

# EDITORIAL

The newspaper's view

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CITY OF SEATTLE AND JAMES CORNER FIELD OPERATIONS

An architectural rendering of the Seattle Waterfront Park looking north. The park, expected to be fully completed by 2024, will be a corridor with trees, art, public-beach access and bike lanes where the Alaskan Way Viaduct once loomed.

## IN WATERFRONT PARK, THE SEEDS OF A BETTER SEATTLE

When the final pieces of the new Seattle Waterfront Park are completed in 2024, it will include a monumental Northwest Coast art piece along Pier 58 called “Family” created by a member of the Puyallup Tribe.

It consists of three welcoming figures facing Elliott Bay, with round faces and rectangular bodies. If those forms could talk, what would they say?

Maybe they would start with the Duwamish people, who for generations harvested shellfish, caught salmon and raced canoes along the shore. And then the settlers arrived, and things along the waterfront have been changing ever since.

The city is now at the precipice of another new era. Waterfront Park, years in the making, is in its final stretch. Saplings of Sycamores, Lodgepole Pines, Green Mountain Sugar Maples and many other varieties of trees and plants are in the ground. While the recent concrete strike has delayed road work, expansion of the new park promenade is expected to continue this year.

When the park is finished, it will be an asset to the community and a vast improvement from the Alaskan Way Viaduct, which loomed above the waterfront and cast a gloom from Pike Place Market to Pioneer Square. Indeed, building a tunnel, tearing down the elevated roadway, and creating more green space counts as one of Seattle's greatest civic achievements for which we all should be proud.

At the moment, there's not a lot of green, and the vision of the 1.5 mile park is incomplete. For many, the overall impression so far is a lot of cars, a lot of pavement and a lot of gray. Said one Twitter commenter: “I've met zero people who like this.” Arguing about the waterfront

is as Seattle as rain. But at this time, it would be best to withhold judgment.

The completed Alaskan Way roadwork around King Street includes four lanes of traffic, plus two lanes for ferry-bound vehicles and two lanes for buses. That's indisputably a lot of concrete. But north of Columbia Street along the new Alaskan Way, the bus and ferry lanes will go away, leaving only four traffic lanes. That's not clearly visible at the moment, hence the consternation.

“When it's done, people will be very, very happy with it,” said Maggie Walker, a board member of Friends of Waterfront Seattle, a nonprofit that partners with the city of Seattle and is responsible for helping to fund, build and program park activities. “It's all about people taking the time to understand what they're looking at. It doesn't lend itself to explanations on Twitter.”

The view looking north from the air at University Street shows the massive Seattle Waterfront Park construction project on Thursday. At left is Alaskan Way, which will become a pedestrian promenade after the road is relocated to the street being built at right.



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An architectural rendering of the Seattle Waterfront Park along University Street looking north.

### More information

For more information, go to: [waterfrontparkseattle.org](http://waterfrontparkseattle.org)

No major project ever turns out looking exactly like its architectural drawings, but Waterfront Park is delivering on its promises. With more private fundraising needed, it has the opportunity to create a corridor with trees and art and public-beach access and bike lanes. It will be far better than what existed before.

As history shows, nothing about the waterfront has been easy.

Piers and mills displaced Na-

tive gathering places in the 1800s. A plan to build several parks along the waterfront failed in 1912, and the area was given over to manufacturing. As industry moved to the north and south ends of Elliott Bay after World War II, the central waterfront became fodder for countless task forces and citizens committees. Should the area be a tourist “fun strip”? Should it include fish processing and light manufacturing? Should it embrace its industrial surroundings, or attempt to create a more pastoral space?

Eventually, a park was designed from Pier 57 to Pier 59 that featured docks, a fountain

and a public space on Pier 58. The Seattle Aquarium, once slated to be built at Golden Gardens in Ballard, moved to Pier 59. At the dedication in 1974, Seattle Times reporter John Hinterberger noted what kind of noise drowned out each speaker: a freight train, passing trucks, departing and arriving ferries.

The 2001 Nisqually earthquake set in motion a decade of arguing about the viaduct and waterfront. After the decision to replace the hulking structure with a tunnel went forward in 2009, James Corner Field Operations, based in New York, was brought in to plan for redevelopment.

A 2016 ballot measure that would have scrapped the design in favor of making the viaduct a “garden bridge” went down by 80%. On Sept. 13, 2020, Pier 58 sank during renovation.

Traffic noise will be part of the new park, too. But so will 150,000 plants and more than 600 trees.

Taking strike-related delays into account, those guiding the project hope to open new lanes on the east side of Alaskan Way up to Union Street later this year. This will allow the current roadway to be removed and replaced with green space, bike lanes and pedestrian walkways.

A new Union Street Pedestrian Bridge is anticipated to open later this year. Construction of the new Marion Street Pedestrian Bridge is slated to begin in 2022. Pier 62 opened in 2020 and hosts activities like music and dance performances and fishing.

Funding for the \$756 million project comes from the city of Seattle, Washington state and downtown property owners through a special tax. Private donations are expected to contribute \$200 million, and Friends of Waterfront Seattle has raised nearly \$90 million. At the same time, the Seattle Aquarium hopes to raise \$160 million to build a new Ocean Pavilion across from its current location. It's brought in \$97 million so far.

The pavilion's roof will include open space with panoramic views, as well as pedestrian access to Pike Place Market via a pathway leading from street level.

Waterfront Park and the Ocean Pavilion are worthy of philanthropic support. Now in its final stages, the project kept on track despite different mayors and Seattle City Councils, a stuck tunnel boring machine and various political challenges.

In the long view, the welcoming figures along Pier 58 might say this, too, is transitory, just another chapter of Seattle's history until something else comes along. But for the foreseeable future, the completion of Waterfront Park will no doubt add to the city's quality of life.

Even more, it affirms that after all the arguing and hand-wringing, the city can accomplish great things.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Luis Carrasco, Alex Fryer, Jennifer Hemmingsen, Mark Higgins, Derrick Nunnally and William K. Blethen (emeritus).

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