

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL
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August 8, 2012

Hon. Pat McCarthy
Sound Transit Board of Directors
401 So. Jackson St.
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Surplus ground surface use for Sound Transit University District Station

Honorable Members,

The University District Community Council strongly endorses the transit-oriented urban design concept proposed by Phil Thiel, emeritus professor of architecture at the University of Washington, for the ground use of the U District Sound Transit station. The design concept has been developed in a three-dimensional model, as shown in the enclosed brochure.

The University District needs a public “focal point” to serve the functions that the Westlake Mall does for Seattle, and Pioneer Park does for Portland. The Sound Transit site is located in the heart of the University District, near or adjacent and within easy walking distance to banks, hotels, theaters, retail shops, restaurants, the post office, University of Washington offices, bookstore, and main campus. It is directly across from the UW Tower with its adjacent Tsutakawa fountain and Sperry ceramic stele and open space of artistic brickwork. With the Sound Transit station, it would become the hub of pedestrian traffic.

This concept envisions developing the area of the eastern half of the block situated between the alley and Brooklyn Avenue NE, and between NE 45th and NE 43rd streets south of the Neptune Theater, as a public plaza for civic activities.

The primary open space, 187 x 460 feet, would match those found in the heart of major European capitals such as Paris, Rome, London, Vienna, and Berlin. The plaza surface would have ornamental brick, which would extend into the alley and Brooklyn Ave NE to give an appearance of openness, as comparable brickwork on Pine Street does for Westlake Park. Both the alley and Brooklyn Ave. would be open to traffic, though could be closed when special planned events warrant. The plaza would be enriched with trees, a fountain, a stage or bandstand, street furniture, a bike rack, a small children’s play area and artwork. An arcade with a newsstand and/or café or merchandise kiosks would

UDCC endorsement of TOD Public Park for above ground use at U Dist. ST Station

connect the plaza with University Way, much as a passageway now connects the parking lot on the eastside of Brooklyn with the Ave in the block south NE 43rd. The windowless south wall of the Neptune Theater could host a large screen as a backdrop for activities, a digital reader board, and/or a 100-foot mural produced annually to showcase local artistic talent.

The transit-oriented plaza development would animate this living heart of the University District. It could host the weekly farmers' market, band concerts in summer, Seafair and holiday activities, weekend outdoor movies, gatherings for visiting dignitaries and politicians, art fairs, classic car shows, etc.

At the University District Street Fair last May, more than 200 people signed a statement of support for the Plaza concept; many of them offered to assist. Some members of Sound Transit staff visited the UDCC booth, and made supportive suggestions that proponents of the concept should answer these questions:

- *Does Red Square on the University Campus serve the same purposes as the Plaza concept?* No. Red Square belongs to the UW and is strictly regulated and reserved for student-related use and activities. Its location is neither central nor accessible to the U District and planned median-rise structures. For the last generation, Red Square has not generated public activities in any way comparable to those envisioned for the plaza.
- *How does Sound Transit benefit?* Sound Transit prospers when the region prospers, particularly given that much of its revenue comes from sales taxes paid by residents and visitors to the region in question. The plaza would make the station a more desirable place for Sound Transit riders, and transfer traffic to and from Metro buses. The activities may generate pedestrian traffic much as Washington Square in Manhattan's Greenwich Village or redeveloped Times Square.
- *Why should Sound Transit study the concept since its policies favor high-rise or mid-rise residential development around stations in urban areas?* It cannot be overemphasized that the plaza *is* a form of transit-oriented development within the scope of Seattle's planning guidelines and, hence, in keeping with Sound Transit's policies. The State Environmental Policy Act, RCW 43.21C (SEPA) and its implementing regulations require consideration of alternatives at the early stages of the environmental review process and very definitely before major decisions are made. SEPA overlays local ordinances and must be enforced even where a particular use is permissible by local law, regulations, or policy. Sound Transit's decision on the use of the station's ground space will have such far reaching impacts that the plaza concept requires prompt and serious consideration.

Can we afford to lose this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a livable, revitalized, distinctive urban identity for yet another maxed-out building bulk? Is the University

District not the Seattle neighborhood most deficient in open or public park space?

Yours truly,

Sharon Scully
President

cc: Phil Thiel