

Mercer Blocks

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Azzurra Cox

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Commissioners Present

Justin Clark, Acting Chair
Kim Baker
Elizabeth Conner
Mark Johnson
Vinita Sidhu
Elaine Wine

Commissioners Excused

Azzurra Cox
Amalia Leighton

Non-Voting Commissioners Present

Adam Amrhein
Jill Crary

Project Description & Background

In December 2017, the Seattle City Council granted concept approval to vacate of a segment of Broad Street between Mercer St, Roy St, Dexter Ave, and 9th Ave (Clerk File 314309). The vacation request was evaluated by the SDC who developed a series of recommended conditions to the Council as part of the Concept approval process. The conditions included the adoption of design guidelines for public realm improvements along 8th Avenue N between Roy and Aloha as well as within a pedestrian easement between Mercer and Roy Street.

At the time of Council review, no development had been proposed concurrent with the vacation request. The Council approval required the SDC to evaluate the application of design guidelines in the 8th Avenue N easement between Mercer and Roy prior to the issuance of any Master Use Permit for future development.

The development proposal brought by Alexandria Real Estate (ARE) includes two buildings located on one parcel, with shared below grade parking and utilities. The two buildings are sited along a 60' wide pedestrian easement running north-south through the site along the 8th Ave N corridor. The easement provides a connection to 8th Ave N at Roy St, but does not continue across Mercer St. The proposed design for the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement includes a series of gathering spaces, pathways, street trees, and planting areas.

Meeting Summary

This is the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first full review of the Mercer Blocks Project proposed by ARE. The project was previously reviewed during a subcommittee on August, 14th 2020, where Commissioners provided initial feedback and recommendations to be addressed during today's meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to review the proposed design for the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement, using the adopted 8th Avenue N design guidelines. The SDC voted 6-0, to approve the design of the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement for the Mercer Blocks project, thereby fulfilling the Council condition.

Recusals and Disclosures

Azzurra Cox, recused herself as her employer is working on the project.

April 15, 2021

1:00 - 3:00 pm

Project Type

Street Vacation

Phase

Public Benefit item approval

Previous Reviews

[8/14/2020 Subcommittee](#)

Reviews under Broad St Vacation Project - [7/21/16](#), [4/7/16](#), [11/19/15](#), [7/16/15](#)

Presenters

Rikerrious Geter
GGN

Holly Golden
HCMP

Christian Gunter
ARE

David Malda
GGN

Ryan Mullenix
NBBJ

Attendees

Beverly Barnett
SDOT

Carey Dagliano
NBBJ

David Graves
SPR

Joseph Hurley
SDCI

Megan Koretz
UW Student

Ross Leventhal
NBBJ

Lish Whitson
Central Staff

Summary of Presentation

Christian Gunter, of ARE, David Malda and Rikerrious Geter, of GGN, presented the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement design for the Mercer Blocks project. The team provided a summary of the neighborhood context and review of the condition and recommendations provided by the SDC during the 2016 review of the Broad Street Vacation project. The team then provided an overview of the 8th Ave N Design Guidelines and discussed how they were integrated within the proposed design for overall project concept as well as the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement.

The team presented the proposed design for the 8th Ave N Pedestrian Easement. The design incorporates themes from the 8th Ave N Design Guidelines that encourage developing spaces for a healthier community, neighborhood, and environment. While the space will only serve non-vehicular movement, the overall design is meant to serve as a continuation of 8th Ave N, creating a series of spaces and pathways for the public to gather and move within the site. Elements such as sidewalks, street trees and planting areas will be located and design using materials that are similar to what is used within the public right-of-way (ROW) along 8th Ave N to the north of the project site (see figure 1).

The northern edge of the site, located adjacent to Roy St, will serve as a gateway, inviting users into the space. The area will include wide pedestrian

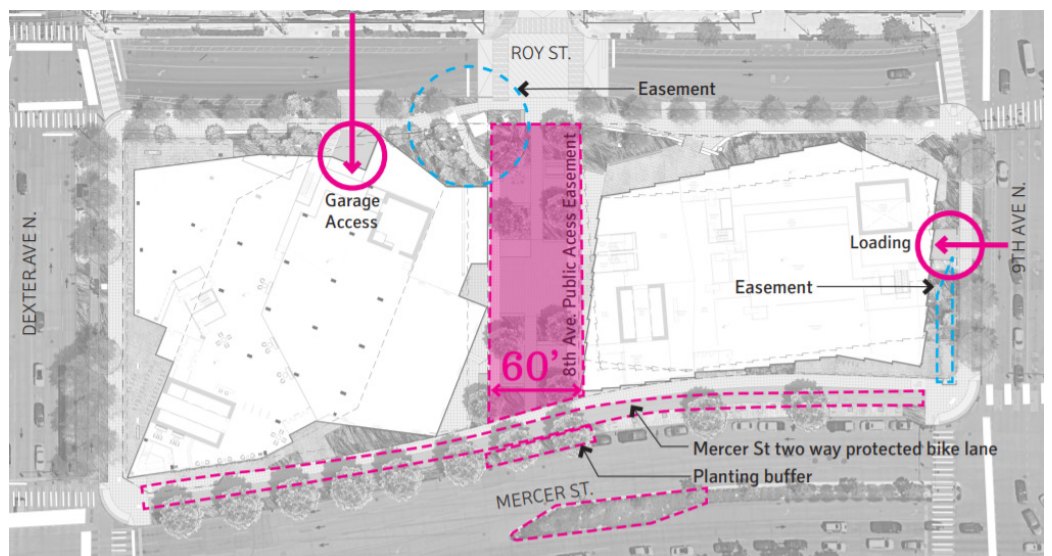
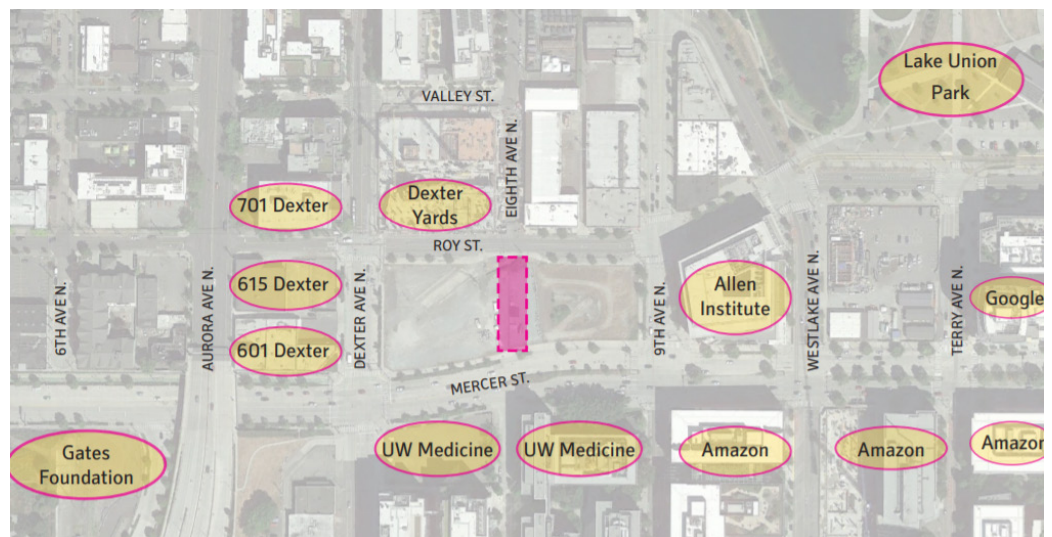


Figure 1: Project location (pink)

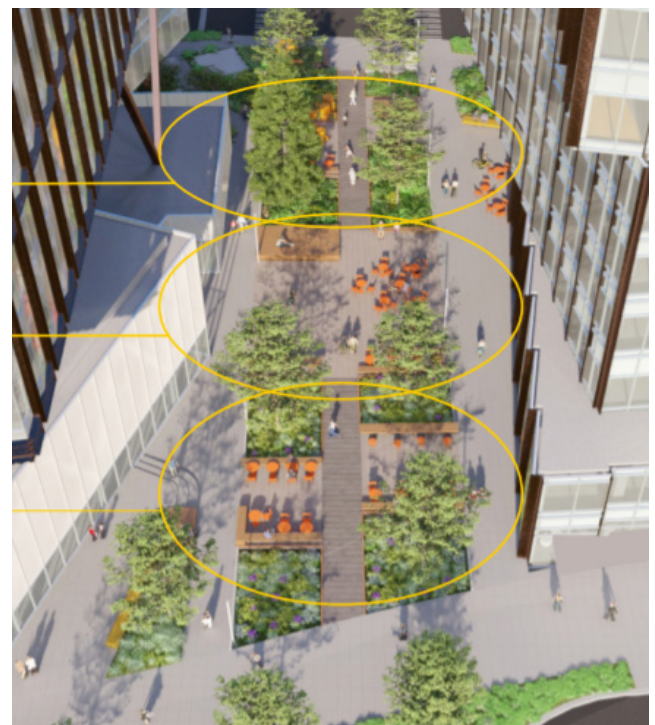


Figure 2: Updated design proposal (top), Rendering of proposed outdoor rooms (bottom right), and rendering of site entrance along Roy St. (bottom left)

pathways, planting areas, interactive art elements, and community board and/or welcoming sign to visually communicate that this is a public space (see figure 2). A series of outdoor rooms are located within the interior of the space, each includes a mix of fixed and movable site furniture such as larger wooden tables with bench seating and smaller, high top tables with stools, benches, and plinths as well as moveable metal tables and chairs. Separately, the outdoor rooms are meant to provide a unique experience for users, while also having the flexibility to jointly provide space for larger events such as a farmers' market, festival, or other community event (see figure 2).

The Community Center, which will be operated by Seattle Parks and Recreation, is located within the building to the west of the pedestrian easement. The main entrance to the community center will connect to the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement. The proposed design provides a seamless physical and visual connection between the outdoor space and the community center. The building façade along the edge of the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement will be highly transparent, allowing users to view programming such as gym activities occurring within the community center.

The southern edge of the site includes connectivity to Mercer St as well as planting areas and vegetation to buffer noise originating from Mercer St. The proposal does not include pedestrian access to cross Mercer St but provides a visual connection for users.

The proposal addresses sustainability within the landscape plan, which includes a series of on-bioretention facilities for onsite stormwater management and a diverse plant palette to respond to the different environmental conditions onsite, ranging from sunny seasonal wet meadow to shady seasonal wet woodland.

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, Appreciated the team's thorough presentation as well as the level of detail provided in responding to previous concerns and recommendations. Beverly appreciated the continued development of the design concept, specifically the layout of each space and pathways through the site. Beverly then commented on the proposed signage and wayfinding, reminding everyone that signage should explicitly provide language guaranteeing public access and 1st amendment rights within the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement.

Public Comments

Megan Koretz, Student - University of Washington, Thanked the project team for their presentation. Megan appreciated the proposed design and wants to ensure that it will support an ecosystem for both science and nature.

Summary of Discussion

The SDC focused its discussion on the proposed design of the 8th Ave pedestrian easement and the requirements to meet the condition set for the approval of the public benefit for the Broad St Vacation project. The Commission discussed if the proposed design served as an extension of the public realm, providing high quality space for gathering within and moving through the space, and related to the 8th Ave N design guidelines.

The SDC agreed that the proposed design met the condition set for the approval of the public benefit package for the Broad St Vacation project. Commissioners commended the project team for their overall design concept, layout and connectivity of pedestrian scaled spaces, integration of landscape, lighting, and paving elements as well as the commitment to providing interactive art. The Commission agreed that the space will serve as a gathering space for the community, while also attracting greater public use and are excited to see how the design continues to develop. The Commission also appreciated the team's commitment to partnering with neighborhood organizations and City agencies to provide year-round programming within the space, specifically with their partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation to manage the onsite Community Center. Commissioners then encouraged the team to consider how other tenants can further activate the space outside of traditional business operating hours.

The SDC reiterated their support for the integration of art, wayfinding, and site furnishings within the public space and strongly recommended the project team continue to think about additional ways to integrate art, signage, wayfinding, and site furnishing elements to create a cohesive space that is welcoming for public use. Commissioners appreciated the use of interactive art elements to connect with the King County utilities located onsite and recommended the project team continue to think about ways to make art interactive throughout the site. The Commission then discussed the addition of vent structures and strongly encouraged the team to focus on the location and design, including the consideration of art integration, of the vent structures to ensure they are integrated within the surrounding site context. Commissioners also appreciated the team's consideration of integrating Indigenous cultural expressions within the design and artistic elements of the Community Center and surrounding space. Commissioners strongly recommended the team coordinate with the Indigenous community throughout this process.

The SDC discussed site circulation and access. Overall, the Commission appreciated the project team's explanation of site circulation, which highlighted the multi-directional design intent. While the design includes several pathways traveling through the space, Commissioners felt that there was still a primary focus on northeast movement through the site from the southwest corner along Mercer St to the northeast

edge along Roy St. Commissioners encouraged the team to design for additional primary pathways and circulation patterns through the site, specifically from the northwest corner near Roy St, to Mercer St along the southeastern corner of the site. Commissioners appreciated the size of the interior pathway, design of adjacent public space, and integration of landscape materials, which, they agreed, will create an intimate setting within the larger space. Although Commissioners had originally questioned the size of the interior pathway, they agreed that the proposed width was adequate given its connectivity to smaller interior spaces as well as its proximity to adjacent pathways.

Commissioners then discussed ways to address public access and safety through signage and wayfinding elements. Commissioners stressed the importance of providing signage that clearly stated that this space is publicly accessible for all users. The SDC strongly recommended the team locate and design community boards to be easily used and accessible for all users. The Commission encouraged the use of primary paving treatment through the site, which will enhance the public nature of the site while also assisting with wayfinding through the site. The Commission also recommended the use of signage to address safety for all users and to reduce potential conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians moving through the site.

Action

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation of the 8th Ave pedestrian easement design for the Mercer Blocks Project. The Commission appreciated level of detail provided for the proposed design and the overall thoroughness of the presentation. The Commission agreed that the proposed design of the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement fulfills the condition adopted by the City Council. The SDC voted, 6-0, to approve the 8th Ave Pedestrian Easement design for the Mercer Blocks Project. The Commission also provided the project team with the following recommendations to consider as the project continues to develop:

1. Continue to refine wayfinding and signage to reinforce that the space is publicly accessible and will promote safety for users moving through the space
2. Ensure opportunities for public to easily utilize and access the community messaging board
3. Continue refining the role that art and signage play in activating the public spaces.
4. Coordinate with Indigenous communities when integrating cultural expressions into the SPR Community Center and surrounding public space.
5. Continue refining ways to increase pedestrian connections through the site, including movement from the Roy and Dexter intersection through the site to the Mercer and 9th intersection
6. Refine and advance partnerships for programming with community organizations and City agencies