

NOTES FROM THE JUNE 15, 2015 COLONNADE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Drafted by Chris Leman

Attending: Art Tuftee (Community Design Liaison), Tyson Cecka (Parkour Visions), Shelly DaRonche (Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center), Lorena Eng (WSDOT), Sean Kelly (skateboarder), Pam Kliment (Seattle Dept. of Parks and Recreation), Sharon LeVine (Citizens for Off-Leash Areas), Jens Madsen (Eastlake homeowner), Chris Leman (project administrator), Nathan Pauli (rock climber), Emily Perchlik (Pike-Pine area; runner), Mike Sidwell (Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance), and Bonnie Tabb (houseboater; pedestrian commuter)

The agenda was approved as submitted. Pam Kliment reported on the June 9 meeting of the Parks Dept. ProView Committee (Ed Pottharst of the Seattle Dept. of Neighborhoods also attended), which gave a very positive reception to the Colonnade alternatives analysis presented by Jim Brennan and Emily Griffith of J.A. Brennan Associates. The ProView committee is chaired by Andy Sheffer, who managed construction of I-5 Colonnade Open Space (opened in 2005). Although the ProView Committee minutes are not yet available, Pam said that points emphasized: (1) maximize access for people with disabilities; and (2) under Seattle's policy for race and social justice, ensure outreach to and consideration of the needs of people of color and the underprivileged.

Chris Leman reported that input had been received from homeless people in the area, with some concern expressed about possible loss of the place where they sleep, but very significant support for a public restroom. A homeless couple who live in their car came to the May 7 bicycle workshop because they enjoy mountain biking at Colonnade.

Chris also reported that prior to the June 10 public meeting (as he had done prior to the April 19 public tour), he had knocked on the doors of those who live directly abutting the current I-5 Colonnade Open Space and speaking to those available. He also delivered a letter to all at those addresses, inviting them to attend the June 10 public meeting and the June 15 Steering Committee meeting.

Following are notes on the Steering Committee discussion of potential Colonnade program elements:

ART

Several comments in the on-line questionnaire and at public meetings have addressed Colonnade as a major opportunity for the arts.

Inherent grandeur of space. As a space of cathedral-like proportions with Parthenon-like columns, Colonnade is itself a piece of art that defines its site and frames the cityscape.

Sector art. A balance must be struck between any Colonnade-wide art theme vs. allowing the different uses and sectors to be unique defined by their art.

Integral art. Art should be integrated into functional objects or structures that are designed for such uses as wayfinding, children's play, parkour and other exercise, bicycle and skateboard stunts, railings, walls, etc.

Street art. The Colonnade design should identify places where "street art" is encouraged. Some very creative art appears on an ongoing basis on WSDOT retaining walls that are hidden in fenced-off portions of the right of way. This art is entirely different from the (sometimes gang-related) graffiti being scrawled in the most publicly visible parts of I-5 Colonnade Open Space and elsewhere in Seattle.

Temporary art. Some have proposed locations for display of temporary art at Colonnade. Sean Kelly knows some of the artists who Sound Transit commissioned to decorate the plywood walls surrounding its construction site near the intersection of Broadway and Denny.

Art for off-leash area. This area needs to be better seen and recognized from Franklin Ave. E. below. A possibility are large dog outlines (example is Seattle's Blue Dog park). Within the off-leash area, some bare walls of ecology block could become murals.

Art for mountain bike area. Community design liaison Art Tuftee reported that an unusual natural/sculpted 5-foot tall wooden hand (later stolen) signified the mountain bike area during and immediately after construction. A monumental wooden foot by the same sculptor is still present in the lower north mountain biking area. More secure replacements for the hand and foot might be commissioned. Additional commissioned art might have a bicycle theme, make use of found bicycle parts, and/or be designed to accommodate bicycle riding and stunts.

Art for skatespot area. The site currently proposed for a skatespot is compact and visible, offering the possibility of distinctive art that could also be functional for those doing stunts or those watching them.

The columns. There was much discussion but no resolution regarding art on the columns themselves.

(1) A dramatic example of well thought-out representational art is under I-5 on Jackson St. where Chinese dragons signify Chinatown/the International District.

(2) A more abstract design could involve geometric shapes that enhance perspective of the height and march of the columns—examples are under I-5 on Ravenna Blvd., and under the Spokane St. Viaduct.

(3) Certain columns could be used for wayfinding—color coding and words identifying different use sectors of Colonnade. In this case the height of the columns would be a plus, allowing the wayfinding info to be seen from far away.

(4) An area could be reserved where individual columns would be decorated by different artists.

(5) Sharon LeVine emphasized that based on unfortunate experience elsewhere, any permanent paintings should be preserved with sealant.

(6) There are also I-5 columns just south of the Ship Canal where the Eastlake community has encountered a checkmate of public opinions and artistic conceptions, leaving as more feasible the simple beauty of undecorated columns.

EXERCISE/PARKOUR

Tyson Cecka, of the non-profit Parkour Visions, was welcomed to his first Steering Committee meeting. His group suggests making use of a currently unprogrammed hillside just SW of Colonnade's east entrance plaza from Lakeview Blvd. which could include not only exercise objects but also additional stairs that would provide public access to the area. Tyson also suggested exercise elements for another currently unprogrammed area just north of the west (lower) part of the central stairway (Howe St. alignment).

Although parkour is a strenuous running/gymnastic format requiring certain facilities, Tyson suggests integrating its needs with specialized designs for facilities that would also have more general functions such as railings and walls along stairways and pathways, chin-up bars, dip bars, and situp and pushup ramps. Most pathways in Colonnade do not have railings or walls, which if installed would be a major value for parkour while also providing more safety to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Currently much of Colonnade's slope retention is with gabions (wire enclosure filled with rocks). Replacing some of the gabions with concrete walls would immediately provide new opportunities for exercise as well as for use by mountain bikes and skateboards.

CLIMBING AND BOULDERING

“Climbing” implies the use of ropes, pitons, and other equipment, while “bouldering” does not require such equipment, and thus is more widely practiced. Parkour routines make episodic use of bouldering. Nathan Pauli was welcomed as a liaison with the climbing and bouldering communities. He mentioned that around town (such as by the UW docks and in the Park Dept.'s Camp Long), some existing classic climbing rocks are available yet somewhat underused, while most bouldering opportunities are indoors and require payment to use. Seattle has a shortage of free bouldering locations; the best example is a park in Kent.

Nathan, Tyson, and Sean Kelly emphasized the opportunity in the fact that retaining walls will be needed in some parts of Colonnade to create flatter areas for new uses. With thoughtful design, the downside of the retaining walls will provide bouldering opportunities.

COMMERCIAL USES RESTRICTED

To the suggestion of fundraising through sales of space on the columns or elsewhere in Colonnade, WSDOT's Lorena Eng pointed out that Seattle's current lease Colonnade is for non-profit uses only. Commercial uses are unlikely to be approved.

AMPHITHEATER

On either side of the central stairway (Howe St. alignment), could additional steps or seating be built on the hill, creating an amphitheater with the middle landing becoming a kind of stage when needed?

SKATESPOT ISSUES

Continuing a valuable dialogue that had started by e-mail, there was an in-depth discussion about the opportunities and limitations in the site and design for a skatespot proposal from Sean Kelly and Micah Shapiro for Colonnade's north edge along the Lakeview underpass under I-5 (the currently unprogrammed space is among the best sheltered from precipitation, a high priority for skateboards). Emily Perchlik urged ample public access from the north sidewalk, multipurpose features (such as a running pathway through the site) for those times when skateboarders are not present, and opportunities for people to comfortably watch the skate action, and ways to avoid passerby perceiving Colonnade as only a skate area. Sean emphasized the value to passersby of the proposed general entry from the north (currently unavailable) and of the new opportunities to watch skate action, while acknowledging that this first draft had not yet added places for spectators to sit or lean. The Steering Committee expressed appreciation to Sean, Emily, and Micah for their efforts and the hope that it will continue toward refinement of the design.