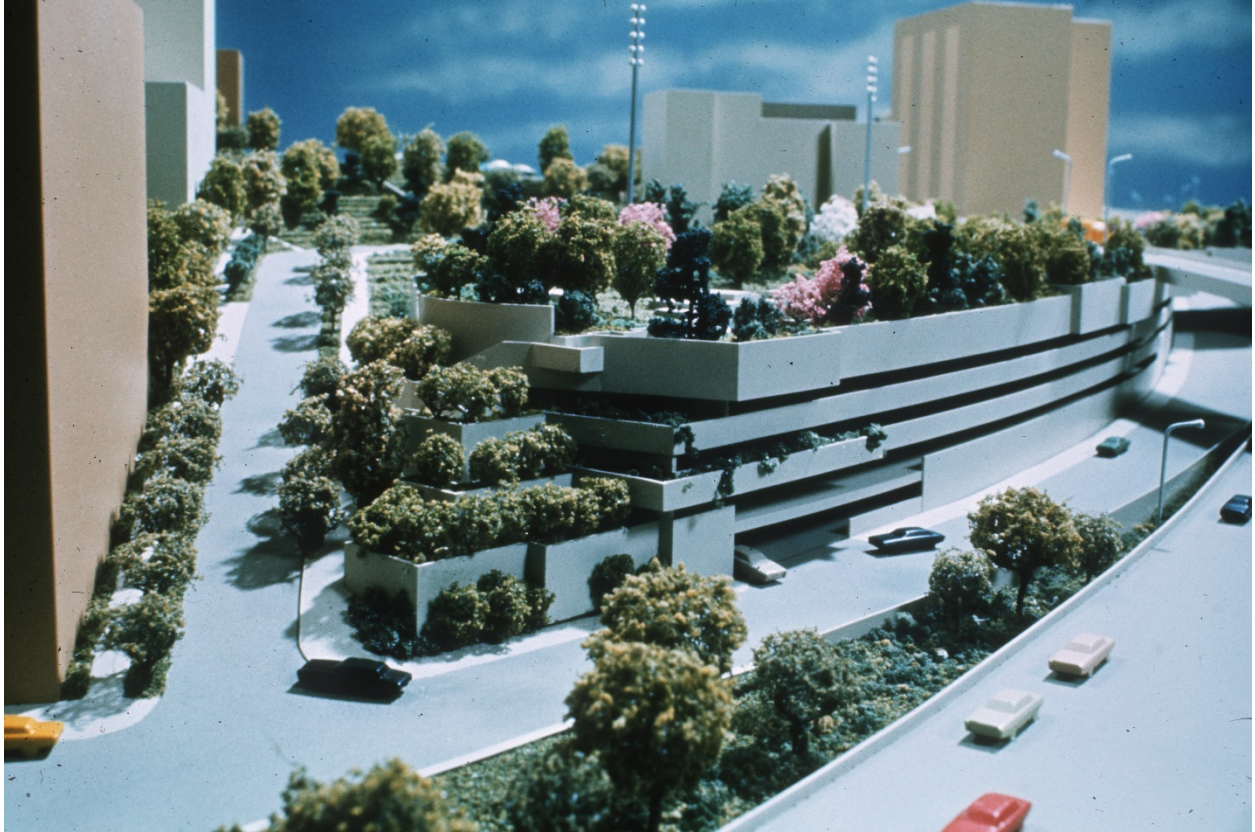


Figure 18. Model of Freeway Park's East Plaza, 1970, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.





Figure 19. Model of Freeway Park, view south, 1970, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.



Figure 20. Freeway Park's Canyon Waterfall, view northeast, 1976, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.



Figure 21. Freeway Park's Canyon Waterfall, view northeast, 1976, with active waterfall, courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives.

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Date: September 24, 2021

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(Historic Preservation Officer)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_