Washington State Convention and Trade Center

E X P A N S I O N

Street Enhancement Project Plan

Carolyn Law January 1998

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

CONVENTION CENTER EXPANSION

ART PLAN CONCEPT

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THE ART OF COMMUNICATION IN THE "PEOPLES' PLACE"

com-mu-ni-ca-tion: (n) an act or instance of transmitting: a process by which meanings are exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols.

The intent of the plan to incorporate art into the ground or pedestrian level zone of the district, being formed by the expansion of the Washington State Convention and Trade Center, springs from the idea that artists working with architects can produce exemplary public spaces for communities. Our goal is to insert artists' thinking and their artworks into the most public spaces of this project - primarily the streetscape but secondarily, the new lobby including the entrance to the existing galleria. This space, handled in the way we envision, will add vitality and meaning to the east edge of Seattle's urban core and generate a understanding that the Convention Center is a "peoples' place. The streetscape sets the 24 hour stage for the buildings of this new district of the downtown and as such is a very good location to focus on with artists.

Through the addition of artwork into this area, we can explicitly acknowledge and relate to people the unique character and the exciting behind-the-scenes activities going on within these public buildings. A thoughtful integration of art and architecture specifically intended to define and symbolize the dynamic and diverse communication activities of the convention center will allow the citizens of the city to glimpse what happens here and how it relates to their lives, whether they ever attend an actual event. Putting the story *"on the street"* ,through design and symbol, is a window to the future where the face-to-face communication like that which takes place here, has endless implications locally and globally. Such communication that draws us together and imparts meaning.

Most importantly, what happens at WSCTC has a human dimension to it. People come together very purposefully because something happens that is significantly different from communicating via technology. They share knowledge and information, and connect on a human, personal level with their colleagues. This type and level of activity at the Convention Center contributes well to the overall sense of Seattle as a diverse city, one interested in exchange of ideas.

This new district will have a lively sense of itself as a public place which will enhance the fabric of downtown. It will be an extension of downtown for Seattlites who will be increasingly drawn by the choice of activities within the retail and the expanded public spaces incorporated into the facility, as well as in the direct vicinity. Conventioneers will also make use of the area. This new development will also act as a gateway at the eastern edge of downtown when accessed and viewed from other neighborhoods. Care is being taken to produce a dynamic blend of architecture, art and landscape, which will constitute a significant contribution to the city for its citizens and will invite them to enjoy the public spaces, art and services offered by the Convention Center.

BACKGROUND

The Convention Center has commissioned Ann Gardner to produce a suspended artwork for the atrium of the new lobby at Pike and 7th Avenue. She may also work with the floor directly beneath her piece. This work will be added to the existing collection of the Convention Center, all of it in the public areas of the facility.

With the redesign of the old entrance at 8th, an opportunity is created for a new sculpture. The intention will be to commission a major, interactive work that enlivens this entrance establishing a gathering space and emphasizing that the existing galleria is public space. An sculpture placed here helps carry pedestrians along the south-eastern facade of the building over the freeway. There is also the opportunity to draw more attention to the second story exterior balcony where David Mahler's "Bell Garden" artwork is.

In order to clarify for the public that there are indeed many public spaces, both outside and inside the facility, and to enliven them so that there is a sense of a "district", several more artists will be contracted with to work extensively in the exterior areas of the site. This process contributes to an already highly developed sense of design for the areas in the public domain, but can also assist in telling the citizens of Seattle that this facility is public and the groups that use the facility are involved in a diverse set of fields that many of us have connections to and are interested in. As well it can help point out that there are many programmed activities which can be enjoyed by them on an on-going basis.

As the project artists become involved, the initial artist advocate/planner, Carolyn Law, will expand her purview to work with both artists and architects to encourage collaboration to create and implement the best ideas possible. She will continue to be involved through proposal development, fabrication and installation.

"Artists through their art can significantly enrich our public spaces and provide beauty, identity, meaning, and the formal qualities which engage the viewer/user in many ways. The role of the artist is to complement the design."

Going Public: A field guide to developments in art in public places

THE PLAN

The plan calls for having several artists work on the project. The goal is to integrate artwork effectively into the pedestrian zone that makes visible the multi-faceted communication activities that take place in the Convention Center. The artists will begin by learning about the functions of the Convention Center and getting up to speed with the overall design of the site to date. They will then work with the artist/planner and the architects to develop artworks that seamlessly become part of the horizontal surfaces and several other features of the site, such as the exit doors, bollards and sculptural armature in the covered area of 8th Avenue.

Having a rougher sense of the sites at this time gives us flexibility to match artists with their strongest site opportunity and to come up with the combination of art placement that will produce the most striking public benefit. Essential to the success of our plan is the development of a balanced integration of art and architecture that will gracefully and meaningfully tie together the entire site.

We will begin the selection of artists early 1998, to collaborate with the architects on the sites for which they are chosen for. It is necessary for the artists to work on their ideas in conjunction with the architects efficiently and effectively, keeping to the overall schedule. Budgets will be established for artists design, fabrication and installation activities.

POSSIBLE ART SITES

"A successful collaboration provides a context for design professionals and others to do work that transcends and dissolves the boundaries between their disciplines in a way that produces a product that could not have been conceived of individually...to develop something that has a greater strength than any of the ingredients alone."

George Suyama, *Private Visions, Public Spaces*

Ground plane

This is an exciting site because the WSCTC has never before worked on the street. Working here has become more essential because the expansion project now brings the Convention Center into alignment with the urban grid. It now becomes very much a part of the city as streets and sidewalks move through and connect various parts of the total complex.

At present a very general conceptual idea has been proposed by LMN for the intersections and sidewalks of the entire site, with the possibility of an extension into the lobby areas. This idea with the inclusion of artwork has every opportunity to unify and enliven the entire ground plane. The concept is a visual metaphor for the idea of levels of communication and offers an exciting framework and set of possibilities for artists to develop the concept further through variations of image, symbol, language, scale, width, shape, color, and materials. For example there are a variety of concrete systems including colored, scored and stamped concrete, inlays of cast pieces/parts or other materials which can be incorporated within the concrete. In the new lobby the primary material is terrazzo which can be dealt with through use of color and inlays of metal and/or other materials.

Exit doors

Relatively large numbers of exit doors at street level are a necessary reality of convention centers. When viewed as an opportunity however, they provide surfaces for visual activity that extends the metaphor on the street. Therefore it will be important to transform their blank surfaces in a way which works together with the architectural design and detail of the facades and enhances the streetscape rather than appearing as voids within the vertical plane. For this site, an artist will propose an artwork that is most likely applied to the doors given the code restrictions for fire doors.

Bollards

Bollards are provided along Pike Street to improve pedestrian safety. These street elements have been identified as an opportunity for an artist to work versus use of stock manufactured pieces. They occur in clusters in several specific areas, which allows them to be treated conceptually as an extension of the narrative revealed in the ground plane. They have the benefit of being lit at night so they will have a dual nature which could be interesting to work with.

Metal armatures for lighting of 8th Avenue

In the revised design of the ceiling over 8th Avenue, metal armatures which span the width of the street and hold the trolley wires, up and down lighting and decorative lighting become an very important aspect of the space. These spanning structures provide an ideal element for artist involvement and could beautifully create what LMN is calling a street scale chandelier.