

# Freeway Park

700 Seneca Street, Seattle

Presented by  
Chrisanne Beckner, MS (HRA)  
for Seattle Parks and Recreation  
May 18, 2022



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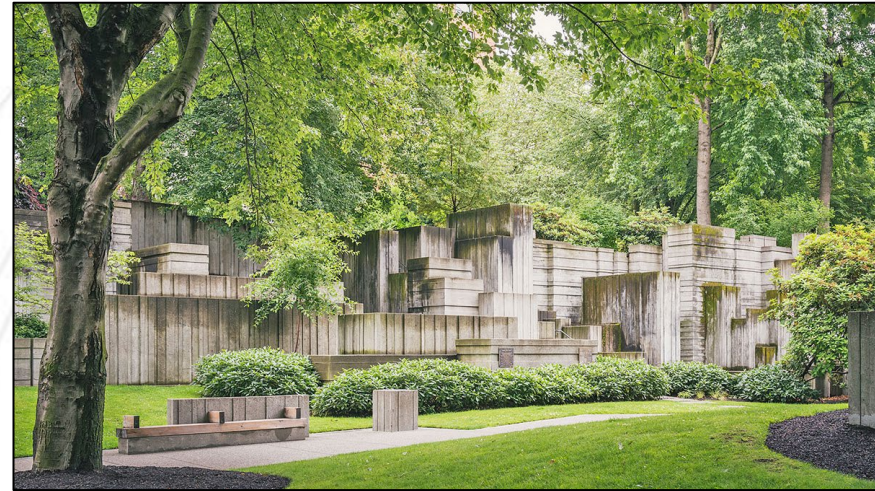


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# Freeway Park, Seattle

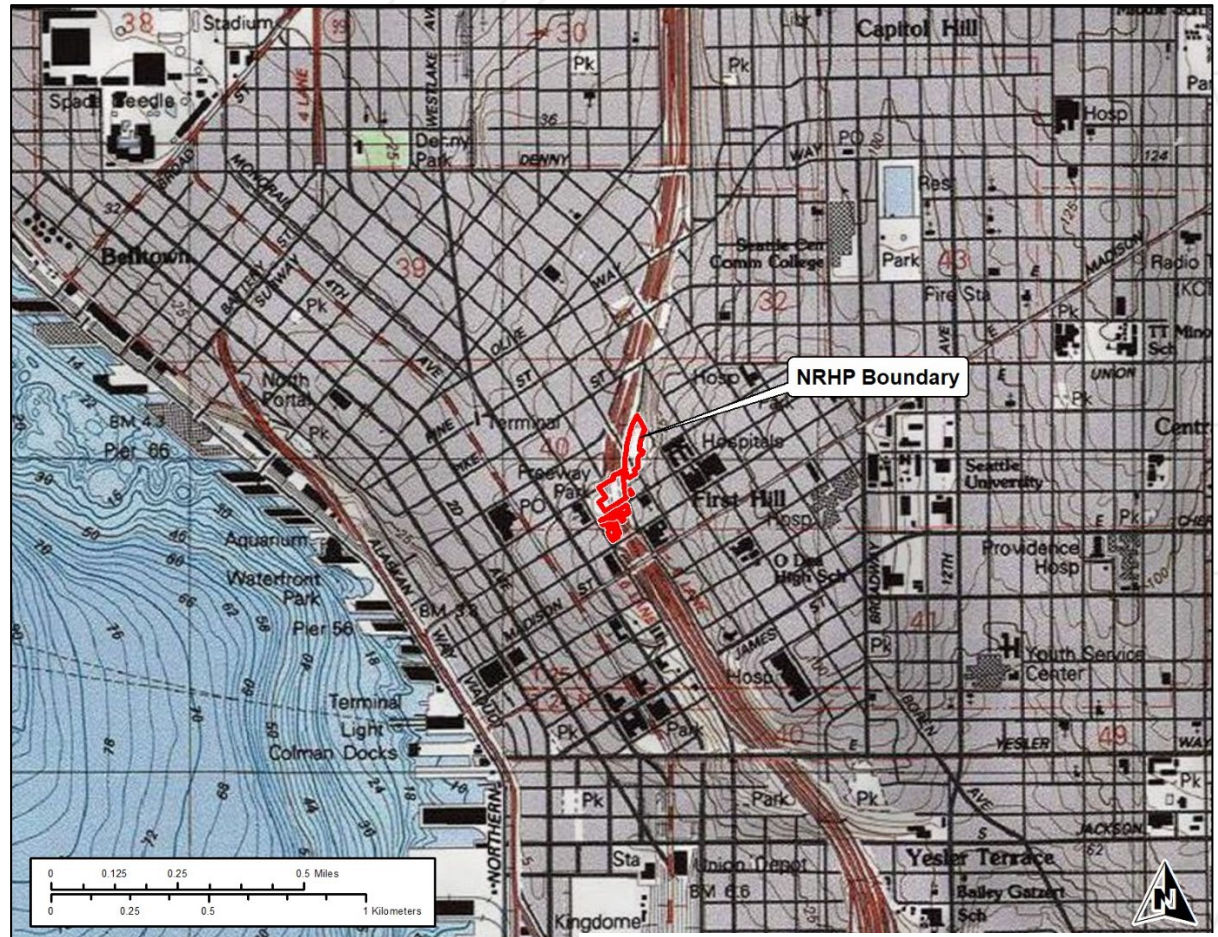
- Five-acre urban park completed over I-5 in 1976
- Designed by Lawrence Halprin & Associates (Angela Danadjieva Tzvetin)
- Built by Peter Kiewit and Sons (Contractor); David A. Mowat Company (Contractor); Edward & Associates (Landscape Architect)
- Parcels 197670PUBL; 1976700245; 1978200055
- Owned by Seattle Parks and Recreation, City of Seattle
- Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 2019.



The Canyon, East Plaza, Freeway Park, courtesy of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, Aaron Leitz, 2016.

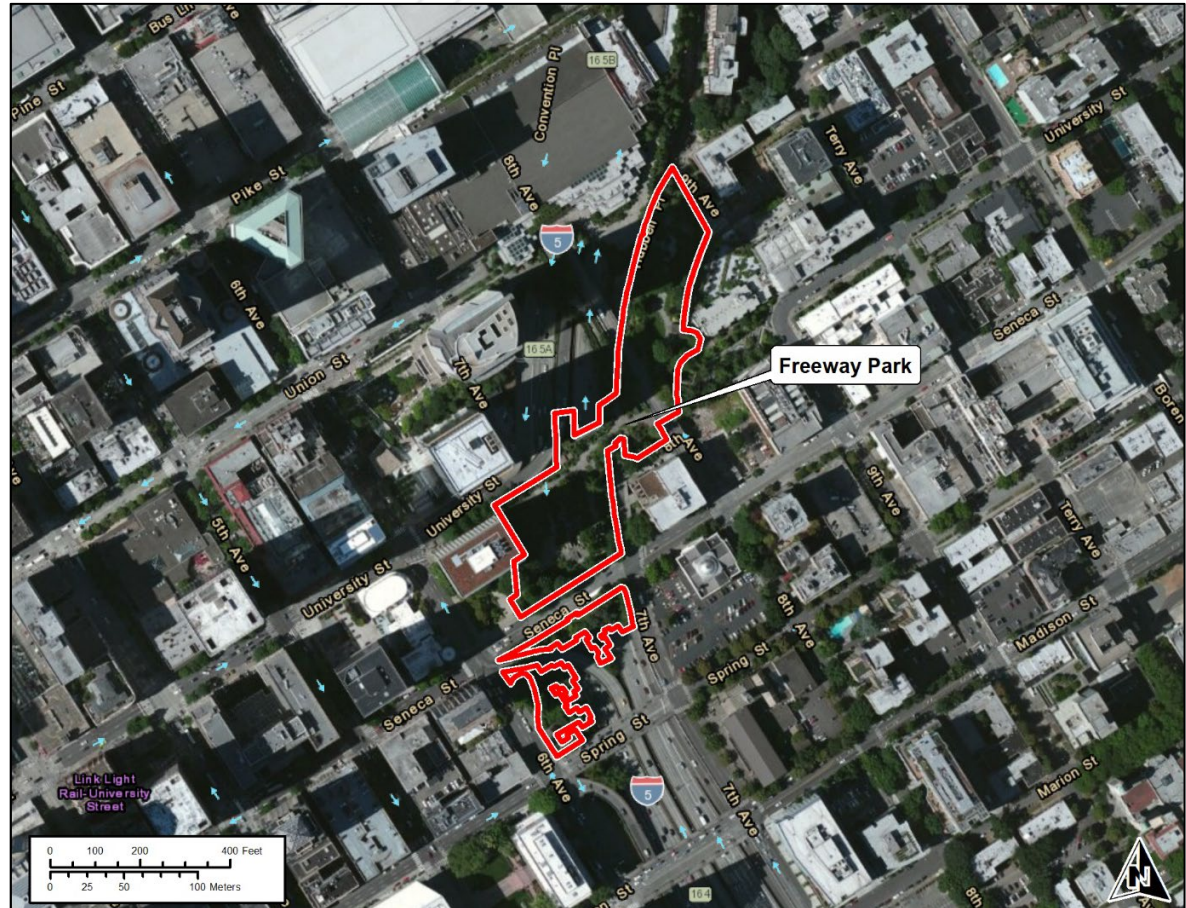
# Freeway Park, Seattle

- Set in central city
- An oasis shielding pedestrians from traffic
- Believed the nation's first park bridging an interstate



# Freeway Park, Seattle

- Designed to recaptured “air space” above the freeway
- Consolidated land left over after freeway construction
- Constructed with private, city, state, and federal funds



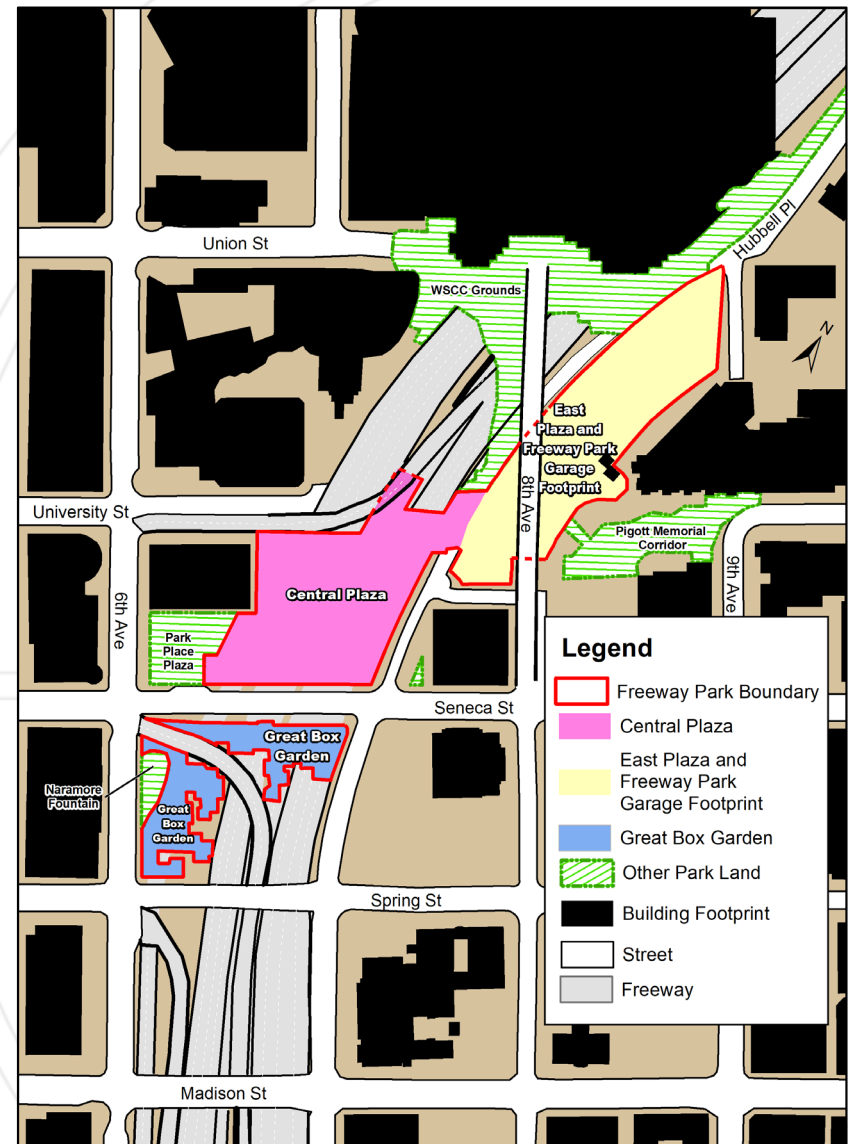
# Freeway Park, Seattle

Proposed landmark includes the following:

- Great Box Garden
- Central Plaza
- East Plaza

Nomination excludes the following resources, owned or managed separately:

- Naramore Fountain
- Park Place Plaza
- Freeway (I-5)
- Freeway Park Garage
- Pigott Memorial Corridor
- WSCC Grounds



# ➤ Seattle's Park System

- 1892:** Park Superintendent E. O. Schwagerl promoted a citywide and city-owned park system, connecting proposed parks with bicycle and pedestrian paths throughout Seattle.
- 1902:** James D. Blackwell of Seattle Electric Company reached out to the Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, to design a system that could grow with Seattle.
- 1903:** John Charles Olmsted and Percy Jones visited Seattle and drafted the first plan for a citywide park system, as they did for cities including Spokane, Portland, and others.
- 1909:** After the City quietly acquired lands recommended for acquisition, Seattle Parks released the Olmsted plan to the public as part of the Park Commission's 1909 annual report. Subsequent Olmsted reports promoted playgrounds, ballfields, and large undeveloped parks, expanding the system as Seattle annexed additional land.



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## ➤ Washington's I-5

- 1951:** An inner-city toll road, two to three blocks wide, was proposed to bring revenue and additional activity to downtown Seattle.
- 1956:** The Federal-Aid Highway Act offered to fund 90% of an interconnected network of high-speed roadways nationwide.
- 1960:** The first section of I-5 opened for traffic in Tacoma while additional construction plowed through areas considered “blighted” in the age of urban renewal.
- 1961:** In protest, activists including noted architect Paul Thiry and the First Hill Improvement Club, proposed a radical idea, a “lid” over I-5.
- 1966:** Partly in response to freeway construction, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 passed into law.
- 1969:** Washington completed the final section of I-5 between Marysville and Everett, completing the backbone of the West Coast between Mexico and Canada.



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## ➤ Forward Thrust

- 1962:** Seattle hosted its second World's Fair, known as the Century 21 Exposition, drawing 10 million visitors with science exhibits. Lawrence Halprin, Paul Thiry, and Space Needle designer, John Graham, designed the Expo's buildings and grounds.
- 1966:** In the face of growth, James Ellis and a group of civic minded citizens formed a club to consider improvements for Seattle and King County, proposing a series of bond measures for transportation, housing, mass transit, and parks.
- 1967:** Naramore Fountain by George Tsutakawa was installed at a site near I-5, inspiring Seattle Parks to construct a surrounding public plaza.
- 1968:** Voters approve Forward Thrust bond initiatives for fire protection, sewers, roadways, and youth facilities--plus \$118 million for parks.



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# ➤ Freeway Park Planning

- 1968:** Based on Thiry's "lid" idea and Halprin's 1966 book, *Freeways*, Seattle Parks considered expanding Naramore plaza into a park over I-5.
- 1970:** Richard Hedreen, who'd acquired land at 6<sup>th</sup> Ave, and University St., constructed Park Place Plaza (1972).
- 1970:** Seattle chose Lawrence Halprin & Assoc. to design the adjacent Freeway Park.



Halprin chose Danadjieva-Tzvetin as the lead designer on Freeway Park and other northwest projects, including Portland's Ira Keller Fountain.



Halprin, 1960s, courtesy of the Cultural Landscape Foundation

Danadjieva-Tzvetin, nd, courtesy of the Cultural Landscape Foundation



# Lawrence Halprin & Associates

- **UW Campus Master Plan** with Paul Thiry, Seattle, WA  
1960
- **Pacific Science Center, Century 21 Exposition**, Seattle, WA  
1962
- **Ghirardelli Square**, San Francisco, CA  
1964
- **Sea Ranch**, Sonoma County, CA 1963-1998
- **Water Garden**, Olympia, WA  
1972
- **Open Space Sequence**, Portland, OR  
1965 to 1978



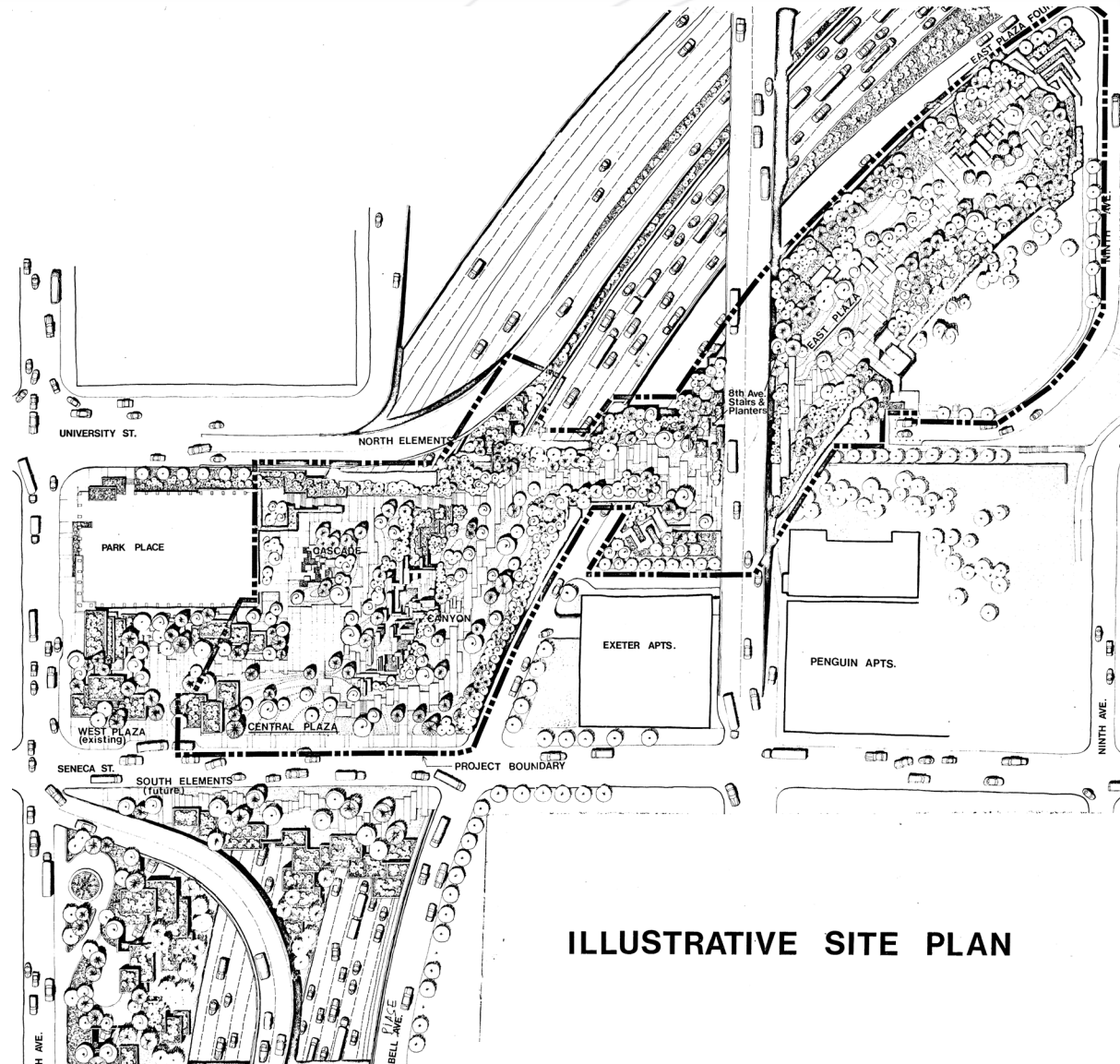
Open Space Sequence, Jeremy Bittermann, 2016



Ghirardelli Square, Carol Highsmith, 2012

# Freeway Park Seattle, 1975

- Park designed with site conditions in mind
- Plantings chosen for resistance to wind, water, soil conditions
- Tree wells installed for root systems
- Irrigation system built in



ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN



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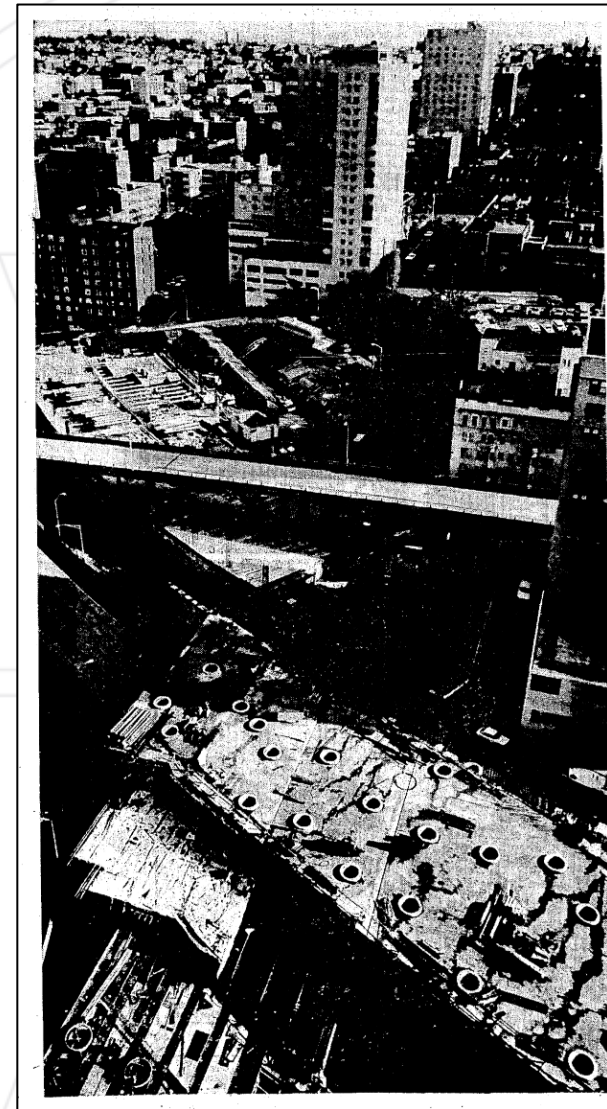


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# ➤ Freeway Park Construction

- 1972: Plans for Freeway Park garage approved
- 1973: Seattle Design Commission approved Tzvetin's initial park plans
- 1974: Construction of Freeway Park began with the Central Plaza, followed by the Great Box Garden, the bridge over I-5, the garage, and then East Plaza above it.
- 1976: **Grand Opening celebration on July 4.**

Freeway Park won awards from the Washington Precast Concrete Industry, Design and Environment magazine, the Association of Landscape Contractors, and the American Society of Landscape Architects.



*Seattle Times, February 24, 1975*



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# Future Freeway Park, 1969

University St.

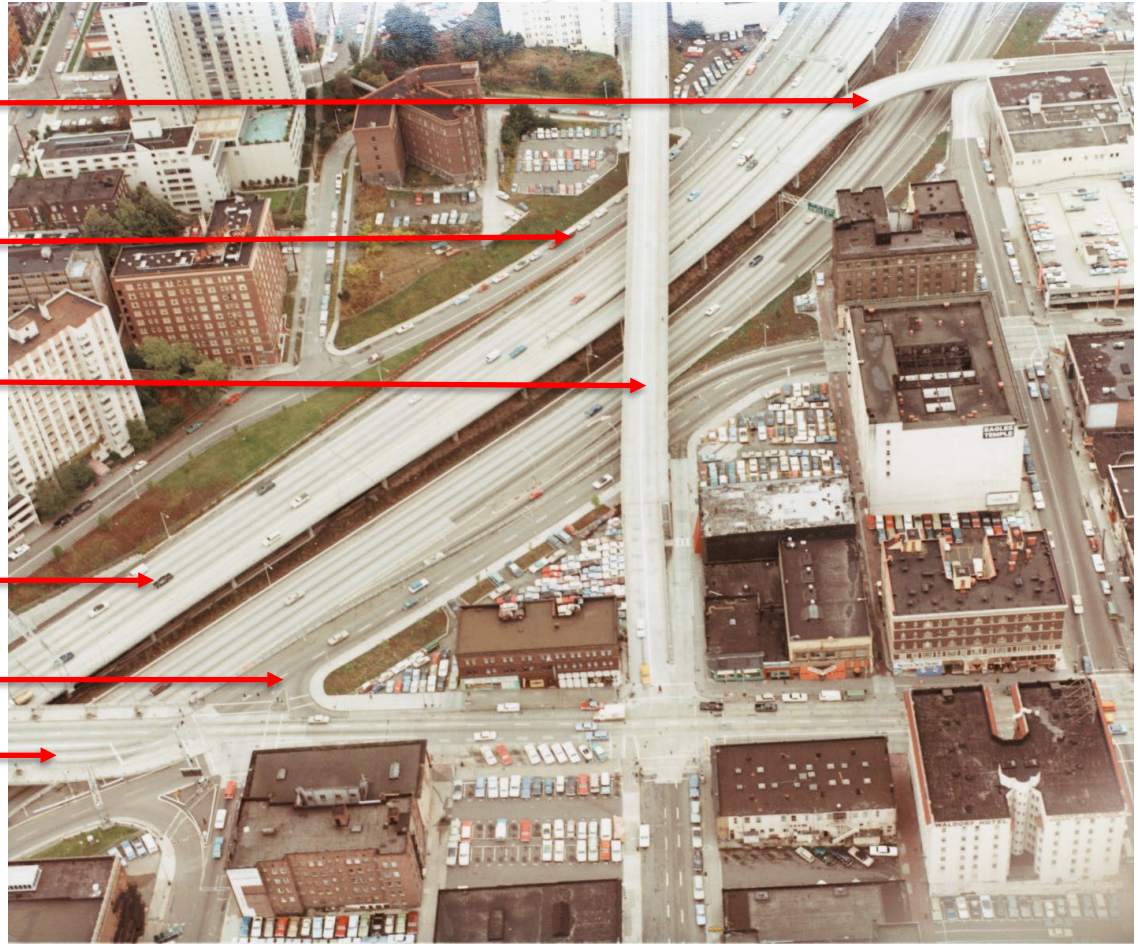
Hubbell Pl.

8<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Interstate 5

Union St.

Pike St.



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# Model Freeway Park, 1970

Spring St.

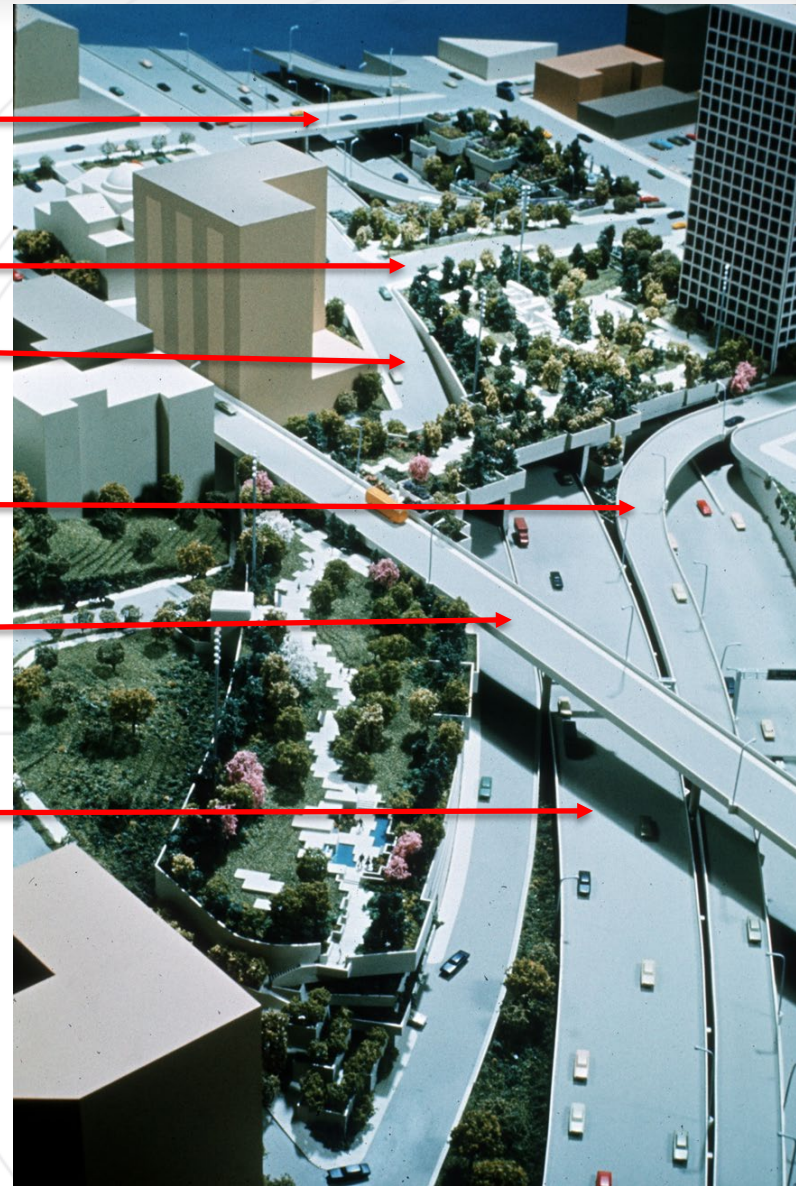
Seneca St.

Hubbell Pl.

University St.

8<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Interstate 5

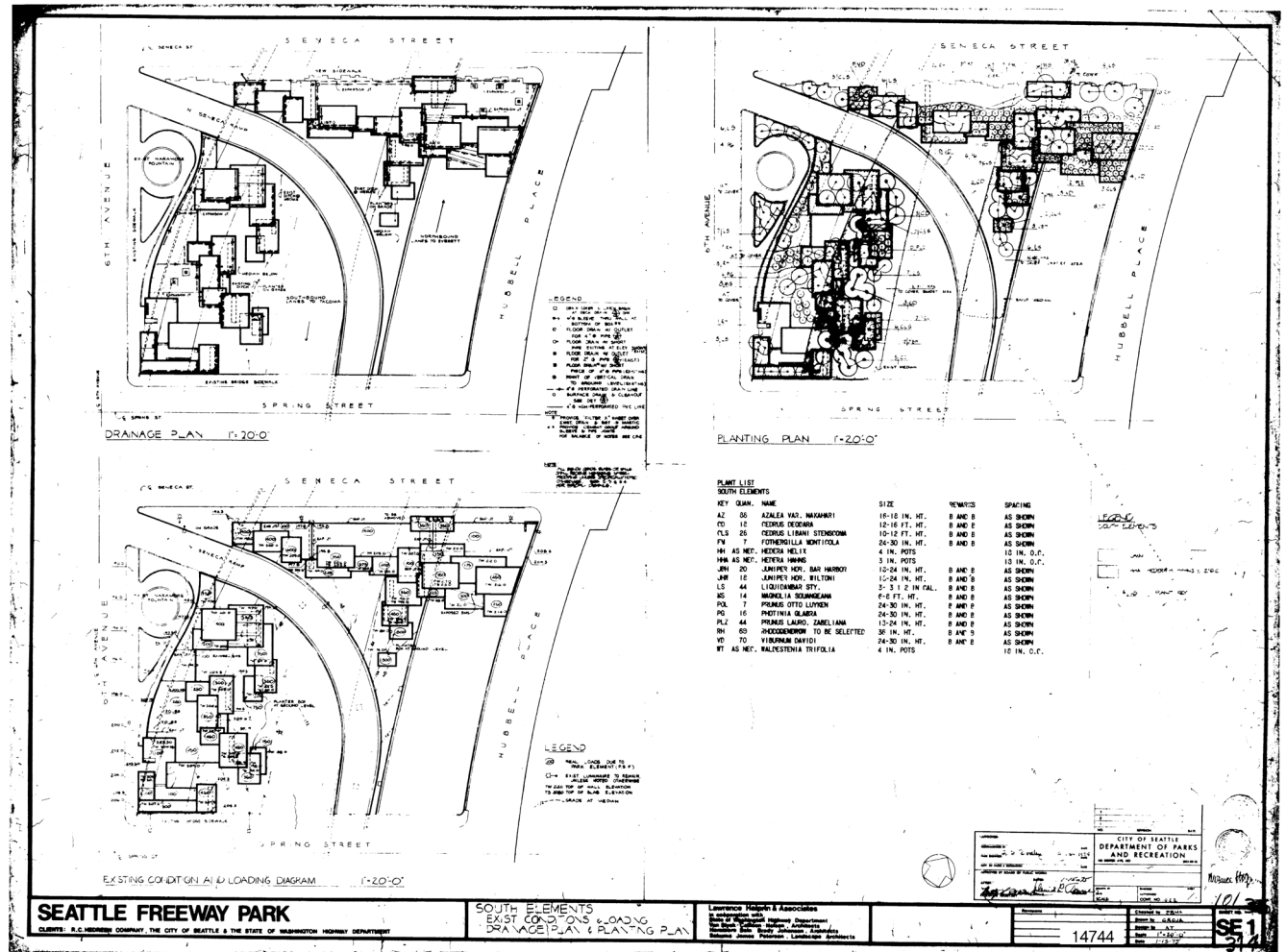


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# Design: Great Box Garden, 1975



# Great Box Garden, 1976



Image courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives

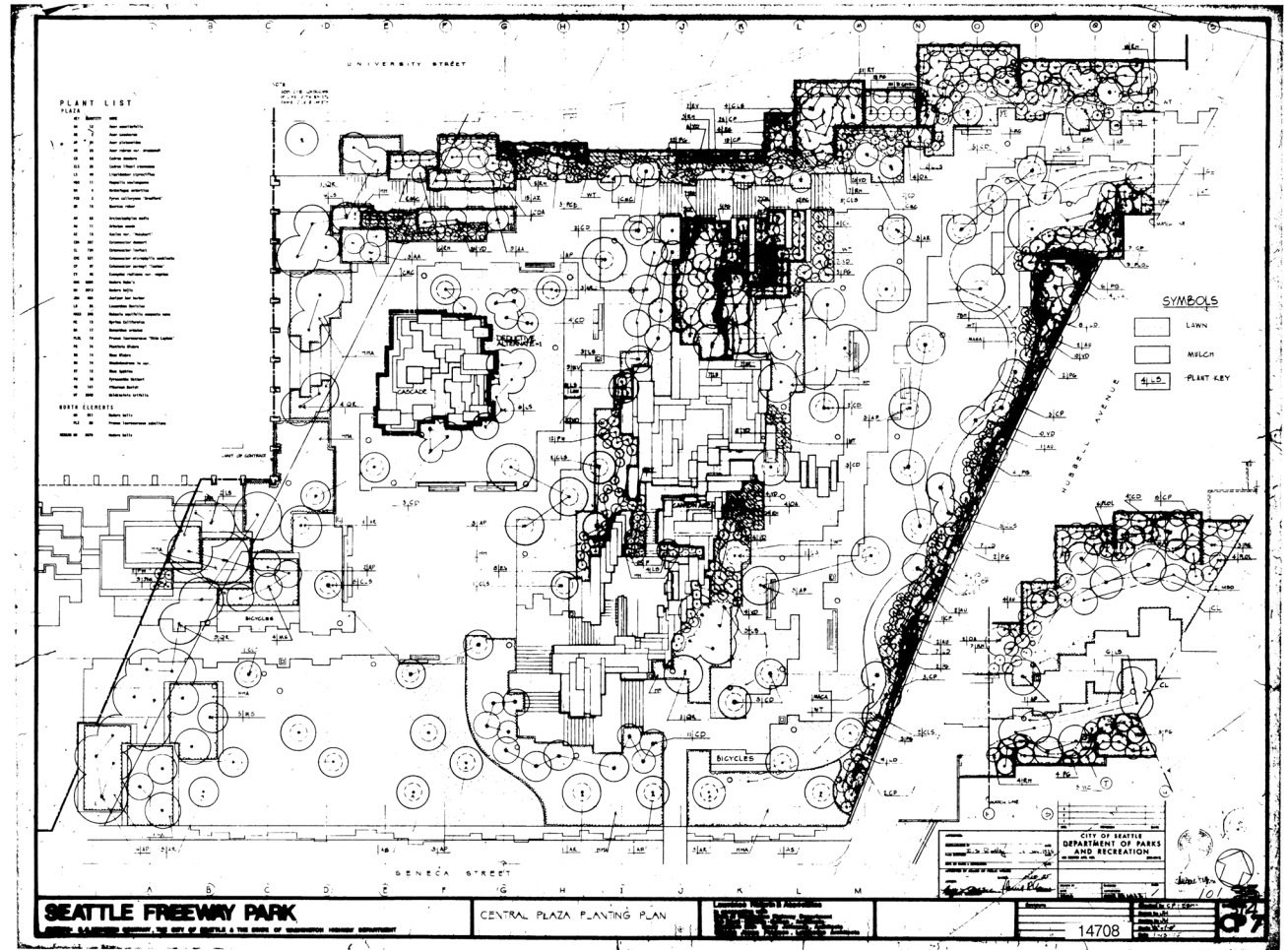


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# Design: Central Plaza, 1975

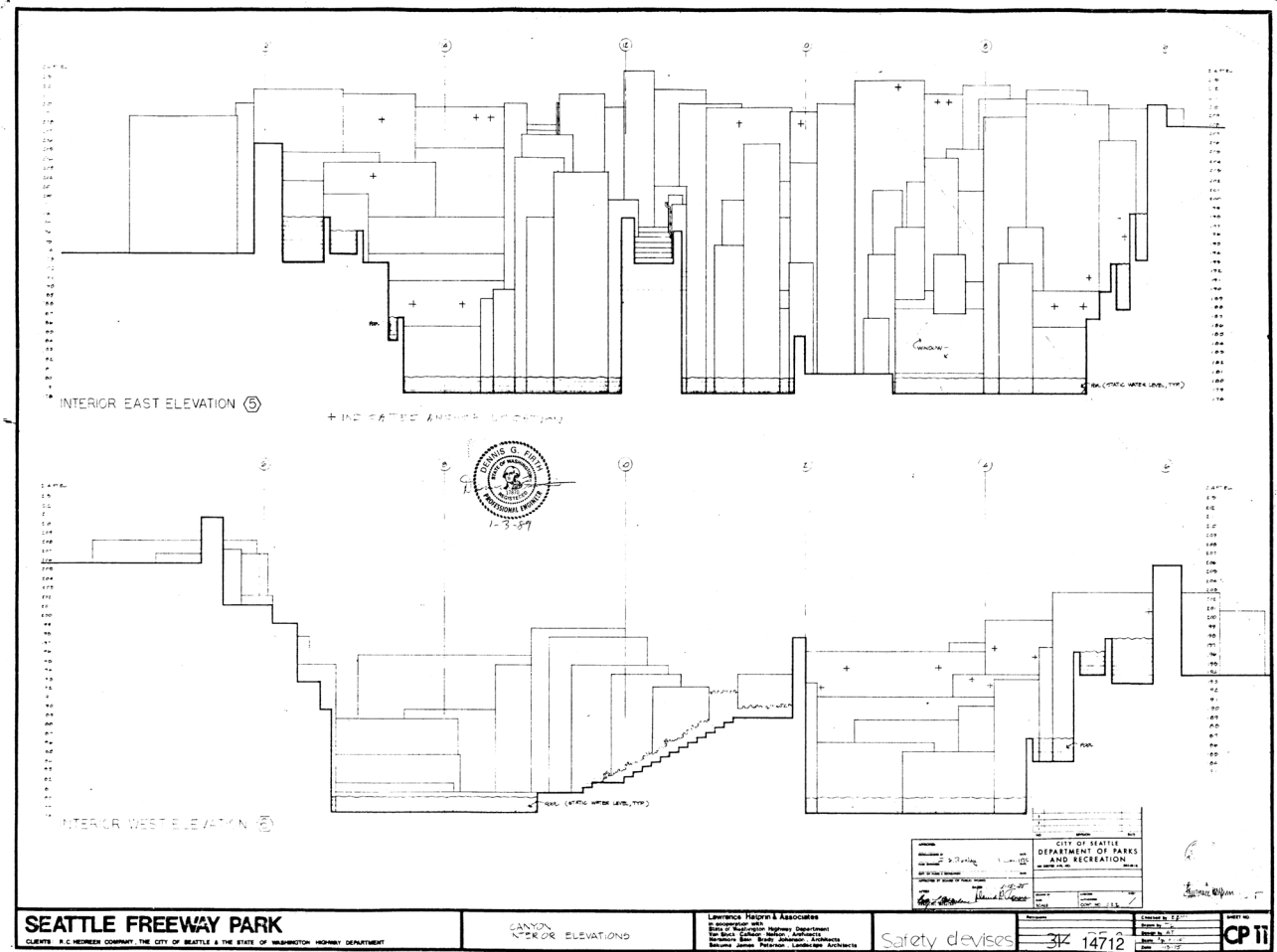


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# Design: The Canyon, 1975



# Model: Central Plaza, 1975

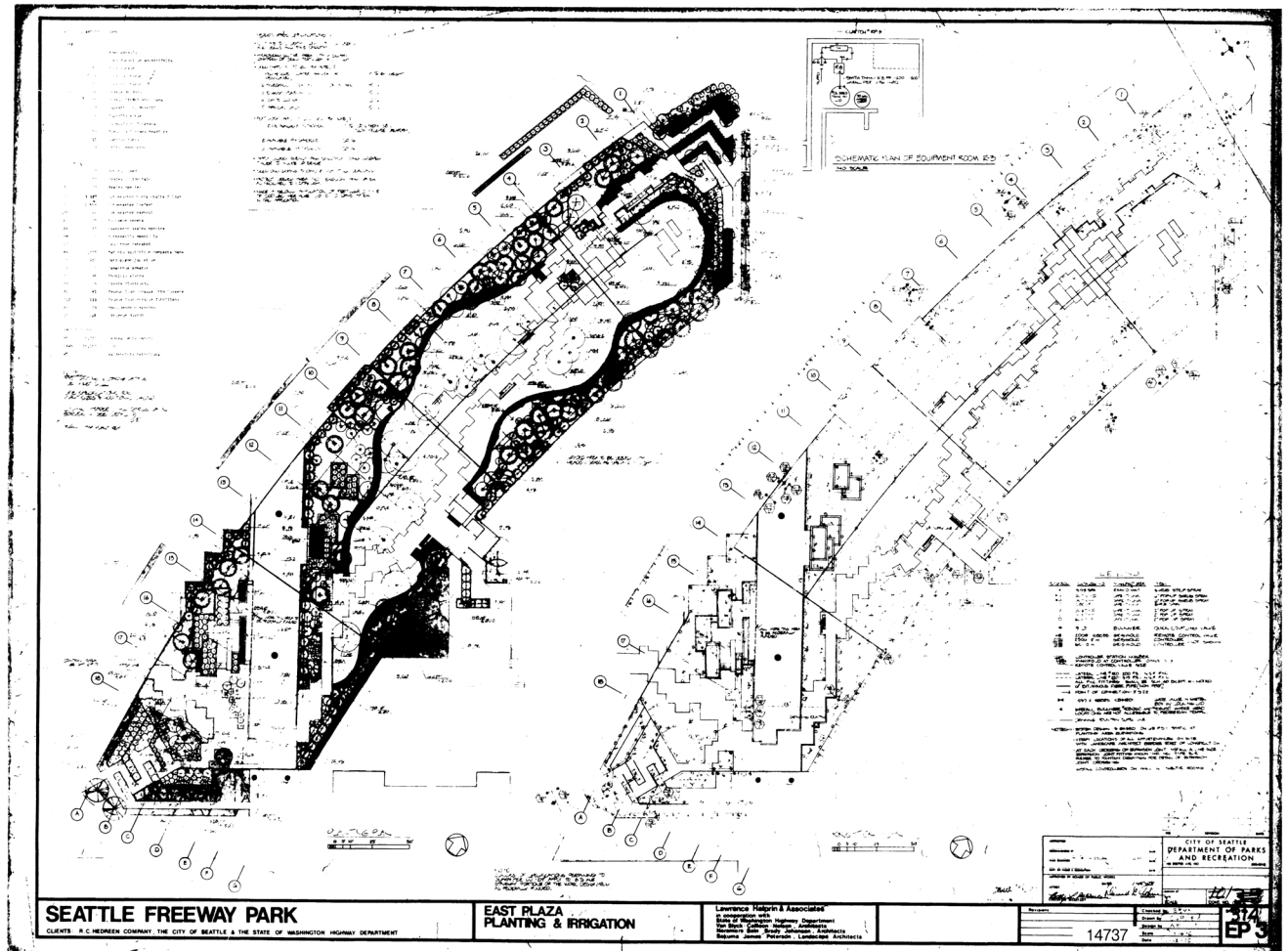


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# Design: East Plaza, 1975



# Model: East Plaza, 1975



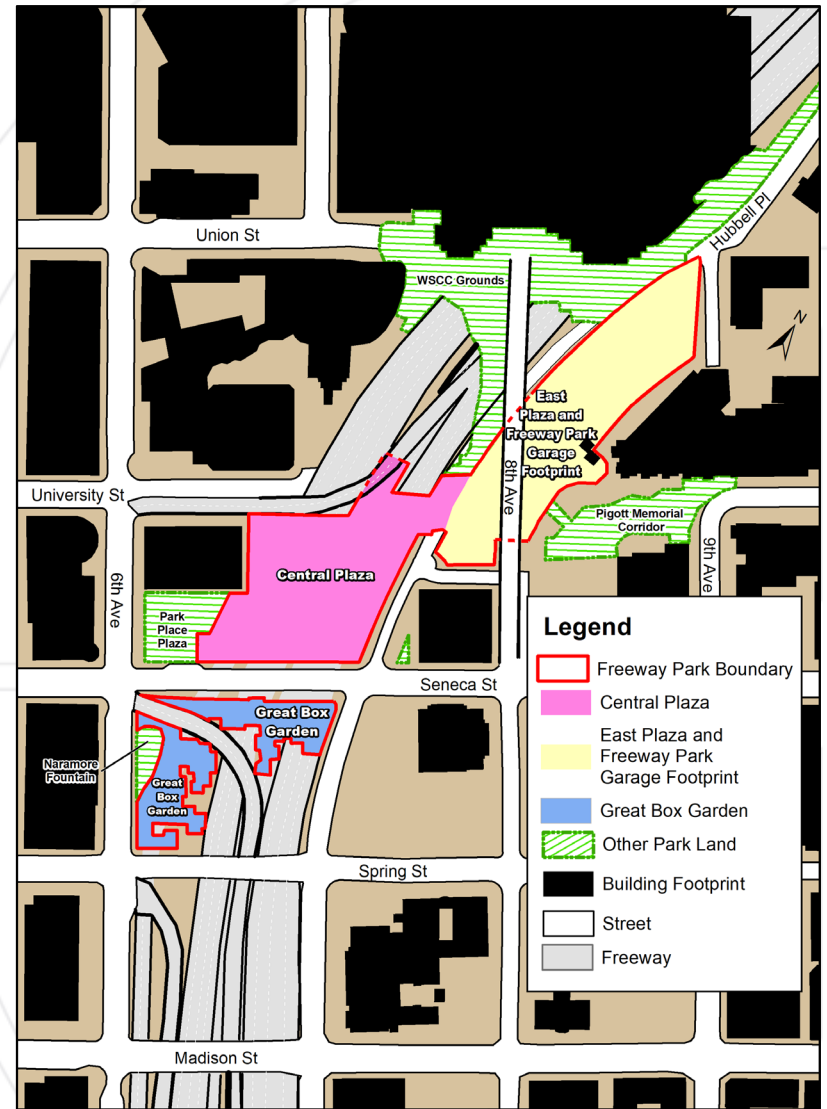
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# Freeway Park Seattle, Today

- Great Box Garden
- Central Plaza
- East Plaza



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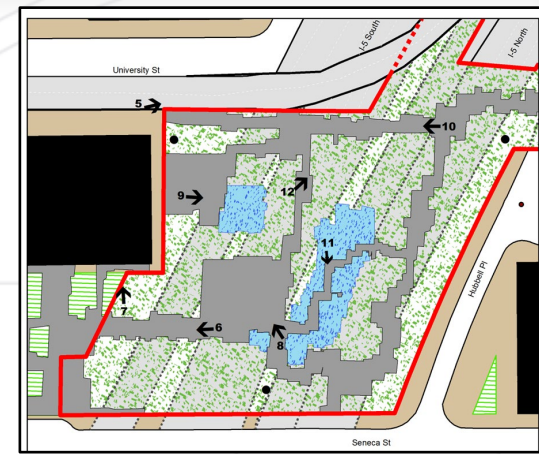
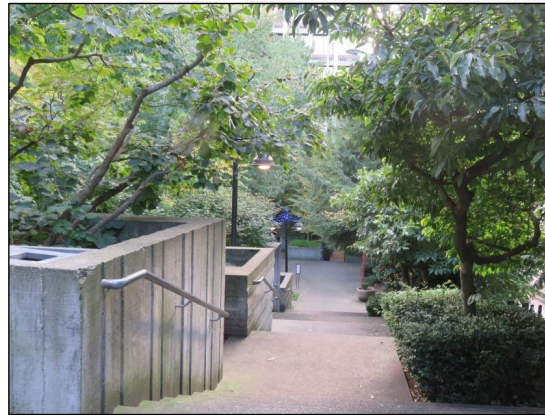
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# Great Box Garden



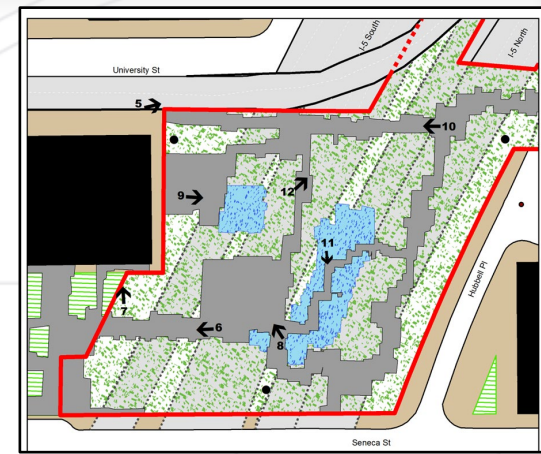
- Board-formed concrete for rough “naturalistic” texture
- Changes in elevation to interact with I-5
- Dangling vines and park landscape visible from below

# Central Plaza



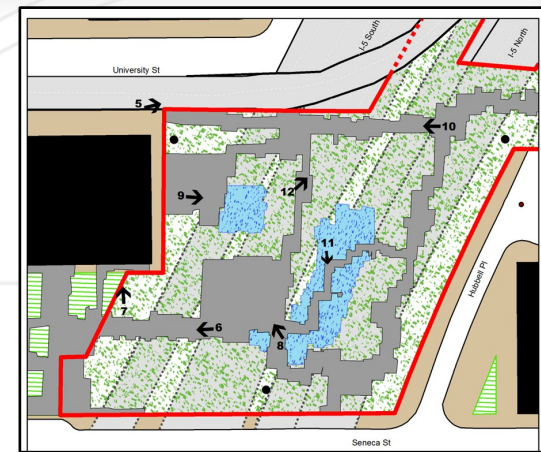
- Wide open plaza
- Irregular steppingstones
- Benches of wood and concrete
- 100 ft light standards
- Water features...

# Central Plaza Water Features: “The Cascades”



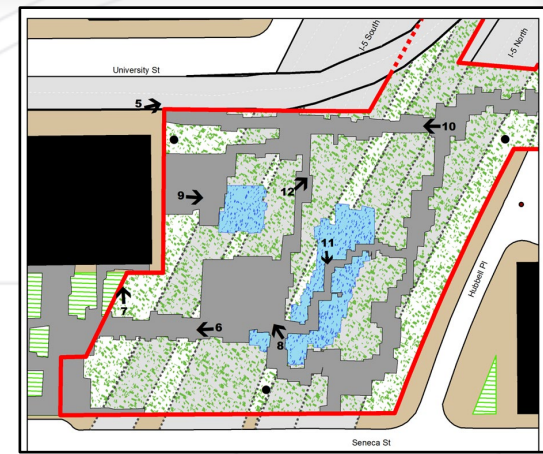
- Naturalistic forms
- Dynamic, varied water features
- Interactive forms

# Central Plaza Water Features: “The Canyon”



- Striated concrete, Brutalist and dynamic
- Water sounds masking traffic
- Forms reminiscent of stone

# Central Plaza Water Features, 1976



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# East Plaza

- A garden atop a parking garage
- Water features
- Comfort station



# Freeway Park's Character



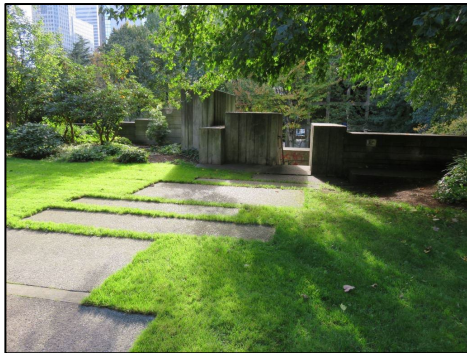
Rough, board-formed concrete



Open, sun-dappled plazas



Density keeping the city at bay



Concrete steppingstones



Plantings visible from below



Falling water at elevation



100 ft-tall lights

# History of Alteration, Freeway Park

- 1983:** Danadjieva-Tzvetin asked to design Paul Pigott Memorial Corridor to connect Freeway Park to First Hill
- 1988:** The Washington State Convention Center connected Freeway Park to the Center's grounds
- 1995:** Maintenance shed added under 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue overpass; new light standards, kiosks, planters, small features
- 2007:** Seattle Parks and Recreation, with Ian Robertson, revised the plant palette:
- thin or replace overgrown trees
  - use trees that are smaller at maturity
  - open up once sunny lawns and plazas
  - eliminate blind spots
  - remove plants inconsistent with the original design



# Comparable Seattle City Landmarks

- Seattle's first, and believed to be the nation's first, freeway lid park.
- Five parks listed as Seattle Landmarks:
  - Dakota Place Park, a former substation and grounds (1930)
  - Kinnear Park (established 1874-1897)
  - Liq'ted (Licton) Springs Park, a sacred place for the Duwamish and other Coast Salish peoples
  - Volunteer Park, a 1901 park designed by the Olmsted Brothers



- Gas Works Park, a former gas works transformed by landscape architect, Richard Haag, into a public park, is a response to changing environmental conditions (1973)

# Freeway Park's Legacy

- Separated pedestrians from freeway traffic
- Masked I-5 and the surrounding city, prioritizing plantings and interior views
- Reestablished pedestrian link between First Hill and downtown
- Inspired Seattle to construct additional lids over I-90 (Sam Smith Park; Audrey Davis Park) and more than six acres of lids over SR 520.
- Inspired additional freeway lidding parks in Phoenix Boston, Dallas, St. Louis, Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

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.

-- Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell



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# Thank you!



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