

# Seattle Center Skate Plaza

**Jenny A. Durkan**  
Mayor

**Samuel Asefa**  
Director, OPCD

**Ben de Rubertis** Vice Chair

**Justin Clark**

**Rikerrious Geter**

**Laura Haddad**

**Brianna Holan**

**Mark Johnson**

**Rick Krochalis**

**Michael Jenkins**  
Director

**Valerie Kinast**  
Coordinator

**Aaron Hursey**  
Planner

**Matthew Allen**  
Administrative Staff

**Office of Planning and  
Community Development  
Seattle City Hall**  
600 4th Avenue, 5th Floor  
Seattle, WA 98124

**TEL** 206-684-0435  
**FAX** 206-233-2784  
[seattle.gov/designcommission](http://seattle.gov/designcommission)

## Commissioners Present

Justin Clark  
Rikerrious Geter  
Laura Haddad  
Brianna Holan  
Mark Johnson  
Rick Krochalis

## Commissioners Excused

Ben de Rubertis, Vice Chair

## 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) first review of the Seattle Center Skate Plaza project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the concept design (30% design phase) for the project. After the presentation and discussion, the SDC voted 4-2 to approve the concept design phase with several recommendations.

## Recusals and Disclosures

**Mark Johnson**, disclosed that his firm was a part of a team that pursued the project, but was not selected.

**April 4, 2019**

9:00 - 10:30 am

**Type**

CIP

**Phase**

Concept Design (30% phase)

**Previous Reviews**

None

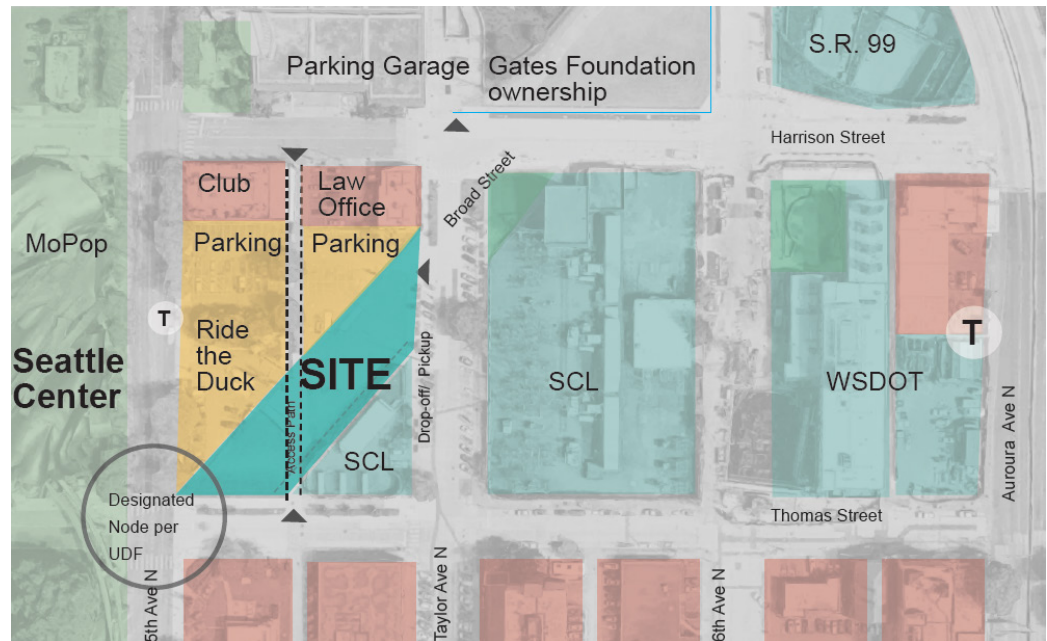
**Presenters**Lesley Bain  
FrameworkJill Crary  
Seattle CenterMark van der Zalm  
VDZ+AJulia Levitt  
Seattle CenterPerri Howard  
Artist**Attendees**Kristin Ebeling  
Skate Like a GirlAmy Gray  
SDOTMatt Johnston  
Seattle Center Skatepark  
CoalitionMary Junttila  
SCLRobert Nellams  
Seattle CenterMatthias Olt  
DLR GroupChris Ray  
New Line SkateparksKanton Russell  
New Line SkateparksRuri Yampolsky  
OACSara Zora  
SDOT

Figure 1 Proposed location of skate plaza (labeled as "SITE")

**Summary of Presentation**

Jill Crary and Julia Levitt, of Seattle Center, Mark van der Zalm, of VDZ+A, and Lesley Bain, of Framework, presented the concept design for the Seattle Center Skate Plaza. The presentation included a brief history of skateboarding at Seattle Center as well as a summary of the site context and community outreach. This is the second time the skate facility has been relocated. The first skate park was constructed in 2000 and was located on what is now the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation property. In 2009, the skate park was relocated near the southeast corner of Seattle Center Arena; the park closed in October 2018. The current proposal will relocate the facility within the unused portion of Broad St, between 5th Ave N, Thomas St. and Taylor Ave N. (see figure 1).

The project team described the proposed skate plaza as meeting the intent of the Seattle Center Master Plan to enhance connections between the campus and the surrounding neighborhood, improving and activating pedestrian connections between Seattle Center, Uptown and South Lake Union, and filling gaps in the Seattle Citywide Skatepark Plan (2007). Recent upzones within the Uptown Neighborhood have increased the height and density, and the team anticipates the existing low-rise buildings and surface parking lots adjacent to the site will be redeveloped. The site will have to maintain service access for the adjacent parcel owned by Seattle City Light. The site also includes a paved access path, built for a temporary construction easement during the Mercer Corridor West construction, which connects to the private parcel and the alley to the north. The project team is working with SDOT to understand if they are required to maintain vehicular access through the site.

The project team then described the collaboration with skateboarder groups as part of their larger outreach efforts. Representatives from Seattle Center Skatepark Coalition and Skate Like a Girl have remained committed to participating as the City's partners in site selection, programming, feasibility studies, RFPs, and design team selections. The vision and values of the stakeholder group are to create a facility that is inclusive of all ages, gender identities, and abilities.

Perri Howard, the design team artist, described how her original laminated glass art panels created for the 2009 Seattle Center Skatepark have been

temporarily removed and stored so that they can be re-contextualized into the new project. Hand-cast bronze figures of skateboarders originally created for the 2000 Seattle Center skatepark have also been removed and stored for incorporation into the new project.

The project team then presented three conceptual designs – named Sawtooth, Dichotomy, and Hilltop. The designs included non-skating functions for rest and spectating as a way to be inclusive and inviting. The designs respond to the topography of the site and include hardscape and planting materials as well as sustainability elements to create a sense of place. See figures 2-4 for more detail.

**Agency Comments**  
None

**Public Comments**

**Matthias Olt**, of DLR Group, stated his preference for the Hilltop design concept, which recognizes the topography of the site and includes a strategy to provide future pedestrian circulation for the property to the north, where the plaza will likely transition from public to private space. Mr. Olt then encouraged the design team to come up with suggestions to think about safety and security around the site as well as near the alley since the proposed on-site programming will target youth.

**Matt Johnston**, Seattle Center Skatepark Coalition, encouraged the commission to think about what is important to skateboarders. Mr. Johnston then stated that skateboarders previously thought about what can make parks better for them, but that it has evolved to thinking about how to design a skate park that is inclusive and inviting for all. Mr. Johnston said that this is a unique opportunity to have a showcase skatepark that is designed from the beginning to be inclusive as well as a space for skaters to progress. Mr. Johnston then voiced his concern with the alley followed by recommending the design include a covered space for weather protection.

**Kristin Ebeling**, of Skate Like a Girl, is excited to be a part of the project. Ms. Ebeling then acknowledged the youth centered nature of the plaza, stating that skateboarding is going to be in Olympic sport in 2020, which will hopefully inspire the next generation of skateboarders. Ms. Ebeling then said that the plaza should be designed to attract youth who haven't started skating yet and should serve as a safe space. Ms. Ebeling then stated that the new plaza should increase access and equity by creating space that is well lit and includes a covered area for weather protection.

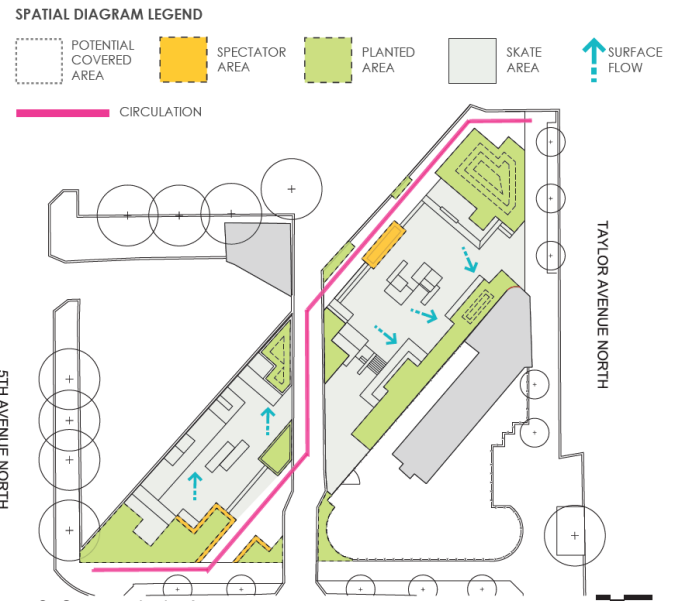


Figure 2: Sawtooth design concept

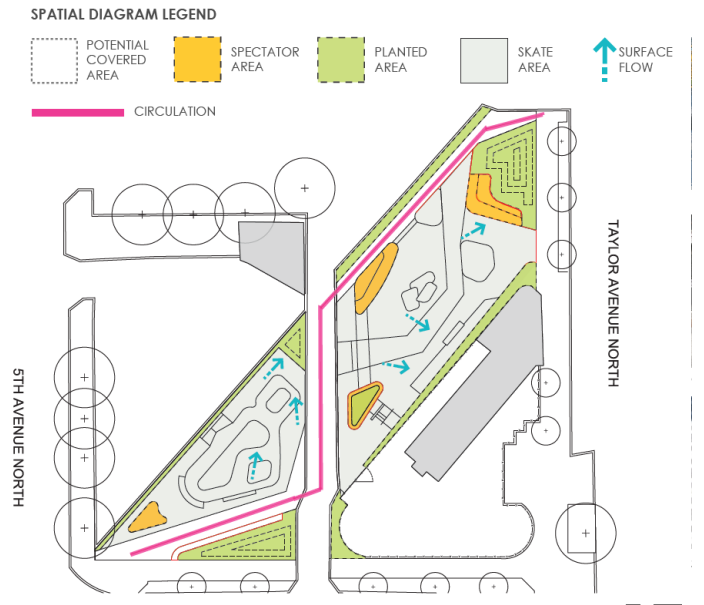


Figure 3: Dichotomy design concept

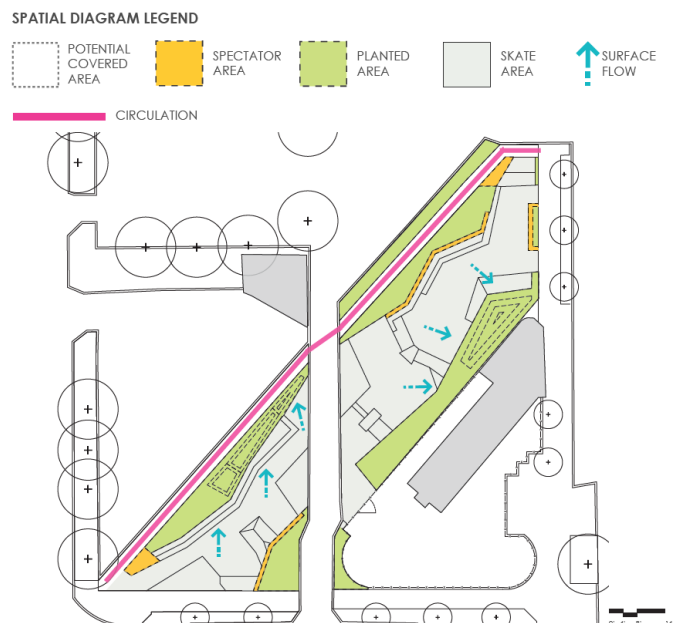


Figure 4: Hilltop design concept

## Summary of Discussion

The Commission organized its discussion around the following issues:

- Equity and inclusion
- Public engagement and influence of scope and program
- Sizing and configuration of program
- Design response to site conditions
- Art and lighting

### *Equity and inclusion*

Although the Commission appreciated the project team's plan to reach out to different communities across the city in the near future, they expressed their concern with the lack of diverse community members and organizations involved with the planning and design process to date. Commissioners want to ensure a greater, more diverse group of users feel like the plaza is being designed for them to use as well. The Commission then strongly recommended the project team bring more voices to the design conversation by engaging with diverse communities and organizations throughout the city.

### *Public engagement and influence of scope and program*

Although the SDC expressed their concern with the lack of outreach to diverse communities and organizations, commissioners appreciated the level of involvement from communities and organizations who were engaged throughout the process and their influence on shaping the design concepts.

### *Sizing and configuration of program*

The SDC is very concerned with the location and use of the paved vehicular access path. Commissioners voiced their support for removing the access path that connects the adjacent alley to Thomas St, stating that vehicular paths generally do not cut through critical program elements in other urban parks and plazas. Commissioners also commented that the proposed design shouldn't be influenced or limited due to providing access for vehicles. If the access path cannot be removed, the Commission strongly encouraged the project team to design the site to promote safety along the path edge as much as possible. Commissioners then recognized the challenges with safely designing a public space that must accommodate vehicular circulation. The SDC strongly recommended the project team continue to negotiate solutions to resolve access to the alley north of the site and to show how these solutions are reflected in the proposed design.

The SDC then acknowledged that the skate plaza has been relocated several times and are concerned that the skate plaza will be viewed as a short term or temporary use. Commissioners then discussed how the proposed design and programming can increase the permanence of the plaza at this location. The Commission encouraged the project team to think about the future urban character of the surrounding parcels to better understand how the plaza can be a catalyst for any future development while serving as an asset for the surrounding community.

### *Design response to site conditions*

The SDC acknowledged the importance of the area near the intersection 5th Ave N and Thomas St. as it serves as an entrance to Seattle Center. The Commission recommended the project team show how the proposed design adjacent to that intersection will respond to and serve as an additional entrance to the Seattle Center campus. Commissioners then agreed with the integration of stormwater elements as skateable features within the site and are excited to see how this design element will continue to evolve.

The Commission continued to express their concern with having the vehicular access path dividing the plaza. Commissioners then strongly recommended making the pedestrian crossing the access path as short as possible if the project team is required to maintain the access pathway.

### *Art and lighting*

The SDC commended the project team for their innovative lighting strategy, specifically with the proposal to integrate lighting within planting areas, surface materials, and other elements. Commissioners encouraged the project team to continue moving forward with those ideas. Commissioners then encouraged the project team to use innovative lighting technology to increase safety around the access path, such as using lighting changes when vehicles are passing through.

The Commission encouraged the project team to pay close attention to the placement of light fixtures so to not have lighting that cast shadows on skating elements. Commissioners then recommended the project team consider sighting both pedestrian lighting and technical lighting for skateboarding to ensure there being adequate lighting levels throughout the site.

The SDC then commended the project team for their preservation and reuse of existing artwork. Several commissioners voiced their concern with positioning opaque glass panels within the plaza as they can limit transparency and permeability throughout. The commission did not have a specific solution to limit the reduction of transparency, but encouraged the project team to explore other uses and/or locations for the glass panels such as a canopy cover.

### Action

The Commission thanked the project team for its presentation on the concept design phase for the Seattle Center Skate Plaza. Overall the Commission appreciated the project team's public engagement strategy, which has allowed the community to have a sense of ownership and pride over the plaza, as well as the reuse of existing art. The SDC voted, 4-2, to approve the concept design phase of the Seattle Center Skate Plaza with the following recommendations:

1. Bring more voices to the design conversation by engaging with diverse communities and organizations throughout the city.
2. Continue to negotiate solutions to resolve access to the alley and show how these solutions are reflected in the proposed design
3. Continue to think about how the plaza design will relate to future development to the north of the project site.
4. Show how the intersection at 5th Ave N and Thomas St respond to the Seattle Center campus
5. Shorten the pedestrian crossing across the proposed vehicular access path
6. Consider sighting both pedestrian lighting and technical lighting for skateboarding
7. Consider providing a covered area for weather protection

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

**Laura Haddad-** Although I fully support the project and appreciate the direction the design is heading, I have too many concerns with setting up a condition where small children are skating across a functioning alley. This design issue doesn't seem resolved enough for me to support it.

**Brianna Holan-** I agree with what Laura Haddad said. I can't in good conscience support this project without resolving the issue of having an alley crossing the plaza. That design issue needs to be adequately addressed prior to moving forward.