

Memo



To: Pioneer Square Preservation Board
From: Andy Mitton
Subject: City Hall Park and Vicinity Detailed Project Description

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Executive summary

Seattle Parks and Recreation proposes to renovate two city-owned park resources in downtown Seattle, the Prefontaine Fountain in Prefontaine Park (parcel 0939000555; 425 3rd Ave.) and City Hall Park (parcel 0942001145; 450 3rd Ave.). The two parks are located along Yesler Way and separated by 3rd Ave. They are located in the northwest quarter of Township 24 North, Range 4 East, Section 5 in Seattle, King County, Washington. Both parks contribute to the Pioneer Square Preservation District, which was established in 1970 and requires a certificate of approval from the Pioneer Square Preservation Board for alterations to any structure. Both parks also contribute to the overlapping National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed Pioneer-Square-Skid Road Historic District, listed in 1970 and updated most recently in 2007 (Link 2007; Pioneer Square Preservation Board 2003).

This narrative has been prepared for an early guidance briefing to the Pioneer Square Preservation Board to provide background information that explains park renovations being proposed for these two park spaces. The current scope of the project is to develop preferred schematic designs that will guide park upgrades of these parcels over the next 1 to 10 years.

Early public engagement for the project occurred in 2023 where multiple stakeholder meetings were held to hear opportunities and concerns from local residents, shop owners and providers. Based on this feedback, three concept alternatives for City Hall Park and two alternatives for Prefontaine Fountain were presented to an Interdepartmental City Team on February 15, 2024, that build off community input obtained to date.

We are currently working on preferred schematic plans for both sites and would like preliminary feedback from the preservation board prior to going to the public in the fall/winter of 2024/2025. We are simultaneously seeking input from local tribes on redevelopment possibilities for these sites. The goal is to reach consensus on a preferred schematic design by December 2024/January 2025.

Potential capital improvements associated with City Hall Park is mostly un-funded to date. There is around \$1 million allocated for the reactivation of Prefontaine Fountain. This process will identify potential costs associated with any proposed redevelopment that will be utilized to identify funding sources. There is pressure to complete improvements to Prefontaine Fountain by Spring of 2026 in anticipation of the FIFA World Cup events that will occur later that year in Seattle.

Project Context

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Land ownership in this area is made up of a combination of parcels owned by Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) as well as Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR). The project area is mainly focused on the park parcels identified on slide 4 of the presentation. However, SDOT has been an active partner in determining how changes in the right-of-way could support the redevelopment goals of the project. This includes the integration of the new cycle track that is utilizing Dilling Way that bisects City Hall Park. It is also important to note that Dilling Way is not a dedicated SDOT right-of-way and has been identified as a roadway that is non-essential and could be repurposed back to park space. There is also an access easement to a tunnel that leads to the basement of the courthouse building. This tunnel is obsolete and is not currently in use.

In 2019, SDOT and SPR co-led a public process with findings that were published in a report titled Public Life Action Plan. The report identifies key improvements for City Hall Park and Prefontaine Fountain that address areas of need associated with safety and accessibility with these public spaces. Recommendations focused on capital improvements to key portions of the park spaces with the goals of meeting the needs of current users, bringing more people to the area, creating a more diverse usership, and establishing a cohesive network of public spaces in Pioneer Square that are designed to optimize spaces for movement, as well as for people to linger and spend time together. Of particular note from this report are the tight constraints that are created where built elements at Prefontaine Place and within City Hall Park create narrow walkways with poor visibility.

Further findings were outlined in the 2022 Northeast Pioneer Square Framework Plan+ Vision. The framework plan was the outcome of a community driven engagement process that synthesized the needs of residents, businesses and local service providers that led to goals and objectives for new community-driven initiatives. The goals and objectives that align with City Hall Park and Prefontaine Fountain look to establish and maintain beautiful civic spaces. Of important note is to invest in a high-quality, well maintained, seamless public realm, increase activation and programming, improve tree and vegetation management, and improve retail frontages.

Both of these studies have been the catalyst for potential improvement to both sites that Seattle Parks and Recreation started studying Summer 2020. The work was paused for a period of time due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resumed with the completion of the 2022 NE Pioneer Square Framework Plan.

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Seattle Parks and Recreation hosted multiple community engagement meetings in 2023 that asked the community if the findings of the previous reports were still relevant. Additional recommendations were identified as part of this engagement process. A major takeaway from meeting with residents in adjacent buildings is learning there is a high population of people that have dogs that desired a potential off leash area. Other considerations focused on the need for a public restroom, maintaining the presence of a large green space with trees and lawn, and additional flexible seating. Another important factor has been the blank facades and inactive edges that surround these public spaces. The project is looking for ways to better integrate with potential retail spaces of adjacent parcels as they are redeveloped in the future.

City Hall Park Upgrades

Upgrades to City Hall Park study how the site could be reactivated by addressing the edge conditions. In all the scenarios, existing trees are preserved. Dilling Way that bisects the park is proposed to be re-purposed as park space and the 60 foot wide driveway along 4th Avenue reduced to a typical curb cut for emergency vehicles, food trucks and maintenance. Short term parking is also examined. The designs look at opportunities to increase accessibility, mobility, park activation and flexible seating opportunities. Where appropriate, some of the studies look at the possibility of providing an off-leash area. All of the alternative concepts presented include a pavilion that would be staffed by park rangers to increase park programming opportunities.

The preferred schematic plan for City Hall Park weaves many of the larger concepts from the three design studies together. In this preferred design there is an iconic entry plaza space that speaks to the shoreline concept connecting to the design language and character of the upgrades to Prefontaine Plaza and Fortson Square. In addition to providing a clear visual connection and wayfinding opportunity, the plaza also offers additional seating areas and a restroom facility. In this design many of the existing trees are preserved while still allowing for an accessible path to connect through the park.

Dilling Way is envisioned into a new paseo walk integrated into the park with a visually identified separate cycle track connecting cyclists from 4th Avenue to Yesler Way. This paseo also provides a staging area for food trucks and tents for farmers markets and a multiple of community events. There are planting areas woven into the topography of the site while still providing ample space for open lawn areas. This balance of space will allow users to enjoy the serenity of the large open green space in the center of the City while also feeling embraced in nature.

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There are a multitude of seating opportunities varying in size and space, from larger open plaza spaces to more intimate smaller gathering areas for all to enjoy. This design will integrate upgraded lighting throughout the entirety of the park to offer a sense of security and highlights the upgrades to the space for the community. This design will include a pavilion in the west plaza area that will offer a variety of park programming opportunities for visitors to utilize. Lastly, this preferred design provides an optional canopy walk connection from Yesler Way into the center of the park that will allow users to experience the space from a very unique perspective.

The slides from the IDT presentation and the working preferred schematic design are being submitted for your review.

Prefontaine Fountain Upgrades

Prefontaine Fountain has not been operational for decades, and the majority of the mechanical equipment has been damaged, removed or is no longer functional. Much of the space had become a public nuisance and was fenced off in 2023 in an attempt to change behaviors along the 3rd Avenue corridor. The schematic design alternatives and preferred schematic design attempt to address a couple of key issues.

The first issue is a CEPTD issue that has been brought to our attention from Barb Biondo at the Seattle Police Department and Jon Jianga from Seattle Parks and Recreation Emergency Management and Security team. Due to poor sight lines and visibility in the area, it is easy for drug dealers and anyone trying to evade police to jump behind the fountain and run down the alley behind the Smith Tower. This is one of the primary factors that led to the area being fenced off in an attempt to change behaviors that had been increasing in severity since the pandemic.

The second issue looks to find potential opportunities to increase pedestrian mobility in and around the built fountain elements. The 2019 Public Life Action Plan identified a pinch point between the fountain and the Sound Transit Head House that is causing increased issues for people trying to enter or leave the transit tunnel. We were also asked to find locations for bike and scooter ride share services in and around the transit station entrance.

Early alternative studies for Prefontaine Fountain looked to retain much of the existing built fountain elements that were designed by Carl F. Gould. Slight modifications were suggested to remove two short six foot segments of the westernmost cast stone wall segments to allow access for a ramped walkway around the back of the monument. This allowed the ability to fit in a new underground vault that could accommodate new fountain mechanical equipment and electrical service. The majority of all the existing cast stone built elements were retained in these concepts with the exception of the existing fountain bowl.

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The first design alternative looks to remove the deep bowl and reconstruct a shallow bowl that would be easier to maintain with similar water jets to the original design intent. The existing turtles would be preserved and restored in this option since they have been heavily damaged and are both currently missing their heads.

The second design alternative looks to remove the existing fountain bowl, curb around the bowl and the existing turtles. In the same footprint of the old bowl and curb, a new concrete paved area would have fountain jets set flush with the pavement to allow flexible use of the space and lower maintenance needs. A primary concern of this design alternative is that we cannot meet a Department of Health requirement that any water that comes in human contact will require a restroom within 100 feet of the wet deck. This is not something that can be achieved at this site.

For any fountain element on this site, Seattle Parks and Recreation would like to reduce water use and maintenance needs associated with the design. After reviewing the design alternatives, the team was asked to study if it would be possible to remove the mechanical equipment and chemical storage vaults in favor of a simplified flow through water system that could utilize in ground mister jets.

The preferred schematic design attempts to achieve the primary goals of allowing more opportunities for circulation in and through the area, better visibility through the site to achieve CEPTD principles, reduces water usage and maintenance needs. In order to do this, a large portion of the existing built fountain elements are proposed to be demolished. There are select elements that are proposed to be preserved, and the overall layout of the fountain is represented in the layout of the site. The fountain bowl is now a paved concrete area that can be textured to have the appearance of water and can be illuminated at night such that it looks like water. The decorative turtles could be reimagined as mosaic tiles on the ground plane.

Additional information is included in the schematic design packet that shows what elements are proposed to be altered as part of the park upgrade project.

End of Memo