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MEETING MINUTES

Z Block Alley Vacation

July 20, 2023

Convened 8:30am

Adjourned 3:00pm

Projects Reviewed

City briefing - WSBLE

Georgetown to SODO Bike improvements

Commission business

Block Z Alley Vacation

Commissioners Present

Jill Crary, Chair

Adam Amrhein, Vice Chair

Elizabeth Conner

Puja Shaw

Kevin O'Neill

Ben Gist

Phoebe Bogert

Molly Spetalnick

Commissioners Excused

Matt Aalfs

Erica Bush

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Windy Bandekar

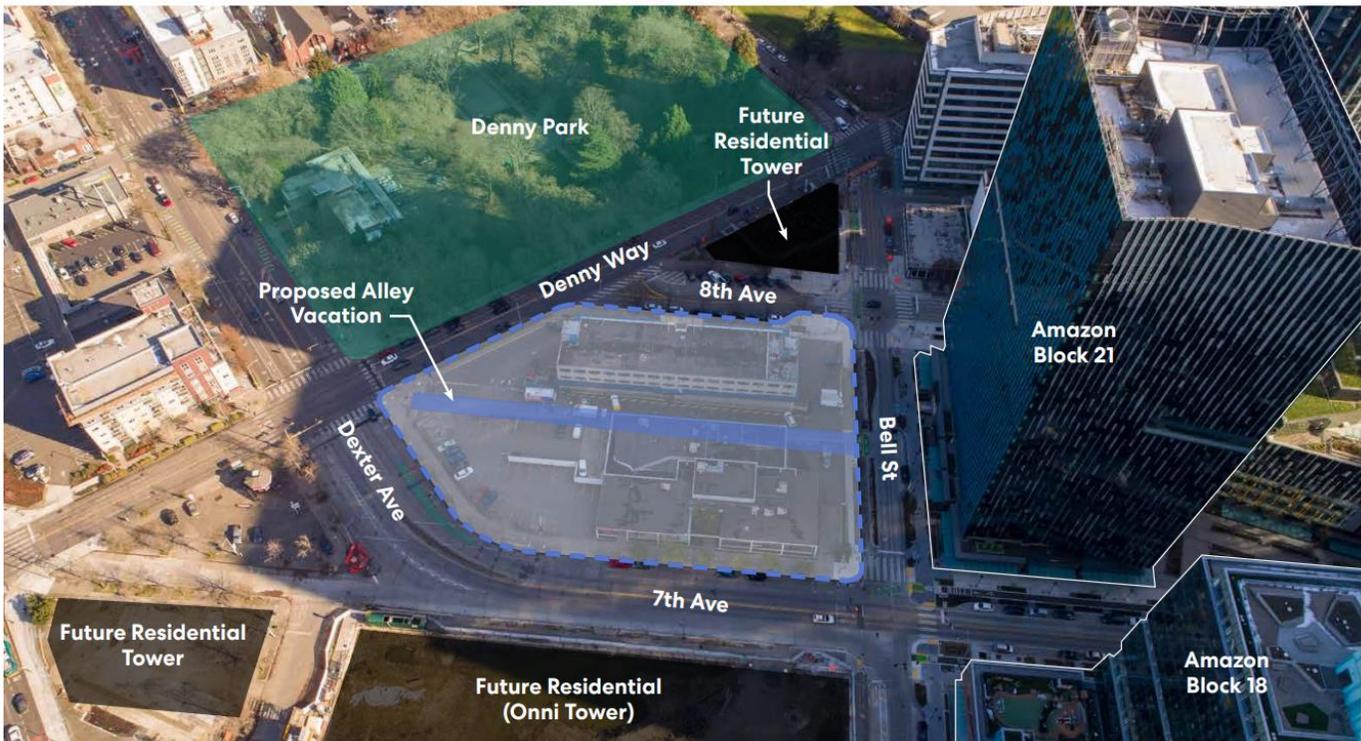


July 20, 2023
1:30 – 3:00 pm

Project: Block Z
Type: Alley vacation
Phase: Public Trust review
Previous Reviews: December 1, 2022 – pre-petition subcommittee
Presenters: Jim Keller, SiteWorkshop; Jennifer Whelan, Perkins+Will; Katie Kendall, McCullough Hill.
Attendees: Beverly Barnett, SDOT; Joe Hurley, SDCI

Project Description

BioMed Realty (BMR) is proposing the vacation of an alley that connects Bell Street to the south and the intersection of Denny Way and Dexter Avenue to the north. The vacation would allow the construction of approximately 600,000 square feet (sf) of office and lab spaces distributed in 2 towers. The towers will share a podium with 4 levels of below grade parking that will include approximately 621 stalls. Vehicular access to parking is proposed from 8th Avenue, to be shared with the building loading dock and building services. The north tower is planned for 17 floors and the south tower for 11 floors. Approximately 2,000 sf of retail is proposed on 8th Avenue near its intersection with Bell Street. Two plazas, one along 7th Avenue and the other on 8th Avenue, will provide a mid-block connection with pedestrian routes. The plazas and pedestrian routes will include landscaped areas that relate to Denny Park to the north.



Public Trust review

The purpose of this meeting was to evaluate how the design team had addressed the first phase of the review of a petition to vacate an alley – public trust. Public Trust is an evaluation of the impacts of the alley vacation on the functions of the abutting and adjacent rights of way, and how the development team has offset or addressed those impacts. The 8 elements of public trust are listed below.

- Circulation
- Access
- Utilities
- Free Speech
- Open Space
- Light and Air
- Views
- Land use and urban form

Public comments:

None

Agency Comments:

Beverly Barnett, SDOT lead for Street and Alley vacations, provided comments. She described the block's shape as unusual and challenging. SDOT is working with the project team to address issues with utility relocation, intersection signals, and the potential bike lane intersection improvements. Beverly also emphasized the importance of the site's exterior, stressing that the site's perimeter should be as carefully planned and pleasant as the proposed interior spaces, rather than being merely functional for loading and trash. Beverly highlighted the significance of pedestrian enhancements and expressed concerns about ensuring safe crossings, including at Denny Way. Beverly indicated that there should be clarity in guiding people through the site and assisting them in navigating once they cross through the site. Despite the complexities of the project, she feels optimistic about the ongoing dialogue with the project team.

Commissioner questions:

Following the design teams' presentation, Commissioners asked a variety of questions about the implications of the alley vacation and potential site improvements. The following is a summary of Commissioners questions and requests for clarification, based on topics related to public trust:

- How the interior open spaces are being designed to allow public use of these spaces, and not solely for building tenants.
- The challenges and issues surrounding the extension of the 7th Avenue bike lane to the Denny/Dexter intersection and the extent to which this will be completed with this project.
- The location of bus stops at or near the building.
- How ongoing demographic information is used to inform design of the public spaces.
- How ADA accessible paths are integrated into the site and surrounding the project.

- The implications of electrical relocations and coordination with Seattle City Light.

Commissioner deliberations:

The following is a summary of the main themes from the Commissioner's deliberations on the scope and concepts for Public Trust:

Circulation

- The commissioners are broadly supportive of the planned automobile circulation, while requesting additional information about the height, width, and other design details of the proposed combined 8th Avenue auto/truck entry.
- Additional information is needed on the various pedestrian routes in and around the site, including information on whether there is an intended hierarchy of importance in these routes that would be reinforced through design features.
- Commissioners indicated support for the open spaces and pedestrian connection through the site, connecting 7th Avenue and Denny Way.
- Streetscapes along each of the abutting rights of way were appreciated, especially the upgraded accessible paths through and around the site.

Access

- Create a point of interest for pedestrian access to the site along 8th Avenue and at the related open space.
- Support for direct and clear visual and physical access from the site to Denny Park.
- Enhancing pedestrian access through the location and the attributes of ground level uses including the proposed 8th & Bell retail space, the mid-level bike facility access point from Bell Street, the lobbies at the 7th avenue plaza, and building amenities at or near the public realm.

Utilities

- Did not voice any concerns or make any recommendations.

Free Speech

- Varied perspectives are shared about free speech and public assembly.
- One commissioner liked the site's closeness to the park, suggesting that an enhanced visual and physical connection can be made with Denny Park.
- The proposed open space near 8th and Denny should be designed for public assembly.

Open Space

- Concern about the relationship between building overhangs and their impact on the usability of the various open spaces.
- Concentrating activities can enhance the value of open spaces.
- Appreciation for how the open space designs provide visual and function access to the public.
- One approach to consider is the development of a hierarchy for the various open spaces in terms of size and configuration and how they interconnect and relate to the surrounding public realm.
- Concern about how the location of structural columns impacts the use and function of open spaces.
- Appreciation for detailed focus on all four streetscapes.

Light and Air

- Concern about how the proposed building overhangs impact the use and function of related open spaces.

Views

- Support was expressed about how the building designs related to and integrate with surrounding development.
- The logical interconnectivity of the grid was emphasized, especially without an alley.
- Curiosity about ground floor uses, suggesting varied views.

Land use and urban form

- A commissioner voiced support for the massing strategy, noting coherence with adjacent blocks.
- Logical interconnectivity of the grid was discussed.
- Concerns were raised about how portions of the building abutting the public realm need more activation. In various locations there are large open spaces, access points, or building elements that do not activate the abutting public realm.

Action:

The SDC voted 7 to 0 to approve the Public Trust phase of the vacation.