

Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee (ABGC) Minutes

Web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/wpa/abgc/>

The Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee is a Joint effort of the Arboretum Foundation, Seattle Parks Department, and the University of Washington, and designated by Seattle City Council Ordinance 65130, approved December 27, 1934, and Ordinance 116337, approved September 8, 1992.

The ABGC is closely monitoring the WSDOT SR520 project for impacts to the Washington Park Arboretum. Please see <http://depts.washington.edu/wpa/520.htm>

Meeting Location: Graham Visitors Center, March 10, 2010

Voting Members

Present:

Arboretum Foundation

- Barbara Wright, Arboretum Foundation President
- Paige Miller, Arboretum Foundation Executive Director

City of Seattle

- Jack Collins, Mayoral Appointee
- Kjris Lund, Mayoral Appointee

University of Washington

- Theresa Doherty, University of Washington, Assistant Vice President for Regional Affairs
- Sandra Lier, University of Washington Botanic Gardens (UWBG) Director
- Iain Robertson, University of Washington Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture

Excused:

- Tim Gallagher, Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation
- Dave Towne, Washington State Governor's Appointee

Other Staff Present:

- David Graves, Seattle Parks, Project Manager
- Donald Harris, Seattle Parks, Property Manager
- Fred Hoyt, UWBG, Associate Director
- Michael Shiosaki, Seattle Parks, Planning & Development Deputy Director

Members of the Public Present:

- Nancy Belcher, Arboretum Foundation/SR520 Project
- Marty Hefron, UW Traffic Engineering Division
- Larry Sinnott, Board Member, Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks

ABGC Staff:

- Sandy Brooks, Coordinator

Standing Committees

Building Committee:

Paige (AF); Donald (City); & Sandra (UW)

Funding Requests to State Legislature:

John (AF), Jack (City), & Dave T (Washington State)

Fundraising Policy:

AF: Paige Miller & Barbara Wright

Master Plan Implementation Group (MPIG)
Mission Statement:
Naming Recognition Guideline:
SR520 Mediation:

City: Tim Gallagher (Chair) & Donald Harris
UW: Tom Hinckley & Sandra Lier
Michael (lead), Donald, Fred, Julia, Paige, Sandra & Tom
Kathleen Pierce (AF), Donald (City) & Sandra (UW)
Paige (AF), Donald (City), & Sandra (UW)
AF, David Graves (City), & Theresa Doherty (UW)

This extended meeting began at 8:00, due to the extensive agenda focused on the SR 520 project and the ABGC's response to the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Barbara Wright, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Legislation – State Bill #6392

ABGC members briefly discussed this bill "Clarifying the Use of Revenue Generated from Tolling the State Route Number 520 Corridor" (to read the bill see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=6392&year=2009#documents>) and noted that Section 5, Page 4, reads that WSDOT shall consult with the Arboretum's governing board. ABGC members urged the Legislation to change the language to "shall consult with the ABGC" (which is the Arboretum's governing board); however, the language was not changed. The bill is now ready for Governor Gregoire's consideration. Jack expressed curiosity as to why State Representatives Frank Chopp and Ed Murray voted against the bill. Nancy believes they are waiting for consensus on the footprint of the project before giving the bill their support. Jack asked if the ABGC will send a letter of support to the Governor and, after discussion, ABGC members agreed to do so.

Jack moved Barbara, as Chair, to write the letter and cc: Mayor McGinn, City Council members, and UW members. The letter will include that the ABGC appreciates being recognized as the Arboretum's governing body and will consult with WSDOT. Kjris seconded the motion. The vote was taken and unanimous in favor. Motion carried. The letter will include a reminder that the Governor has a representative on the ABGC. Kjris offered to assist Barbara with the letter, which will be distributed today. Michael noted that the description of the Technical Working Group doesn't include a reference to Seattle Parks Department. The ABGC letter will urge that Parks be included in the language.

Theresa next introduced Heather Ramsey of the National Parks Service, Department of the Interior, who has considerable experience and knowledge of 4f and 6f park land designations. She reviewed several questions that Theresa sent her prior to this meeting and explained the 6f rating in respect to the SR 520 project and Arboretum. The funding for the Arboretum trails came from a federal grant and the land must be kept for recreation use in perpetuity. The City and UW are responsible that the land is protected and any damage be mitigated.

Theresa noted that the project is expected to take 5.8 acres of Seattle's park land, valued at several million dollars. Heather responded that the Uniform Replacement Act requires the land to be replaced in equal or greater value and there are many stipulations on the replacement. Members of the Technical Working Group, which includes Fred, Michael, Theresa, and David, would help make the assessment. WSDOT would then present approved UW and City options to the National Park Service.

Discussion focused on the waterfront trail. Heather noted that any loss does not just include the trail itself; rather, it includes the entire experience of the trail: wetlands, view, parking, etc. Paige stated that any replacement lands not located in the Arboretum is a loss for the Arboretum. Heather noted that the law provides land taken from the UW can be replaced in other areas. Land taken from the City must be replaced in the same area. Iain asked if decks built across SR 520 would qualify as a trade. Heather answered that such a replacement would be allowed, but it is difficult to protect the ownership and she would recommend against. Barbara asked if the law allows for taking private land. Heather responded that federal laws allow

this, but the State law doesn't. The City has a deed of ownership for the trails, as well as a State grant that was the source of funding. WSDOT must compensate the owner.

David next addressed sources that may require mitigation from the project: State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA); National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA); Corp of Engineer for permits and consultation with tribes; 4f and 6f restrictions; Washington State Conservation Funds; Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); Seattle Department of Planning and Development for the shoreline critical area ordinance; Seattle Parks Department; and the general legal compensatory ramifications of taking of public park land. The Technical Working Group is now focused on the NEPA and SEPA processes.

Following the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement comment period, the Governor is expected to announce the preferred alternative, followed by an additional 30-day comment period. Jack suggested the ABGC develop a policy to help guide it through this project and asked that this be addressed at a future meeting. Jack asked if the overall goal of the group is to implement the Master Plan and Barbara agreed that it is. Jack suggested that the ABGC approach each agency with a different project and suggest mitigation to fund it. Donald cautioned against this approach, as it could be seen as selling out the protection of the Arboretum to get mitigation. Iain asked a rhetorical question: if the Master Plan is funded and the Arboretum is harmed by the SR 520 project, are we ahead? The group strongly agreed that the top priority is that no harm comes to the Arboretum. Sandra stated that the UW would favor using mitigation funds to help care for the Arboretum, by providing staff and salaries. Barbara doesn't believe mitigation funds can be used for this purpose.

ABGC members thanked Heather for the information and agreed this was a very helpful conversation.

Paige noted that the DSEIS refers to Lake Washington Boulevard as a street. Parks Superintendent Gallagher wrote WSDOT requesting they correct the information to show it as a park boulevard. Park land must be analyzed differently from a city street to determine if there is a feasible and prudent alternative. She believes the alternative would be to have the SR 520 ramps lead into 23rd and Montlake and be removed from the Arboretum. This reasoning can be a powerful and effective tool in protecting the Arboretum from this project.

ABGC members agreed to send any additional comments on the SDEIS to David by March 19, in *track changes* mode. He will incorporate the comments into a final document for review and approval at the April 14 ABGC meeting. It was agreed that the tone of the response will be on a higher level and deal with noise and visual impacts, as well as safe access to the north end of the Arboretum. Any incongruities in the SDEIS are to be addressed in a separate and general statement. The UW, Arboretum Foundation, and others are expected to respond in a more detailed level of comment.

Lake Washington Boulevard Traffic-Calming Measures

Luke Korpi, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) Traffic Operations, gave an update report on his initial traffic-calming plan for Lake Washington Boulevard. He first attended the October 2009 meeting. Since then SDOT has completed a traffic study and a walking tour of the Boulevard. Both were very informative. SDOT staff used this information to begin developing options to increase pedestrian safety on the Boulevard. Parks, SDOT, and City Light will coordinate on the following projects:

Illumination project:

- SDOT and City Light staff determined that 16 of the 21 historical street lights are burned out. Repairing/replacing these will increase pedestrian safety and will be one of the earliest parts of the project to be completed.
- City Light is studying additional ways to add historical-style lighting to the Boulevard for pedestrian safety.

- Park boulevards are not required to have the same level of street lights as a city street does. ABGC members asked that City Light keep this in mind, as well as the need for historical-style lights to adhere to the Olmsted design.

Pedestrian crossings

- Barbara noted that the number of Arboretum visitors increases substantially each spring and pedestrian safety is of utmost importance.
- Luke reported:
 - Crosswalks must be situated in highly-visible areas, have advanced warning signs, be located in areas where approaching drivers have good visibility, and may not be located in curves.
 - New federal regulations call for strict adherence to advance warning signs of a crosswalk.
 - Any new crosswalks will not initially be ADA complaint. ADA compliance is quite costly and there is a current two-year waiting list.
 - Vehicle speeds approaching the Japanese Garden average 27 mph, as the curves force drivers to decrease their vehicle speed. This lower speed precludes the need for a speed cushion at the Japanese Garden crosswalk. The crosswalk will have advance warning pedestrian signs, signs at the actual crosswalk, and will be painted yellow. It will not have flashing lights.
 - SDOT's traffic study found the most obvious crosswalk from the Japanese Garden to the new Pacific Connections gardens is problematic, as there is no street light and the area is very dark.
 - The parking area at the intersection of Interlake and Lake Washington Boulevards experiences a high level of pedestrian usage, with visitors crossing to and from Azalea Way. This is an appropriate place for a new crosswalk. It requires a wheelchair ramp, as well as improved illumination. The existing pedestrian crosswalk, located south of this area, is under-utilized and could be removed. A speed cushion would work well at this site.
 - City Light is working on a plan to improve the lighting and believes that work will be completed by end of 2010.
- Paige stated a large school group tried to cross the busy street the day before, coming from the Pacific Connections garden to use the restrooms at the Japanese Garden. She suggested adding yellow pedestrian flags that can be carried and increase driver's attention to pedestrians crossing the street. Luke responded that SDOT can present information on the flags; however, the flags are often removed, must be regularly replaced, and involve some liability risks.

Speed cushions

- Luke noted there is a real trade off with speed cushions, as there is a definite increase in noise where vehicles are decelerating from 35 mph as they approach the cushion and accelerating after they cross it.
- Fred responded that the cushion would be in a park and not near residences.
- Jack asked that the cushion be installed and Parks and UW would then determine if it is effective.

Pedestrian bridge – discussion

- Sandra asked if SR 520 mitigation could include a pedestrian bridge.
- Luke responded that the bridges come at a high cost and low benefit, as people avoid using them and tend to instead dart across the street.
- Theresa added that the City doesn't approve of overpasses in general, as they are a view obstruction.
- Michael noted that the Arboretum's Master Plan shows a pedestrian bridge to be added near the Holmdahl Rockery.

Crosswalk Signage Concerns

- Some members expressed concerns with the signs required for crosswalks. Luke responded that if crosswalks are installed without the usual amount of signage, it gives pedestrians a false sense of security and doesn't give drivers adequate warning. Paige commented that the group wants to

preserve the aesthetics of the historic Olmsted-designed park, while inviting the public to safely visit the Arboretum and Japanese Garden.

- Jack recommended that SDOT assess the number of traffic signs in the Arboretum and remove any non-essential signs, in particular the “high car prowler” area signs. He believes these were installed many, many years ago at the request of Seattle Police Department and portray the Arboretum as an unsafe area to visit. He is unsure if Seattle Police Department statistics support the “high car prowler” area claim.
- Pay particular attention to the style of the signs and do not add industrial-type ones to the Arboretum.
- Requested Luke to complete a sign audit to determine if current Arboretum signage is appropriate, useful, and installed in the correct area and to report back to the ABGC with the findings and any recommendations for additional signs.

Japanese Garden South Entry

- Luke reported that the SDOT study showed the configuration makes it difficult for drivers to exit while looking for vehicles and pedestrians. ABGC members agreed to consider a reconfiguration as part of SDOT’s traffic-calming plan.

Other suggestions

- Create decorative landscaped areas at the Arboretum entrance at Lake Washington Boulevard and Foster Island Drive.

Traffic Diversion from Lake Washington Boulevard

- Consider changing timing of the traffic light at 23rd and Madison to make the left turn longer and shorten the left turn light that allows vehicles to turn onto Lake Washington Boulevard.
- Post speed limit signs where vehicles enter Arboretum near Foster Island and from Madison; also consider radar signs.

Timeline/Next Steps

- Luke & SDOT to develop traffic-calming plan & bring to ABGC for review and approval. City Light to work closely with Parks staff on lighting aesthetics. Luke will send the traffic calming plan to the ABGC 1-2 weeks prior to the scheduled presentation (June) meeting and attend to answer questions.
- SDOT to complete basic crosswalk project and sign project, with some assistance from Parks staff, as needed.
- SDOT to add ADA components to crosswalk as quickly as funding is available.

Keeping the Public Informed

In the past, the public has objected to new signage/tree cutting/other changes to the Arboretum. ABGC members asked Luke to report to the ABGC on all lighting improvements, crosswalks, and new signage so it can alert the public to upcoming changes.

Master Plan Implementation Group (MPIG)

Donald and Michael expressed concerns that no members of the press attended yesterday’s press tour of the tree removal site at the Gateway to Chile, scheduled to begin the first week of April. A public tour is scheduled for this afternoon and a public meeting is scheduled for next week. ABGC members were urged to attend the public meeting. A June 11 Holmdahl Rockery groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for June 11.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

APPROVED _____ DATE _____
Barbara Wright, ABGC Chair