



Pier 62 is shown here below the Overlook Walk that will connect Pike Place Market to the waterfront. The city and nonprofit partners say events, intense maintenance and 24-hour security will help keep the waterfront clean and inviting. Renderings by James Corner Field Operations

Will we really have a ‘Waterfront for All’?

Since planning began in 2012, the new Seattle waterfront has been officially called the Waterfront for All.

Remember that next month when the Alaskan Way Viaduct closes. It’s been our aerial highway for over six decades, which made Seattle’s shoreline a Waterfront for Cars.

Motorists will be mad, at least until state Route 99 traffic can use the new highway tunnel in February. In the meantime, jackhammering of the viaduct will go on, and on.

Construction of the new waterfront will be done in 2023, with about 20 acres of new paving and open space along the shore, as well as the crescent of historic finger piers still reaching into the bay.

A rebuilt Alaskan Way will dovetail with open spaces and lots of public amenities, from seating and plantings to paved trails, and even small, naturalistic beaches.

A new pedestrian promenade and a broad, landscaped walkway will connect MarketFront and Pike Place Market with a future plaza near the Seattle Aquarium.

People living in downtown neighborhoods should be happy. But some property owners are being asked to help pay for the new waterfront through a special levy called a local improvement district. The LID boundaries go from Belltown to Sodo, and generally between the waterfront and Interstate 5.

A group of condo owners who live near the waterfront and within the LID boundaries has challenged city’s levy, which is expected to yield \$200 million of the \$717 million cost to rebuild the waterfront. Ongoing



People will be able to walk and jog along the waterfront. Planners count on regular maintenance to keep the planting beds green.

talks with the city may yield an agreement. But there was none as of last week, according to Marshall Foster, director of the city’s Office of the Waterfront.

Maintenance, safety

Among the homeowners’ demands are adequate planning for ongoing maintenance, cleaning and security in the new open spaces along the waterfront. In other words, will it really be inviting to all, or will the new spaces become a campground for people living on the street?

The condo owners have a point, since areas under the viaduct have become campgrounds lately.

Public plazas are the pride and



Friends of Waterfront Seattle has already started bringing new attention and activities to the shoreline. Here, the Filthy FemCorps show their brass. Photos by Robert Wade

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the life of cities. We want them to be comfortable and attractive, and we want people to like them — 24 hours a day. Yet we don't want people to live there. And desperate people do just that. They leave everything from garbage to personal effects to human waste. It's a human tragedy that also becomes a cost of managing and maintaining open space in cities all over the U.S.

From New York to Seattle, new public parks and plazas — small, large and linear, like the waterfront — are getting carved out of existing rights of way. They are loved by urban residents, and also shared to some extent with homeless people. Increasingly they are designed with subtle and not-so-subtle defenses against camping — things like raised planters instead of ground-plane beds, or no plantings at all.

It will be a little more intense along the rebuilt Seattle waterfront, according to Foster. A high standard of cleaning and maintenance will be literally built in, based on an analysis of needs that began in 2015. Hose bibbs and irrigation and equipment storage are in there, but so is budgeting for the costs of ongoing maintenance.

Heidi Hughes directs Friends of Waterfront Seattle, a nonprofit city partner that raises private funds for activation, maintenance and security as well as capital improvements. “We’ve done a thorough analysis of what it takes to maintain these spaces at a very high level,” said Hughes.

The city has been working with overall waterfront designer JCFO to make this planning very specific. It's based on a standard in use in “peer parks” in New York City, such as The Highline, Hudson River Park, and East River Waterfront Park. A recent draft plan includes per-square-foot costs for paving repair, surface scrubbing, and litter removal — all fine-tuned for differing features and types of landscape along the waterfront.

Graffiti or vandalism is to be removed within 24 hours. Trash and recycling will be emptied every 55 hours, according to the draft plan. Hourly times for cleaning and maintenance are assigned for different kinds of play areas. Water features, plantings and biofiltration systems, kiosks, and lighting fixtures get their own schedules. It calls for twice-daily cleaning of restrooms, including two stand-alone “Portland Loos.”

Elevators are in there, along with art and signage. There's space for storing the materials and equipment needed for this under the Overlook Walk, which will connect Pike Place Market with the waterfront.

So who will pay?

Is the money there? Hughes said it will be. Friends of Waterfront Seattle has promised \$100 million toward the project and has raised \$32 million so far — ahead of schedule. Fundraising really gets started with construction, she



Events like KEXP Rocks the Dock will help bring crowds to the waterfront.

Photos by Robert Wade



The Rave Foundation sponsored a ‘soccer octagon’ on the waterfront this year.

said.

The group has also pledged to cover annual maintenance and security costs of \$1.5 million, in addition to voter-approved funding of \$4.2 million annually for waterfront maintenance and security through Seattle’s parks department. That will include what Hughes calls “enhanced security” — 24-hour services that will be over and above ordinary park maintenance or law enforcement.

The city will oversee the new waterfront as a city park, and that designation brings existing no-camping laws with it. But these laws are now unevenly enforced, and that adds to skepticism about the waterfront plan.

But hold on. Hughes said management will be based on a three-pronged strategy for the waterfront and other public open spaces that includes programming and events, above all. It also includes what she calls “meeting people

where they are” — which means outreach to the homeless and to people who are being a nuisance, but not doing anything illegal.

Most of all, her group and other supporters are banking on programming and “activation” — such as sponsored activities and events that will bring people to the open spaces. That’s a specialty of Friends of Waterfront Seattle, which has made this the cornerstone of its partnership with the city and Downtown Seattle Association that has been credited with “saving” Westlake and Occidental Parks in the last few years.

But there’s more to it. Setup, day-to-day event management and some cleaning and security as well as homeless outreach has been provided through groups called ambassadors. They work for DSA in partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation.

While the costs have been shared between the city and nonprofit

partners, the city has been calculating the total costs of these services in order to apply what it has learned to the future activation and maintenance of the waterfront.

Hughes estimates that Friends of Waterfront Seattle has spent a total of \$400,000 per year on its programs for the waterfront and downtown parks, including Westlake and Occidental, all before construction on the waterfront.

DSA President Jon Scholes said, “There’s broad support for this project.” He likes the plan for the new waterfront and the LID in principal, but he worries about maintenance, too. “It doesn’t deliver much value if they write the check and then it falls into disrepair.”

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