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APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

November 20, 2008

Convened 8:30 am
Adjourned 4:30 pm

Projects Reviewed

Neighborhood Planning and Station Area Planning
SR 519 Phase II Grade Separation
Burke Gilman Trail Missing Link
Conner Homes, West Seattle Junction

Commissioners Present

Karen Kiest, Chair
Tasha Atchison
Brendan Connolly
John Hoffman
Mary Johnston
Juanita La Fond
Dennis Ryan
Norie Sato
Darrell Vange
Darby Watson

Unconfirmed Commissioners Present

Andrew Barash
Nathan Polanski

Staff Present

Valerie Kinast
Shannon Glass

Celebrating 40 Years 1968-2008



November 20, 2008	Project:	Conner Homes, West Seattle Junction
	Phase:	Partial Underground Alley Vacation
	Last Reviewed:	
	Presenters:	Peter Greaves, Weber Thompson Joseph Hines, Weber Thompson
	Attendees:	Marsha Barkman, Harbor Properties Beverly Barnett, SDOT Todd Carden, Elliott Bay Brewery Jessie Clawson, McCullough Hill Michael Dorcy, DPD Scott Evans, TRA James Geimer, Legacy Partners Gabe Hanson, Weber Thompson James Miller, Conner Homes Co. Kerry Nicholson, Legacy Partners Tracy Record, West Seattle Blog Tom Rengstorf, TRA

Time: 1.25 hours

(170)

ACTION

The Commission thanks the design team for their presentation of Conner Homes West Seattle Junction partial subterranean alley vacation proposal, and unanimously approves the urban design merits, with the following comments:

- The Commission encourages the design team to carefully consider pedestrian flows during and after construction.
- There are concerns about the alley and sidewalk perimeters; Commissioners encourage wider sidewalks along all street frontages of the project to allow nodes or eddies to allow pedestrian rest opportunities.
- The Commission encourages continuous connection of mid block pedestrian flow.
- There are concerns that the alley is tapered where it meets SW Alaska Street and the appropriate balance between retail and public space. The Commission encourages the design team to consider eddies or nodes of respite opportunities along the frontage of the project, as well as enhancing the nodes at alley entries.
- The Commission encourages more retail spillage into the alley.
- The Commission encourages considering the site lines to the loading docks and terminals.
- There is concern about the duplication of ramps at the 42nd Avenue SW alley. The DC strongly encourages a coordinated design response that avoids redundancy between separate parcel developments.
- Commissioners encourage a greater pedestrian buffer from the traffic along California Avenue SW.
- Commissioners hope to see more definition of the landscape design elements.

Project Presentation

Project Background

This project is a subterranean alley vacation for a site that is bounded by SW Alaska Street, California Avenue SW, 42nd Avenue SW, and SW Edmonds Street. It is in the heart of the West Seattle junction urban village.

The proposed project features two buildings, which share an underground parking garage, hence the need for an alley vacation. There is a building on the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street made up of eighteen-foot retail along the street, with six stories of housing. The other portion of the project is located at the corner of SW Alaska Street and 42nd Avenue SW. The proposal connects the two projects, in order to optimize use, minimize the number of curb cuts, and minimize excavation.

The east site occupies 28,000 square feet, and the west on occupies 16,000 square feet. The proposed alley vacation is 2,800 square feet, which is 28 feet deep with a four-foot cover.

A single point of parking garage access from 42nd Avenue SW encourages mid block pedestrian connection across the alley. It also allows for a visible garage entry. Since the building residents and retail share it, the garage is used publicly and privately.

The connection of the garage below grade also enhances a green lattice network, referencing the 1999 West Seattle Neighborhood Plan, which envisions using streets and alleys to create a network of pedestrian spaces running north-south, with mid block connections to create a third lattice. The alley vacation allows for an enhanced mid block pedestrian corridor. Harbor Properties has recently developed the site on the southeast part of the block and they set back their building eight feet from their north property line where it meets the proposed Conner Homes project. The Conner Homes project is set back fifteen feet which, in addition to the eight feet of setback by Harbor Properties, provides a nice pedestrian zone. This pedestrian walkthrough takes a jog along the alley toward the north, and connects west to California Avenue SW. The block is 600 feet long by 300 feet wide.

An urban design analysis covering a nine-block area is complete. Diagrams show area zoning, development, street classifications, transit routes, peak hour traffic volume patterns, parking lots, and nearby commercial use.

Existing Alley Use

There are public and staff alley entries existing along the alley. Businesses are casually used as mid block cross throughs. Pedestrians heavily use the alley, and businesses recognize them with “back door” alley entrances.

The site plan shows the proposed mid block location of the garage entry on 42nd Avenue SW, the building setback, and residential entries. It also shows the use and animation of alley spaces by locating the residential amenities at the ground floor of the alley.

No vacation Option

No alley vacation requires two garage entrances from the alley. Two entrances create conflicts between garage entries, alley traffic, and pedestrian flow. There is less retail opportunity at the mid block crossing. It also requires more excavation, and the number of parking spaces is reduced because of the space taken up by ramp circulation structures.

Proposed Alley Vacation

The proposed alley vacation allows opportunity for ground floor retail. The retail space wraps into alley, providing an amenity for both buildings, and opportunity for live-work space on the ground floor. The design offers a variety of sidewalk widths around the building as a pedestrian amenity. In the alley, there is no required building setback, but the proposal is to set back two feet from the sixteen-foot right-of-way, creating a twenty-foot distance between the buildings flanking the alley. Terraces and units facing the alley increase visibility. It is a vibrant mixed-use location, because there are two active facades on each building.

The proposed sidewalk width is wider than City of Seattle standard requirements; and the requirements of the West Seattle Neighborhood Plan are either met or exceeded. The entries are recessed to provide additional space at the pedestrian level.

The proposal also shows enhanced landscape and permeable paving. The proposed public benefit consists of 9,092 square feet of open space above and beyond what is required by code, which is a 54% increase over the existing public area. There are also overhead rain protection canopies along the sidewalk. If the alley is vacated, the public space along the storefront area increases by 140 square feet.

Public Comments

Michael Dorcy, DPD

There have been two public meetings. Early design priority guidelines have been completed, and the design team has responded to those guidelines.

Both the Board and public were not enthusiastic about an earlier presentation, which showed access to retail along the alley. Another concern is the possibility for 85 feet height on the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street. Nearby existing buildings are one or two stories high. The Board is not concerned about the structure on the east side of the alley. It is focused on the bulk and scale of the proposed building at the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street.

Beverly Barnett, SDOT

SDOT just started looking at traffic coming onto 42nd Avenue SW. The community concerns about disruption during construction is under review. The alley vacation does not contribute to scale and density of the project. The development proposal is running into classic vacation problems, with amenities in alley instead of street. It is trying to respect West Seattle alley tradition; but every step to enhance the alley takes away from opportunity to create active frontage on California Avenue SW. Widening the alley to aid pedestrian safety does not solve vehicular problems. There is concern about delivery truck access, and there are pedestrian-vehicular conflicts at the mid block crossing.

Policy and technical issues with the proposed alley vacation have not been completely resolved, but there are no major red flags. SDOT lacks policies on subterranean alley vacations. SDOT is unable to recommend it yet, due to concerns regarding pedestrians and development.

Marsha Barkman, Harbor Properties

Harbor Properties supports the temporary route of alley during construction. They hope to restore public access to the alley in six or seven months instead of eighteen months.

Commissioners' Comments & Questions

Are there any utilities in the alley that will need to be relocated?

A gas line that can be capped off, and electrical lines will be rerouted.

What paving is proposed for the alley?

Scored concrete for the driving surface, and permeable paving.

What traffic control exists at 42nd Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street?

A stoplight.

If there is no alley vacation, is there a reason the east portion of the site would not enter from 42nd Avenue SW?

It seems logical that the garages should have alley access for the residents.

See no problem with urban design implications of the proposal. It enhances the urban village plan.

See no physical, functional, traffic or utility reasons why it should not move forward.

Appreciate thorough and complete presentation package. Does the street landscape fulfill Green Factor requirements?

There is some overlap. A series of vertical green screens on the alley side is proposed.

Some elements will not count toward the Green Factor. It is unclear if rain gardens in the right-of-way are counted.

The mid block connection and alley activation is very positive. There is a point when a sidewalk becomes so wide that it is no longer a utility.

Trying to reinforce the streetscape on the corner is appreciated.

What happens if one walks along the mid block route, toward SW Alaska Street?

It reduces in width north of the alley. There is a pedestrian zone, but not a crossing. There is a connection to encourage movement between California Avenue SW and the corner.

The southwest sun exposure on corner offers opportunity for retail space.

Retail and public space is not synonymous. California Avenue SE is very restricted for pedestrians. There are few opportunities to stop. There is little emphasis on respite. Nodes or eddies could be enhanced.

As the design matures, there is opportunity for flexibility in the storefront skin.

At the midblock crossings, it is important for that area to be lively – otherwise uncertain it is a public benefit.

In response to early design guidance, the hybrid response is retail and residential amenities.

More detail in the landscape, lighting, bollards, paving patterns, and entries which will draw people in . A green passage is a time-honored idea. The arcade has opportunities.

The arcade may appear like a tunnel; encourage making it a welcoming, attractive portal.

In terms of traffic on 42nd Avenue SW, encourage change in pavement treatment for definition.

Encourage more sidewalk dimension along 42nd Avenue SW, due to the amount of vehicular traffic.

There is continuous planting along there, for a soft edge.

Retail enlivens the street, but narrows the sidewalk in some cases. Encourage more width in those areas.

How many parking stalls are gained by using the underground alley?

Spaces are not gained, however, excavation is minimized.

West Seattle is unique in breaking up blocks with active alleys. It does not detract from California Avenue SW.

Encourage working with Harbor Properties design team on the ramp in the alley.