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I-5 Colonnade Open Space Study

Final Design Concept Memo

Prepared For:

The Colonnade Planning and Design Study Steering Committee, administered by the Eastlake Community Council

J.A. Brennan Associates PLLC

INTRODUCTION

The I-5 Colonnade Open Space is a neighborhood nexus and a community pivot point. Located between the populous neighborhoods of Eastlake, Capitol Hill, and the rapidly densifying South Lake Union we have a unique opportunity to foster vital green space and recreation in an area where this will only become more of a premium.

Left as a barrier and wasteland by the 1962 opening of Interstate 5, the area began to become a recreation resource and crossroads with the 2005 opening of the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation's I-5 Colonnade Open Space on leased state right of way. Colonnade is still under programmed, with great unrealized potential to stitch this part of Seattle back together, and serve citywide and regional recreation and nonmotorized travel needs. It will be dramatically transformed by the coordinated program of improvements in the current study. New facilities and amenities will diversify and intensify the adventure of a visit to Colonnade, attracting people across the city and beyond. New pathways, stairways, and gateways will safely and enjoyably bring pedestrians and bicyclists to and through this area that still is impenetrable from most directions.

In 2014 the Eastlake Community Council was awarded \$24,575 in Neighborhood Matching Funds from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods for the Colonnade planning and design study. The study was conducted in 2015-16 in partnership with the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and other public agencies, as well as a wide range of stakeholders including user groups, residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The 20 acre study area included the 7.5 acres of I-5 Colonnade Open Space land currently under lease from WSDOT to the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, and an additional 12.5 acres of WSDOT land south to E. Aloha Street.

The Colonnade planning and design project was overseen by a Steering Committee of residents, businesses, property owners, and non-profit organizations; public agencies were invited and fully

involved in the Steering Committee. The study had the support and cooperation of WSDOT and of five Seattle departments: Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Neighborhoods, Department of Transportation, Department of Planning and Development, and Department of Financial and Administrative Services.

The planning and design process included participation by 299 members of the public in eleven public events (a kickoff tour, three open houses, five public meetings, and public workshops on off-leash, bicycle, skateboard, and fitness needs), and an online survey with 118 responses. On the public outreach and agency liaison process, see the Steering Committee's final report.

The present document is J.A. Brennan Associates' summary of the final design concept, whose graphic representation is the 2016 schematic long-range plan with its sub-area plans. All are posted on the Colonnade project web page (<http://eastlakeseattle.org/?page=colonnade>), along with many other documents including the Colonnade Steering Committee's final report, which additionally discusses the design elements and planning issues introduced here.

THE DESIGN:

The current I-5 Colonnade Open Space consists primarily of pathways and steps, a mountain biking area, and a dog off-leash area. The pathways and steps accommodate significant bicycle and pedestrian traffic, especially on the E. Howe Street steps that extend east-west under the freeway. The mountain bike area was popular in the early years, but its use has dropped off in recent years. The off-leash area has throughout its history received only limited use. The Steering Committee's final report discusses specific design reasons for the currently limited use of the mountain bike and off-leash areas. It also identifies as a limiting factor for all potential visitors their concerns about public safety and about the number of outdoor occupants (including the homeless), and that lighting is currently limited to the east-west stairway on the Howe Street alignment.

For within Colonnade's existing 7.5 acres and for a roughly four acre expansion area to the south of the existing boundary, the schematic long-range plan for Colonnade lays out a comprehensive program of recreation and travel improvements, including greatly improved lighting. The schematic plan also envisions pedestrian and bicycle improvements outside the current and expanded boundaries, better connecting Colonnade to the surrounding area. The various improvements envisioned in the schematic plan will dramatically increase the number of people visiting all parts of Colonnade.

A wide range of user groups have already expressed interest and enthusiasm about the plans, offering major opportunities for donated time and outside fundraising. Excited participants will spread the word amongst their own communities and help activate the new amenities. The planning and design process involved close cooperation with the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance for redesign of the mountain bike facilities; with Citizens for Off-Leash Areas to identify needed improvements in the off-leash area; and many other groups including skaters, runners, parkour/free-running enthusiasts, and more.

Connections and Access:

The construction of I-5 created a new barrier between the Capitol Hill and Eastlake/South Lake Union areas. The 2005 opening of Colonnade was a first step in restoring bicycle and pedestrian connections under I-5, primarily at its north end east-west with a pathway at E. Newton Street and a stairway along the E. Blaine Street alignment. The 2016 schematic plan greatly expands Colonnade's bicycle and pedestrian routes east/west and north/south along a three-quarter mile stretch of I-5 between E. Newton and E. Aloha streets, transforming the barrier into a network of connections through the site as well as within it. Also envisioned are greatly improved connections with the surrounding area, such as Eastlake, South Lake Union, and Downtown, Capitol Hill, the Lakeview-Melrose corridor, the Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop, the University District and north Seattle.

There were three major considerations for pathway design across the site: (1) the steep incline of the current site; (2) provide as much barrier-free access (ADA/Americans with Disabilities Act) access as feasible; and (3) maintain clear access for WSDOT maintenance roads.

The core route is a new north-south multi-use pathway extending the entire length of the site between Newton and Aloha streets. South of E. Galer Street (where it does not go between freeway columns) the path conforms to WSDOT design manual standards for a shared-use path a 10 foot wide paved surface with a maximum of 5% slope. The northern segment of the path must go between columns that are less than 10 feet apart; there the pathway would be 8 feet wide, and in some places would be supported by retaining walls.

The schematic plan envisions four key East-West connections underneath I-5 to reconnect Eastlake, South Lake Union, and Capitol Hill:

1. At the west entry at E. Blaine St., barrier-free access will at last be achieved to the north end of the off-leash area and the current south dead-end of an existing barrier-free route, while also providing access to the north-south multi-use pathway which will also provide barrier-free access.
2. Paralleling the wildly popular E. Howe St. steps that are at Colonnade's north end, a new stairway and some paths will follow the E. Blaine St. alignment.
3. Near the E. Garfield St. and E. Galer St. alignments, new stairs and paths will connect Franklin Ave E and Lakeview Blvd. E. The connection on the E. Galer St. alignment would be a fully ADA accessible pathway.
4. The Lakeview Meadow that looks across I-5 from the east will provide view opportunities of the lake and mountains and an barrier-free path connecting to the north-south multi-use pathway and the Lake Union area.

Adding to the current difficulties in getting to the Colonnade site is that many sidewalks were demolished by the freeway construction and remain missing. Replacing these sections of sidewalk will increase the number of people who can easily access and enjoy Colonnade.

Safety and Visibility:

The planning and design process uncovered substantial public concerns about feeling unsafe on the site, and that Colonnade feels hidden and unknown. Public safety will improve as new

attractions, connections, gateways, and wayfinding draw more users throughout the site. Vegetation management on the edges will increase public safety and enhance views into and out of the site.

The current lack of lighting in most of Colonnade hampers safety and limits the hours of use. Improved lighting, some of it also serving artistic ends, will enhance safety and bring much wider use.

Site Activation:

Colonnade as a sheltered, lighted space for recreation and for bicycle/pedestrian travel will be a unique regional asset, offering year-round recreation opportunities. The added and improved attractions, and increased access to and through the site, will bring an influx of new people.

A signature feature will be the three-quarter mile north-south multi-use pathway extending the length of the current Colonnade and continuing south to where the available freeway right of way ends at E. Aloha Street. This pathway will be a major regional connection and exercise opportunity, while also providing access to all of Colonnade's recreational features in combinations with the staircases and pathway network within the site.

The existing mountain bike area will be substantially redesigned to have more cross-country trails, new features fitting a wide range of skill levels, and a pump track. The off-leash area will be improved with a more paws-friendly surface, larger yards, better signage and visibility, and other attractions. There will be new facilities (also lighted and sheltered from the rain) for skateboards, bouldering/climbing, and parkour/freerunning; and an outdoor gym/all-ages movement playground. And there will also be new flat spaces for public events and for exercise such as yoga and pilates.

In the four-acre expansion to the south along the north-south multi-use pathway there are further opportunities. They include a labyrinth navigable by foot or wheelchair, exercise nodes along the path, and some areas that are designated for future development but will be determined based on what proves popular in further public outreach events. Connections to and from Colonnade will be greatly improved with new entries, sidewalks on adjacent streets where some are missing, and improved parking for those arriving by motor vehicle.

The "Eastlake Slope" is roughly an acre of WSDOT land south of E. Galer St. that is a prime area to develop a community garden or P-Patch, a gathering plaza, a children's play area, and an barrier-free accessible hill climb path, with stairs for a more direct route. Community garden space is a sought-after amenity in Seattle as proven by the multi-year waiting lists.

Lastly, a restroom is a crucial amenity for this site. As an improved and expanded I-5 Colonnade Open Space fulfills its potential as a regional draw for many different types of activities and as a Seattle nonmotorized crossroads, a restroom will serve families and exercisers, and support the many recreation sites and the events that will increasingly occur there. The restroom location is will also serve the popular Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop just a few blocks away, a six-mile pedestrian and bicycle route around the lake that was inaugurated in 2009 jointly by Seattle's Department of Transportation and its Department of Parks and Recreation.