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RE: Move Seattle Oversight Committee 2018 Report to the Mayor and Council

Dear Mayor Durkan, Council President Harrell, and members of the Council,

Please receive here the 2018 Annual Report of the Move Seattle Oversight Committee (LOC). The Committee is pleased to offer in this report our observations of what worked and what could have been improved within the scope of our oversight duties during 2018, and any recommendations for changes for 2019.

**2018 Assessment**

Such a lookback on 2018 must begin with the Move Seattle Levy assessment effort, effectively a reset of project deliverables. We are deeply disappointed that such an assessment was necessary. We are grateful that you, Mayor Durkan, called for the reset early in 2018 and appreciative of staff's thorough and exhaustive work to get to the bottom of what was real and what was unrealistic in the Move Seattle Levy stated commitments.

To quote from our [August 23, 2018 letter to the Mayor and Council](#) offering our response to the assessment: *The most basic function of the Oversight Committee is to serve on behalf of the public as a mechanism to ensure accountability around how Levy funds are spent. It was deeply disturbing to the Committee, though perhaps not surprising, to learn that commitments made to the public in 2015 could not be delivered upon. During the first two years of the Levy, we often experienced frustration in trying to get from staff a clear understanding of Levy expenditures and project delivery. The 2018 assessment has been an important reset of the reality of the Levy for all of us – the City, the Oversight Committee, and especially the public.*

The LOC's role throughout the assessment was to provide guidance to staff in the eight of the 31 (now considered 30) subprogram areas that were identified as being at risk of not meeting targeted outcomes promised to the public. We transmitted our recommendations in each of the eight areas in

the August 23 letter, which were reflected in SDOT's November Levy to Move Seattle Workplan Report.

We also included in the August 23 letter a list of recommendations for moving forward that are worth repeating here (paraphrased) with updates as we see them:

- **Revise the Workplan.** SDOT completed this task with the November report and we are pleased the report will receive ongoing monitoring and regular revisions as necessary. We look forward to future reports on progress being made on the revised workplan.
- **Restore funding to complete all projects committed to by seeking additional funding, prioritizing safety projects and spending, and assessing the remaining subprograms to determine if these subprograms are still of value to the community and if not, consider reallocating funds from these subprogram areas to the now unfunded subprograms.** We agree that the robust local economy has caused higher than anticipated construction costs. But the robust local economy is also generating more city tax revenues than anticipated when the levy passed. We appreciate the small steps the City has already taken such as maintaining the level of general fund support for arterial paving and allowing a small portion of the transit levy to be used for capital purposes. But much more could be done to allocate higher revenues to meet higher costs and restore SDOT's ability to deliver on all projects committed to the voters in 2016. Safety continues to be a priority for the LOC, and we remain interested in an assessment of the remaining subprogram not studied in 2018.
- **Transit Plus / Multi-modal corridors subprogram:** This program took the biggest hit in the assessment and at the same time is the most complicated of the subprograms to deliver. We encouraged, and continue to encourage, SDOT to not just rely on LOC recommendations in this area but engage all modal boards, other key stakeholders (i.e. Metro) and especially the communities where these investments will occur in determining allocations of Levy resources. The original goal of addressing all transportation needs holistically should not be abandoned. But the rate of delivery must be accelerated, and work should proceed incrementally if warranted.
- **Reset relationships, improve management and culture at SDOT, and institute more robust cost tracking:** This work is under way and we hope to see improved relationships, management and processes under new leadership at SDOT. Cost tracking and project delivery reporting are considerably improved from previous years. The assessment process produced a realistic baseline of what can be delivered and SDOT is now demonstrating it can deliver these projects as promised.
- **Maintain original Levy promised targets:** The Committee sent a strong message that it didn't want the assessment process to move the goalposts but rather maintain sight of original promised targets, acknowledging SDOT's failure to deliver these targets in

affected subprogram area. This approach was used by SDOT and we think it best paves the way to restore the public's trust.

- **Role of the Oversight Committee:** We acknowledged our own need to step up our game in providing oversight of levy funds. To that end, we are now meeting monthly (minus summer and December) and continuing to work with staff to make sure we have the information we need to do our work.
- **New SDOT Director:** In our letter we laid out important criteria we wanted to see in the selection of the new director. The LOC was pleased to be invited to participate in the search process and are optimistic about working with Director Zimbabwe. He meets all our suggested criteria and we have confidence he can lead the department successfully, including implementing the LOC's recommendations above and delivering projects as promised. We look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

In addition to comments around the assessment we wish to highlight two other topics of concern which came to our attention in 2018:

### **Bicycle Safety subprogram**

The 2018 assessment along with input from the Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board (SBAB) called to our attention the lack of progress being made toward both overall Levy goals and the adopted 2017-21 Bicycle Master Plan goals. 2018 Levy goals in this area were not met and just 1.42 miles of bicycle lanes are planned to be built in 2019. This rate of progress is unacceptable. We understand SDOT staff are working directly with SBAB to find a workable plan to make greater progress. We will continue to monitor this area of Levy funding and expect to see greater progress toward Levy and Master Plan goals in 2019.

### **Neighborhood Repaving Projects**

In 2018 residents from at least two neighborhoods (NE 35<sup>th</sup> Street and Greenlake) came to the LOC meetings to provide public comment around their unhappiness with how SDOT worked with the community. In at least one case, there was a request that we intervene to ask SDOT to make changes to the project. The LOC discussed the request and we declined to do so, agreeing this was outside our role. But we did observe there seemed to be an institutional problem with the way SDOT was interacting and communicating with neighborhoods related to major repaving projects. We recommended changes be made to how SDOT engages with neighborhoods and understand this is now happening. Discussion of this topic at our November 29 LOC meeting was helpful and staff reported recently that six new FTE's have been added in the Department of Neighborhoods to improve communications between residents and SDOT. Enhanced outreach efforts must make an effort to include traditionally excluded groups such as renters, working class residents who often have non-traditional schedules, people of color, and youth.

## **Restoring the Public Trust**

July 1 2020 marks the mid-way point of the nine-year Move Seattle Levy. Questionable budgeting for projects promised, underspending in early years, and ineffective management during the first two years of the Levy resulted in considerable damage to the public's trust in SDOT's ability to be good stewards of taxpayer funds. The long, arduous, public and transparent process of resetting SDOT's workplan in 2018, along with a change in leadership at SDOT, sets the stage for that trust to be regained and rebuilt. What will be needed is continued improvement in SDOT's spending to implement promised projects to ultimately deliver on promises made to the public in 2015. Preliminary reports of 2018 spending indicate this trend is headed in the right direction.

Regaining the public trust will also require finding new ways to talk about what is being delivered by SDOT – going beyond merely counting and reporting on lanes of miles paved, number of curb cuts installed, bridges restored, and street signs replaced. It will require finding better ways to translate those projects into real improvements in the lives of all Seattle residents – increased mobility across the city, better access to transportation choices by all, improved safety and fulfillment of Vision Zero's goals, and much more. The LOC doesn't believe simply 'counting outputs' produced with Levy funds is sufficient to inspire Seattle citizens. Since our work began in 2016, we've debated the question of identifying new performance measures for Levy outcomes. The complexities of identifying more perfect performance measures for the many types of projects delivered with Levy funds makes this challenging. Still, it's a debate we think is worth having and we will continue to press SDOT on finding a better way to talk about the benefit of the projects delivered with Move Seattle Levy funds. We know SDOT is having the same discussions internally and we are confident that improvements will be made in SDOT's ability to measure benefits and better communicate the value of Levy funded projects to the public.

None of this discussion diminishes the need for SDOT to be accurate 'output counters.' The public's trust relies upon the fundamental belief that SDOT is accurately counting and transparently reporting on the many deliverable outputs it produces. As painful as 2018 was in many ways for the committee, for SDOT and for the public, the result has been much improved confidence in the department.

Finally, we wish to thank those who served on and retired from the LOC in 2018: Alex Krieg, Blake Trask, Laurie Torres, Katie Garrow, Emily Paine, Pat Cohn and Dustin Lambro. We express our gratitude to Interim Directors Goran Sparrman and Linea Laird for their leadership and tenacity in undertaking a successful assessment process. We especially thank Elliott Helmbrecht who staffed the Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee from its inception through 2018, and welcome new staff liaison Rachel McCaffrey. And we wish to express our appreciation to Council Member O'Brien and the Office of the Mayor for your active engagement with our work.

We look forward to working with Rachel, Director Zimbabwe, and SDOT staff in 2019 to carry out our oversight duties.

Sincerely and on behalf of the Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee,

Ron Posthuma  
Co-Chair (2019/20)

Betty Spieth-Croll  
Co-Chair (2016-19)

Cc: Sam Zimbabwe, Director, SDOT