



Public Meeting Summary
First Hill Park Acquisition Project
Skyline at First Hill
Tuesday, December 1, 2009
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Meeting purpose: Discuss park acquisition criteria, funding, site search history, recommendation for purchase.

The meeting began at 6:30 and was facilitated by three Parks staff, Donald Harris, Manager of Property and Acquisition Services, Chip Nevins, Acquisition Planner, and Lise Ward, Senior Real Property Agent.

Approximately 60 citizens attended, including local residents (some from new buildings such as M Street, Landes Apartments, Frederic Ozanam House, and Skyline), representatives of the First Hill Improvement Association (FHIA), Harborview Medical Center, Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), the Catholic Archdiocese, and the Frye Art Museum.

6:40 – 6:55 p.m. First Hill Neighborhood Overview

Donald Harris started the meeting by introducing the FHIA, Harborview Medical Center and Seattle Housing Authority representatives. Jim Erickson, Government Liaison for the FHIA, spoke about its mission and recent neighborhood improvement projects. Elise Chayet of Harborview Medical Center spoke about its redevelopment project and the demolition of Harborview Hall with its replacement by open space. Brian Sullivan of SHA presented preliminary plans for Yesler Terrace and the 5-8 acres of open space that will be included in the project.

6:55 – 7:05 p.m. Urban Villages/Park Acquisition Criteria

Chip Nevins described the park siting criteria, which includes focus on Seattle's urban villages that are taking population growth, walking distance between parks, a minimum of 10,000 sf in size with sun exposure and close to other development so it can bring "eyes on the park."

7:05 – 7:20 p.m. 2000 Pro Parks Levy/2008 Parks & Green Spaces Levy
Acquisition Considerations

Donald Harris explained that the Pro Parks Levy acquisition targets were based on the First Hill Neighborhood Plan, which specifically identified a 4,800 parcel at Terry and Cherry for park acquisition, ostensibly because it already looked “green.” Its small size would limit both design and utility, unless an adjoining L-shaped parcel owned by the Catholic Archdiocese (unwilling seller) could be purchased as well. The Philippine Government, the property’s owner, was unresponsive for years to the City’s emissaries. A couple of years ago someone informed the Parks Department that a “for sale” sign had gone up on the property. The Philippine Government decided to sell to the highest bidder on a short timeline. The City retained the services of a land conservancy to present a bid on its behalf, but the winning bid came from the Frye Art Museum, situated across the street from the subject property. The Frye intends to hold on to the property at this time.

With the Terry & Cherry site being unavailable, the Parks Department focused its efforts south of Madison Street, where population growth was expected to occur (and has). The area north of Madison is partially served by both Freeway Park and First Hill Park (University Street and Minor Avenue East).

Parks evaluated other sites, including:

The 8th Avenue corridor, which is designated a pedestrian street and contains mature street trees.

8th & Madison. Negotiations went far – until the price went beyond what the City could pay.

8th & Columbia. This site contains the office building built and once owned by architect Paul Thiry, architect of the 1962 World’s Fair. The building is likely to be designated a City Landmark at some point in the future, practically impossible to demolish, and that would make that site problematic for park development.

First Hill triangle properties. Martha Barkman of Harbor Properties submitted a list of triangles that could conceivably be developed into pocket parks. Many of these properties are street rights-of way and do not need to be acquired (the focus of the Levy funds), but could be developed through other funds such as the opportunity fund.

Archdiocese properties. The Catholic Archdiocese is a major landowner in the area, but intends to hold on to its properties to further its mission to provide affordable housing in the neighborhood, as evidenced by the completion of the Ozanam House located directly across the street from St. James Cathedral. The Sisters of Cabrini are open to the idea of selling a portion of its Cabrini Senior Apartments property at Madison Street and Terry Avenue for a park. Parks has evaluated the site, and driveway and garage improvements would impact usable open space.

Midblock between Marion and Columbia, 8th and 9th Avenues. This site, which has been referred to as the “Spanish Steps,” is a proposal that the City acquire a parking lot on 8th Avenue and the corresponding upslope parking lot on 9th Avenue. Linking the two would enable convenient passage between 8th and 9th Avenues. While the idea of the “steps” is only an identifier, some have believed a park with a staircase would not provide sufficient utility.

7:20 – 7:25 p.m. Parks Recommendation

Parks recommended the purchase of a 7,200 sf parcel (currently being used for parking) located mid-block on 8th between Marion and Columbia. It could serve as a stand-alone park, yet provide utility should the adjoining 9th Avenue parcel be acquired in the future.

7:25 – 7:50 p.m. Questions and Discussion of Options (Parks response in [BLUE](#))

1. Does Parks make a habit of locating its meetings next to its recommended park sites? [No.](#)
2. Has freeway noise been taken into consideration when siting a park on First Hill? [While the City purchases property for parks with no preconceived notions of design, it is likely the noise could be buffered by landscaping. Ironically, one suggestion that has found its way to the new mayor is additional lidding of Interstate 5. When we purchase a site for a park, we are thinking ahead for the next 100 years.](#)
3. Plant buffers don't work, how about the upper side of Madison – the U.S. Bank site?
4. Yes, the U.S. Bank site works better for those with mobility issues.
5. What about the Harborview “no man's land” by Interstate 5. Sunsets and linkages.
6. Yes, support the Harborview option as it would connect to Yesler Terrace and Little Saigon. It would support “wayfinding” walking paths via hospitals

and schools. For these types of project we don't always need acquisition money to make it happen.

7. Please show the Harborview option visually. Harborview and SHA representatives overlapped their presentation boards to show the potential linkages.
8. What about the large parking lot across the street from the Frye Art Museum? Still available? The site was approved at one time for a high rise development. While not economically viable at this time, the Frye intends to continue holding this site, using it for needed parking.
9. Programming? P-Patches? Any conversations about P-Patches as you were looking at sites? P-Patches generally come in during a park's design phase. We prefer to use the term "community gardens," which provide common space vs. the "private space" afforded by P-Patches. Park design comes as a result of what the community wants. For example, at our Capitol Hill Urban Center Village site at 16th & East Howell, some people wanted a traditional park, some people wanted P-Patches. The end design result is a "hybrid" park. We wouldn't preclude P-Patches or community gardens on First Hill. Suggestion made because 18% of the P-Patch wait list is people from First Hill and Capitol Hill. A sloped site could be used for terraced gardens.
10. What about a lid on the large parking lot on 7th Avenue, between Marion and Columbia? We looked into this option extensively. It doesn't pencil out at this time. Due to high engineering/construction costs, the cost of the project cannot be amortized unless a tall structure is built above the underground parking.
11. I like the 8th Avenue park proposal between Marion and Columbia. I also like going up to 9th. It's (Spanish Steps) is an imaginative concept. Freeway Park works, even if the fountains don't work. An 8th Avenue park would connect Yesler with downtown and Freeway Park.
12. The Pigott walkway connects Virginia Mason to a lower level. A change of grade can be handled with good design.
13. (A.) 8th Avenue deadends at Jefferson Terrace. Not a connector to Yesler Terrace. Ninth Avenue is stronger. (B.) Can a street vacation allow for park land? (C.) There are other ways to implement green space on a different scale, through green space development. What is happening in Belltown (parts of street rights-of-way are being developed with park features) is an example of what could happen. Land was too expensive to purchase in Belltown, so we went to the City Council to get approval to use acquisition money for park development in the right-of-way.
14. Terry Avenue might be better.
15. You don't need to vacate a street. The question is how to best spend the money to get other amenities.

16. Who owns the recommended site on 8th, between Marion and Columbia. [A private party.](#)
17. What about the full-block parking lot on 7th Avenue, between Marion and Columbia? [That property is owned by the Phillips family, which has been in the parking business for many years, and, by all accounts, intends to continue the parking use for the foreseeable future.](#)
18. Couldn't you have gotten 8th & Madison through eminent domain? [The City Council did authorize the use of condemnation, however, the price went beyond what the City could pay. The use of eminent domain is always an option.](#) What if we ask the Frye and the Archdiocese to give back to the community by selling their property (Terry & Cherry site and the L-shaped parking lot around it) to the City for a park? Maybe give them incentives for added height? After all, the "Spanish Steps" benefit St. James Cathedral. [Both proposals are not unreasonable.](#)
19. Think of the character of a park so close to the freeway. Cal Anderson Park versus Freeway Park. Freeway Park is an impressive solution for a difficult site, yet it's transitory, people don't use it. Cal Anderson – people use it.
20. If the fountains work that makes a difference.
21. Can you show us the recommended site? [Parks representatives pointed to their presentation boards.](#)
22. Can we reconsider the large Frye parking lot? [A Frye representative stated that the Frye Art Museum's mission uses no tax dollars to provide opportunities to the community. Park location is important. Its long-term use is important to consider.](#)
23. To the Frye representative: Have you considered an art sculpture park? [Frye rep: The highrise development proposal from several years ago would have provided open space. That Master Use Permit is now expired.](#)
24. What about the Bank of America parking lot in the middle of the block between Madison and Marion? [We didn't want to be in the middle of a hospital complex. Could people find it? I'm hearing support for the 8th Avenue site. Mike McGinn, our incoming Mayor, believes in investing in what we own to make it better – a green infrastructure. Should we take our pot of money and look at spending it in other ways \(like Belltown\), i.e. improvements to streets, sidewalks, adjusting traffic flows, reducing parking?](#)
25. Buy something significant. Negotiate a good price on a good piece of land. Buy something at the top of the hill on Madison, which is the heart of First Hill, accessible, and on a bus line.
26. There are properties for sale on Seneca at Spring & Summit, also Boylston & Seneca. [Too close to First Hill Park.](#)
27. Talk to Swedish about the Bank of America site. It's commercially viable – expensive, on the northeast corner of Minor and Marion. [Martha Barkman of](#)

Harbor Properties: The site has permits. The developer is waiting for the economy to improve.

28. The noise is not that bad along 8th Avenue.

29. The 8th Avenue site requires the upper and the lower. Otherwise, the hillside is a barrier. Martha Barkman of Harbor Properties: Covering the entire site like Harbor Steps is not the only option. There could be upper and lower parks with an interesting connector.

30. Have the landowners of the upper and lower properties been approached?
Yes.

7:50 – 8:00 p.m. Next Steps

The Department will make further inquiries into the status of the U.S. Bank site on Madison, although it was reported that the site is under option to a developer.

In the absence of the identification of other viable options, the Department will pursue appraisal of the adjoining parking lots on 8th and 9th Avenues and initiate negotiation with the owners. In order to allay concerns about the “steps” concept, Parks will have developed several conceptual ideas showing how a functional park can be developed on this sloped site.

A summary of this meeting will be available on our website,

<http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/parks/proparks/projects/FirstHillAcquisition.htm>

Please contact us if you have other thoughts.