

Seattle Center Skate Plaza

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Commissioners Present

Ben de Rubertis, Chair
Brianna Holan, Vice Chair
Justin Clark
Rikerrious Geter
Laura Haddad (excused at Noon)
Mark Johnson
Rick Krochalis
Amalia Leighton
Vinita Sidhu
Elaine Wine

Commissioners Excused

Project Description

Seattle Center is proposing to relocate an existing skate park to an undeveloped portion of Broad St. right-of-way (ROW) between 5th Ave N and Taylor Ave N in the Uptown Neighborhood. In 2009 a 10,000-square foot skatepark opened near the southeast corner of the Seattle Center Arena. The proposed redevelopment of the Seattle Center Arena will require the existing skatepark to be demolished. The new skate plaza would be located in the Broad Street right of way and will include above ground skateable elements, seating, vegetation, street trees, and green stormwater management as well as gathering spaces for groups and classes

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) second review of the Seattle Center Skate Plaza project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the design development phase for the project. The SDC took an action on two items during today's meeting, phase I and phase II design proposals. The SDC voted 6-3 to approve the phase I design proposal with one condition to be reviewed at a future subcommittee meeting. The SDC then voted 9-0 to approve the phase II design.

Recusals and Disclosures

Vinita Sidhu disclosed that her employer, SiteWorkshop, applied for the project but was not selected.

August 1, 2019

10:30 am- 12:15 pm

Type

CIP

Phase

Design Development

Previous Reviews[4/4/19](#)**Presenters**Lesley Bain
FrameworkPerri Howard
ArtistJulia Levitt
Seattle CenterMark van der Zalm
VDZ+A**Attendees**Beverly Barnett
SDOTJill Crary
Seattle CenterSoph Elden
Skate like a GirlAmy Gray
SDOTMary Junntila
SCLScott Shinn
Parents for SkateparksRuri Yampolsky
OACSara Zora
SDOT**Summary of Presentation**

Julia Levitt, of Seattle Center, Lesley Bain, of Framework, Mark van der Zalm, of VDZ + A and Perri Howard, Artist, presented the design development phase for the Seattle Center Skate Plaza project. The project team began by providing a summary of responses to previous recommendations made at the April 4th 2019 meeting. The team then discussed the terms of the ordinance approved by City Council on July 22, which transferred a portion of the Broad Street right-of-way (ROW) from SDOT to Seattle Center. As part of the terms, SDOT required that the project continue to maintain access for vehicles through the ROW to provide for alley access and service needs of the block to the north, but that the access may be removed if the alley to the north is vacated by the property owner in the event of future development. Seattle Center is also required to maintain access to the Seattle City Light Annex from Thomas St. in perpetuity.

As a result of needing to maintain a vehicle access drive in the near term, the project will be developed in two phases. Phase I will include an east and west skating area, divided by the vehicle access drive. The west skating area is smaller in size and features more advanced skating elements, while the east skating area will be open with lower vegetation, skating elements, and an open plaza for gatherings, workshops, and classes. A pedestrian pathway along the northern edge of the site will connect the full site across the vehicle access drive. Physical barriers including landscape buffers, railings and boulders stand between the skating elements and vehicle access drive, to reduce possible conflicts between plaza users and vehicles. The vehicle access drive will include physical cues such as a raised stamped crosswalk, speed cushion, and signage to let drivers know they are entering a pedestrian area. *See figure 1 for more detail*

Phase II assumes that the alley has been vacated and the vehicular path eliminated. This phase proposes connecting the east and west skating areas with additional skateable features, trees, and vegetation. The raised pedestrian crosswalk will be replaced by a pedestrian pathway and planting strip matching the rest of the pathway treatment. Access from Thomas St to the Seattle City Light Broad Annex will be maintained, with physical buffers separating the driveway from the skateboarding area. *See figure 1 for more detail.*

In both phases of the design, art and lighting will be integrated throughout the site. The project will re-contextualize the original glass artwork created by Perri Howard for the previous Seattle Center skatepark, and install them to serve as an interesting edge along Thomas St as well as along the skateable ramps and seating areas. The design proposal includes lighting along the pedestrian pathway. The project team discussed possible future enhancement opportunities such as an overhead shelter and additional specialty lighting for skating areas and artistic element. Those elements are not included in the current proposal, but could be added in the future if funded by 3rd party sources.

Agency Comments

Sara Zora, SDOT, mentioned that they had previously committed to see how SDOT could address the vehicular drive isle at April 4th SDC meeting. Sara Zora then stated that they had several discussions between departments and the project team about potential scenarios and outcomes for the plaza design. Sara also mentioned that SDOT was provided with information regarding potential changes to the parcel north of the project site, which altered what design solutions should be considered for both the interim period and long term. As a result of that information, SDOT decided there could be a drive aisle



Figure 1: Phase I design proposal (top) & Phase II design proposal (bottom)

for the existing business in the interim and that the drive aisle could be closed if the north parcel were to be redeveloped. Sara Zora then stated that although visibility from the Ride the Ducks vehicles is not ideal, both SDOT and Seattle Center were comfortable with this interim solution.

Public Comments

Soph Elden, Skate like a Girl, commented that although they were originally nervous about having vehicular access running through the site with kids skating on either side, they now feel more comfortable after seeing how the project team has designed the spaces in a way to prevent kids from running into the alley. Soph Elden then mentioned that it would be a good idea to place an additional speed bump along the vehicular access area before entering through the skate plaza area to serve as visual cue that someone is entering into a new space. They then stated that it would be nice to have shade in the amphitheater or gathering area and that they would prefer the project team provided sport lighting over mood lighting to increase visibility for skaters.

Scott Shinn, Parents for Skateparks, stated that this proposal was the most detailed design they have seen to date. Scott Shinn then thanked the project team for their efforts, followed by thanking the SDC for reviewing the project.

Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion of the pedestrian land bridge around the following issues:

- Circulation and safety
- Skate programs
- Materials

Circulation and safety

The SDC is very concerned with safety issues associated with the phase I interim design proposal. The Commission also expressed its concern that alternative options have been overlooked, such as making the vehicular access drive one way direction. Commissioners reminded the project team that it will be difficult for the Ride the Ducks vehicle to maintain good sight lines while using the vehicular access drive.

The Commission then discussed the possibility of only developing the eastern portion of the site for skating in the interim while the western portion of the site could be for pedestrian use. Opinions on this solution varied between commissioners, with some believing the solution would solve their safety issues, while others maintaining that the solution would not fully eliminate the need for crossing the vehicular access drive. Commissioners also commented that in the event that phase II is never constructed, they should advocate for building as much skateable area as possible in phase 1. The Commission then agreed that SDOT and Seattle Center should work to solve the vehicular access through the site, including rerouting Ride the Ducks vehicular access to 5th Avenue rather than recommending Seattle Center to only develop a small portion of the site.

Skate programs

The SDC commended the project team for their integration of the art within the design. Although the Commission appreciated the re-adaptation of the art panels and its positive impact on the pedestrian experience along Thomas St, several commissioners were concerned that the panels would reduce visibility into the skate plaza. The commission encouraged the project team to think about balancing the art and seating opportunities with providing views into the plaza from the Thomas street edge.

The Commission then encouraged the project team to think about multigenerational use and providing seating opportunities for all user groups. The Commissioners appreciated the location of a gathering space near the intersection of Thomas St and 5th Ave N, but also encouraged the project team to provide the same programming near the northeast corner of the site, along Taylor Ave N. Commissioners then encouraged the team to reorient some of the boulder seating to provide better views of the skating area.

Materials

The SDC again commended the project team for their integration of the art panels along Thomas St. Several commissioners then expressed their concern with using galvanized steel for railing and skateable elements. The Commission also recommended the project team provide sport lighting and a shade structure in the phase I design.

Action

The SDC thanked the project team for their presentation of the schematic phase for the Seattle Center Skate Plaza project. Overall, the Commission commended the project team their presentation. The SDC appreciated the long term design vision for the plaza, but continued to express their strong concern with allowing a vehicle access drive during the interim period. The SDC took two actions during today's meeting. The first action addressed the phase II, or long term, design, while the second action addressed the phase I interim design. The SDC voted, 9-0 to approve the phase II design with no conditions or recommendations. The SDC then voted, 6-3, to approve the phase I interim design with the following condition:

1. Provide further study and evaluation of the vehicular access drive for the Ride the Ducks business.

The following are statements from commissioners who voted against the phase I interim design for the Seattle Center Skate Plaza:

Rikerrious Geter- stated that the study might not result in anything different from what is proposed in the interim design and there would still be a concern about the overall safety of the users falling into the vehicular access drive entrance for the Ride the Ducks business. Any opportunity to eliminate that interference would be greatly appreciated, but without seeing that eliminated, he is not comfortable approving the project.

Ben de Rubertis- stated that the observations provided from SDOT made him more concerned about potential conflicts between large vehicles and plaza users and that it highlighted structural weakness in the plan. The lack of studying an alternative access for the Ride the Ducks business is the source of the critical flaw and he would encourage the design team and agencies to come up with that solution rather than introduce a conflict.

Brianna Holan- stated that her concerns are the same with the access points. She likes the park and appreciates the programming amount of work going into it but cannot stomach the concern with the location of the vehicular access drive and is very concerned with children skating there.