

Mt. Baker Housing Alley Vacation

Jenny A. Durkan
Mayor

Samuel Assefa
Director, OPCD

Ben de Rubertis, Chair

Brianna Holan, Vice Chair

Justin Clark

Laura Haddad

Mark Johnson

Rick Krochalis

Amalia Leighton

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Commissioners Present

Brianna Holan, Acting Chair
Justin Clark
Laura Haddad
Mark Johnson
Rick Krochalis
Amalia Leighton
Vinita Sidhu
Lucas Whitesell
Elaine Wine

Commissioners Excused

Ben de Rubertis, Chair

Project Description

Mt. Baker Housing Association, an affordable housing developer based in Seattle's Rainier Valley neighborhood, is proposing to vacate an alley between S Grand St and S Holgate St. in the North Rainier HUB Urban Village. If the vacation is approved, the applicant will develop over 200 units of affordable housing at the 60 percent area median income (AMI). The development will include a variety of units between 1 and 3 bedrooms. The building will be a part of a larger 3-block development developed in conjunction with Lake Union Partners. The developments are located along Rainier Ave S between S State St and S Holgate St, which will include ground level commercial and office space as well as market rate and affordable housing.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) first review of the Mt. Baker Housing Alley Vacation project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the vacation pre-petition for the project, as required by the City Council Street Vacation policies (Resolution 31809). These policies require the applicant to present the proposed vacation to the SDC before the proposed development can proceed through the City's early design guidance review process. These minutes will be provided to both the applicant and the City's Design Review Board through the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection for consideration at the initial early design guidance meeting.

Recusals and Disclosures

None

November 21, 2019

1:00 - 2:00 am

Type

Alley Vacation

Phase

Vacation Pre-Petition

Previous Reviews

None

Presenters

Conor Hansen

Mt. Baker Housing

Matthew Porteous

Hewitt

Melissa Wechsler

Runberg Architecture Group

Attendees

Barry Baker

Mt. Baker Housing

Beverly Barnett

SDOT

Susan Busch

Runberg Architecture Group

Thaddeus Egging

KPFF

Joe Ferguson

Lake Union Partners

Patrick Foley

Lake Union Partners

Moir Gray

SDOT

Brendan Lawrence

Lake Union Partners

Randall Olsen

Cairncross & Hempelmann

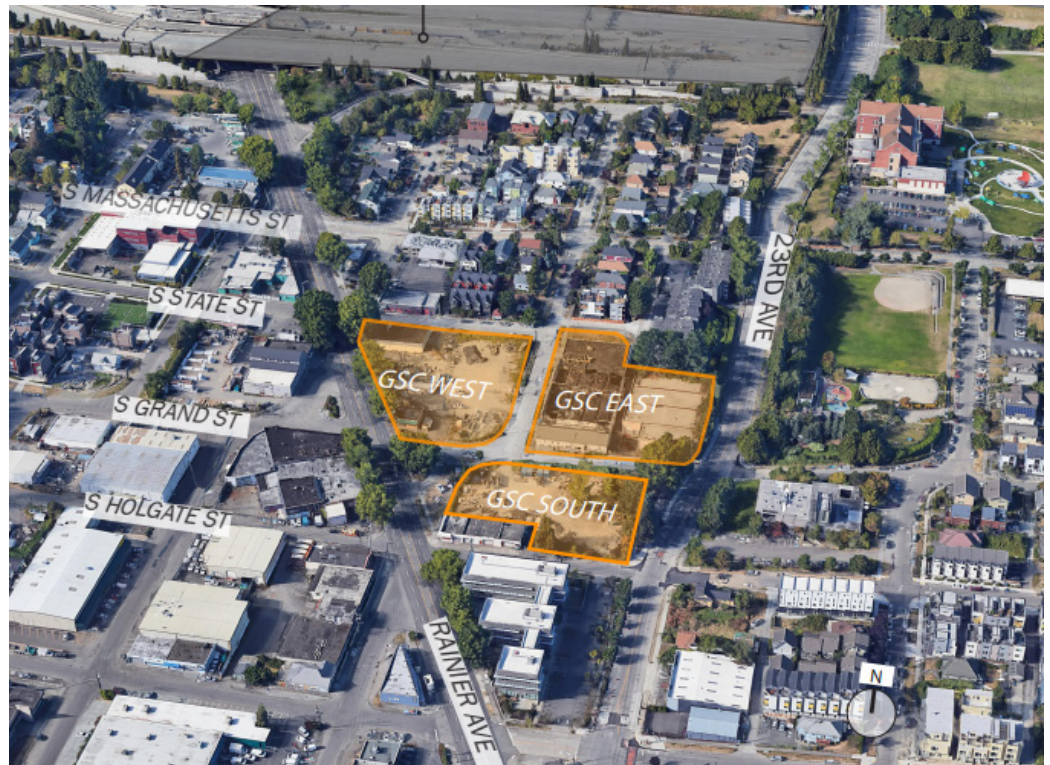


Figure 1: Site location and neighborhood context

Summary of Presentation

Conor Hansen of Mt. Baker Housing, Matthew Porteous of Hewitt, and Melissa Wechsler of Runberg Architecture Group presented the vacation pre-petition for the Mt. Baker Housing Alley Vacation project. The project team provided background and neighborhood context for the project. The project team is proposing to develop over 200 units of affordable housing for families at the 60 percent AMI on a site bounded by Rainier Ave S, S Grand St, 23rd Ave S, and S Holgate St. The building is a part of a larger 3-block mixed-use development, developed in conjunction with Lake Union Partners, that will include commercial, office and residential space. The site currently consists of two parcels bisected by an Alley between S Grand St and S Holgate St (*See figure 1 for more detail.*) The goal of the proposed development is to create a new neighborhood center that is accessible and affordable to a variety of people and levels of affordability.

The project team provided three design alternatives – vacation with S Grand St realignment, no vacation with S Grand St realignment, and no vacation with existing S Grand St alignment. The vacation with S Grand St realignment alternative includes the development of one multi-story building along S Grand St, 23rd Ave S, and S Holgate St. with one curb cut for vehicular access along S Holgate St. The proposal would realign S Grand St and reduce its width from 22 feet to 18 feet, to reduce vehicular speeds and to create a better intersection at Rainier Ave S. The realignment would eliminate a curb cut along S Rainier Ave while creating additional public space along Rainier Ave S.

Both no-vacation alternatives include the development of two buildings along S Grand St with vehicular access along the existing alley. The no vacation scenario with S Grand St realignment would realign Grand St and eliminate a curb cut onto S Rainier Ave. *See figure 2 for more detail.*

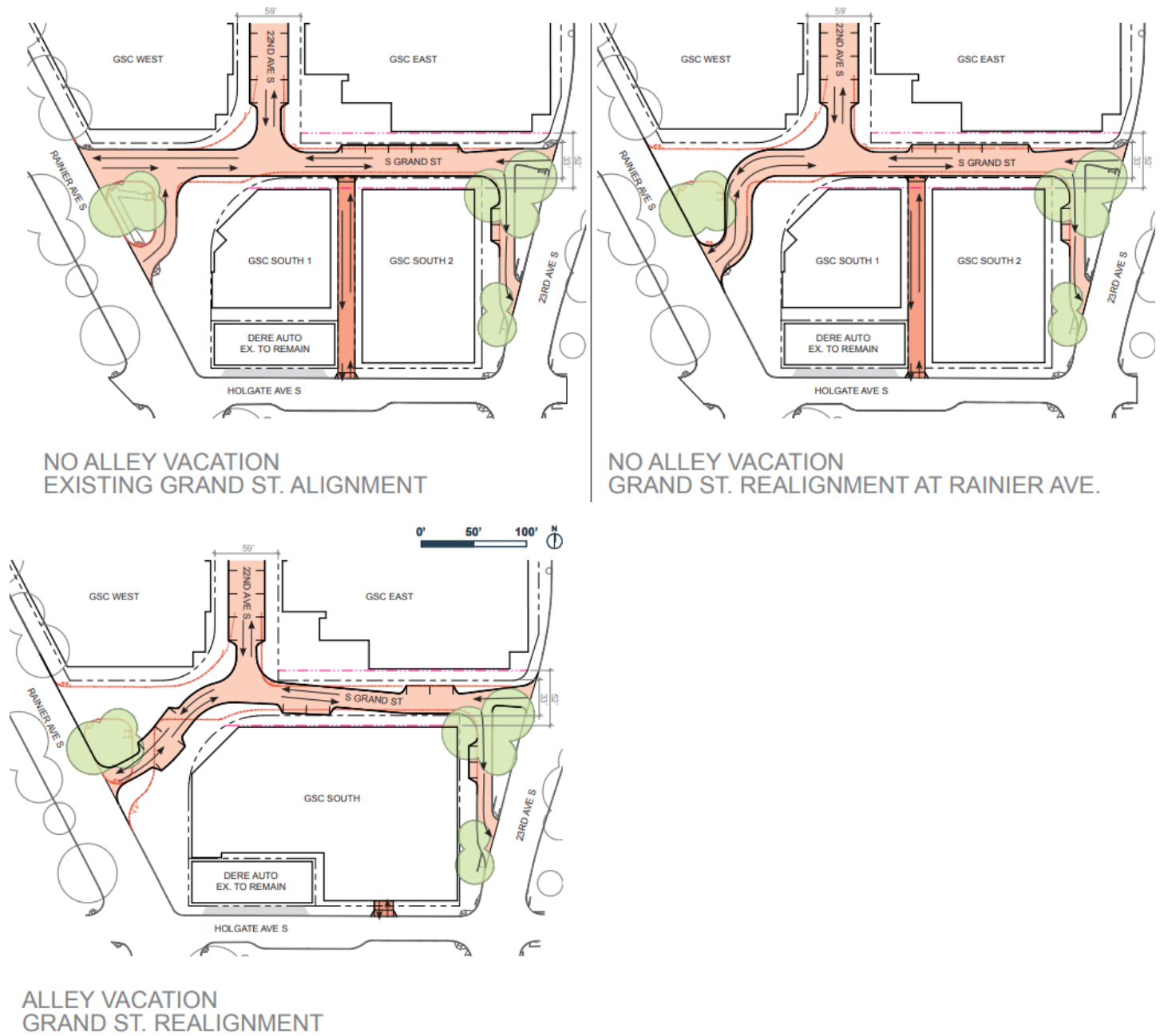


Figure 2: Proposed design options without an alley vacation (top) and with an alley vacation (bottom)

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, stated that while they were still in the pre-submittal process with Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDC), which also includes an early review by Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), they are open to the realignment of S Grand St near Rainier Ave S because it doesn't function well currently. Beverly then stated that because the proposed alignment change is located within the right-of-way, a vacation is not needed. Beverly then mentioned that the alignment changes they make a part of development obligations and need to meet street improvement standards and approved by SDOT.

Public Comments

None

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Necessity of vacation request

- Public trust considerations
- General comments

Necessity of vacation request

The SDC recognized the effect the vacation request will have on the urban form of the surrounding neighborhood. Commissioners stated that the proposed development is located within a transition area from a higher density area along Rainier Ave S to lower density residential areas along 23rd Ave and strongly recommended the project show how the form and massing of the development will positively impact that transition.

The Commission also recommended the project team continue to understand how the vacation and realignment of S Grand St will affect transportation and circulation around and through the development as the project evolves.

Public trust considerations

The SDC recognized the limited impacts the proposed alley vacation will have on the elements highlighted in council policies but questioned how the development will engage and relate to the street edge. The commission strongly recommended the project team look at the building perimeter and how it will interact with the surrounding streetscape. Commissioners were specifically concerned with the building facades not facing S Grand St and recommended the project team be attentive to how each façade is treated.

General comments

The SDC commended the project team for providing a traffic analysis for Rainier Ave S and the surrounding streets. Commissioners agreed that the analysis provided better understanding as to how the proposed realignment along Grand St will respond to traffic issues.

The Commission expressed concern about the proposed location of public space along Rainier Ave S. Commissioners recommended the project team provide more information as to how the public space will be used as well as how it will feel public rather than serving as an extension of the commercial and retail space along S Grand St¹. Commissioners encouraged the project team to think about how to create a public amenity for the entire neighborhood.

The SDC also stressed the importance of meaningful community engagement and strongly recommended the project team to broaden outreach to better reflect the diversity of the larger community. Commissioners requested more information on outreach as the project team moves forward. The SDC also requested more information on how the project is including City community preference policies as well as more information as to what types of businesses could be located retail spaces, encouraging the project team to consider providing space for locally owned and minority owned businesses.

¹Please refer to the [Commissions policy on equity in the design of public space](#)
November 21, 2019