

**ISSUES, PROBLEMS, AND OPPORTUNITIES:
DRAFT SITE ANALYSIS FOR THE COLONNADE STUDY AREA**

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Introduction | Off-leash area |
| Background | Bicycling |
| Stairways | Skateboards |
| Paved pedestrian and bicycle pathways | P-Patch |
| Connections with the surrounding area | Art |
| Wayfinding | Lighting |
| Access for people who are disabled | Drainage and runoff |
| Exercise | Parking and loading |
| Restrooms | Outdoor residents |
| Entrance plaza | Public safety |
| Granite gathering area | Conclusion |

INTRODUCTION

Public discussion is in progress about the possibilities for improvements or expansion of the Colonnade area. This document is a draft for a site analysis. Listed and analyzed here are issues, problems, and opportunities that have been suggested at this early stage in the planning process. Many more suggestions are welcome and needed, and will be fully reported in subsequent drafts, the most recent of which will always be posted on the project web site, <http://eastlakeseattle.org/?page=colonnade>. There also you will find background about the Colonnade planning and design process, photos and location maps, and an on-line survey questionnaire to fill out. Comments and suggestions (including suggested revisions for the present document) are also welcome to info@eastlakeseattle.org or c/o Eastlake Community Council, 117 E. Louisa St. #1, Seattle, WA 98102-3278.

BACKGROUND ON THE CURRENT PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS

The I-5 Colonnade Open Space is very close to the geographic center and population center of Seattle—between Downtown, South Lake Union, Eastlake, the University District, and Capitol Hill. It is ranked by the internationally regarded CityLab web site as among the world’s nine “cool parks under freeway overpasses.”

With Colonnade celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2015, it is receiving a fresh look. How could Colonnade be improved? Should it be expanded? How can it be made more accessible on foot or bicycle to and from the surrounding area? To address these questions, a planning/design process is now in progress with support from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods to the Eastlake Community Council to engage user groups, residents, businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies in a 20-acre study area that includes the 7.5 acres of WSDOT land currently managed under lease by the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation and an additional 12.5 acres of WSDOT land south to E. Aloha Street, much of it now fenced off and marked “no trespassing.” This study is a unique opportunity, as no other plot of land this large and close to downtown has such potential for increased

recreational opportunities, and the planning process is bringing together disparate user groups, stakeholders, and public agencies.

Cooperating agencies include Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Transportation, Department of Planning and Development, and Department of Financial and Administrative Services; and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

The J.A. Brennan and Associates landscape architecture firm is the project consultant, and Art Tuftee is the community design liaison. Project oversight is by a Steering Committee with a wide variety of stakeholders; management support is provided by the Eastlake Community Council.

STAIRWAYS

Easily the most used feature in the I-5 Colonnade Open Space is the Howe Street stairway that spans the area under I-5 between Franklin Avenue East and Lakeview Boulevard. Opened in 2005 as a central feature of the Open Space, it re-established an ages-old pedestrian connection that was closed by the 1962 construction of I-5. The stairway is an essential east-west connection between Capitol Hill and the Eastlake/Lake Union area, and it directly connects across Lakeview Boulevard to the Seattle Department of Transportation's Howe Street stairway and indirectly to the Blaine St. stairway one block to the south, both which climb up to 10th Avenue East. Like these stairways, Colonnade's stairway is heavily used for travel and for exercise. While stairways are not accessible to those with wheelchairs or strollers, in this hilly part of Seattle site they will always be heavily used as a form of transportation. Following are some possibilities.

- Adding an additional stairway between Franklin Ave. E. and Lakeview Blvd. to continue the Blaine St. steps that connect 10th Ave. E. to Lakeview Blvd. would provide better east-west connections through the I-5 Colonnade Open Space and would also be a recreational asset, creating an interesting loop option paired with the Open Space's Howe St. stairs while reducing the current load of exercisers on them. This new stairway would also be a safety improvement, as the east-west maintenance road (which should remain in some form) that crosses the middle of the I-5 Colonnade Open Space roughly at Blaine St. is very steep--not a comfortable climb or descent even for a fit pedestrian.
- Where gaps between the freeway lanes drench stairways and their users, rain covers could be installed.
- In the possible expansion area to the south, steep terrain does not allow current access between the Colonnade area and the Lakeview/Melrose area. A cantilevered stairway to Lakeview Blvd. could be installed, possibly in combination with a switchback trail.

PAVED PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE PATHWAYS

The current I-5 Colonnade Open Space has some pathways that are successful and heavily used, some pathways that are not user friendly, and some locations that seem promising for added pathways. The paved pathway (fully wheelchair-accessible) between Newton St. and the top of the Howe St. steps is

very well used, mostly by people passing through. It has an easier grade than Newton St. and walking or bicycling this route avoids crossing in front of fast-moving traffic that enters the southbound I-5 on-ramp. Opportunities for improvement in pathways:

- The north-south pathway south of the steps down to the granite gathering place is uncomfortably steep. Although an ADA-compliant slope may not be feasible, this pathway might be given an easier grade with some switchbacks.
- The south half of Colonnade (south of Blaine St., of the Main Gathering Area and of the north end of the off-leash area) lacks any north-south pathway for bicycles or pedestrians. If added, such a pathway could be wide enough to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, along with a separate dirt trail for mountain bikers.

CONNECTIONS WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA

Colonnade is a node among many communities, parks and green spaces is desired,, but it is not fully equipped with the needed connections. The northwest entrance to the I-5 Colonnade Open Space from Newton street is by a well-integrated and heavily used pedestrian and bicycle pathway that provides an inviting and safe alternative to crossing fast-moving southbound I-5 on-ramp traffic. The view plaza at the top of the stairs near Howe Street is also an inviting and popular entry point.

However, the three other entrances offer poor or non-existent pedestrian or bicycle connections to the surrounding area. In fact, much of the south end of Colonnade has either poor connections or none to Capitol Hill, the Melrose corridor, South Lake Union, and downtown.

- A north-south trail with spectacular views and weather protection could be installed in the potential expansion area from the south end of Colonnade further south to the intersection of Eastlake Ave. and E. Aloha Street, and with a branch to the intersection of Franklin Ave. E. and E. Galer St., near the currently locked gate.
- On the WSDOT land between E. Galer and E. Nelson streets that connects Colonnade with Eastlake Avenue, there could be steps and a switchback trail (for more discussion see above on P-Patch).
- The south portion of the park is currently inaccessible toward the east to Lakeview Blvd., where there is steep topography. A stairway and/or a switchback trail would establish a connection where none currently exists, helping to open the park to those on Capitol Hill and the nearby Melrose corridor.
- A pathway connection east-west through the St. Mark's greenbelt would greatly open up access to Colonnade to and from Capitol Hill.
- The lack of a sidewalk on the east side of Franklin Avenue East between Blaine St. and Galer St. requires those approaching the park to walk in the street, and also makes it more difficult to use the on-street parking.

- The lack of a sidewalk on the east side of Lakeview Blvd. between the Blaine St. stairs and the Howe St. stairways exposes pedestrians and bicyclists to traffic dangers, and makes it more dangerous and difficult for those using the stairs as a loop for exercise.

WAYFINDING

The Colonnade area has few signs directing visitors to the Open Space or within it, to different features and destinations. Well-designed and easily understood wayfinding information would substantially enhance the recreation and commuting experience

ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE DISABLED

Those in wheelchairs or who use strollers or walkers, as well as some people who are disabled, seniors or children, benefit from facilities that meet or nearly meet accessibility standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act. They currently have access to the following Colonnade features: the plaza at the top of the steps; an ADA-accessible paved pathway between the top of the Howe St. steps and E. Newton St.; and south of this this pathway the switchback pathway down to the Main Gathering Area. However, there are several gaps:

- There is no ADA accessibility to or from the three entrances along Franklin Avenue E., the main street on Colonnade's western boundary. In fact, those with wheelchairs or strollers who enter the ADA-accessible switchback pathway at the northwest corner of the I-5 Colonnade Open Space and head south find themselves in a dead end, with no ADA-accessible route except to return the way they came.
- Uncomfortably steep even for the most experienced pedestrian or cyclist, is the east-west maintenance road that provides a pathway to and from Colonnade's middle entrance from Franklin Ave. E. (roughly at the Blaine St. intersection). This route is the only east or west access to the granite gathering area and to the north end of the offleash area, and it is at the south end of the ADA-accessible switchback pathway.
- To solve the ADA-accessibility gap just described, a gradually sloped ADA-accessible meandering pathway could be built under the redwood trees; steel supports would probably be needed to protect their roots from damage. All users would benefit from better access to the off-leash area's north end, the granite gathering place, and the ADA-accessible switchback pathway that goes north. The new pathway would also allow walking under the redwoods without getting wet feet.
- Equally steep is the continuation of the east-west maintenance road that serves as a pathway up to Lakeview Blvd. An ADA-accessible switchback trail along this route would greatly enable those in wheelchairs or who use strollers or walkers. Further study is needed to ascertain whether the steep slope can accommodate this proposal. Care would need to be taken not to obstruct the maintenance road.

EXERCISE

The I-5 Colonnade Open Space is often used for exercise. In particular, the plaza at the top of the stairs has been used for yoga classes as well as for informal activities like stretching for runners and those climbing the stairs for exercise. Improvements could facilitate many more exercise activities. A large Colonnade Fitness Day open house on May 9, 2015 brought many suggestions from the 60+ participants. These suggestions will be listed in the next draft of this document.

Flat space for exercise can be created at the middle and lower landings of the existing steps with terraces for yoga or other activities. The plaza at the top of the stairs could also be expanded.

There is a proposal for a “parkour” exercise facility on the slope just southwest of the entry plaza.

Some aspects of the existing pathways provide the “illusion of going somewhere” and thus are interesting for those using Colonnade as a destination and not just passing through. Such featured pathways could be expanded. For any new or remodeled pathways, enlightened designs could enhance the experience as well as help people get from here to there.

RESTROOMS

The closest public restroom is at Rogers Playfield, about five blocks north of Colonnade’s northernmost edge, and it is not uncommon for users to need to relieve themselves in the Open Space or on nearby land. Of the 60 people who signed in to the May 9 Colonnade Fitness Day workshop, fully 30 (the most for any suggestion) expressed a wish for a restroom. A public restroom would serve not only those in the I-5 Colonnade Open Space, but also the many who use the Blaine and Howe Street stairs and who use the Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop.

ENTRANCE PLAZA [not yet written]

GRANITE GATHERING AREA

The granite circular seating feature is a popular informal gathering place which has been used for impromptu meetings and performances.

- The granite gathering area needs repairs, including having anti-graffiti sealer applied to the stone work

OFF-LEASH AREA

The 1.2 acre off-leash area is currently underused. Paws-friendly resurfacing to replace the river rock with granulithic (crushed granite) has begun, but has a long way to go. Other possible improvements:

- Better access to running water
- Small dogs area

- An agility course and other fun things for dogs
- Greater visibility from the street
- More parking
- A sidewalk on the east side of Franklin Ave. E.
- Dog-themed art
- Lighting at night
- Improved security, such as a police call box

BICYCLING

Through the donations and volunteer sweat equity of the mountain biking community, this part of the park was built with under \$50,000 in City funds, but with the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars in donated labor, materials, and funds. Following is just a sample of the active rethinking now going on; the next draft of this document will include many more suggestions and ideas.

- Some of the existing bike features in the south part of Colonnade (phase two of the bike project) are little used (partly because of the require an unusually high skill level) and are difficult to maintain.
- The artworks incorporated with the bike features on the Tqalu trail are important and should be retained even if the features are relocated.
- There is a desire for more flowy dirt single track such as the Fisher trail located just below Tqalu.
- The Fisher trail could extend south across the E. Blaine St. access below the dog area to the E. Galer St. entrance. Care would need to be taken to ensure a safe pedestrian route and to protect the roots of the redwood trees along this route.
- A paved pump track that could be used by both skaters and bicyclists is a proven concept; several locations are possibilities.
- The current pump track, which has a dirt surface and is located near the off-ramp, is a popular feature but needs to be rebuilt. At the far northeast section of the mountain biking area, the "Novice Loop" is a current loop of beginner flat that is low to the ground that skinnies to the north of the steep rocky chute entrance right next Lakeview. It flows down to the south to the existing pump track. Currently there are a few jumps and some log rides in that space. A proposal has been received for a better pump track and a few progressive DJ lines -- all out in the open -- not under the freeway canopy
- The bike feature known as "Pip's Hips" could be removed to make way for a north-south pedestrian/bicycle pathway in the south half of Colonnade that could extend into the possible

expansion area and emerge on Eastlake Avenue near Aloha St. Bicycle commuters might prefer this pathway's gentle grade to the loss and gain of elevation along Eastlake Avenue.

- Sections of the above-mentioned north-south commuter trail could be paralleled with single track dirt trail for mountain bikes.

SKATEBOARDS

Although skateboarders helped in the successful effort to include Colonnade into the 1999 parks levy, Colonnade lacks any features specifically designed for skateboarding. Opportunities:

- The currently un-programmed gently sloped terrain next to Lakeview Blvd. at the north end of Colonnade is suitable for a variety of skate features.
- Skate features are also a possibility in the central area below the palm tree art installation. Even just a flat dry space of smooth concrete is usable by skaters.
- Some skate features could be linear and more trail-like; they do not need to be unconnected localized features.
- The wide covered area under the freeway south of E. Nelson Place has potential for a skate area but may be limited by the need to maintain access for maintenance trucks.

P-PATCH

The closest community gardens (City P-Patches) are miles away and have waiting lists that are years long. On some WSDOT land that is between I-5 and Eastlake Avenue just south of Galer St., there is a sunny slope that could accommodate many community garden plots, serviced by the existing WSDOT maintenance road. Integrated with the community garden could be an east-west stairway and switchback trail.

ART

The main art installation now in the park is John Roloff's tree and lighting piece. Additional art could be commissioned, such as for the mountain biking and offleash areas, and for the possible skatepark feature.

LIGHTING

Currently there is lighting in only a few areas of the I-5 Colonnade Open Space. Designed and located in a way that it does not disturb nearby residents, lighting could be added in many areas.

Artist John Roloff might be willing to modify the schedule for the lighting of his palm tree art installation so that the lights are on during the periods when most needed by those visiting Colonnade

DRAINAGE AND RUNOFF

Although Colonnade is mostly protected from the rain, I-5 collects huge amounts of runoff, most of which drains directly into Lake Union. Because of holes and disconnections in the pipes, some of this runoff drains into the park. This runoff has heavy metals and organic chemicals and is regarded as toxic by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology. While the runoff is probably unavailable for land treatment, wet vaults might be installed that could have subsidiary benefits, such as by providing a concrete surface for recreation.

PARKING AND LOADING

Although most visitors to the Colonnade area arrive on foot or by bicycle, some who come from far away (such as to use the off-leash and mountain bike areas) arrive by motor vehicle. With no on-site parking, the main option for parking or loading is on-street, where users compete with nearby residents and office workers, as well as “hide-and-rides” who actually work downtown. The shortage of parking is a particular barrier to greater use of the off-leash area. Possible opportunities:

- Although parking is technically allowed on the east side of Lakeview Blvd., drivers have little realistic access to it because of soil sliding and overgrown foliage. A retaining wall and sidewalk would serve not only those who park, but also those walking along Lakeview Blvd, a major north-south route.
- For those block faces abutting residential uses, a restricted parking zone that allows two-hour parking without a permit could favor both Colonnade users and residents while discouraging office workers and “hide-and-rides”.
- Just south of the I-5 Colonnade Open Space. Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc. currently leases from WSDOT a large parking lot whose spaces appear to be rarely fully used. The company might be receptive to slightly reducing the number of its leased parking spaces. This would involve moving the lot’s security gate and west fence eastward, thus opening some of the existing paved parking for use by recreationists, especially users of the adjoining off-leash area.

OUTDOOR RESIDENTS

Parts of the I-5 right of way, including occasionally within the existing Park Department-administered Colonnade, are occupied by people who have made it their home. Issues have arisen regarding litter, sanitation, public safety, and possible disruption of their residency.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Especially at night, there have been concerns about possible assaults or thefts, as well as car prowls.

- The I-5 Colonnade Open Space has police call boxes marked with blue lights; these could be expanded in number and location.

- Graffiti is extensive, especially in the fenced-off areas. A possible solution is to allow and encourage street art in one or more specific locations.

CONCLUSION [not yet written]

This document is the 5/20/15 version, with some formatting changes. Comments and suggestions for revision or expansion are welcome and should be e-mailed to info@eastlakeseattle.org.