



The Urbanist

Examining Urban Policy to Improve Cities and Quality of Life
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March 18, 2016

Moira Gray, Street Vacation Specialist, Street Use
City of Seattle Department of Transportation
700 5th Avenue, Seattle, Washington

Moira Gray,

The Urbanist is excited to support the Addition to the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC). The project will undoubtedly enhance the quality of life in Downtown and spur economic development citywide. However, the scale of the project (\$1.4 billion) and its unprecedented petition for five street vacations (Clerk File 314338) merits a strong public benefit package that supports a variety of community interests. Seattle City Council Resolution 30702 provides for the use off-site public benefits and in-lieu mitigations that should be used to full effect.

We hereby endorse the public benefit requests of the following organizations (attached at the end of this letter):

Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council: Funding the extension of Plymouth Pillars Park at the eastern corner of the Boren Avenue and Pine Street intersection, funding a comprehensive consultant study of lidding Interstate 5 between Pike Street and Olive Way, and ensuring the WSCC Addition is designed to be a civic landmark in keeping with its program, location, and cost.

Capitol Hill Housing: Funding low-income housing near the WSCC Addition site and studying the lidding of Interstate 5 to provide space for parks, jobs, and housing.

First Hill Improvement Association: Funding the Terry Avenue green street/woonerf, an open space and pedestrian project identified in the First Hill Public Realm Action Plan.

Capitol Hill Community Council, Central Seattle Greenways, and Melrose Promenade: Funding physical safety improvements to Olive Way, including rechannelization of the Interstate 5 ramps and the intersections with Melrose Avenue and Bellevue Avenue.

Freeway Park Association: Funding safety and accessibility upgrades to park entrances, new wayfinding infrastructure, and improved pedestrian-scale lighting.

This collection of projects will greatly transform the Center City for the better and improve local quality of life for a diverse array of people. We look forward to seeing these items as part of the public benefit package. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Cordially yours,

The Urbanist Board of Directors
Owen Pickford
Stephen Fesler
Ben Crowther
Sarah Oberklaid
Scott Bonjukian



The Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council Lid I-5 Campaign

Date: March 18, 2016

To: Moira Gray, Seattle Department of Transportation

From: John Feit, Chair PPUNC; Jim Castanes, Bruno Lambert, Scott Bonjukian

RE: Comment on the Washington State Convention Center Addition Street Vacation Petition

The Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council (PPUNC) supports the concept of the expansion to the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC). The project is an exciting development for Seattle and will positively contribute to the urban form and energy of our Downtown and the Capitol Hill neighborhood; however, PPUNC is disappointed with the proposed public benefits approach put forth by the applicant as well as the architectural design, mix of retail, and community activities. Our concerns with the design — namely the lack of consideration for street-level activation on Boren Avenue, Olive Way, and Pine Street — have been repeatedly logged with the Downtown Seattle Design Review Board, the Seattle Design Commission, and City Council.

We are strong advocates for a more robust public benefit package as compensation for the five street vacations and the Planned Community Development. The WSCC Addition is unprecedented in its scale and the number of requested street vacations (Clerk File 314338). The on- and off-site public benefits as proposed are anemic and do not fulfill the intent of City Council Resolution 30702.

The developer and the WSCC have an obligation to exceed their current plans and provide greater public benefit to the Downtown, Capitol Hill, First Hill, Pike/Pine, and the Denny Triangle neighborhoods. We respectfully request the Seattle Department of Transportation and City Council consider the following items for inclusion in the public benefits package:

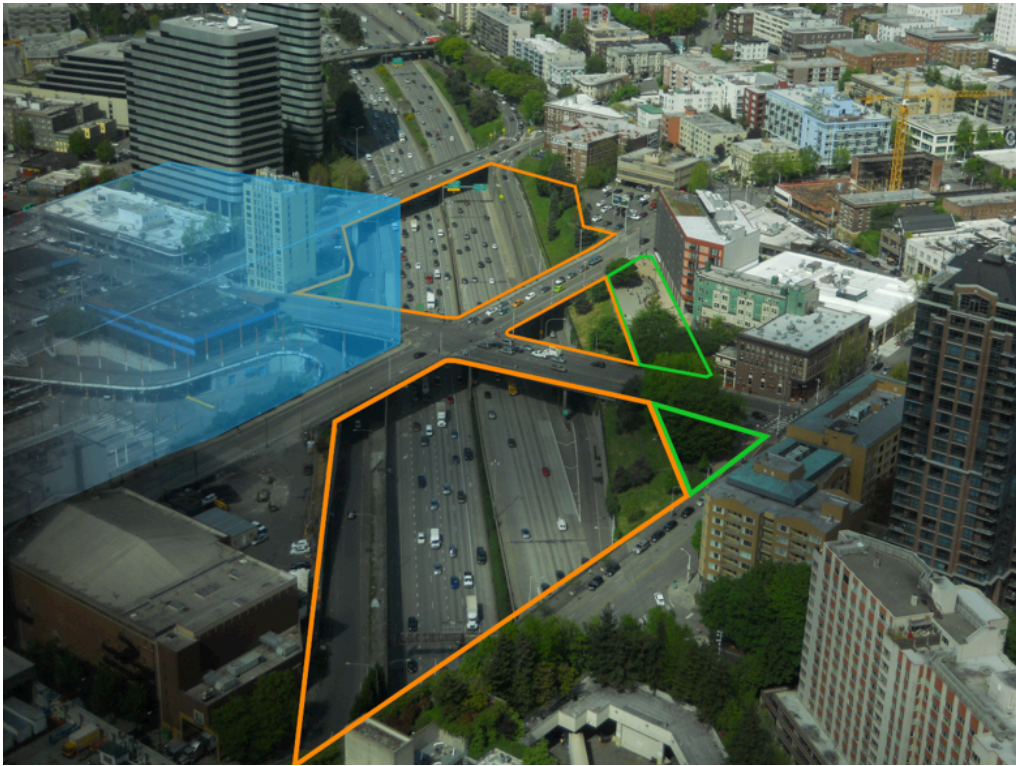


Figure 1. Proposed area for a lid study (in orange), existing parks (in green), and the mass of the Convention Center Addition (in blue).

- Complete Plymouth Pillars Park by lidding I-5 adjacent to the dog run; this will be the first, modest step in adding valuable open space to an existing network.
- Have the WSCC fund a comprehensive feasibility, urban design, costing, and programming study of a freeway lid between Pike Street and Olive Way to include affordable housing, neighborhood businesses, and open space components. Such a study would cost in the order of \$0.5M to \$1M, or more.
- Direct the applicant to create the kind of civic grandeur and empowering public realm its central location, program, cost, and impacts dictate.

We believe these items will strengthen the connection between Downtown, Capitol Hill, First Hill, and South Lake Union by repairing our urban fabric. As demonstrated across Seattle and the Puget Sound region, freeway lids knit together neighborhoods and provide public open space and civic buildings above transportation corridors. Lids provide numerous public health and environmental benefits, including the improvement of air quality, storm water filtration, wildlife habitat, reduction of urban heat island, and the encouragement of walking and bicycling over motor vehicle trips.

There is a strong nexus for including these requested items in the street vacation public benefit package. It is in the best interests of the WSCC to be situated next to vibrant neighborhoods and park space, and the project itself prefers to cantilever over a portion of Interstate 5 right-of-way.

We will continue to be engaged on this issue and help develop the public benefit package of the WSCC Addition. Thank you for your attention to this matter and the opportunity to provide public comment.



1620 12th Avenue, Suite 205
Seattle, Washington 98122
206 329-7303
www.capitolhillhousing.org

February 4, 2016

Seattle Design Commission
City Hall
600 4th Ave
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Design Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed street and alley vacations of the Washington State Convention Center expansion. Capitol Hill Housing (CHH) urges the Design Commission to support affordable housing as a central part of the community benefits provided along with the vacations. We also believe that the Convention Center should contribute to a long-term plan to lid the adjacent section of I-5 and build out streetscape improvements detailed in existing neighborhood plans.

Founded in 1976, CHH provides affordable housing for over 2,000 low income residents in 48 buildings across Seattle. We also work to create equitable and sustainable communities in central Seattle and have been involved in neighborhood planning in the Pike Pine Corridor for many years. One of our properties, the Villa Apartments, provides affordable housing for 62 households across I-5 from the Convention Center expansion site. Additionally, as a Public Development Authority, Seattle Municipal Code 3.110.050 (e) empowers CHH to “recommend to the Mayor and City Council appropriate public improvements and expenditures in areas of the city in which [we] by our charter have particular responsibility.”

As you know, the Convention Center expansion will require 3 alley vacations, 1 block of full street vacation, and 2 blocks of subterranean street vacation. The City code for street and alley vacations states that, “the public benefit proposed be proportional to the benefits gained by the Petitioner and to the scale and impacts of the project.” Covering 4 city blocks, with an estimated cost of \$1.4 billion, the Washington State Convention Center expansion is perhaps the most expensive single real estate project in Seattle history. Such a uniquely large project, with such numerous street and alley vacations, therefore warrants a proportionally generous package of benefits to balance the unprecedented infrastructure burdens placed on the surrounding community.

Affordable housing should be placed at the heart of the community benefits for this project. In November, Mayor Murray declared a State of Emergency on Homelessness. Just last week, volunteers with the One Night Count found nearly 3,000 Seattleites without shelter, a 68 percent increase over the last 5 years. Our homelessness emergency is part of our broader housing affordability emergency. Almost 45,000 low-income Seattle households are spending over half their income on housing and displacement has forced many others to seek housing outside of the city, further removed from services, jobs, and community anchors. The Convention Center and

the many hotels planned around the project will employ low-wage workers that deserve an affordable place to live close to their work. Recent research indicates that a parent's commute length is a key reverse indicator of upward mobility for children from low-income households.

We also support the long-term vision of lifting the section of I-5 adjacent to the Convention Center expansion site. Reconnecting Terry and Minor Avenues over I-5 would improve transportation connections. The reclaimed land could meet needs for parks, amenities, a lively streetscape, more jobs, and more housing, including affordable housing. The Convention Center design should anticipate a lid and support further design and feasibility analysis as part of the community benefits package. Too often, convention centers and other large scale public buildings function as walls and dead spaces. Contributing to a freeway lid would instead reknit Capitol Hill, First Hill, Downtown, and the Denny Triangle and enliven this node of intersection.

Helping families thrive equitably in our city is a community priority that should go hand in hand with quality design and the essential streetscape improvements already outlined in existing neighborhoods plans. We trust that the Design Commission will use its considerable expertise and powers to pursue a Convention Center that makes all Seattleites proud.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Persons", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Chris Persons
CEO
Capitol Hill Housing



First Hill Improvement Association

1425 Broadway #281
Seattle, WA 98122

March 18, 2016

The First Hill Improvement Association (FHIA) looks forward to the expansion of the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) and the jobs and activity it will bring to Seattle. The unprecedented scale and scope of the project, along with its expansion into an already dense part of the City, will require significant funding of “off site” public benefits to compensate for the proposed five street and alley vacations.

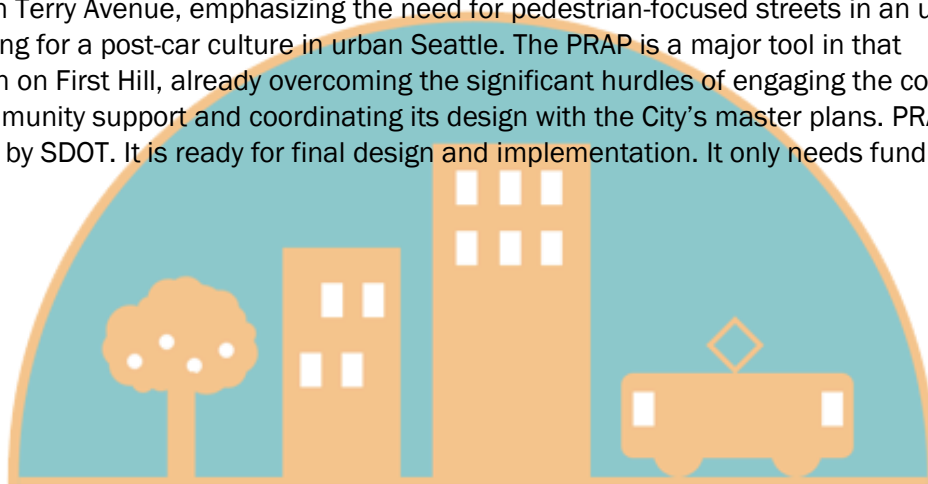
In particular, the “de facto” loss of Terry Avenue demands a compensating long-term benefit to the general public for the loss of circulation, access, light, air, open space and views that the street currently provides. FHIA proposes that this benefit be created by transforming Terry Avenue between Marion and Cherry Streets in front of the Frye Art Museum, St. James Cathedral and O’Dea High School into a festival street.

In 2015, in collaboration with the Seattle Department of Transportation, the Department of Planning and Development, (now Department of Construction and Inspections), and the Parks Department, FHIA created a neighborhood plan to help remedy the shortage of public open space on First Hill. The resulting 2015 Public Realm Action Plan (PRAP) responds to 15 years of unsuccessful attempts to acquire park space on First Hill by re-envisioning the streetscape.

The 2015 PRAP proposes to repurpose the Terry Avenue right-of-way between Marion and Cherry Streets to put primary focus on pedestrian uses. While vehicular traffic would not be banned and the area would continue to provide emergency access, pedestrian uses and public events would receive preference. During events, vehicular traffic would be limited to that related to events, like food trucks, temporary performance stages, loading and unloading of HOV or emergency vehicles. Bollards and temporary barriers may be used to redirect traffic.

The requested mitigation funds would pay for the necessary reconfiguration of the street Right of Way, utility hook-ups to support events, changes to the lighting, seating, and parking areas to support pedestrian activities, and signs to redirect autos around these blocks. The funds would also raise the three intersections at Columbia, Cherry and Marion where they cross Terry into street-width speed bumps, as proposed for the Pike/Pine street intersections, to calm traffic and improve pedestrian safety. This improvement directly satisfies the City’s requirements for off-site public benefits, as defined by City Council resolution 30702, with enhancements to pedestrian and bicycle environments, designated green streets, funding elements in our adopted neighborhood plans, wayfinding signage and places for public art. It creates the open space we have been searching for, and will help us reshape our urban form.

A great deal of community planning has been undertaken recently to improve pedestrian focus and open space on Terry Avenue, emphasizing the need for pedestrian-focused streets in an urban fabric that is preparing for a post-car culture in urban Seattle. The PRAP is a major tool in that transformation on First Hill, already overcoming the significant hurdles of engaging the community, obtaining community support and coordinating its design with the City’s master plans. PRAP has been adopted by SDOT. It is ready for final design and implementation. It only needs funding.



Funding the implementation of the PRAP is, in large part, opportunistic—it relies upon the current, extensive redevelopment of real properties, transit systems, and institutions (like the Convention Center) that can help mitigate their impacts by funding PRAP amenities on First Hill.

The redevelopment of the parking lot across from the Frye Art Museum on Terry Avenue into a high-rise apartment complex is one of these opportunities. The developer, Westbank Corporation, has already used the PRAP as a guide in the redevelopment of the sidewalks and open spaces on their property. Adding Convention Center mitigation funds could allow Westbank: 1) to extend their design concepts into the Right-of-Way, connecting with the Frye Art Museum across the street; 2) to extend those designs north to include the block between St. James Cathedral and O’Dea High School; and 3) to install traffic-calming raised intersections. The result will be to create a beautiful public space framed by the majesty of the cathedral and its beautiful old trees, the sleek modern architecture of the Frye and the new apartment tower, and the enlivening presence of the neighborhood residents and the school’s students.

The Westbank high-rise development is currently in Design Review, and is planned for completion in early 2019. Therefore, these proposed PRAP street improvements, if done in conjunction with its construction, could be completed within 3 years. Fully implementing these two blocks of Terry Avenue will give the First Hill community some of the open space it has been seeking for over 15 years. It will create a public stage for First Hill’s premier non-profit organizations to engage in community building and activities that enhance the education, arts and culture of the city’s residents and visitors. FHIA, the Catholic Archdiocese and the Frye Art Museum will take on leadership in hosting events within these new public spaces.

We thank you for considering this request as part of the appropriate mitigation for the taking of Terry Avenue for the WSCC expansion.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Hudgins
FHIA Board President

Alex Hudson
FHIA Director

Cc: The First Hill Improvement Association Board of Trustees:

- Mary Ellen Hudgins, Resident
- Ted Klainer, Harborview Medical Center
- Kendall Baker, Resident
- Daria Cardin, Ash Consulting
- Betsy Braun, Virginia Mason Medical Center
- Bob Terrell, Resident
- Frank Conlon, Resident
- Gordon Werner, Resident
- Jeffrey Hirsch, Frye Art Museum
- Jim Erickson, Resident
- Lindsay Radliff, Resident
- Sherry Williams, Swedish Medical Center



Date: March 18, 2016
To: Moira Gray, Seattle Department of Transportation
From: Capitol Hill Community Council, Seattle Central Greenways, and Melrose Promenade
Subject: Comment on Street Vacation Petition for the Washington State Convention Center Addition (Clerk File 314338) and Requested Public Benefits for Olive Way

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the street vacation petition for the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Addition. This is an exciting and innovative public project for Seattle, and it promises to spur further economic growth through new jobs and visitors. It will also positively contribute to the urban form and energy of Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

However, the project is unprecedented in its scale and the number of requested street vacations. The currently proposed public benefits are nominal and do not fulfill the spirit of City Council Resolution 30702. The WSCC and its developer must go above and beyond in how they give back to the Downtown and Capitol Hill communities. **We believe the time is now for one particular improvement to Seattle's public realm: increasing safety on Olive Way.**

Data shows that on the portion of Olive Way between the project site at Ninth Avenue and the Sound Transit light rail station at Broadway, from 2007 to 2014, there were 69 people walking and bicycling hit by cars. This is an average of ten collisions per year, an unconscionable rate of injury.¹

The Addition will double the Convention Center's capacity and it is foreseeable that thousands of new and existing visitors, employees, and residents will use Olive Way to reach the shopping, restaurants, and entertainment offerings on Capitol Hill. Further, the Convention Center anticipates creating hundreds of low wage service jobs that are likely to involve commuting by foot, bike, and transit. It is in the best interests of the City and the WSCC for Olive Way to be a safer and more attractive street for all.

The WSCC Addition and its associated co-development will straddle Olive Way, but the petitioner currently proposes anemic improvements to the pedestrian environment and the roadway. The petitioner also proposes entirely closing two blocks of Olive Way during at least one stage of construction, a major break in the street grid for traffic, transit and especially pedestrians.² The proposed addition of two bike-share stations also makes safety improvements along and across Olive Way critical for bicyclists.

The Capitol Hill Community Council, Seattle Central Greenways, and Melrose Promenade are jointly requesting Olive Way safety improvements be included in the WSCC's public benefit package. We are most concerned with the area around the Interstate 5 ramps and the intersections with Melrose Avenue and Bellevue Avenue. We believe these areas are eligible for both physical off-site benefits and in-lieu funding.

Olive Way's safety problems have been substantially documented. The 1998 Capitol Hill Neighborhood Plan notes, "...some pedestrian crossings along E Olive Way remain treacherous due to poor location and fast vehicle speeds. Pedestrian crossings at Interstate-5 are especially dangerous. The street's diagonal orientation results in acute corners that make it difficult for pedestrians to be seen by cars."³ The dual on-lane ramp also encourages high speeds, as recently demonstrated by a collision that destroyed a pedestrian warning sign.

The same plan identified a solution: rechannelizing the Interstate 5 off- and on- ramps, forcing vehicles to a complete stop and improving drivers' view of pedestrians (see Figure 1). As the plan notes, this change would greatly improve the safety and convenience of walking across Interstate 5. With increased foot and vehicle traffic from the WSCC Addition, now is the time to implement this improvement.

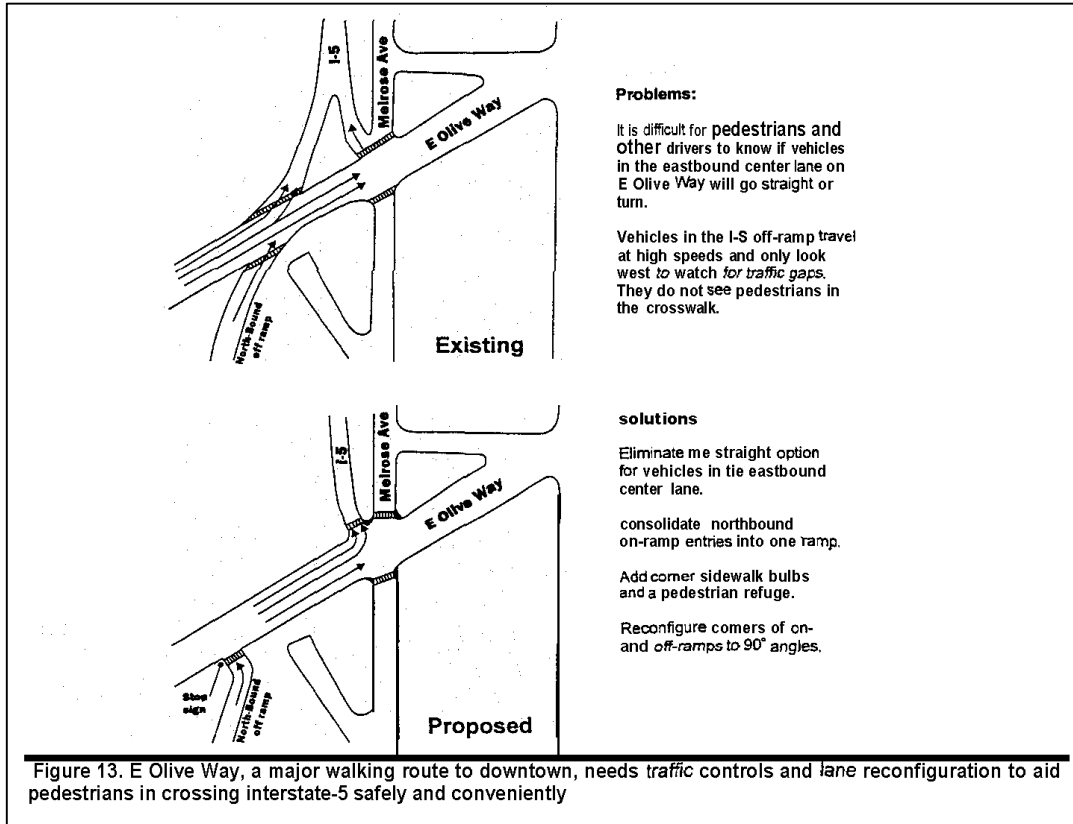


Figure 1 - Proposed configuration of the Olive Way freeway ramps from the Capitol Hill Neighborhood Plan, page 30.⁴

Another possible option at this interchange is to allow vehicles exiting Interstate 5 to turn left onto Olive Way, simplifying traffic flows to the WSCC Addition. This would necessitate converting the Olive Way overpass to two-way traffic, which is how Olive Way already operates on both ends of the overpass (see Figure 3 for one example of a concept design with this feature).

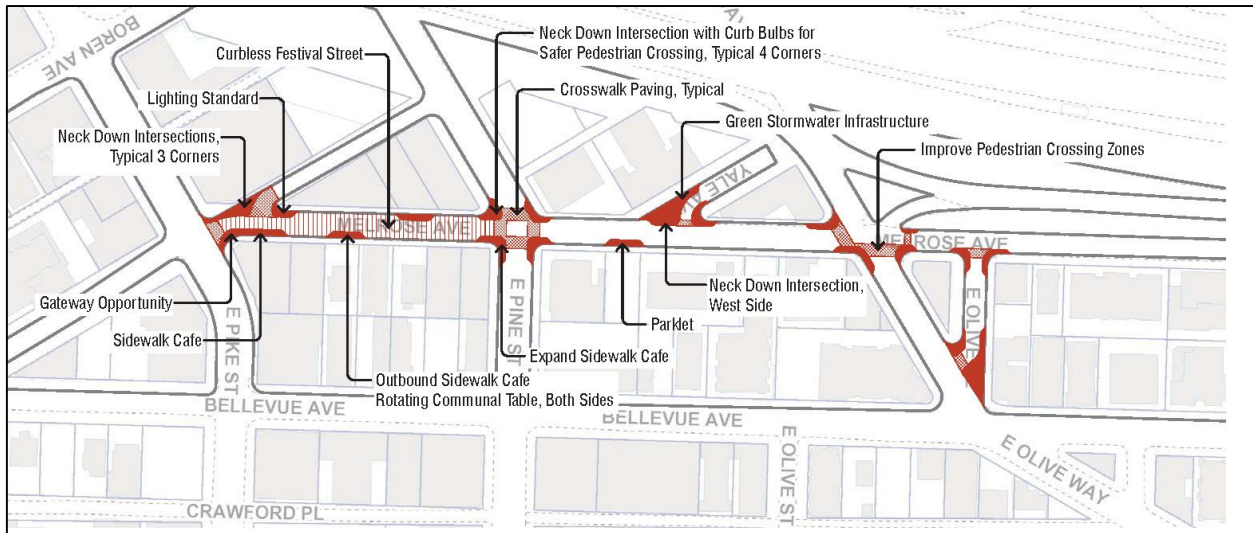


Figure 2 – Street improvements envisioned by the Melrose Promenade plan, page 49.⁵

The Melrose Promenade plan, more recently completed by community members with extensive stakeholder input, also envisions safer and shortened pedestrian crossings at the Melrose Avenue intersection with numerous sidewalk extensions (see Figure 2). Of particular importance is the narrowing of E Olive Place, which currently is an extremely wide crossing that draws significant traffic because of the eastbound left-turn restriction onto Melrose Avenue.

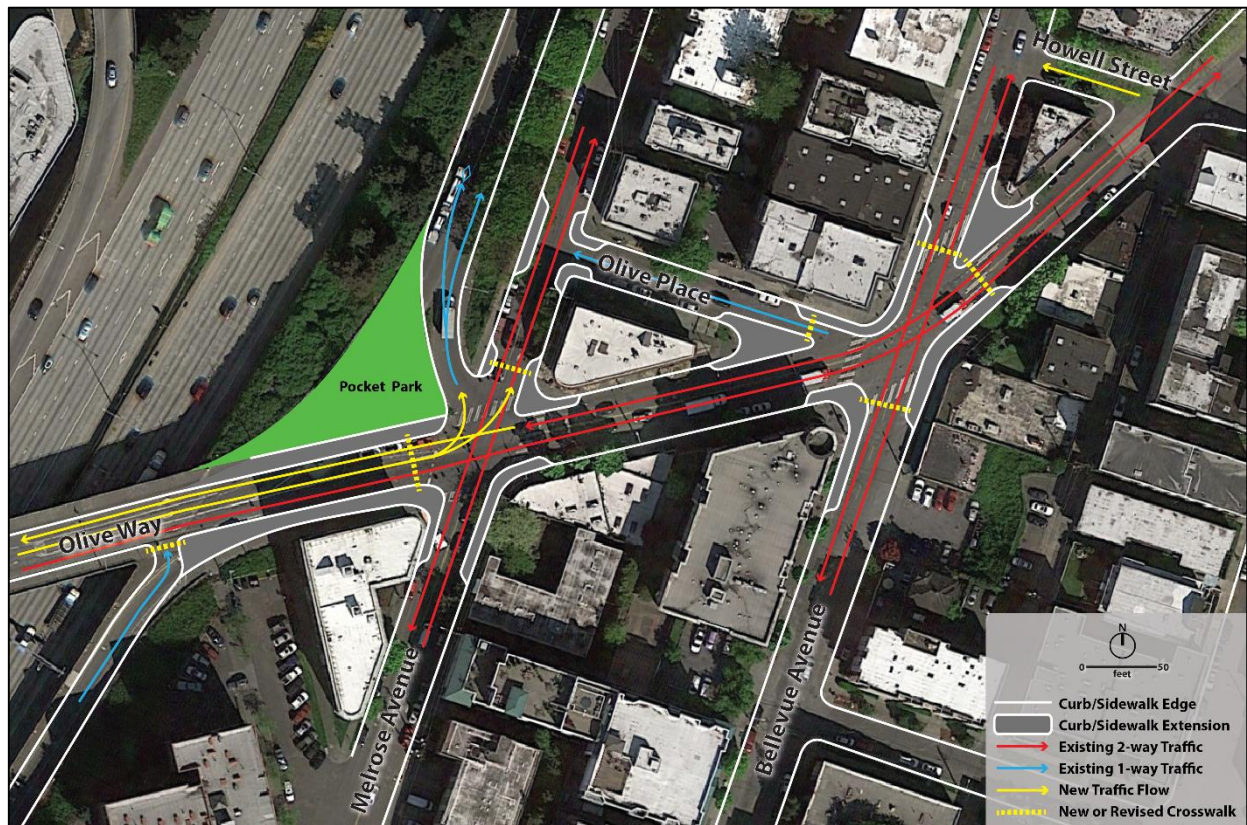


Figure 3. One concept for improving Olive Way at the I-5, Melrose Avenue, and Bellevue Avenue intersections.⁶

These improvements would effectively decrease the chance of traffic collisions for Olive Way's most vulnerable users. We are strongly interested in staying engaged on this issue and helping SDOT and the City Council develop a public benefit package that benefits the wider community. We appreciate your attention to this matter and the opportunity to provide comment on the street vacation process.

With regards,

Capitol Hill Community Council

Zachary Pullin, President
Elliot Helmbrecht, Vice President
Mike Archambault, Treasurer
Natalie Curtis, Secretary
Jesse Perrin, Member At-Large
Lauren Burgeson, Member At-Large

Seattle Central Greenways

Brie Gyncild, Chair
Merlin Rainwater, Co-Chair

Melrose Promenade

Michael Kent, Chair
Mel Burchett, Co-Chair

Capitol Hill Residents

Scott Bonjukian
Ryan Packer



¹ Collision data from *The Seattle Times*:

<http://old.seattletimes.com/flatpages/local/pedestrianandbicyclecollisionsinseattle.html>

² Washington State Convention Center Addition Draft Environmental Impact State, Page 2-32 (February 2016).

³ Capitol Hill Urban Center Village Neighborhood Plan, Page 26 (December 1998):

<http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/Planning/Plan/Capitol-Hill-plan.pdf>

⁴ Ibid, page 30.

⁵ Melrose Promenade Vision Project, page 46 (2013):

https://melrosepromenade.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/melrose-promenade_report_final.pdf

⁶ "Let's Make Olive Way a Safer Street for Everyone" by Scott Bonjukian (February 9, 2016), *The Urbanist*:

<https://www.theurbanist.org/2016/02/09/lets-make-olive-way-a-better-street-for-everyone/>



JIM ELLIS FREEWAY PARK ASSOCIATION

900 University Street | Seattle, WA 98101

March 18, 2015

Moira Gray & Beverly Barnett
Seattle Municipal Tower
700 5th Avenue
Seattle WA, 98104

To Moira Gray and Beverly Barnett,

We are writing on behalf of The Freeway Park Association (FPA) in an effort to secure public benefit funds as mitigation for the street vacations that have been requested for the Washington State Convention Center expansion project. We believe this request will benefit the Park, the Convention Center and the City at large.

Freeway Park is Seattle's largest downtown public space. The 5.2 acre park opened 40 years ago on July 4th, 1976, bridging Seattle's Downtown and First Hill neighborhoods after they were severed by the construction of I5. Designed by Lawrence Halprin and Angela Danadjieva, it is widely considered a masterwork of a modernist master and a precedent setting park that single-handedly defined a new land-use typology for American cities.

Freeway Park's unique brutalist architecture directly influenced the look and feel of the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) when it was constructed in 1985. And the Park's seamless connection to the south of WSCC essentially serves as its backyard. The lush plantings, tree canopies, artwork, and event programming provide tens of thousands of visitors to WSCC with flexible spaces for formal and informal meetings and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, enriching their experience and providing an elegant backdrop for work and play.

With the expansion plans, attendance at the Convention Center is projected to double from current levels. These extra hundreds of thousands of people will be amplified by increased numbers of employees, vendors, construction workers, and indirect employment at hotels, restaurants, etc. The need to accommodate these new users will have a significant and direct impact on Freeway Park, which is why we believe that public benefit funds are an appropriate source for mitigating this impact.

The Freeway Park Association has been working since 1993 to identify and shepherd improvements to Freeway Park ranging from extensive landscape renovations to unique programming and activation. Throughout all of our work to improve the Park we still recognize a distinct lack of visibility into the Park from its edges and entrances as well as a need for safe and easy way finding throughout its meandering and often disorienting landscape.



Therefore, in order to accommodate the increase of users in the Park, we need to make much-needed improvements to the Park's hidden entrances, outdated lighting infrastructure, and lack of wayfinding tools. These improvements will make the Park safer, easier to access, and more welcoming.

To this end, we intend to leverage the WSCC expansion's mandated public benefits to mutual gain, and are asking that the following projects to be considered as part of the public benefits package associated with the street and alleyway vacations.

- Visibility improvements to all 10 entrances to Freeway Park.
- Wayfinding infrastructure throughout the Park and directional signage into the Park.
- Updated and enhanced lighting throughout the Park.

These improvements meet the need for connectivity, visibility and public safety, helping visitors of all backgrounds to feel safer, more informed and welcomed into and throughout the Park. The benefits to the WSCC and Seattle at-large are hard to overstate. This masterwork of architecture and largest of Seattle's urban parks is often difficult to locate and hard to navigate, leading to underutilization and misuse. Creating a more inviting public realm will lead more people to use the Park and help to make all people feel that their experiences in Seattle are enjoyable and safe, which in turn has a direct impact on the WSCC's ability to attract and retain business.

The Freeway Park Association is excited about the WSCC Expansion Project, and the tens of thousands of new visitors in will bring to Seattle and to Freeway Park. We ask that the expansion project help us make this important green space safer and more accessible for these visitors to enjoy.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working together toward our mutual goals of creating wonderful experiences for people to work and play.

Sincerely,

Riisa Conklin
Executive Director

Robert Y Anderson
Board President

