

# Across ‘the I-5 canyon’ from Capitol Hill, Convention Center expansion plans take shape

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(Image: LMN Architects)



Sometime after the planned start of construction in 2017, you'll have a new view of things from Plymouth Pillars Park  
(Image: LMN Architects)

The next wave of design review board sessions to matter most for Capitol Hill will cover projects that aren't on Capitol Hill. We'll focus on the biggest — by far — first as the design plans to shape the \$1 billion expansion of the **Washington State Convention Center** are slated to get their first public review next Tuesday, May 19th.

With the first review focused on “context” and “urban design analysis,” here’s how the project’s planners are illustrating the proposed buildings will fit into the connective area just over the “I-5 canyon” from Capitol Hill. “The WSCC Addition project has the opportunity to stitch the adjacent neighborhoods together with a similar blend of street level activities, making the proposed facility an intergral (sic) player in the richness and identity of this urban setting,” the planners write.



Here’s how **LMN Architects** describes the

convention center’s expansion:

*The proposal is to apply for Master Use Permits for development of a convention center addition on a site consisting of 3 blocks: Site A: 1600 9th Avenue, Site B: 920 Olive Way, and Site C 1711 Boren Avenue, that will collectively form the proposed Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Addition Project. The 3 block site is bounded by Howell Street to the north, Pine Street to the south, 9th Avenue to the west, and Boren Avenue and I-5 to the east. Terry Avenue and Olive Way divide the site on the interior. Street and alley vacations will be required for this project.*

The proposal tackles some specific “urban design” problems you might be familiar with from your walks up or down the Hill. For Pine from Capitol Hill, for example, the planners say their proposal will “bridge the gap between Capitol Hill and downtown” and “capture both the dynamic granular character of the Capitol Hill and the large-scale civic character of Downtown. It will also, “encourage pedestrian activity through urban streetscape amenities,” naturally.



The future view from Pine (Image: LMN Architects)





Here are some more of the “opportunities” documented in the proposal neighbors around Capitol Hill, First Hill, and beyond might be interested in:

- *Engage in meaningful dialog with the adjacent landmarks of the former Camlin Hotel and Paramount Theatre*
- *Create a transition in scale between Downtown and Capitol Hill*
- *Fill in the corner of Pine Street and Boren Avenue to complete the urban block*
- *Shorten the bridge over I-5*
- *Take advantage of the exposure created by the I-5 canyon and site topography to create a meaningful addition to the Downtown skyline*
- *Contribute to the evolving character and increasing density of the transitioning neighborhood*
- *Promote Olive Way as a desirable pedestrian connection across I-5 connecting Capitol Hill to Downtown*
- *Create a prominent corner at the edge of I-5*
- *Bridge the gap between First Hill and South Lake Union*
- *Fill in the corner at Pine Street and Boren Avenue to complete the urban fabric*
- *Improve Boren Avenue as a pedestrian connection*

And, of course, keep Seattle competitive in the convention biz: “Washington State Convention Center has had to turn away more than 300 conventions in the past five years,” [KIRO reports](#). 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. This rendering from LMN doesn’t appear in the early review materials but will give you an idea of the end

goal — that's Pine you're looking at:



The proposed structure 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 is currently “in negotiations” to acquire the transit center land from the county for its expansion.

The numbers behind the expansion are impressively large:



**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*

All of the \* starred items are “approximate” measurements, the architects note.

Two additional parcels north of Olive Way are also shown in the massing renderings with representations of the developments the WSCC is hoping to pursue. Those projects would go through separate review processes. “Potential Residential or Commercial co- development with street level uses is being studied for feasibility,” the proposal notes.

According to the proposal document, the **Department of Planning and Development** has requested for the Convention Center components of the reviews to go through multiple “early design guidance” sessions. The first session next Tuesday will focus on “the applicant’s context and urban design analysis for this large and significant project,” according to LMN.

**[920 Olive Way](#)**

*Design Review Early Design Guidance application proposing a 5 level exhibition and meeting room facility, with retail at grade, 800 parking spaces and associated loading docks within the structure. (Washington State Convention Center Expansion).*

**[View Design Proposal](#)**(17 MB)

***Review Meeting***

*May 19, 2015 7:00 pm*

*City Hall*

*600 5th Ave*

*Bertha Landes Room*

***Review Phase***

*EDG–Early Design Guidance*