

Planning With Grassroots Media

Scott Bonjukian, University of Washington

Nick Welch, City of Seattle DPD

Owen Pickford, The Urbanist

Josh Feit, PubliCola

APA 2015 National Planning Conference

Session Code S463

Sunday, April 19, 2015

Learning Objectives

- Why grassroots media is relevant to planners and public policy decisions
- How planners can use it to promote ideas
- How to generate civic conversations with grassroots media, especially among youth
- Why it's important citizens have a voice outside of formal planning processes
- How the spread of information through grassroots media benefits the public, electeds, and the planning profession

Today's Speakers

Scott Bonjukian

[The Northwest Urbanist](#)

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Graduate student at the University of Washington and intern planner

Nick Welch

Planner, [Seattle DPD](#)

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Urban design, public space, and the City's comprehensive plan update.

Owen Pickford

Executive Director, [The Urbanist](#)

owen@theurbanist.org

Bridges the gap between experts and lay readers through blogging

Josh Feit

Founding Editor, [PubliCola](#)

josh@publicola.com

Reporter's look at grassroots media versus the mainstream

Today's Agenda

- Individual presentations
 - Scott: Introduction to blogging for planners
 - Nick: Government interactions
 - Owen: Experts and casual readers
 - Josh: The mainstream doughnut hole
- Panel discussion
- Audience Q & A



Scott Bonjukian

Grad Student, University of Washington

Introduction to Grassroots Media

- What is grassroots media?
 - Hyperlocal, volunteer based, issue-driven news
 - Passionate residents who care about the same issues that planners deal with every day
- Why pay attention to it?
 - It is playing an increasingly important role in shaping public policy
 - It's a two-way street; you can use it to your city or firm's advantage while also contributing your time

Seattle's Media Landscape



Seattle's Media Landscape



Starting Up Grassroots Media

Seattle Planners Release Marijuana Map

Posted on [September 5, 2013](#)



Hearing on Metro Cuts Highlights State's Transportation Issues

Posted on [October 14, 2013](#)



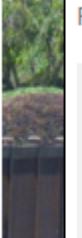
Seattle Bike Activists Launch Major Infrastructure Campaign

Posted on [February 6, 2015](#)



The Alaskan Way Viaduct Must Come Down

Posted on [December 18, 2014](#)



Mayor Leads Scripted U-District Community Walk

Posted on [February 23, 2015](#)



CascadiaCast Episode 3: Michael Maddux

Posted on [April 3, 2015](#)



In this episode I sit down with Michael Maddux, a paralegal and Democratic Party leader running for Seattle City Council in District 4. Michael helped spearhead the formation of permanent parks and recreation funding through the voter-approved [Seattle Parks District](#) in 2013. And hailing from Eastlake, a neighborhood that has not seen its fair share of [public investment](#) over the past two decades, Michael has a vision for a more vibrant and equitable city. His ideas include reforming the land use

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The Power of Cross-Posting

- Find ways to amplify your voice and get attention
- For public agencies, private firms, nonprofit orgs.

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Top Apps Emerge from Seattle's Commute Hackathon

Published on March 24, 2015 by Scott Bonukian | Filed in Civics, Data, Research, Technology, Transportation



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Friday, January 16, 2015 9 Comments

Seattle Car-Share Is Growing, But Is It Cutting Traffic?

by Ben Fried

After launching a pilot program three years ago enabling the company car2go to use on-street parking spots for its car-share fleet, Seattle is pursuing an expansion that would allow new companies to enter the market and dramatically increase the availability of point-to-point car-share vehicles.

Scott Bonukian at [The Urbanist](#) has the details about the expansion legislation and some interesting stats from the pilot program:

Up from 350 vehicles beginning in 2012, the company has reached the 500 vehicle cap under a pilot program monitored by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). The service has proved immensely popular, and reportedly has 59,000 members in Seattle – the largest of car2go's 30 home cities — representing nearly one-tenth of the city's



Photo via [The Urbanist](#)

Cities

Amazon's new downtown Seattle HQ: victory for the city over suburbia?

While Microsoft and Nintendo have stayed in the suburbs, Amazon is building a futuristic new inner-city home. Not everyone is happy - but this could be a masterstroke for the city

Colin Marshall in Seattle

Thursday 22 May 2014 07.27 EDT



668

Comments

65



Featured comment

Seattle's downtown has always been its weakness. It's one of the reasons why Vancouver up the road is the better city to live in overall. Would be nice to see Seattle supplement its vibrant outer neighborhoods with a world class downtown area.



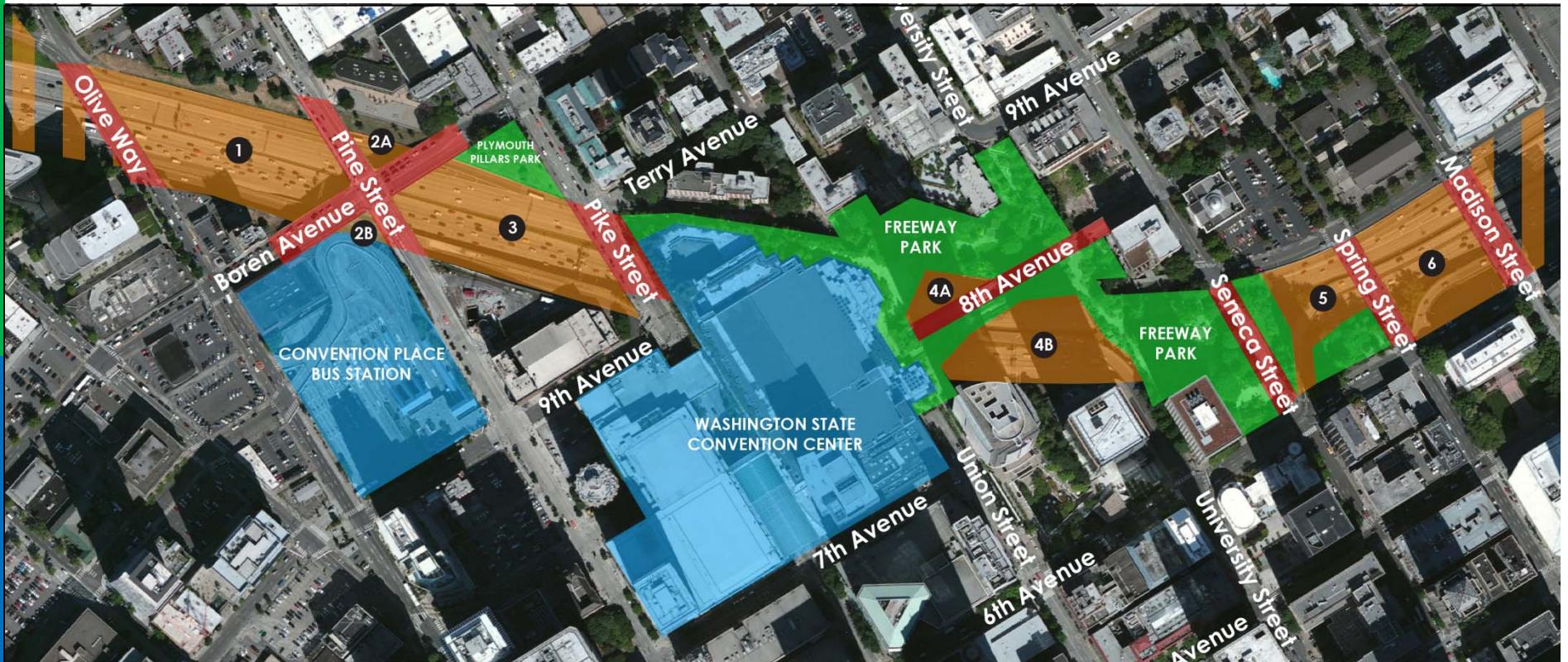
Kaitain

Scott Bonjukian, who closely observes Seattle's development at [The Northwest Urbanist](#), finds South Lake Union "a poignant example of the nationwide shift towards a service economy". Discussing the change in the neighbourhood's



Scott Bonjukian, who closely observes Seattle's development at [The Northwest Urbanist](#), finds South Lake Union "a poignant example of the nationwide shift towards a service economy". Discussing the change in the neighbourhood's

Exploring Project Ideas



"Wow spend spend spend, you libs think alike! People need healthcare ,mental healthcare, food and basic necessities...we are in a earthquake zone!!!"

"God this would be amazing. I would first build a lid between Pike & Pine, and use as much space as possible for new buildings, as tall as engineering allows."

Blogging Tips

- DO
 - Clarify opinion versus objectivity
 - Use lots of sources and images
 - Be brief, relevant, and timely
 - Reach out to people and orgs. for info and quotes
 - Explore social media to expand your reach
- DON'T
 - Use click bait headlines
 - Feed the trolls and angry commenters



Nick Welch
Planner, City of Seattle DPD

Challenges for Planners

- The need for better engagement
- Leveraging your expertise
- **Grassroots media can be a resource for both**

Neighborhood Blogs

- Expand awareness of planning and development projects
- Local focus
- Platform for organizing neighborhood



Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan Update

- Events posted on neighborhood blog calendars
- Engage with ongoing Twitter conversations



Issue-Focused Media

- Outlet for deeper engagement on specific topics
- Coverage of projects and issues that are otherwise under the radar for most people



The Northwest Urbanist

Planning and design news for Seattle and beyond



U District Urban Design



Photo by Sky-Pix Aerial Photography

U District Urban Design

- Planning for light rail in 2021
- UW expanding and growing
- Market-rate development



U District Urban Design

Figure 1-2
Alternative 1

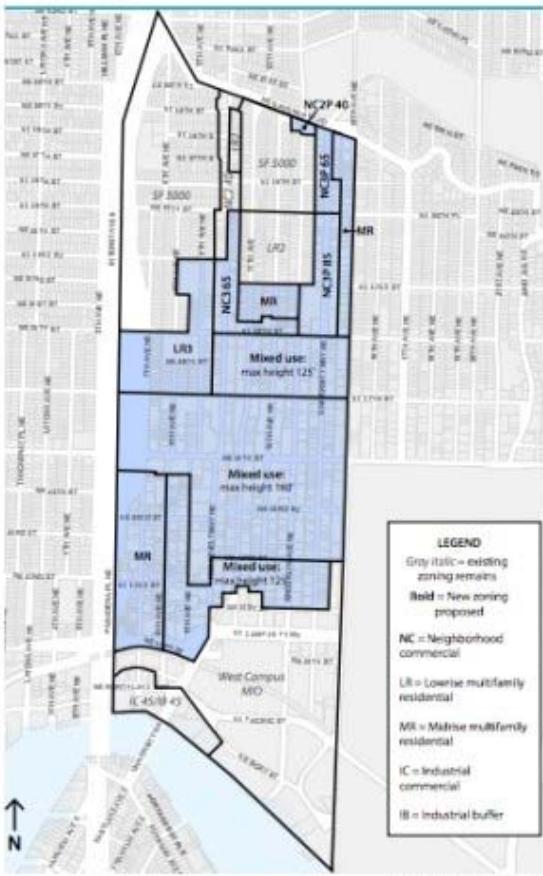


Figure 1-3
Alternative 2

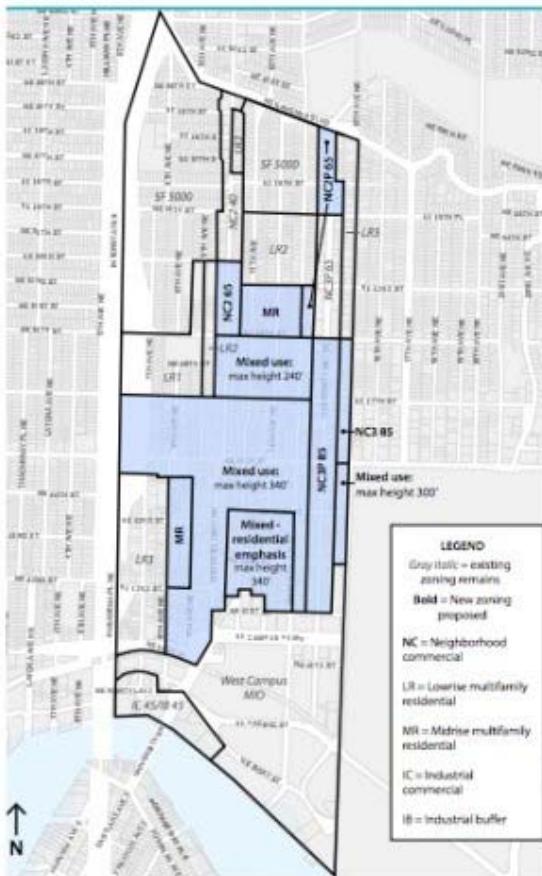
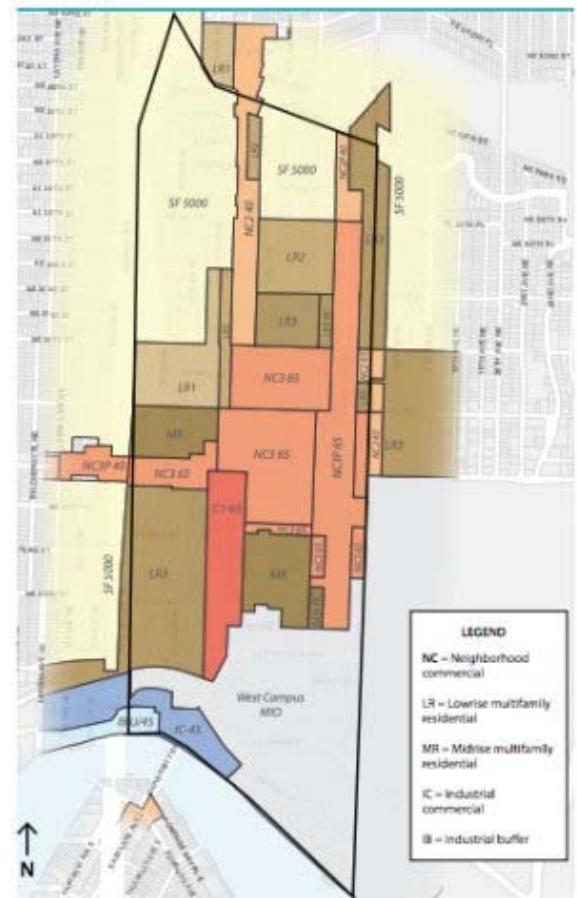


Figure 1-4
Alternative 3



U District Urban Design

- EIS evaluating 3 alternatives for zoning changes
- The Urbanist had detailed coverage of the project
- Recommended “Alternative 4”

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Choose Alternative 4 for the University District

Published on June 19, 2014 by The Urbanist Editorial Board | Filed in [Housing](#), [Land Use and Development](#), [Plans and Policy](#)

Editor's Note: For a more in-depth primer on the University District Urban Design Framework, see our [background article on the project](#).

This is a pivotal time for the University District. The neighborhood is undergoing many major changes, including a [new light rail station](#), an improved [Burke-Gilman Trail](#), expansion of the [UW's West Campus](#), and [dozens of mixed use projects](#) in the heart of the neighborhood. The University District will be growing rapidly over the next 20 years. As the light rail station opens, and the network expands to Lynnwood and Bellevue, the University District will only grow more important as an educational, shopping, employment, and residential center, for students and long-term residents alike.

Over the past few years, the Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) has been developing [an urban design framework for the University District](#).

The University District Urban Design Framework (UDUDF) will play a huge role in shaping the University District's growth over the coming decades. DPD has proposed three alternatives for accommodating the University District's expected growth. Alternative 1 would distribute housing and development throughout the neighborhood, with moderately taller buildings near the light rail station. Alternative 2 would focus development into high-rises around the light rail station, while making fewer changes to the rest of the neighborhood's zoning. Alternative 3 would make no changes at all.



U District Urban Design

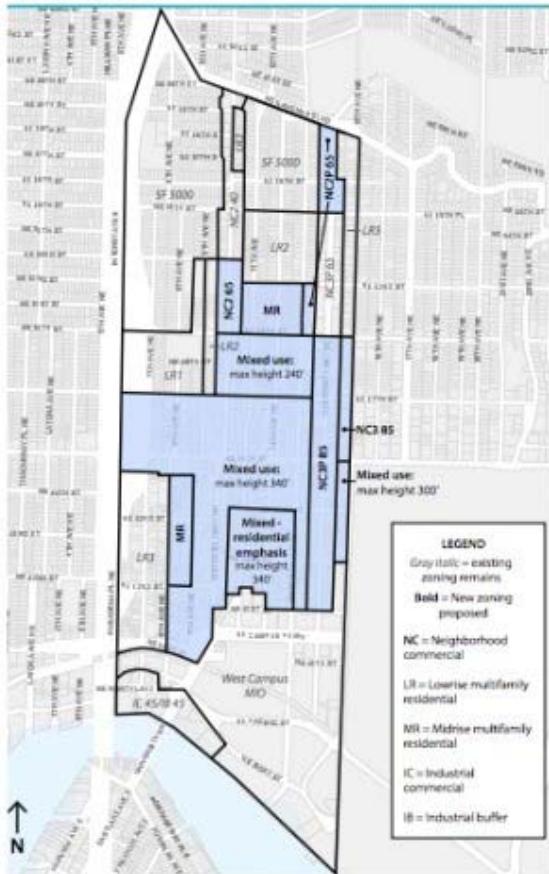
Figure 1-2

Alternative 1

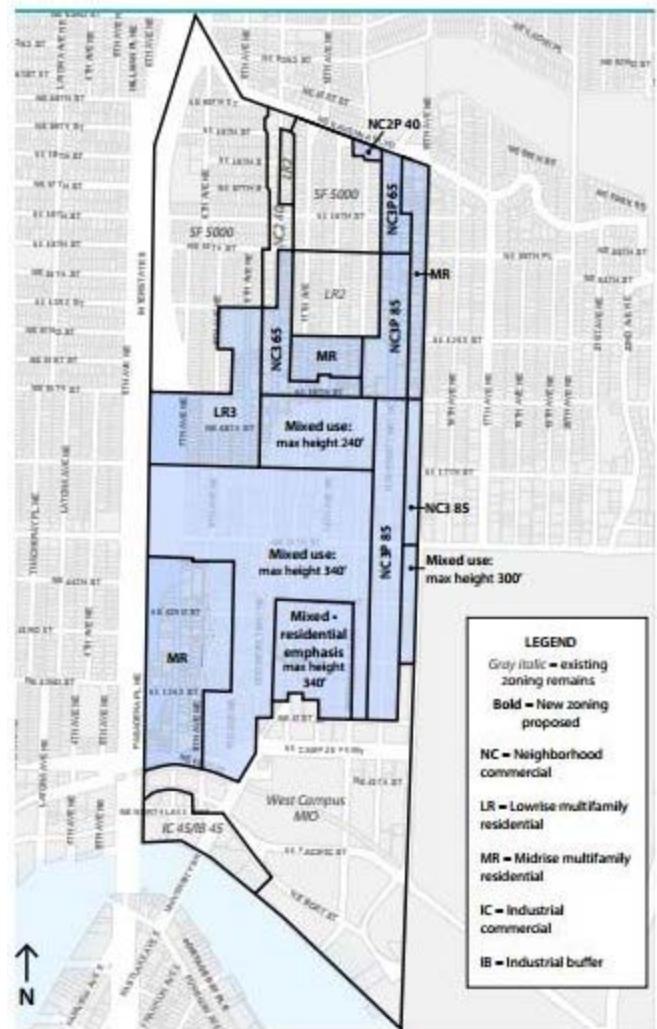


Figure 1-3

Alternative 2

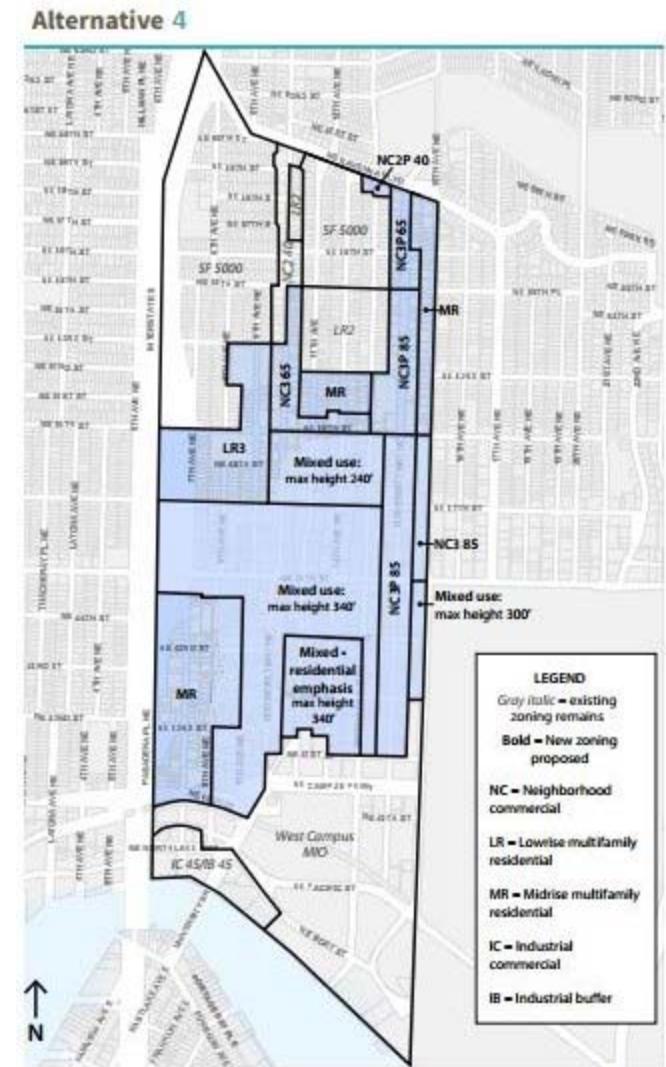


Alternative 4



U District Urban Design

- Many short comments endorsing Alternative 4
- Few long comments objecting to growth in neighborhood
- More voices engaged
- Challenge of balancing input



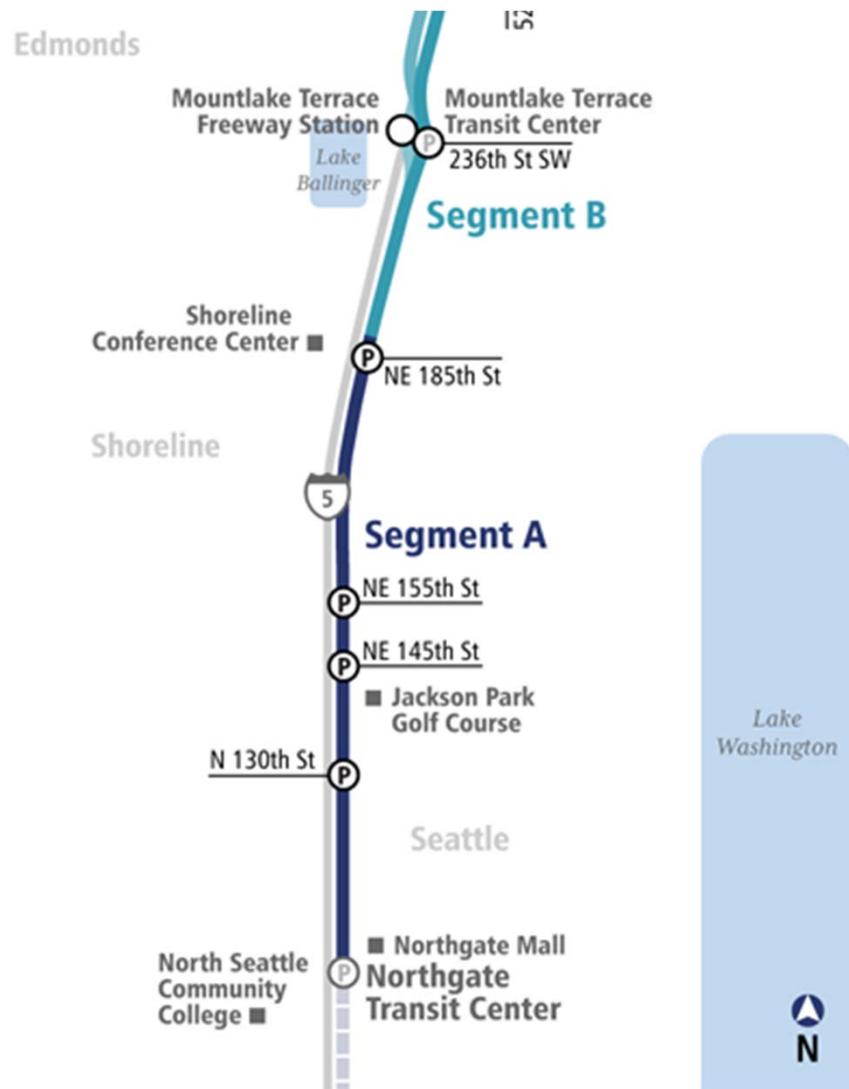
Light Rail Expansion

- Sound Transit extending Link from Northgate to Lynnwood
- Seattle Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP)
 - Planning, development, design professionals
 - Primarily review design of station and public realm surrounding



Light Rail Expansion

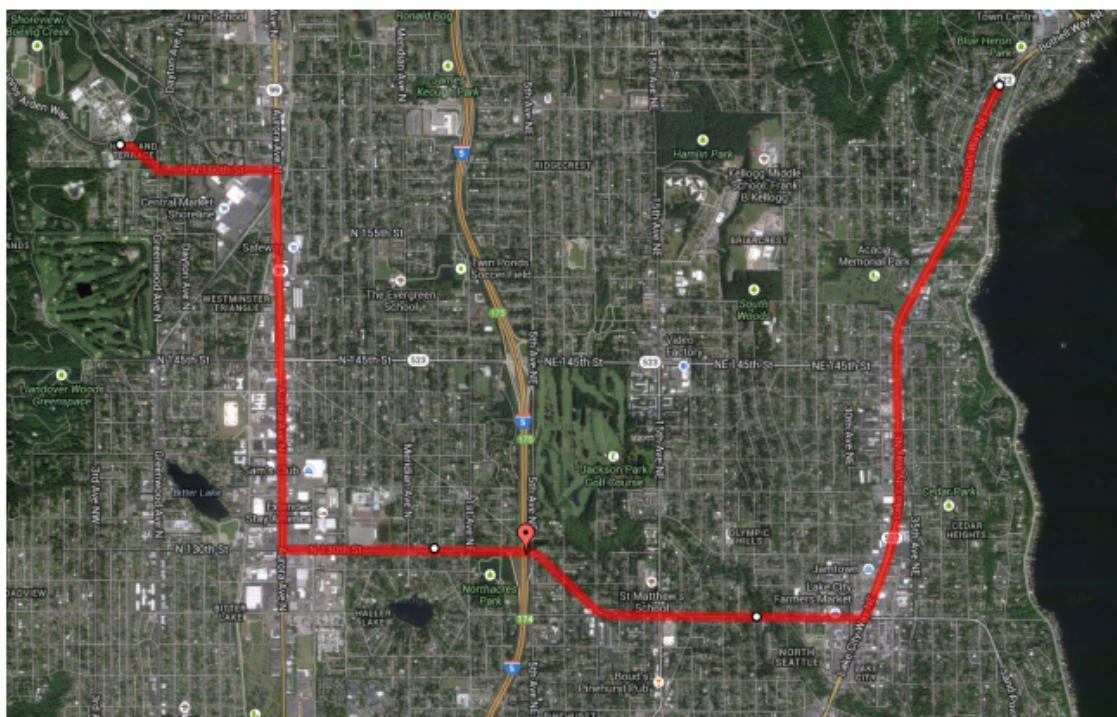
- Sound Transit extending Link from Northgate to Lynnwood
- Seattle Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP)
 - Planning, development, design professionals
 - Primarily review design of station and public realm surrounding





NE 130th Street Station: A Critical and Underdeveloped Idea

OCTOBER 7, 2013 AT 6:00 AM BY ADAM BEJAN PARAST



NE 130th Street Station – Linear, High-Demand Destinations

Since [October 2010](#) we've followed the Lynnwood Link project fairly closely. Unlike other Link extensions, Lynnwood Link had several viable alignments including SR-99, I-5 and NF 15th

ABOUT

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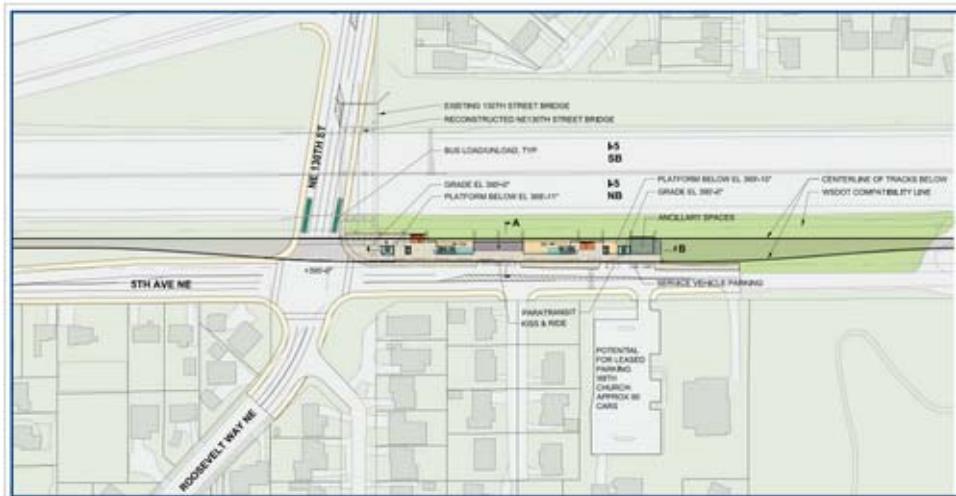
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The Case for a NE 130th Street Station

Published on February 6, 2015 by *Renee Staton* | Filed in *Transit, Transportation*



Option A for the NE 130th Street Station, courtesy of Sound Transit.

Members of the Sound Transit Board are expected to make a decision in April 2015 regarding light rail station locations on the [Northgate-to-Lynnwood extension](#). One station being considered is a [NE 130th Street Station](#) on the east side of I-5 and NE 130th Street. The proposed 130th Street station would not have a parking structure and would rely on people walking, biking, and riding transit.

A proposed King County Metro bus route could serve an [east-west corridor stretching from Bitter Lake to Lake City](#) while providing direct service to a NE 130th Street station. On top of that, protected bike lanes are planned for the area, which would encourage more people on bikes to ride to the station.

The 130th Street/125th Street corridor has far greater room for additional capacity than Northgate Way or 145th Street. It also offers a shorter distance between the urban hearts of Lake City and

Our Mission

The Urbanist's mission is to examine and influence urban policy to improve transportation, housing affordability, social and environmental justice, economic opportunity, and quality of life.

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RSS Feed

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- Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Nearside
- April Special Election Endorsements
- Reenvisioning the Public Realm of South Lake Union, Belltown, and Denny Triangle
- Mayor Murray's Departments Back Better Parking Solutions
- Stories from Metro Route 7: Cafe Avole, Rainier Mini-Mart and Stop 8190
- What We're Reading: Shakespeare's London, Defining Families, and Saving Amtrak Cascades
- Othello II

Latest Tweets



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- New post: A Panel With The Urbanist At The American Planning Association National Convention <http://t.co/M3GtMtUDaT>



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Michael Jenkins
Design Commission Director

Valerie Kinast
Coordinator

Nicolas Welch
Planner

Joan Nieman
Administrative Staff

Date: April 17, 2015
To: Sound Transit Board
From: Light Rail Review Panel
Re: Lynnwood Link NE 130th St Station

The Seattle Light Rail Review Panel (LRRP) continues to support the Sound Transit Board of Director's efforts to obtain funding for the proposed light rail extension from Northgate to Lynnwood. However, we have continued to evaluate the potential station at NE 130th Street and have concerns about the approach reflected in the recent Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). We submit the following thoughts in advance of the Board's upcoming vote on station locations.

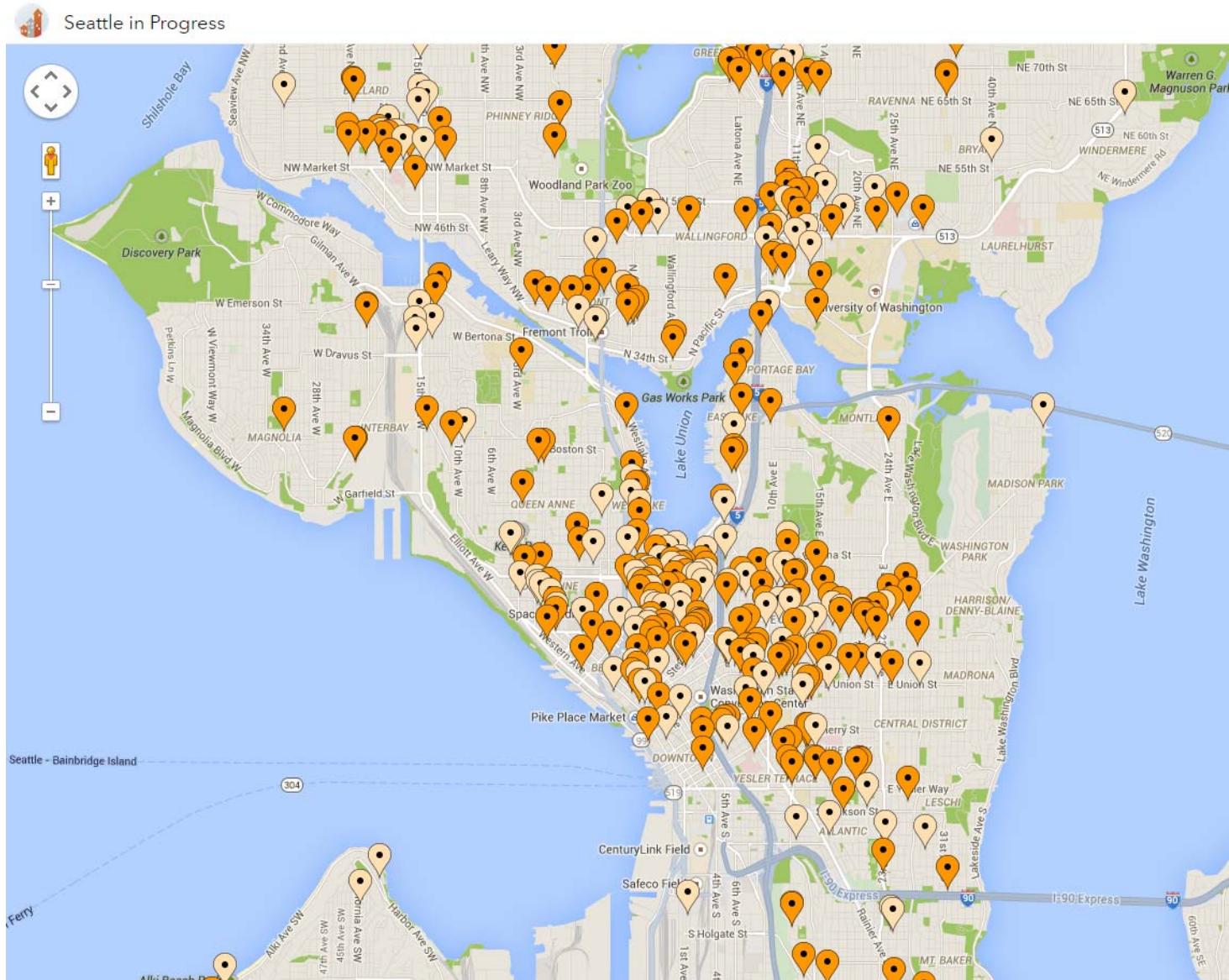
The LRRP supports locating a station at NE 130th St rather than stations only at Northgate and NE 145th St for the following reasons:

1. Compared to the station under construction at Northgate or the proposed station at NE 145th St, a station at NE 130th St better serves the neighborhoods in and around Bitter Lake and Lake City, two growing hub urban villages that offer affordable housing options and have transit-dependent populations.
2. Because of its lower traffic volumes, planned bicycle facilities, and opportunity for bus route restructuring, NE 130th St is a superior location than Northgate and NE 145th St for connecting non-automobile modes with light rail.
3. A station at NE 130th St offers the potential for greater increased ridership than captured in the FEIS. This and other benefits outweigh the one-minute increase in travel times.

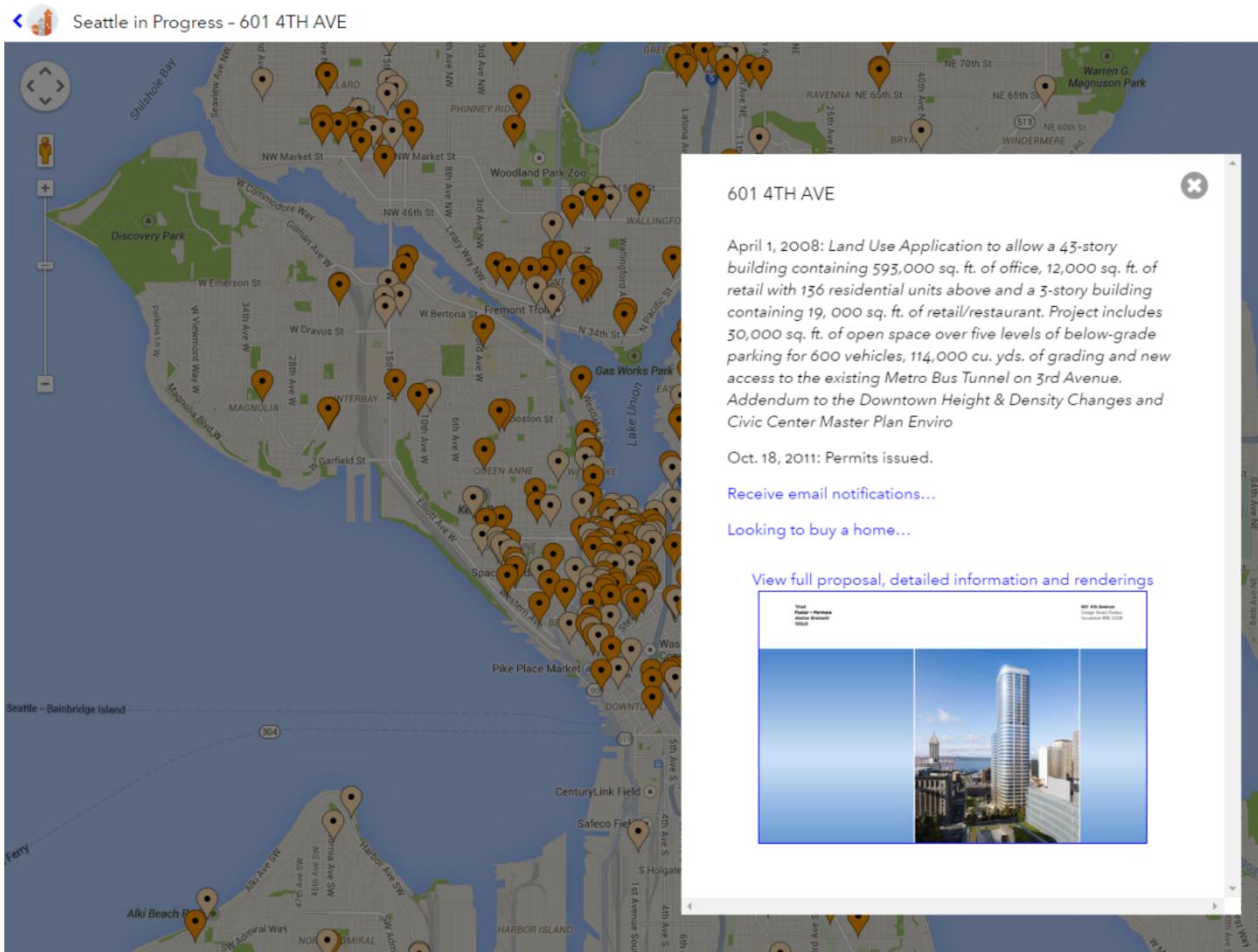
The following discussion expands on each of these arguments.

With membership from the Seattle Design, Planning, and Arts Commissions, the Seattle Light Rail Review Panel is the advisory body that provides integrated review of Sound Transit Link Light Rail projects. LRRP members are professional from the various fields related to urban development and infrastructure, including urban planners, transportation planners, and developers. The LRRP provided rigorous review of Central Link and University Link and is in the process of reviewing Northgate Link and Rainier Station.

Seattle in Progress

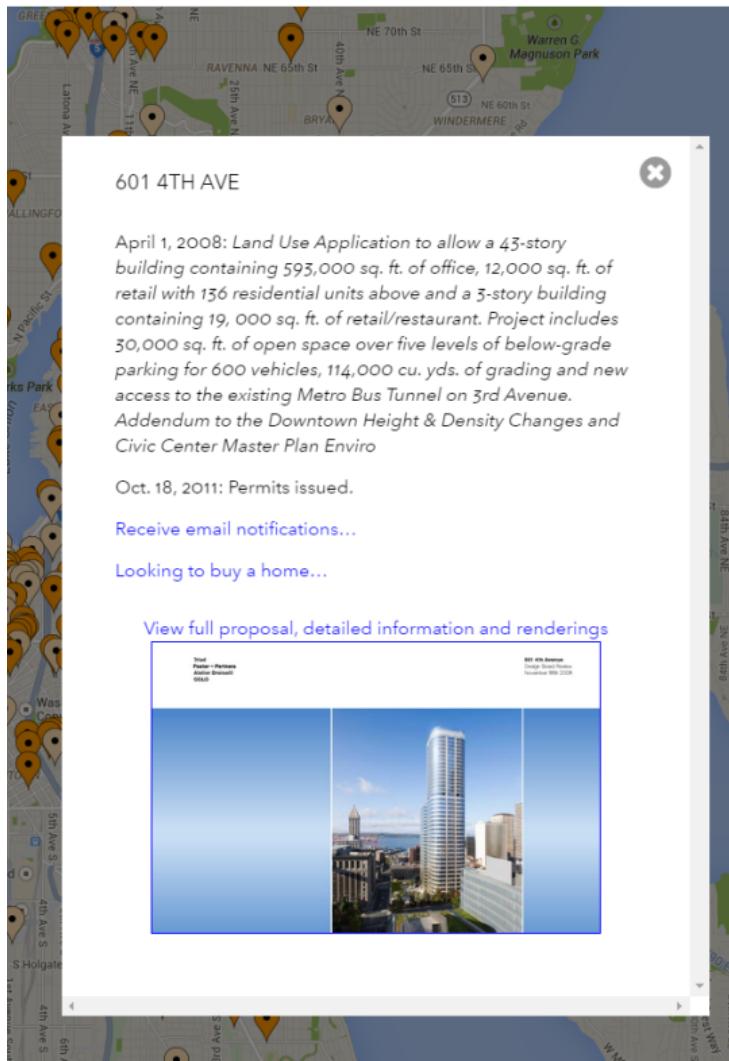


Seattle in Progress



Seattle in Progress

- New app makes use of DPD information that very few people saw or used
- Potential new platform for commenting
- Idea started at Urbanist meetup



A Different Type of Meeting

- Difficult to gather people to talk and listen
- A chance for planners, public, advocates, experts to connect in casual setting
- One part of doing better engagement





**Owen Pickford
Executive Director, The Urbanist**

Grassroots Media Shapes Policy

- Education with a purpose
 - Unite advocates around shared ideas, understandings, and facts
 - Create an outlet and citizen sponsored watchdog for organizing advocacy efforts
- Grassroots media is more than about publishing
 - Weekly meetups
 - Walking tours
 - Presentations and talks
 - Political endorsements

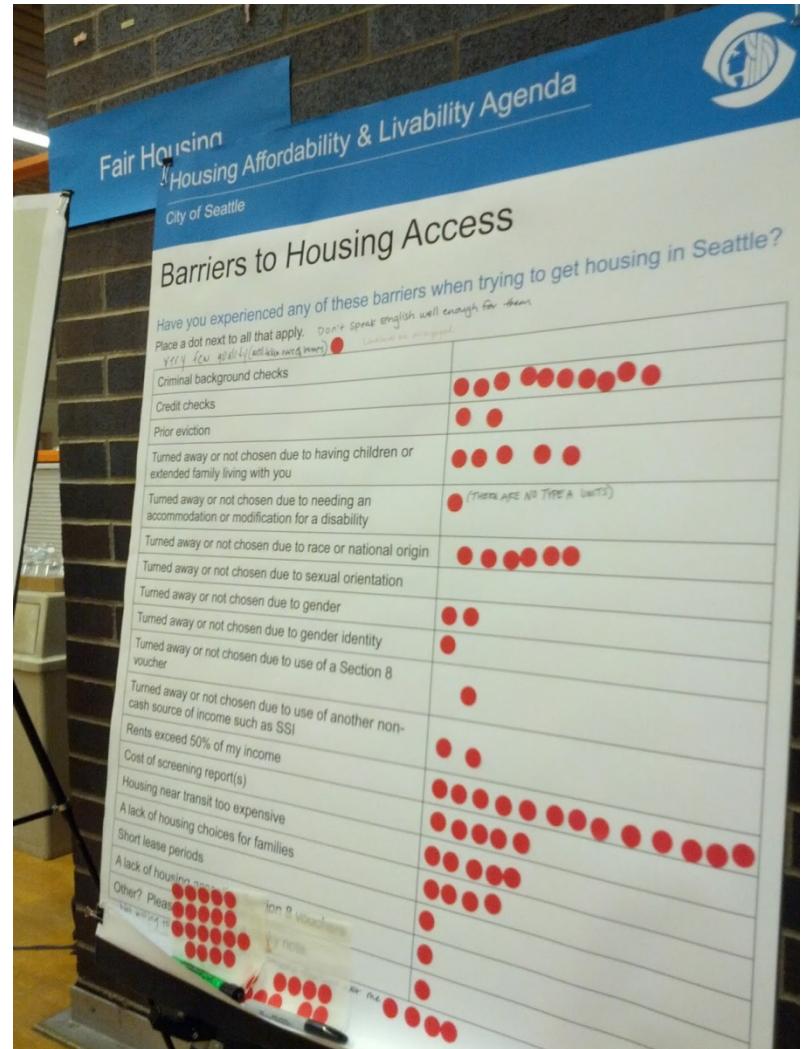
The Impact of Grassroots Media

“I, too, was rather ignorant in my suggestions initially. I can go back to some of my old comments and cringe... But then I started listening. I started reading the arguments... I realized that a few of my assumptions were simply wrong. I started having “epiphanies” about transit systems, only to realize that other professionals had already come to the same conclusion and had plenty of data (real scientific studies) to support those ideas.”

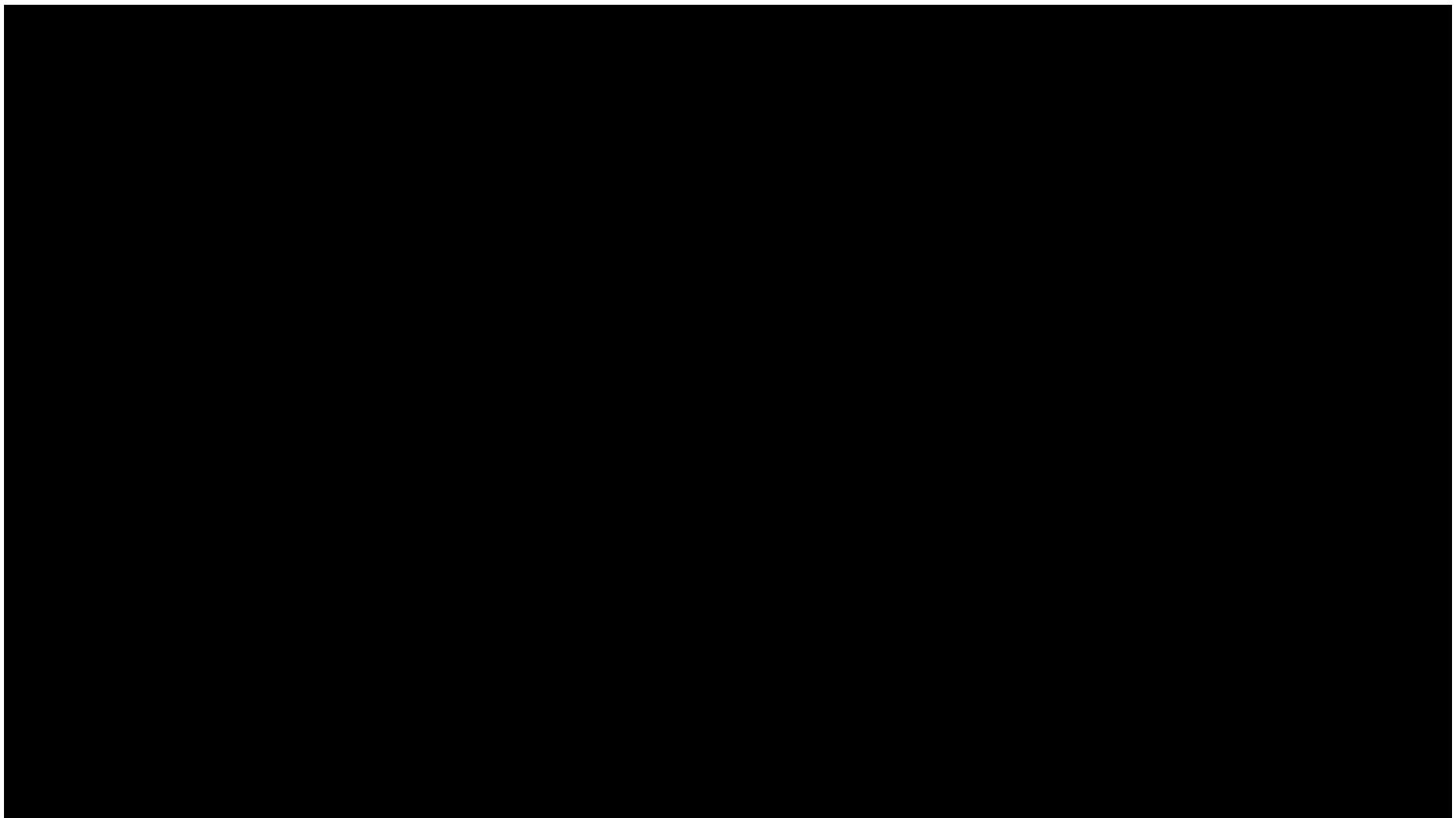
- A reader on The Urbanist

The Bridge Between Expert Knowledge and Lay Participation

- Planning departments want and need to find a balance between experts and the public's opinion
- Typical input systems
 - Dots on a board
 - Public hearings
 - Comment periods
 - Surveys



The Status Quo of Engagement



“Parks and Rec Town Hall” by Katrina Marks, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln9oSjltOs>

The Failure of Traditional Media

“I’m no Lesser Seattle type. Growth means jobs, and density means a vital city. But wasn’t it supposed to be managed growth, or smart growth? Plopping down the biggest development in city history on two blocks with little provision for infrastructure seems helter-skelter. Not smart...We’re lucky to be in Seattle, it’s saying. But is anyone in charge?” - Danny Westneat

“Moreover, they may be shoring the reputation of the man some call “Mayor McSchwinn,” and the belief that he is forcing the entire city to follow his two-wheeled lead, while ignoring residents’ concerns about safety, business viability and whether cyclists should be licensed to help pay for all the dedicated lanes they’re getting.” - Nicole Brodeur

“This is ridiculous; business be damned, we’re going to make policies that push convenience for the people who don’t drive the economy.” - Jason Rantz (KIRO)

Bicyclists ride through a busy parking lot on Westlake in Seattle and it’s dangerous, so naturally, rather than tell bicyclists to take a safer route, the city wants to take away a significant portion of parking spots that help keep businesses afloat, reports [KING 5](#).

Wonky Grassroots Experts



“This solution balances the needs of all users by reducing conflicts between cyclists, buses, and motorists. By doing this, we make a safe way for cyclists to go up and down the Hill, speed up buses, and give motorists more options for east-west travel.” - Stephen Fesler

The Results of Experts and Lay People Working Together

- Hyper-local, wonky focus creates a different conversation
 - Tone of comments on Seattle Times is much different than on The Urbanist
 - Attracts the people who care the most, bringing knowledge to the table and people who are everyday activists in their neighborhoods
- Strengths that only a Third Party can have
 - Organizational goals of acquiring and retaining readers through interesting and quality work
 - Curation of information and a captive audience

The Results of Experts and Lay People Working Together

- Importance of a “go to” organization to achieve institutional goals
 - Most planners have goals that aren’t perfectly aligned with institutional/political status quo
 - Third party can work with institutions to speak to the public from a place of trust
 - A third party trusted by institutions can exert more pressure
 - Support is shown for good policy when it encounters opposition, provides breathing room for planners

The Results of Experts and Lay People Working Together

- Media is a conduit of real engagement and enlightenment
 - Media is where most engagement and learning happens, not through press releases
 - Public meetings try to be informational but often end up an airing of grievances





Josh Feit
Founding Editor, PubliCola



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MORNING FIZZ

An Indie Rocker for City Council?

Caffeinated news featuring local rocker considering council run, Sawant may try to delay encampment vote, and a supposedly pro-choice Republican

Published Mar 12, 2015, 8:41am

By [Josh Felt](#)

[f](#) 793 [t](#) 137 [p](#) 0 [r](#) 0 [s](#) 3



1. Local indie rocker John Roderick (the Long Winters) is reportedly considering joining the city council fray, possibly in the district eight



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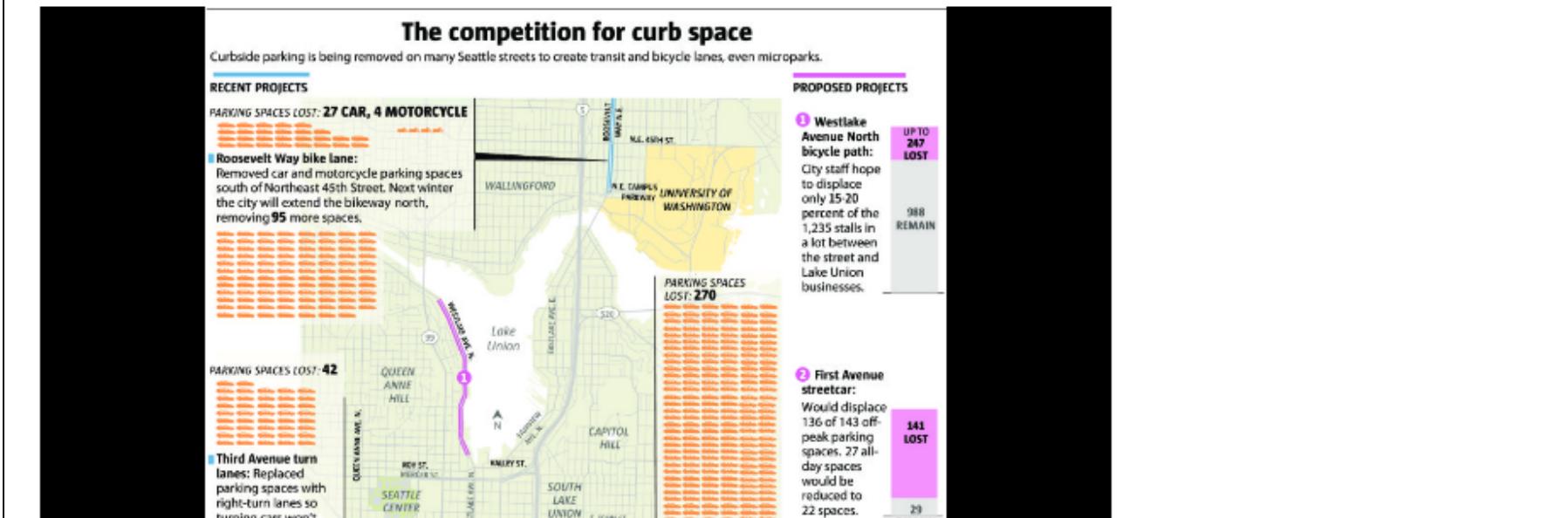
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[Local News](#)

Seattle's street parking vanishes as bus and bike lanes boom

Originally published February 14, 2015 at 5:24 pm | Updated February 16, 2015 at 4:06 pm



URBANISM

The Pedestrian Chronicles: The Pike-Pine Corridor

The Downtown Seattle Association promotes a new plan to connect the waterfront to Capitol Hill.

Published Mar 6, 2014, 1:12pm

By **Josh Feit**

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“The 15 People Who Should Really Run Seattle”



Image: [Brandon Hill](#)



Panel Discussion



Audience Q & A

Thank You!

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