

U District Waterfront Area – Background and Priorities

February 2023

Introduction

The City of Seattle/University of Washington Citizen Advisory Committee (CUCAC) is a group of representatives from the University and surrounding communities that advises on the physical development of the University and the Greater University Area. As a part of CUCAC's review of UW's important investments in Portage Bay Crossing and the incoming West Campus Green, the below memo summarizes the group's initial feedback and long-term priorities for the University District's south waterfront area.

Background

As a part of a 2019 Campus Master Plan, the University of Washington plans to redevelop its west campus area, south of NE 41st Street, which is referred to as Portage Bay Crossing. Along with multiple building redevelopments, Portage Bay Crossing will have a central West Campus Green that connects the campus to the waterfront. The U District's waterfront area is located south of the Burke Gilman Trail and NE Pacific Street, between the University of Washington Medical Center and the Ship Canal Bridge. It is currently bifurcated and most easily accessed by NE Boat Street, which runs between a city waterfront park and what will be the future Campus Green.

This long-range campus planning is an exciting opportunity for the community and could serve to complement and revitalize the U District's waterfront, which is currently home to a mix of University buildings, food, retail and industrial businesses, a marina and house boats, and public open space. In 2020, the City of Seattle opened Fritz Hedges Waterway Park, an important neighborhood open space that includes a dock, kayak launch, beach, natural areas, and permanent seating. The city's park is the first step in a planned transformation for the waterfront. The Campus Green will occupy the sites of Fisheries and Marine Sciences buildings and will be developed incrementally in conjunction with new adjacent buildings. The University's goals for the West Campus Green include a welcoming and activated public realm for diverse groups and uses; a variety of flexible spaces and landscapes; and sustainable and ecologically and culturally appropriate landscaping.

CUCAC's U District Waterfront Priorities

As the University of Washington continues to refine the plans for the West Campus Green, CUCAC has elevated a set of high-level community priorities to help shape and guide the future U District waterfront area.

- **Seamless connection between the West Campus Green and Fritz Hedges Waterway Park** – The new West Campus Green presents a tremendous opportunity to connect to and build upon the existing design of Fritz Hedges Park. This could include a continuation of the open, programmable lawn space, including views overlooking the waterfront.
- **Active ground floor presence for redeveloped buildings around West Campus Green** – Driving the West Campus Green’s development is the redevelopment of several existing buildings. The University should consider multiple public-facing ground floor uses for buildings along the park, including retail and food service that can serve students, faculty, staff, and visitors throughout the day and night.
- **A new design for Boat Street** – NE Boat Street is the major thoroughfare through the waterfront area. It serves as a connection for vehicles, pedestrians, bikes, and freight/deliveries, and it includes wide sidewalks and on-street parking. In the future, Boat Street could be reimagined as a curbsless street or woonerf to be more pedestrian friendly and physically connect Fritz Hedges Park and West Campus Green.
- **New mid-block connections to University Way and Brooklyn Ave** – The U District’s blocks are long and mid-block crossings are rare. The large redevelopment area of the West Campus Green presents an excellent opportunity to include mid-block crossings at the east and west edges to University Way and Brooklyn Ave NE. This will connect the open space to two key streets leading into the heart of the U District.
- **Integration of power and water connections into West Campus Green** – In order to maximize flexible uses of the West Campus Green, the developers and the University should consider multiple accessible locations for electrical power (20, 30, and 50 amp plugs) and water hookups. These connections could be utilized by the University or trusted partners to hold events such as markets, concerts, outdoor movies, etc.
- **A cohesive design and concept for the West Campus Green** – Because the West Campus Green will be developed incrementally in conjunction with adjacent buildings, the University should pre-identify a cohesive design for successful programming of the outdoor space. The design should consider CUCAC and community-identified priorities for the U District’s waterfront as a whole.
- **Engagement with surrounding business and property owners** – In order to ensure a cohesive campus and community connection throughout the U District’s waterfront, the University and surrounding business and property owners should engage in ongoing and meaningful planning and coordination. These conversations should help guide the priorities for the West Campus Green and ground-floor design of adjacent campus buildings. They could also inform strategies to strengthen identity and branding for Portage Bay Crossing or the waterfront area specifically.