

Thomas Street Redefined

Commissioners Present

Vinita Sidhu, Chair
Elaine Wine, Vice Chair
Adam Amrhein
Elizabeth Conner
Jill Crary
Amalia Leighton-Cody

Commissioners Excused

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins
Valerie Kinast

Recusals and Disclosures

Vinita Sidhu was recused.

Project Description

In 2013, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) approved the Thomas Street Street Concept Plan. The Thomas Street Redefined project implements part of the plan, focusing on right of way improvements between 5th Avenue N and Dexter Avenue N (*see Figure 1*). The proposed improvements include a plaza at 5th and Thomas, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, planting areas, and a protected intersection at Dexter Ave N and Thomas Street. The project is scheduled to start construction in Spring 2023.

The public plaza at 5th Avenue and Thomas Street is designed for passive use and to complement the skate plaza program (*see Figure 2*). The 7th Avenue and Thomas Street intersection will be the City's first "protected intersection" (*see Figure 3*). The intersections are at 90% design.

An innovative stormwater management system will store rain water for irrigation.

Meeting Summary

This is the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) second review of the Thomas Street Redefined project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the schematic design phase (60% design) for the project. The SDC voted 3-2 to approve the schematic design for Thomas Street with one condition and several recommendations. The project will be reviewed again at the design development phase (90% design) following a subcommittee review addressing comments and conditions detailed below.

Summary of Presentation

The project team provided background information about various planning and development efforts in the area. This includes the Thomas Street Street Concept Plan, Lake to Bay Trail, several street and alley vacations, and many new private developments. The west end of the site at 5th Avenue and Thomas Street abuts the new Seattle Center skate plaza. The project team described the outreach activity, including a charrette with community members and stakeholders, and a briefing to the Design Commission.

Bruce A. Harrell
Mayor

Rico Quirindongo
Interim Director, OPCD

Vinita Sidhu, Chair

Elaine Wine, Vice Chair

Adam Amrhein

Elizabeth Conner

Jill Crary

Amalia Leighton-Cody

Michael Jenkins
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March 3, 2022

9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Project Type

CIP

Phase

schematic design

Previous Reviews

2/6/2020

Presenters

Aditi Kambuj
SDOT

Mark Brands
Site Workshop

Emma Cave
Site Workshop

Aaron Stephan
Artist

Attendees

Beverly Barnett
SDOT

Valancy Blackwell
Seattle Center

Laurentiu Dusciuc
SDOT

Jordan Lewis
Site Workshop

Maija McKnight
OAC

Jennifer Meulenberg
SDOT

Ryan Moore
SDOT

Mark Ostrow
Community Member

Kay Yesuwan
SDOT

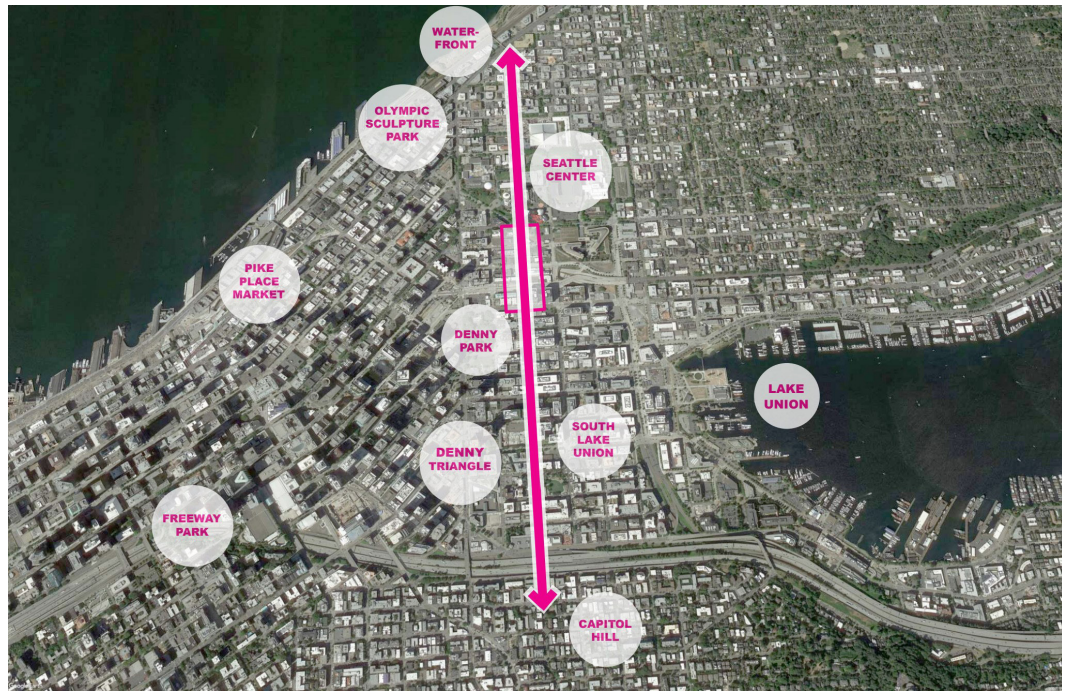
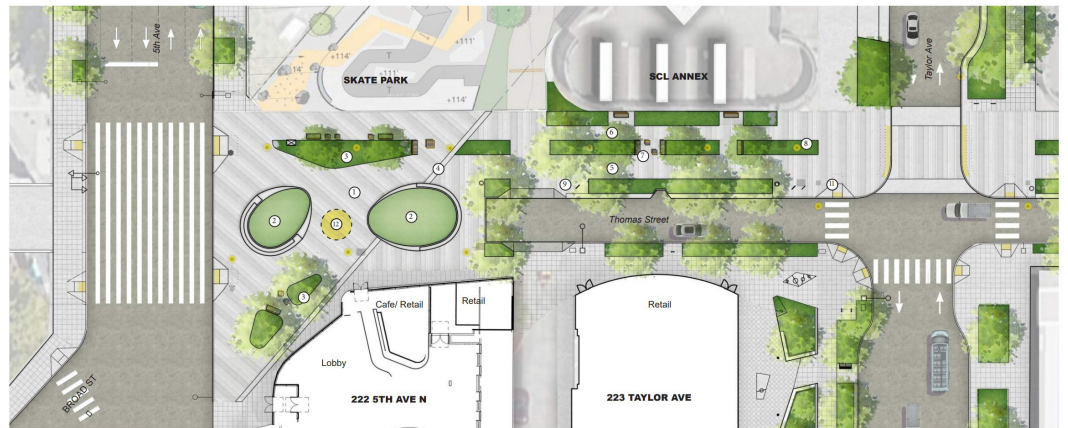


Figure 1: Project location.



- Legend**
- ① 5th Ave Thomas St Plaza.
 - ② Synthetic turf 'bean bags'.
 - ③ Existing and new street trees with understory plantings.
 - ④ Interpretive paving band aligned with Broad Street ROW
 - ⑤ 10' wide multi modal lane flanked by new street trees and understory plantings.
 - ⑥ 6' wide pedestrian zone.
 - ⑦ Groups of site specific street furniture.
 - ⑧ New pedestrian scale light fixtures.
 - ⑨ Bike racks.
 - ⑩ Raised crossing.
 - ⑪ Improved curb ramps and crossing.
 - ⑫ Artwork location.

Figure 2: Public plaza at 5th Avenue and Thomas Street.



- Legend**
- ① Garden rooms along the Thomas St and Taylor Ave N. A suite of site specific street furniture providing a variation of seating opportunities from small groups to single seating within new street trees and understory plantings.
 - ② Raised intersection with the unique paving score of Thomas St.
 - ③ 10' wide multi modal path with new street trees and understory plantings.
 - ④ 6' wide pedestrian zone
 - ⑤ Improved crossings and curb ramps.
 - ⑥ New pedestrian lighting.
 - ⑦ Bike racks.

Figure 4: Protected intersection at 7th Avenue and Thomas Street.

The project budget is \$9,174,692. Funds come from City Light reimbursement for street vacations, proceeds from the Mercer Blocks sale, and Real Excise Tax proceeds. There is an approximately \$780,000 budget shortfall.

The project team presented design studies for the complete corridor, including the 5th Avenue plaza. In addition to new paving, plantings, furnishings, and lighting, the project will provide elements that can be skated on. The project will also include tree planting of trees in the corridor. Seating will be provided in the 5th Avenue plaza at the west end of the corridor.

Agency Comments

None

Public Comments

Mark Ostrow - The closure of part of 5th Avenue eliminates some but not all potential for vehicular conflicts such as left and right turning cars for pedestrians and cyclists moving east-west. This closure was added during the design charrette sponsored by Councilmember Bagshaw.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission discussed the following four themes:

1. Circulation
2. Plaza Design
3. Integration with Surrounding Development
4. Maintenance

Circulation

Commissioners discussed the arrangement of space and east-west connectivity. They expressed appreciation for the protected crossings at Dexter and extensive plantings along the corridor (*see Figure 4*). Commissioners discussed how the closure of Thomas from 5th to 6th Avenue and development of a 5th Avenue Plaza served the overall goal of east-west connectivity. There was concern at the mixing of skateboarders and bikes at 5th and Thomas, due to proximity of the Seattle Center Skate Plaza. Commissioners asked the team to explore how the plaza elements and paving expression might be adjusted to achieve clearer circulation patterns within the Thomas Street corridor, continuing to include the Cascade neighborhood. Commissioners were very concerned that the lack of improvements to the 5th Avenue crossing undermined the goal of accomplishing east-west connectivity.

5th Avenue Plaza Design

Commissioners questioned the necessity of the plaza. There were concerns about the size of the space and a lack of clarity related to circulation. Ideas for how to better serve both purposes of moving people east-west and providing a place to gather were discussed. Commissioners suggested that the team explore changes in the paving patterns and arrangement of elements to increase east-west connectivity, providing places for people to gather, and to enhance safety. They asked to consider how play and the movement of people on bikes through the space would be facilitated safely. Memorializing the former Broad Street alignment east of 5th Avenue with special paving was called into question because it adds cost and also adds complexity in a busy environment (*see Figure 5*).

Integration with Surrounding Development

Commissioners raised concern that the design was not knitting into adjacent public realm and streetscape improvements well enough. There are many recent and current developments of properties along the site (*see Figure 6*). The presentation lacked detail regarding how this project would integrate with surrounding projects and improvements. Commissioners asked the team to look closely at any places where there might be remaining unimproved spaces along the edges of the corridor.

Maintenance and Cost

Commissioners raised some concerns that the purpose of connecting people between Cascade, South Lake Union, and Seattle Center might have been accomplished with less investment. The cost and necessity of closing a block of Thomas and developing a plaza was questioned. Commissioners asked the team to reconsider the cost of installing and maintaining special paving to mark the former location of Broad Street, weighing that against its purpose.

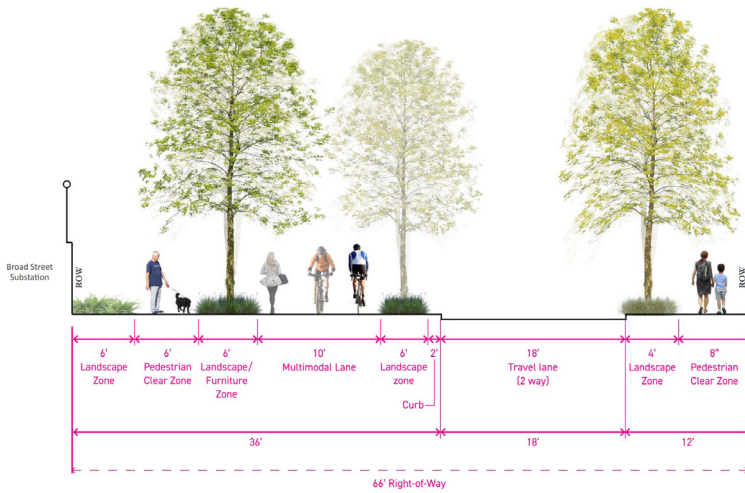


Figure 4: Thomas Street proposed section.

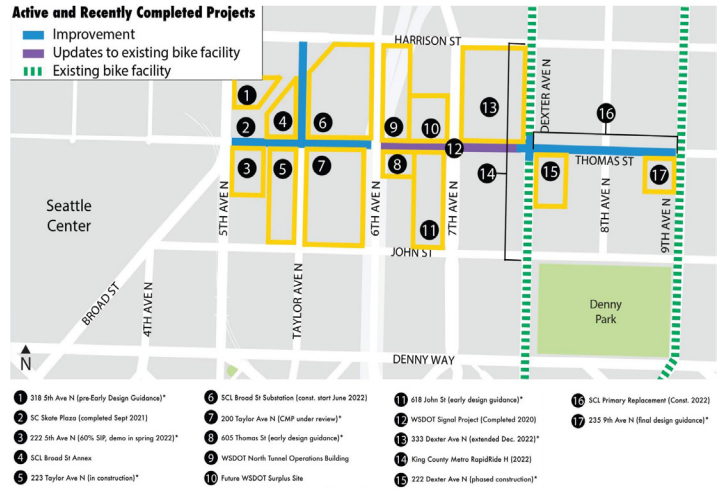


Figure 6: Adjacent development and coordination.



Figure 5: View of 5th Avenue Plaza looking northwest.

Action

The SDC thanked the team for their presentation of the schematic design for the Thomas Street Reimagined project. Commissioners appreciated the goal of strengthening east-west connections between neighborhoods, but pressed to see this further developed in the design. The SDC applauded the increase in plantings in the area and the design of beautiful space for families and gathering. However, they questioned whether such a high level of investment was necessary to achieve the aims of the project.

The SDC voted 3-2 to approve the schematic phase (60% design) of the Thomas Street Reimagined project with the following conditions:

1. After refinements to the design have been made, present to a subcommittee of the SDC information on the following:
 1. Functionality and quality of the east-west connection to Seattle Center for pedestrians and bikes. How closing Thomas Street supports the pedestrian crossing of 5th Avenue.
 2. How, within its context, the configuration of the space, integration of artwork, and material choices - serves the goal of east-west connectivity from Seattle Center to South Lake Union and Cascade; - enhances safety for various user groups (pedestrians, skateboard users, etc.);

- and integrates with right-of-way improvements, development of adjacent private projects, and the skate plaza north of the site.

3. Details on routine and long-term maintenance needs and responsibilities for the improvements, especially of non traditional materials such as artificial turf.
4. Safety relative to integrated artwork and adjacent uses including play, bikes, pedestrians, and skaters.

Recommendations

1. Refine the configuration of all elements with additional detailed attention to circulation patterns and safety.
2. Continue close collaborative design development of the artwork to develop solutions for how users will circulate, linger, recreate, and interact. Consider how the artwork will be integrated into the context of this project, its desired east-west connections, and nearby private developments.
3. Consider extending the geometry of the double tree alley that is provided along the City Light Annex westward to 5th Avenue. Deemphasize or close the curb cut to the driveway that crosses the skate plaza.
4. Coordinate with right-of-way improvements in adjacent private development to support the aims of this project. Knit this project meaningfully and effectively with private improvements. Ensure there are no gaps in the consistency of quality of the ground plane and public realm between the various public and private projects if they are constructed at different times.
5. Consider use of funds for right-of-way improvements to also cover improvements to the intersection at 5th Avenue.
6. Reexamine the rectilinear roadway terminus to better integrate it with the project's open space design.
7. Reconsider providing skateboard elements in the mixing zone and evaluate how skateboard users might be encouraged and/or discouraged from interacting with artwork and other project elements.
8. Reconsider memorializing the location of Broad Street with angled paving. Those funds could perhaps be better used for tactical operational moves to make the connection from Seattle Center across Dexter toward the east: Fairview, Cascade neighborhood, and vital connections to Capitol Hill.

The Commissioners who voted no explained their decisions.

Adam Amrhein - It is not clear how the plaza advances SDOT's goals for the project to provide an east-west connection to Seattle Center. The investment is more than needed to achieve the purpose.

Amalia Leighton-Cody - If connections are not successfully created, the project will seem detached in this location. Was not able to see the nuances of how the project will knit communities together.