

Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation

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Justin Clark

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Rick Krochalis

Amalia Leighton

Vinita Sidhu

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Commissioners Present

Brianna Holan, Acting Chair

Justin Clark

Mark Johnson

Rick Krochalis

Amalia Leighton

Vinita Sidhu

Lucas Whitesell

Elaine Wine

Commissioners Excused

Non-voting Commissioners Present

Elizabeth Conner

Non-voting Commissioners Excused

Azzurra Cox

Project Description

Seattle City Light (SCL) is petitioning to vacate a segment of Diagonal Ave S between 4th Ave S and the BNSF railroad tracks in the SODO neighborhood. This segment is adjacent to SCL's South Service center and is currently used for storage under a previously approved street use permit. The project team is proposing to use the vacated ROW to make improvements to the existing South Service Center. The public benefit proposal includes providing additional open space within the Georgetown neighborhood that will integrate with the Georgetown to South Park Trail. The proposed project will be reviewed as both a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project as well as a street vacation.

Meeting Summary

This was the Seattle Design Commission's (SDC) second review of the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the concept design phase (30% design) for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) project and the Public Trust Analysis for the vacation request. The SDC took two separate actions during today's meeting. The SDC approved, 8-0, the concept design phase for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project. The SDC then approved, 8-0, the public trust analysis for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project with several recommendations.

Recusals and Disclosures

Amalia Leighton Disclosed that her employer is working with SDOT on the South Park to Georgetown trail project

July 2, 2020

9:00 - 11:00 am

Type

CIP & Street Vacation

Phase

Concept Design (CIP) & Public Trust Analysis (Vacation)

Previous Reviews[10/3/19](#)**Presenters**

Tim Croll

Seattle City Light

Ruth Meraz-Caron

Seattle City Light

Emily Griffith

Seattle Parks & Recreation

Hallie O'Brien

Seattle Dept. of Transportation

Mark Jaeger

Seattle Public Utilities

Attendees

Eduardo Aban

Seattle Parks & Recreation

Beverly Barnett

Seattle Dept. of Transportation

Colin Campbell

Seattle Parks & Recreation

David Goldberg

Office of Planning & Community Development

MichaelT Houston

Seattle Dept. of Construction & Inspections

Joy Jacobson

Seattle Finance & Admin. Services

Danyal Lofti

Seattle Parks & Recreation

Sarah Sodt

Seattle Dept. of Neighborhoods



Image 1: Project location (highlighted in dark gray & red on left and blue & red on right)

Summary of Presentation

Tim Croll and Ruth Meraz-Caron, of Seattle City Light, Emily Griffith, of SPR, Hallie O'Brien, of SDOT, and Mark Jaeger, of SPU presented the proposed CIP concept design and public trust analysis for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project. The project team provided background information such as the project location (see figure 1), current use and conditions and site constraints as well as recommendations and guidance provided by the SDC during the previous review.

The project team then provided a vacation and no vacation alternative for the project. The purpose of the vacation request is to provide a better solution to the partial vacation granted in 1986, allows for a more efficient use of the site, and to integrate the site with circulation of the existing South Center facility. The proposed project resulting from the street vacation will provide weather protection for stored materials and equipment while reducing flooding and improving stormwater runoff and site security.

The no vacation alternative would allow the site to continue to function as is, but would not include site improvements to the Diagonal Ave S property nor would it allow SCL to integrate the property within the existing South Center facility. The no vacation alternative would also exclude the development of open space in Georgetown.

The project team then presented the public trust analysis for the proposed vacation as well as an overview of the public benefit proposal. Because the site use would not change as a result of the vacation request, the project team stated that the vacation would have little impact on the surrounding site context, including utilities, circulation and access, light, air, views, land use, urban form, and open space. The proposed vacation would increase onsite suitability through the reduction of flooding and stormwater runoff.

The public benefit proposal includes the development of the Flume property in the Georgetown neighborhood into open space (see figure 2). The proposed design includes the development of an off-leash area and pathway connecting the Georgetown to South Park trail. The design would also include trees, mature vegetation, and fencing around the perimeter of the site. The proposed design is a result of a continuing partnership between SCL, Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), and Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). The Design will include funding from each department as well as long-term maintenance commitments from SPR and SDOT.



Image 2: Proposed open space design for the FLUME property

Agency Comments

Beverly Barnett, SDOT, provided comments on both the vacation request as well as the applicants public benefit proposal. Beverly commented that the project is being reviewed under the revised vacation policy and followed up with details about revisions made to the updated policy. Beverly then stated that issues about scale and impacts related to this vacation petition are different than petitions for projects located in other areas due to its location, which helps when analyzing what the project team is proposing and the potential impact it will have on the public. Beverly also stated that the project team did good job explaining the unique issues surrounding the location of the project as well as the vacation request. Beverly commented that the project team has worked to clearly articulate the need for the vacation and how the site will be used, which is consistent with what the City expects. Beverly then stated that it seems appropriate to move forward with the vacation petition.

Regarding the public benefit proposal, Beverly stated that the project team must provide a benefit that is functional and usable at the time of the vacation request. Beverly then stated that it should be clear that SCL is providing the public benefit, as they are the applicant, and that the public benefit review should be based on what they are proposing. Only after the public benefit is reviewed based on SCL's proposal, should partnerships between other city agencies be reviewed to see how the public benefit can be expanded over time.

Public Comments

Written comments from members of the public were sent The Commission prior to the meeting.

Summary of Discussion

Concept design

The Commission organized its discussion on the concept design around the following issues:

- Access, circulation, and site design
- Impacts to the project site and surrounding context
- Supported utilities

Access, circulation, and site design

The SDC first discussed the merit of providing additional improvements outside of the site perimeter. Commissioners agreed that, while it is important to think critically about any potential impacts being made in the neighborhood, there would be little change to the site function as a result of the vacation request and that prioritizing the development of the public benefit proposal seemed to be the most appropriate use of project funding. The Commission acknowledged the unique situation of this project, based on the site location and present use, and commented that it would not set a precedent for future project reviews.

Impacts to the project site and surrounding context

The SDC did not have any issues related to the potential effect on open space, light, air, views, land use, and urban form as they relate to the proposed design. Commissioners recognized there would be minimal changes to the site function as a result of the street vacation.

Supported utilities

The SDC recognized that the approval of the street vacation petition would allow SCL to fully utilize the site and that they should be advocating for the full utilization of City owned property. The Commission then recognized how the proposed design resulting from the street vacation would enhance the resiliency and viability of the existing SCL service center.

Public trust phase

The Commission organized its discussion on the public trust phase around the following issues:

- Vacation request
- Public benefit consideration
- General comments

Vacation request

The Commission stated that the project team had provided a more detailed explanation as to why they are requesting the street vacation. The Commission restated that the current use would not change due to the street vacation, and that SCL would be able to more fully utilize the site. Commissioners also acknowledged that as a result of this vacation petition, additional open space would be provided for a community in a way that would otherwise not occur. The SDC then commented that as currently presented, once the applicant makes the initial investment in the public benefit proposal, redeveloping land in Georgetown referred to as the "FLUME" property to SPR for open space and trail use, then it would be up to City Council to provide funding for partnering City Departments to achieve the full build out of the space.

Public benefit consideration

The SDC focused its discussion on the proposal to shift jurisdiction of the FLUME property in Georgetown from SCL to SPR and develop the land as an offleash area and trail in partnership with SPR and SDOT. Specifically, the Commission discussed whether the proposal was in proportion to the vacation request. While the SDC appreciated SCL commitment to provide additional open space in the Georgetown neighborhood, commissioners were concerned with the limited funding available for the project development. The Commission agreed that the proposal would not be sufficient if it could not be fully developed due to budget restrictions and strongly recommended the project team provide information about funding commitment during the next meeting. The SDC then recommended the project team provide a design alternative to address how the project could be constructed in phases to address funding issues. The Commission also recommended the team provide additional information on departmental funding and project phasing to better understand how design elements would be implemented.

While the Commission appreciated the project teams ability to create a detailed design with a limited budget, commissioners were concerned with the lack of amenities, such as site furnishings, and stated that the team should focus on creating an open space that can be fully utilized and serve as a long term asset for the community. The Commission encouraged the project team to consider how they provide site furnishings and other amenities through project phasing. The Commission then recommended the project team consider providing additional screening along the eastern edge of the project site.

General comments

The SDC stressed the importance of public involvement throughout the planning and design process.

Commissioners strongly recommended the project team ensure that community engagement is well documented and that it includes demographic data from public participation. The Commission then recommended the project team provide information about how the project team is addressing issues raised by community.

Action

The Commission took two separate actions during today's meeting. The first action was taken for the concept design for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation & CIP project. A second action was taken for the public trust analysis for the Street Vacation component of the project.

The SDC thanked the project team for their concept design presentation for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project. The commission appreciated the detail provided in the presentation and is excited to see how the project will develop. The SDC voted, 8-0, to approve the concept design for the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project.

The SDC then voted, 8-0, to approve the public trust analysis phase of the SCL Diagonal Ave S Street Vacation project with the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that community engagement is well documented and that it includes demographic data from public participation.
2. Provide information about how the project team is addressing issues raised by community
3. Provide information about funding commitments for the public benefit proposal
4. Provide a design alternative to address how project could be constructed in phases.
5. Provide additional information on departmental funding and project phasing to better understand how design elements will be implemented.
6. Consider additional screening from adjacent parcel along the eastern edge of the project site