

Capitol Hill groups make push to shape \$1B Convention Center expansion, close I-5 gap

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(Images: LMN Architects)



A design concept for the center's expansion (Image: LMN Architects)

The early reviews of [the \\$1 billion plan](#) to create a five-story expansion of the **Washington State Convention Center** along Pine — and, many hope, better bridge the “I-5 canyon” separating Capitol Hill from downtown — haven’t quite lived up to the price tag.

“Most of us aren’t visiting the Convention Center — we’re just walking by,” area resident **Sage Kitamorn** told the board as it convened its first review of the project’s design proposals last month. The “frequent pedestrian” asked the design review board to hold the Convention Center developers to creating “something great here and fill in the void.”

The hope went unmet in the first round of the process, according to Capitol Hill community groups and more august bodies like the **Seattle Design Commission**.

Friday night, a Capitol Hill-centered push to improve the project will begin:

Convention Center Expansion, Public Benefits Discussion

Friday, June 12th 5:30 to 7:00 PM

Gay City Health Project 517 E Pike St, Seattle, Washington 98122

Capitol Hill Community Council and PPUNC (www.facebook.com/PPUNC) are hosting a community meeting to discuss the expansion of the Washington State Convention Center, its impacts on the Hill, and what public benefits we should advocate for (such as a lid over I-5!). We need all the help we can get, so if this interests you in the least bit, come join us! If you know someone else who would be interested, please share

CHS wrote here about [the massive project and some of the Capitol Hill-driven initiatives being pushed for inclusion](#) as the blocks between the Hill and downtown are reimagined and rebuilt. The proposed structure and two accompanying developments would encompass the land along the north side of Pine just across I-5 from Capitol Hill where **King County Metro’s** soon to be defunct **Convention Place Station** is located today. The WSCC has already [acquired \\$56.5 million worth of land](#) between 9th and Boren, and Howell and Olive Way that had been home to a car dealership (and will be used as parking in the meantime). In March, the county [condemned the last piece of private property](#) needed to be acquired for the expansion. The Convention Center has been “in negotiations” to acquire the transit center land from the county for its expansion.



The expansion will be a massive project adding thousands of square feet of exhibition space, facilities, and new retail as well as parking for around 800 vehicles:

CONVENTION CENTER PROGRAM

5 stories above grade

2 stories below grade

- *250,000 SF of Exhibition Space**
- *120,000 SF of Meeting Space **
- *70,000 SF of Ballroom Space**
- *280,000 SF of Lobby & Circulation**
- *510,000 SF of Support Spaces**
- *500-800 Parking Stalls**
- *200,000 SF of Loading Area**
- *Street-Level Retail & Restaurants*

“I’ve been involved in a number of big buildings. Do you want it to be this big icon? Or do you want it to fit into this neighborhood?” **Matt Griffin** of the **Pine Street Group** told CHS in a discussion in the days following the project’s first review. Griffin’s company is managing the **LMN Architects**-designed project’s development for the WSCC.

“The work today has all been about making sure the program fits.”

The Capitol Hill development and design-focused community group the **Pike/Pine Urban Neighborhood Council** says the project needs to be more — and also fit. The early plan “lacks the hierarchy, vision, or major goals required for a landmark project and only addresses the low-hanging fruit and obvious needs to repair a poor urban environment,” a letter from the group to the design review board read. You can view the full letter and PPUNC’s specific issues with the project proposal [here](#).

The concerns about the early design proposals aren’t just provincial. The **Seattle Design Commission** has also weighed in with street by street criticisms of where the project’s design falls short:

The **Department of Planning and Development** has also received more than a dozen letters about the project, many calling for a better pedestrian experience. The most straightforward request we found in the bunch might be the most difficult to achieve:

Please include a lid park in the convention center expansion. Thanks.

--Dave

Lidding I-5 also came up in the public comment at the first early design guidance in May. “I can’t give an easy answer about I-5,” the DPD’s **Garry Papers** said at one point in the meeting responding to a public comment that called the highway a “scar.”

“My understanding is the Convention Center wanted to build across I-5,” Papers said.

Pine Street Group’s Griffin said that won’t be the case with the expansion but that the Convention Center is “negotiating with WSDOT” to allow the new building “come all the way to Boren and Pine to create something that will help close the gap.”

“There has always been a discussion about how to connect Capitol Hill to downtown — the great news is it’s starting to happen,” Griffin said. “Our team developed Pacific Place — It’s been our interest for more than 20 years now.”

The Convention Center project is scheduled to return for a second early design guidance session in July.