City of Seattle - University of Washington Community Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes
November 10, 2009 CUCAC Meeting #103

Members and Alternates Present

Matt Fox - U-District Community Council. Ashley Emery - UW
Daniel Kraus - UW Staff Rep Chris MacKenzie - Wallingford Community Council
Neal Lessenger - UW At-Large Ruedi Risler - University Park Community Club
Matthew Stubbs, UW At-Large alternate Kirsten Curry - Laurelhurst Community Club
Elaine King - Montlake Community Club Chris Leman – Eastlake Community Council

Staff and Others Present

Theresa Doherty – UW Regional Affairs Steve Sheppard, City Dept of Neighborhoods
Jan Arntz, Capital Projects Victoria Buker, Vulcan Inc
Chuck Budnick Mike Ward, Seattle Department of Transportation
Cheryl Elsworth – Enviro Issues Virginia Gunby
Phil Fuji – Vulcan Inc Rebeccah Sadinski
Daniel Dunjic - WSDOT Sandra Fan - WSDOT

I. Opening of Meeting/Approval of Agenda/Housekeeping

A. Approval of Minutes for Meeting 102 – the minutes for meeting 102 were approved without substantive change.

B. Approval of Agenda – The agenda was approved without major modification.

II. Update on the UWMC South Lake Union Project

Theresa Doherty informed the Committee that Victoria Buker from Vulcan Inc. would be the primary presenter. She noted that this item was included on the agenda at the request of Brian Ramey. She also noted that this is a courtesy presentation in that the authority of CUCAC does not extend to the UW’s South Lake Union development. CUCAC’s purview is the University District.

Victoria Buker stated that Phil Fuji would also be joining in the presentation. Ms. Buker stated that she was with Vulcan Inc. which is acting as the development manager for the projects in South Lake Union for the UW Medicine organization. She noted similar presentations have been made to South Lake Union Friends and Neighborhood (SLUFAN), the Cascade Neighborhood Group Committee, the Lake Union Opportunity Alliance, the South Lake Union Chamber, and the Downtown Association.

In 2002 UW Medicine put out a request for proposals for property opportunities off-campus to meet the demand for research space. Because of limited space at the current facility and the lease lid, they were looking beyond the immediate University District. In addition, they were looking for a public and private partnership in order to limit the need for state legislature funding. South Lake Union was chosen.
The projects are being funded, financed through tax-free municipal bonds that are issued by a 501c3, and with lease revenues retiring the bonds.

This will be a phased development. Vulcan was the successful responder to the UW RFP. Vulcan is providing the land which is leased to the UW, with the UW building and operating the facilities.

Ms. Buker noted that one of the reasons that the South Lake Union site was chosen was the synergies with other bio-medical research facilities and other bio-tech facilities, including Fred Hutch, Murc Rosetta, Seattle BioMedical Research Properties, Nova Nordisk, and Seattle Children’s. She also noted that this is a three-phase project. Phases I and II are complete. Phase I was completed in 2002 and was a renovation of the former home of Washington Natural Gas. Phase II was completed in 2008 and was a lab building and office building for UW Medicine administration that connected to the renovated old Washington Natural Gas Building. We are now undertaking Phase III.

Phase III comprises the block bounded by Mercer, Dexter, Republican, and 8th Avenue. Phase III consists of three buildings constructed over a 10-year period with the first occupancy in about 2013. This is research only; there are no classrooms or outpatient services.

The Phase III site is a block to the west of Phases I and II. It’s currently zoned Seattle Mixed 65 which in South Lake Union allows construction to 85 feet. There are no open space requirements, no required setbacks required and no FAR limitation. You can build lot line to lot line up to 85 feet in height. The program requirements were for 420,000 square feet in three buildings. Research building standards have driven the choice of design and floor plate. The building floor plates will be about 20,000 square feet so, given site constraints and in order to get 420,000 square feet on the site, we would basically have to build out the whole block in a single building. This was not considered desirable in that it provided little opportunity for common and open spaces. So the designers looked at another option. This arrangement would include open space here similar to the open space in Phase I and Phase II. However, in order to do this, the height limit will need to be increased. So a City of Seattle Municipal Code text amendment to increase the height is currently before the City Council.

If the Text Amendment is approved the project will consist of three buildings in three phases at seven stories rather than the six currently allowed with a total of 420,000 square feet with about 25,000 square feet of open space. Provision of open space was one of the major interests of the Cascade Neighborhood Council. The open space provides a courtyard with good sun exposure. Great care is also being taken to keep the courtyard inviting.

Ms. Buker also noted that under the terms of the test amendment, the project will be required to develop a Transportation Management Plan that limits single occupancy vehicles and will also include requirements for augmented landscaping called “Greenfactor”. She noted that this is a new element for Seattle. The result of this is that whereas under current zoning there is no landscaping requirement or set-backs, under the text amendment the project will be required to have a certain amount of landscaping and put in large trees and large plants.

Ms. Buker noted that the overall zoning in the area is under review. This effort started about a year and a half ago and is evaluating a possible major up zone for South Lake Union since it’s an urban center. This larger effort is being led by DPD which is working with many Lake Union Opportunity Alliance members, Cascade Neighborhood Council, SLUFAN and so forth. Initial work is wrapping up now but development of the EIS still needs to be developed and there is no immediate timeframe for its adoption by City Council.

The floor was then opened for questions from Committee members.
Members asked when the test amendment would be coming before the City Council. Ms. Buker responded that it will go through the Planning and Land Use and Neighborhood Committee led by Sally Clark. One committee meeting has been held and a public hearing is scheduled for Thursday, October 12 at 5:30. After the hearing, the proposal will go back to the committee and then, if it gets out of committee, it goes to City Council. If it gets through City Council it goes to the Mayor’s Office. It is anticipated that the committee will consider this on December 3 after the public hearing.

Members also asked what the bio hazard levels would be at the research facility. Ms. Buker responded that it’s mostly a BL2 lab but there are BL3 facilities. She also noted that there are quite a few facilities in South Lake Union that already have BL3 facilities and that’s as high as it goes. The Center for Disease Control and National Institute of Health classifies pathogens or diseases or bacteria or viruses basically in four different levels from 1 to 4 with 1 being the least dangerous and 4 being very harmful. Even a cold virus could be a bio safety level 2 because there’s not really a cure for the cold, even though you’re not going to die from it.

Chris Leman noted that he had previously asked that a representative of South Lake Union be added to CUCAC. He noted that they are now affected by what the University is doing there and that CUCAC should be following it but really can’t without having a seat for those affected neighborhoods.

Matt Fox responded that he had looked at the City Council resolution that established CUCAC and that it appears to be outside of the charge of CUCAC. He observed that this would probably require a change to the City/University Agreement. Steve Sheppard agreed.

III. NE 45th Street Viaduct Project

Mr. Mike Ward, Project Manager for the Seattle Department of Transportation, was introduced to present this topic. Mr. Ward stated that this project that was included as part of the Bridge the Gap levy vote in November 2006. There are many aspects to the $368 million approved by the voters for the 14 year program, one of which was a bridge program to identify 11 bridges for safety, seismic retrofitting, rehabilitation or replacement depending on what the needs are. Replacement of the NE 45th Viaduct is one of these projects and the City is looking to replace one section of it next summer.

He noted that the viaduct is in two sections: 1) a wood truss and 2) a girder reinforced concrete section. The girder reinforced concrete section was seismic retrofitted in about 1995. We have evaluated it and it is sound so it need not be replaced. Therefore, the project will concentrate on the 470 feet of wood truss supported section. This section will be replaced with a mechanically structural earth wall (MSE). This will involve building walls on both sides and filling between the two walls with either compacted dirt fill or kind of a slurry concrete mix. A decision has not yet been made concerning which material will be used.

Several options for phasing of construction were evaluated including one that would extend construction over a 12 to 18 month period retaining one lane traffic each direction through the corridor for the duration of the project and one that would be more aggressive and be completed in 3 to 3 ½ month but require full closure of the corridor for at least 3 of those 3 ½ months. The second option was chosen.

After a full community review and approval by the Director of SDOT, the City is now 90 percent complete with design with construction to start spring of next year, probably April. The plan is to have the corridor re-opened prior to the first Husky game, and hopefully no later than August.

The floor was then opened for questions from committee members.

Members asked if there would be any other street closures during the construction. Mr. Ward responded that there will be some detour routes that we’re working on that we’re going to publish but there’s nothing else that we’re going to have to close. He noted that one of the detour routes will be along 25th Avenue is part of the detour route as well as NE 65th and 15th NE.
Members also asked what is planned to mitigate increased detour traffic that you’ll see, let’s say on 25th or 65th. Mr. Ward responded that they will be working with the Fire Chief of the Seattle Fire Department which has expressed concerns. So for the five signalized intersections from NE 65th, from 25th NE down to Pacific, the City will install an opticom system - a little computer controller that gets a sensor from the fire truck and it gets a green light. In addition consideration is being given to removal of on-street parking along portions of the detour routed.

IV. SR 520 Update

Editor’s Note: Much of this discussion related to overhead slides and power point presentations and was not easily translated into a written format.

Ms. Danielle Dunjic was introduced to discuss the projects. Ms. Dunjic noted the legislature set a maximum program budget for $4.65 billion last year and that there is a $2.37 billion funding gap. The $2.11 billion for the floating bridge however is fully funded and that’s a combination of federal money, state money and tolling revenue and after sales tax that comes to $1.99 billion. The center section is what’s fully funded - the floating bridge replacement with connections to the west and the east.

After brief discussion of the Pontoon Construction and the Eastside Transit and HOV Projects, discussion turned to the Medina Bridge Replacement. This project will include a 14 foot bike/pedestrian path, two general purpose lanes and one HOV lane in each direction with inside shoulders 10 feet and outside shoulders of 4 feet. The project will also include interchange improvements and a partial lidding of the project. There are several options for the approach, from Option A to K, but there are many similarities among them related primarily to how the Montlake interchange is handled.

Sandra Fan was then recognized to discuss the traffic information that was developed for Options A, K and L and presented to the legislative workgroup. She noted that this is based on information that’s contained in WSDOT’s SDEIS. The focus is on local traffic circulation and the Montlake interchanges.

Ms. Fan noted that, under a no build alternative, traffic volumes would increase by about 20 percent over existing conditions. Option A and Sub-option A are expected to generate similar traffic volumes as the no-build alternative. Option A would also increase traffic on the Portage Bay Bridge and at the Harvard Roanoke St intersection because of the removal of the Lake Washington Boulevard ramps. Some traffic would revert and use 520 to access areas to avoid Capitol Hill. Option K shows 32 percent more traffic crossing the Montlake Cut than the no-build alternative, again because the interchange has been shifted to the right and there are four lanes in that second crossing. That’s separating freeway traffic from local traffic so some of the trips that are being made in the area today are rerouting to use a more direct path.

K and L would have the most traffic in the arboretum area, again because the interchange will be shifted to the east and because of the second crossing on the Montlake Cut and the additional capacity that’s being provided there.

Chris Leman asked for clarification on the no build. He noted that previously several four lane alternatives were put forward that would have improved shoulder geometry and could incorporate many of the improvements that have been identified for the 6 lane alternatives. Ms Dunjic responded that the no build is actually exactly what’s there today. She also noted that WSDOT did evaluate a four lane alternative in the Draft EIS.

Mr. Leman asked why none of those options is being presented or considered. Ms. Dunjic responded that a decision was made following review of information in the DEIS that the replacement would be six lanes. Mr. Leman expressed dissatisfaction with this decision and offered the opinion that concerted efforts by all of the members of CUCAC might still reverse this decision.
Ms. Fan noted that the Legislative Workgroup made recommendations on full corridor financing and the west side design options. The workgroup is comprised of 16 legislators and transportation officials, includes representation from the eastside, westside and legislative leadership. The co-chairs of the workgroup are Senator Rodney Tom from the eastside and Representative Scott White from the westside. There is also a westside sub-group that been formed to focus on the Seattle side design. The process was initiated in July and its recommendation is scheduled to be made by January.

She also noted that the Seattle City Council has scheduled public hearings on November 24th, one in the morning and one in the evening, for communities to come in and make comments on these new options. The refinements that are going on make it very confusing when you arrow and you arrow and by that time you need some summaries of these on the website, including the most current.

Theresa Doherty handed out the 2008 letter from President Emmert to the CUCAC members that outlined the University’s concerns with the various options.

V. Adjournment

No further business being before the Committee the meeting was adjourned.

Adjourned.