

Transportation Staff team – Initial Review

Transportation Team:

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Oak View Group:

A. Provide a world-class civic arena (the “Arena”) to attract and present music, entertainment, and sports events, potentially including NBA and NHL events, to Seattle and the region.

Based on our review of the proposer’s presentation, the design of the Arena is thoughtful and innovative, and does a good job of accommodating multiple events: concerts, basketball games, and hockey games. We assume that the Operations and Design team will be reviewing the specifics of the proposal in more detail.

B. Provide for Project design and Arena operations in a manner that integrates with and enhances connections to Uptown and adjoining neighborhoods and aligns with the Urban Design Framework (“UDF”).

The proposal is very focused on the arena redevelopment site, and does not provide a lot of information relating to the surrounding neighborhood. There is also no discussion, in the transportation chapter, as to how the proposal aligns with the Uptown UDF and Seattle Center Master Plan, as well as other city policy documents such as the Seattle Comprehensive Plan and Climate Action Plan. Our review found areas within the transportation section that would have benefited from a bit more consideration of some of these other planning documents. One example of this relates to the proposed 850-stall parking garage to be located on-site (just south of the new arena). The Seattle Comprehensive Plan and Climate Action Plan have goals of reducing vehicle trips, or shifting more trips to travel modes that generate fewer or no greenhouse gas emissions (sustainable transportation modes), and to reach Zero Net Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions by 2050. A large, new parking garage is potentially in conflict with those broader goals. The location of the added 850-stall garage will add cars to an area already severely congested under current conditions due to the 1st Ave N Garage, creating operational and additional congestion issues. Ingress/egress in this area is already difficult from 1st Ave N Garage alone. The City would like to understand the plan for managing ingress/egress of the new parking garage on Thomas Street, in addition to the existing 1st Ave N Garage.

A parking garage in this location is also inconsistent with an Uptown UDF goal of keeping access to Seattle Center accessible from a transportation/congestion standpoint. It is also counter to a UDF goal of shrinking the parking footprint within the neighborhood. In addition, the proposed location of the parking garage also creates a non-motorized access barrier on Thomas St, which has been recommended as a green street and a neighborhood greenway. Non-motorized travel (walking and biking) should be a high priority for the street. From an access and mobility perspective, the preservation of people walking and biking via Thomas St is important for larger neighborhood circulation and connectivity.

The proposal suggests that a new parking garage (potentially funded by another public agency) will benefit local businesses by taking pressure from on-street parking in the Uptown area. The City regularly assesses on-street parking availability, and adjusts on-street parking to try to ensure short-term parking availability for nearby businesses. The proposed direct garage connection to the Arena might also discourage patrons from exploring the neighborhood on foot, reducing some of the potential local economic development. The same local economic impact would also occur to the extent that patrons walk, bike, and/or take transit to/from Uptown and walk to reach their destination at the Arena. The more people who can use a sustainable mode of transportation to access the arena, the better for surrounding Uptown businesses.

Parking supply and accessibility is a real issue for this area (and Seattle Center operations), but the proposal for a new parking garage in the southwest quadrant of the Seattle Center campus is flawed and does not align with Seattle Center Master Plan because its location does not provide access to the theatre district (along Mercer Street). If the new garage were to account for replacement of parking if/when the Mercer Street Garage redevelops, it is not in the ideal location for that purpose. Finally, in this location the structure may be perceived as a barrier to the Arena building, or at least as a less than attractive entrance for the many event attendees who can be expected to access the event from the South (downtown) via any mode of transportation.

About engagement with the broader Uptown community, the Transportation team would like to better understand the proposer's outreach and/or existing relationships with surrounding Uptown businesses. The proposal includes a project advisory committee, but is unclear how the Uptown community would be represented. The proposal also includes YouthCare to work with/donate to and anticipates focusing on Seattle Center and the Uptown neighborhood to form a steering committee of community members and non-profit leaders to identify the appropriate beneficiaries of \$10M to be distributed over 20 years.

The pledge to hire a full-time community liaison as part of the Arena operations team that will be the voice and point person for ongoing coordination with local neighborhoods representatives and City departments has been added through answering the City's clarifying questions.

C. Provide for design, permitting, development, demolition (if applicable), and construction of the Arena (the "Project") with minimal City financial participation.

The proposer has committed that all arena associated costs are to be privately paid for. In responding to City questions, the proposer has stated that the cost of the garage is included in project costs and will be built even if no financial partner comes forward.

Regarding transportation, it is important to assess the broader area and network that would serve access to the Arena. In its response to City clarifying questions, the proposer indicates a willingness to commit up to \$5M of funding toward select transportation improvements; however, the needs in this area of the City are great enough that the City or other public agencies will have to participate financially if we want the venue patrons to have sustainable multimodal transportation options. As the project goes through the environmental review process and transportation impacts are identified, mitigation for those impacts will be required as part of the development review process.

Throughout the transportation chapter, the proposer uses vague language like they would "support" expansion; "could" stage buses; "will coordinate"; has "explored the possibility ...", etc., around a number of issues. These statements are non-committal in terms of investment of particular transportation ideas. It is not clear how much City financial participation would be necessary to implement the transportation ideas supported by the proposer.

The Transportation team would ultimately like to see a more definitive "transportation investments" table or summary created to display the proposed transportation investment commitments (projects/programs/partnerships) that would be necessary for the arena to function from a transportation standpoint, and who the proposer is expecting to fund the improvements.

D. Provide for the continuous, successful, sustainable operation of the Arena as a world-class civic venue with minimal City financial participation.

The proposal is unclear about financial commitments for on-going transportation operations. The proposal uses vague, non-committal language that makes it difficult to understand the amount of effort that the City would ultimately have to contribute for ongoing transportation operational efficiencies. The proposal suggests there will be funding for partnerships/incentives with Uber and Lyft, bike valet service, shuttle service, regional park-and-ride event shuttles, subsidized transit and Monorail fares, subsidized parking in SLU/downtown garages, and marketing/technology solutions. These are all good ideas, but more clarity is needed on how the proposer would specifically help implement some of these strategies.

The proposal offers to create a full-time community liaison position to assist in managing traffic and parking issues as they arise and would also provide personnel for traffic management, signage, police presence for event traffic control, and other mitigating measures. In responding to City questions, they also propose operations supervision for a transportation drop-off zone near the "east directional entrance to Seattle Center" to provide an alternate site for loading and unloading. They will also pay for Seattle Traffic Control to manage the intersections and garage exits for events.

The Transportation Staff team would like to see on-going transportation operational funding elements added to the transportation investments table, mentioned above in part C.

E. Provide for mitigation of transportation impacts due to Project construction and Arena operations.

The analysis in the transportation chapter, which was primarily focused on vehicle traffic, parking supply, and transit capacity, found that there is "substantial excess capacity in transit, roadway, and parking during peak periods in the direction of travel towards Key Arena." This implies that there may

be little to no impacts to mitigate. This analysis may not be consistent with the real impacts of events during PM peak periods when event transportation demand is added to commuter transportation demand in the Uptown Urban Center and nearby neighborhoods. There was also no mention of Seattle Center daytime events, such as corporate events, graduations, electronic gaming, etc. These events can impact commute hours or weekend events with their unique, atypical event times corresponding to arena events.

The parking supply and utilization/optimization of parking garages within a ¼ mile radius (15-minute walk) of the site shows more than adequate supply available. Therefore, the Transportation team is not clear about the rationale (from a mobility standpoint) of constructing a new 850-stall parking garage after reviewing the analysis in the proposal. The proposal does identify a key issue of patrons having a difficult time locating available parking. Mitigating this through real-time route information and mobile parking application is mentioned. The proposer intends to solve efficiency of parking by managing all Seattle Center garages for one seamless experience and communicating better to patrons regarding all parking options, because they believe the parking capacity within walking/transit distance is adequate.

There is no discussion of pricing to park in the proposed on-site parking garage, or other Seattle Center parking facilities, which was an asset the proposer wants to own (with cost / revenue sharing to be worked out with the City). This is important because parking pricing strategies can significantly improve the availability and ease of access to parking, as well as promote the use of non-auto (sustainable) transportation alternatives. Parking overall near Seattle Center is a real issue that should be addressed (in terms of supply, location, and coordination), but we still question having this much parking at this specific location.

The proposers offer a few specific interventions/programs to “support” a reduction in auto trips, though with no financial commitments. These include: South Lake Union parking shuttles, KC Metro special event transit service to regional park-and-ride lots, marketing and incentives including transit fares, parking near Westlake Center, existing bus service, will add bike storage and valet service, discount parking rate in select garages for vehicles with three or more passengers, and purchase transit passes in bulk for patrons. These are all good ideas to pursue, but more clarity is needed on how the proposers would work with the City and other entities to advance these ideas.

Upon responding the City questions, the proposer will fund up to \$1M towards technology and way-finding solutions. There is discussion in the proposal about developing a mobile parking app to enable patrons to pre-pay for parking, look for availability, and plan trips more effectively (according to the proposer, a similar solution is used at an arena in Portland). Also proposed is traditional outreach (social media, websites, and email), real-time route information, a Community Liaison and other trip applications which would inform and alleviate potential ongoing Arena transportation operation concerns.

In a different section of the proposal, the proposers identify subterranean freight loading under Thomas Street, which may require a subterranean street vacation, and the City agrees that event truck loading should occur on private property. There was no additional analysis of freight impacts outside of what the City recently recommended through the recent Freight Master Plan, so there is no current commitment to freight mitigation or funding improvements. The proposal states that freight usage is outside event hours, but presumes all events are in the weekday evenings, which is inaccurate.

There are a few other investments that the proposer added within their response to City questions, including: committing to spend “more than \$1M” to fund construction of a multimodal mobility hub at 1st Ave N and John St for shuttles, taxi, ride share and bike parking, subsidize the cost of Monorail rides to arena events by bundling event and Monorail tickets, and is prepared to work with the City to contribute up to \$2M towards expansion of the Monorail system, and fund up to \$1M towards the City’s adaptive signal control system.

The proposal refers to the existing Westlake mobility hub and the recommended hub (in the SLU mobility plan) at Harrison and Aurora, though commits no funding to see these become actual hubs. The proposal does mention an on-site mobility hub near/at the future light rail station and commits to "coordinating" with ST, but again, no mention of financial investments.

F. Provide Project construction and Arena operations in a manner that is equitable for workers and consistent with the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative.

G. Provide for Project design and Arena operational integration with Seattle Center, contributing positively to the vibrancy of Seattle Center.