



APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Ed Murray
Mayor

Diane Sugimura
Director, DPD

Marshall Foster
Planning Director, DPD

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Thaddeus Egging

Megan Groth

Martin Regge

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

Michael Jenkins
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Coordinator

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June 19, 2014

Convened 8:30 am

Adjourned 4:30 pm

Projects Reviewed

Waterfront – Overlook Walk

Block 93 – Westlake Ave N & N Mercer St

Commissioners Present

Osama Quotah, Chair

Shannon Loew, Vice Chair

Bernie Alonzo

Brodie Bain

Lee Copeland

Megan Groth

Martin Regge (excused at 3:00 pm)

Ellen Sollod

Ross Tilghman

Commissioners Excused

Thaddeus Egging

Staff Present

Michael Jenkins

Valerie Kinast

Nicolas Welch

Joan Nieman



June 19, 2014	Project:	Block 93 – Westlake Ave N & N Mercer St	
3:00 – 4:30 pm	Phase:	Public Benefit review	
	Previous reviews:	7/6/12; 6/21/12; 8/16/12	
	Presenters:	Patrick Gordon	ZGF Architects
	Attendees:	Beverly Barnett	SDOT
		Rachel Ben-Shmuel	Vulcan
		Sharon Coleman	Vulcan

Recusals and Disclosures

There were no recusals or disclosures.

Purpose of Review

The purpose of this meeting was to review the conditions included in the Design Commission’s 2012 approval of the public benefit package for Vulcan’s petition to vacate 4,368 sf of the alley between Mercer and Republican (and dedicate a 2,200 sf new alley segment) for its development at Block 93 in South Lake Union.

The project was approved by the City Council in 2012 (see Clerk File 312425). As part of that approval, Council adopted a condition requiring additional Design Commission review as the project progressed through design development. The condition was adopted because the project had received final approval from the Commission at an earlier stage of design than typical. The Commission’s final action on the project—7-0 of the public benefit package—was heavily conditioned. Accordingly the City Council required that the project return to the Design Commission to verify that the approved public benefit items 1) were fulfilled and 2) sufficiently read as public, particularly for the covered midblock pedestrian connection.

Summary of Proposal

In 2012, Vulcan petitioned and received approval to vacate a 4,368-square-foot portion of the alley between Mercer St and Republican St and dedicate a 2,200-square-foot new alley segment for a mixed-use development at Block 93. The site is bounded by Westlake Ave, Mercer St, Republic St, and 9th Ave N is the longest block in South Lake Union.

The public benefit package approved by the Design Commission and adopted by the City Council includes:

1. Voluntary building setbacks
2. Publicly accessible open space
3. Bicycle infrastructure
4. Streetscape amenities
5. Sustainable features
6. Streetcar station

Though not included in the public benefit package, the project team also contracted with the artist Spencer Finch to produce an overhead art glass piece for the midblock publicly accessible open space.

Summary of Presentation

Patrick Gordon provided an overview of the project, including a summary of the rationale for the vacation request. He stated that in exchange for the net 1,900 sf of alley vacated, the project creates 18,000 sf of privately owned public open space.

The presentation included a site plan with information on the project program and landscape plan. Mr. Gordon stated that because Westlake Ave is a Class 1 street, street-level uses like retail are required; the Mercer St frontage also has retail tenants. The project includes additional retail in the midblock connection between Westlake Ave and 9th Ave, referred to as “micro-eateries” that are intended activate that space. A tenant-only restaurant at the corner of 9th Ave and Republican St, where the South Lake Union neighborhood plan calls for retail.

Mr. Gordon then provided an overview of the of public benefit package reviewed and approved by the Commission in 2012 and subsequently conditioned by the City Council. The overview included a plan that showed the location of each public benefit feature. Mr. Gordon identified the features that have been implemented to date:

- The proposed bike share features have been included and expanded in size.
- Discussions continue between the applicant and SDOT about the location and function of the bike box on 9th Ave.
- The applicant has signed a contract with Pronto! bike share.
- The applicant has worked closely with Ethan Melone of SDOT on integrating ORCA card readers, signage, and furnishings into the setback of the building for the street car station.

Summary of Discussion

Overall the Commission was supportive of the direction the project team has taken with each of the public benefit items. The Commissioners believed the streetcar station was functioning well and took confidence in the team’s coordination with Ethan Melone of SDOT. The voluntary setbacks and streetscape amenities were well received, and the Commission was encouraged that the team has already secured a contract with Pronto! bike share. They also appreciated that the team pursued Green Factor and LEED Gold even though not code required.

A focal point of the discussion was the midblock publicly accessible open space. The Commission responded positively to the design and particularly appreciated the integration of artwork, which was not a public benefit item. The Commissioners also reiterated the need to provide overt cues to the public that this is an open and inviting space. The Commission believed the “micro” retail spaces proposed in the midblock connection are important for drawing people into the space but wished that the exterior walls that define these spaces pulled out from the building façade to increase their visibility from the right-of-way.

The Commission noted that the Council condition required the project to return for Commission review not near project completion but at 60% design, which is standard practice for projects subject to Commission review. The Commission was concerned that, had today’s review not occurred when the project was well into construction, the discussion would have resulted in conditions or direction that the applicant could have implemented. Instead, the Commissioners were not able to give meaningful

feedback on any element of the project design. Had it been determined that the project team did not satisfy one or more of the public benefit included in the Commission's 2012 action, it was unclear how the review process would move forward. Some Commissioners were particularly frustrated with this situation given the applicant's experience and familiarity with the Design Commission process. The Commission suggested arranging a future conversation with the applicant to evaluate how the vacation approval process is functioning and examine the outcomes of recent projects.

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett explained the reason the team is here subsequent to Design Commission and City Council approval. The Council wanted the Design Commission to verify that the streetscape elements were fulfilled as promised. She noted that this is likely to happen in the future; the 4755 Fauntleroy project is an example. Given the implementation issues that often arise, Council has a desire for the Design Commission to review the public benefit items even after approval.

The project in question raised several issues that are important to examine. A primary concern is the character of the public benefit since it is located interior to the site and covered. The Design Commission has had similar conversations on other projects. Ms. Barnett stated that she wants to hear the Commission's thoughts on the design team's goal of making the space inviting to the general public—people with no business or commercial interest at the site and not necessarily looking to spend money. She believes the team has covered the other concerns well.

Public Comments

none

Action

The Design Commission thanked the project team for presenting the updated public benefit package for the vacation of the alley between Mercer St and Republican St at Block 93 in South Lake Union. The Commission previously reviewed and recommended approval for this alley vacation in 2012, and the vacation was approved by the City Council the same year. While the Council approval required the project to return for Commission review at 60% design, this review did not occur. The project team gave no indication as to why they did not contact the Commission to schedule the review. The Commission was disappointed and frustrated that this review occurred so much later than the City Council approval required. The Commissioners indicated that proceeding with the design beyond 60% without Commission review precluded any meaningful feedback, conditions, or direction that could affect the project design.

With a **vote of 8-0**, the Design Commission determined that the project team had fulfilled the Council's conditions concerning the appearance and function of the public benefit package. The Commission reviewed the six public benefit categories provided the following comments:

- The Commission appreciates the project team's coordination with SDOT on the streetcar station, whose design appears to function well.
- Though not included in the public benefit package or required by code, Green Factor, pursuit of LEED Gold, and the integration of art into the public open space are all worthy of praise.
- Continue to pursue the bike box on 9th Ave N, which the Commission strongly supports.
- Ensure that adequate cues are provided that indicate to the public that they can enter the midblock public open space.

Because the project team did not bring the project for review earlier as required by the Council conditions, and due to the fact that the public benefit features are near completion, the Commission does not anticipate any further review of this project. It is unlikely that the Commission will support or recommend approval of future street or alley vacations that do not include a fully designed public benefit package at the time of Commission review. However, the Commission does appreciate Council's requests to involve the Design Commission in subsequent reviews of projects following their approval to examine how specific project details have progressed through construction.