



Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Julie Bassuk
Design Commission
LRRP Co-Chair

David Cutler
Planning Commission
LRRP Co-Chair

Catherine Benotto
Planning Commission

Dan Corson
Public Art Advisory Committee

Kurt Kiefer
Public Art Advisory Committee

Malika Kirkling
Design Commission

Laurel Kunkler
Design Commission

Kevin McDonald
Planning Commission

Tom Nelson
Design Commission

Julie Parrett
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Osama Quotah
Design Commission

Norie Sato
Design Commission/
Public Art Advisory Committee

Donald Vehige
Design Commission

Debbie Wick-Harris
Design Commission

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Tom Iurino
Senior Staff

October 20, 2011

Convened 8:00 am
Adjourned 10:00 am

Project Reviewed

Northgate Urban Design Study

Panel Members Present

Julie Parrett, Chair
Catherine Benotto
Laurel Kunkler
Dan Corson
Kurt Kiefer
Tom Nelson
Malika Kirkling
Osama Quotah

Excused Panel Members

Julie Bassuk
Kevin McDonald
Don Vehige
David Cutler
Debbie Wick-Harris
Norie Sato

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Tom Iurino

October 20, 2011	Project:	Northgate Urban Design Study
	Phase:	Briefing
	Last Reviewed:	N/A
	Presenters:	Gordon Clowers, DPD Jared Jonson, King County Metro
	Attendees:	Bob Nichols, Sound Transit Keitel Freeman, Seattle City Council staff

Time: 8:30am – 10:00am

Disclosures

Panel member Quotah works for a firm, LMN, which is designing the Brooklyn and UW light rail stations and bidding to design stations outside Seattle.

Panel member Parrett works for the University of Washington, which is affected by Sound Transit's work.

Presentation

The presentation team from DPD and King County provided an overview of past and current planning and urban design work in Northgate. The team summarized the past planning work at Northgate and the most significant developments built in the last decade, such as the library, community center and Thornton Place, which has started to create an identity for the area. The City's current urban design study with other agencies is exploring the implications of the development of the light rail station in terms of the possible type, location and timing of future development; the possible types, amounts, and location of future open spaces; possible bicycle and pedestrian improvement needs, a possible bicycle/pedestrian connection to the light rail station across Interstate 5 from the community college; the design and arrangement for bus-rail transfers; future parking needs; and whether changes to the zoning code would make sense. The team presented a schematic sketch of one alternative representing its exploratory studies, showing a hypothetical development scenario portraying possible locations and manners of infill development

SUMMARY

The Light Rail Review Panel thanked DPD and King County for its presentation about Northgate urban design and planning work. The panel offered the following comments:

- Pursue further work on plans for a bridge across I-5 and connecting the west side of the highway with the Northgate Light Rail Station. Design the bridge as a signature visual element. Be thoughtful and creative about its design, not just practical. It will create an identity and gateway for North Seattle.
- Study environmental factors, such as building orientation and stormwater, and use them as a basis for developing the larger plan.
- Ensure that retail is developed at the base of developments. Retail should include a grocery store and other commercial amenities for those making transfers and going to and from home.
- Follow lessons learned from the residential portion of Thornton Place; its public spaces, scale and accessibility make it open and inviting.
- Strengthen the three clusters individually and promote their development as quality neighborhood districts of the Northgate urban center. While it will be difficult to connect the

clusters in the short term because of the mall, explore future connections and consider engaging the Mall owners directly.

- In the transit station area (cluster B), design the transit center block's public open spaces so they work well for both transit users and other users attracted by future development.
- Develop a public realm plan, and show how the open space, sidewalk, bicycle and natural environmental elements connect.

Panel Members' Questions and Comments

Why are you projecting the need for parking need to go down? Are you talking about way out in the future? I think the numbers might go up.

We think the need for parking will go down, as access improvements are made to the station so people can walk, bike or take the bus.

I encourage the development of a grocery store at the node in the mixed use development near the station.

The bridge options presented to the community were narrow in terms of design. The bridge can be a signature element for the community. It would be a major gateway.

Yes, but we do not have a ton of money. The options represent the high end and low end, studied just for bridge feasibility and alignment. What we've shown and solicited public input for were for bridge alignments that WSDOT has approved only. Bridge structure and design type would be decided during the design phase. To get to that phase would require a multi-agency partnership.

The look and feel of bridge will be a factor in its use. It should be a signature piece. Consider an artist designed bridge. Hope the design and construction is not simply dictated by money.

The bridge project would be competitive for grants. King County is not in business of building bridges. But we are interested in pedestrian and bike or non-motorized access to the station, making the case for less parking demand in the future. Again, we'll need a multiagency effort.

Will the bridge connect to station?

Yes, we're planning for a possible future connection to the station and Sound Transit has stated they are leaving the connection as a possibility in their station design., but are not committed to building it.

Are you looking to find other agencies to support the bridge?

Through the HUD Sustainable Communities funding, King County has partnered with North Seattle Community College, Seattle Housing Authority, the City of Seattle, WSDOT and Sound Transit to study the feasibility of the bridge. All parties have been supportive of this effort. That said, a multi-agency partnership is needed to move the bridge project to the 25-30% design stage.

Can you describe the urban design context?

This transit center station area is its own district, separated from other parts of the Northgate Urban Center by the Mall. There are three types of use arrangements there today: an office park district, a mixed-use district represented by Thornton Place (plus the transit center parking lot), and a Mall property edge that is minimally activated today. Each has a different influence on potential future development patterns, and the adjacency of the transit center property to the rail station means this has the greatest potential as the district's core area. Preliminary evaluation suggests much potential for infill development that could include residential redevelopment in one block between 3rd and 4th Avenues NE south of NE 100th Street. In the rest of the office park area, infill office development would be more likely. A number of possible infill development sites are also possible in the south half of the Mall property. Other features, such as I-5 and the Maple Leaf neighborhood to the east and south provide edges or movement barriers, and hilly topography also discourages pedestrian movement. Over time, there are opportunities for future development to bring more shape to the district, and be interspersed with public spaces. The City has not made any choices with respect to future zoning: it's possible there is no need to change the zoning right now. But it is also possible that building form and open space form could be specified by adjustments in zoning, depending upon more evaluation. Some public opinions expressed to date suggest a majority favor for midrise building scales that would be 85 feet or less, approximately. Towers at 240, possible, link to provide open space. Actual demand is a question.

How does the bike master plan relate to this urban design framework? How are sidewalks south of 100th?

The defined bike routes include those that approach the Northgate urban center from the north and south, with a circuitous designated route from 103rd Street east to 8th Avenue NE, north to 115th Street. First Avenue NE feels unsafe to bicyclists, according to some expressed opinions. In most locations, the Northgate core benefits from relatively complete sidewalks, some newer and better and some narrower and with occasional impediments such as telephone poles. The sidewalks in the commercial district show a few possible shortcomings in a handful of locations, including their presence only on one side of the street on 1st Avenue NE. In other locations, such as in the Maple Leaf neighborhood, there are no sidewalks, and perhaps should be on streets such as NE 103rd St east of 5th Avenue NE, at least. This is also the case on 3rd Avenue NE just south of NE 100th Street, with only one-side sidewalks on 4th Avenue NE as well. The city is evaluating what improvements will be needed, in addition to SDOT's recording of needs in its Comprehensive Transportation Investment Plan (CTIP) for Northgate.

If I take the train to the transit station area, how do I know how to get up to the Northgate Way vicinity or west of I-5? Why doesn't the planning work call it out?

It is a challenge. There are sidewalks on most streets. The sidewalks on 5th Ave are typically 6 feet wide, which may be narrower than preferable. Also, there are some obstructions such as telephone poles. We anticipate future development can provide the necessary infrastructure. We are developing information on that and will show a pedestrian layer in the framework. We wish we had that and a couple of more layers to show you.

Have you talked to the mall about how to draw people from station?

No, we haven't engaged mall owners yet. The mall's internal street at 3rd Avenue in the past several years has improved one connection to south, providing a decent route to the Mall.

Does the bike route along Roosevelt connect here?

Yes it does, via on NE 103rd St.

It doesn't appear that environmental conditions are influencing the design planning work. Elements like drainage, building orientation, higher performing buildings, etc. should take on a stronger role. The connection to Thornton Creek is weak.

That is good advice for the city to take into consideration. The development scenario shows a fairly large public plaza that would tie into the end of the Thornton Water Quality Channel, and there would be a chance to better define the design program that should be present in future development at the transit center property. This is only one hypothetical arrangement, for the city to gauge what arrangement of space might be most preferable.

How successful is Thornton Place? How are the condo sales? The massing of development is nice, except the movie theater building. Encourage that kind of development. Might be more appropriate than the open spaces surrounding the towers. Create walkable neighborhoods.

Agree that the enclave area and curving arrangement of housing at Thornton Place is good and could be a good cue for future development design. The developer converted many offered condos to apartments because of lots of vacancies. However, the apartment rentals are doing well now.

I like the "clusters" concept for the Northgate urban center, but the problem is how the clusters can best be connected. They're all surrounding the mall. Think about the clusters as their own individual thing. Need activity centers near Northgate Way east and west of I-5 – they are close to each other and should connect.

Yes, the reality is that clusters will develop individually. We can't count on future development to connect them with continuous development, especially in the short term SDOT has an improvement concept for the underpass at Northgate Way – if it can be funded. Timing of that is not known.

Can city "strong arm" the mall into being a partner?

The city's past regulatory approach was likely perceived by the mall owners as too aggressive, and was litigated, ultimately with the mall owners prevailing, but much delay incurred to no one's benefit.

The south end of mall is kind of dead. Perhaps the mall could be enticed to participate if they saw that their property could be enhanced through better connections.

Agree.

As the station comes on line, there may be pressure for the mall owner to redevelop.

Agree. There could become more activity and more reason to look at development opportunities near the transit station.

Show auto circulation as a layer in the framework and also where cars are not allowed.

The open space oriented to 3rd Avenue NE feels fragmented and disconnected from the transit station plaza. The open space is not serving well either cluster B or the transit station. Perhaps the buildings shown east of the bus transfer street should be pared back to create a wider opening to the larger plaza in the east half of the transit center property.

Agree. This idea could make sense to provide a more clearcut connection between the transit plaza and the larger plaza.

Create a public realm plan.

Agree. That is a good idea to show as the city continues with its work.

Show how the planning concepts for this transit station area would affect and link with the adjacent neighborhoods.

Agree. We should examine the pedestrian linkage needs and opportunities, and the urban design, land use and zoning relationships between the transit center vicinity and the adjacent neighborhood. Ideally, this station area would become the integral place that people want to visit and would be proud to have it be the activity center of their neighborhood.