

December 15, 2015

SE Grand Avenue between Spokane Street and Tacoma Street is one of the most important segments of public right-of-way in the city for pedestrian and bicycle use. If the purpose of the proposed vacation is to produce a building on the adjacent site that is larger than would be allowed by floor area ratio based on the size of the existing site, if this new building can be designed to be a significant asset for the neighborhood and enhance the entry into Sellwood from the new Sellwood Bridge, let's find a way to accomplish it while retaining a valuable public asset - the SE Grand Avenue right-of-way.

Millions have been spent creating wide sidewalk and bicycle lane improvements on the new Sellwood Bridge. A high volume of bicycle and pedestrian traffic is expected to cross the Sellwood Bridge. The highest volume of bike and pedestrian traffic will be along the north side of the bridge. A very high proportion of the riders and walkers crossing the bridge toward Sellwood will use SE Grand Avenue between Tacoma Street and Spokane Street to connect to the Springwater Trail or to reach the Sellwood Park, Sellwood Waterfront Park, and the Willamette Greenway riverfront trail, the Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge or Oaks Amusement Park. An additional pedestrian and bicycle traffic generator for this portion of Grand Avenue will be a full service community center if it were to be sited at what I consider to be the most logical location at the south entrance of Sellwood Park on Grand Avenue. The city owns this site which is four and a half miles from the nearest full service community center. It would serve the currently under served neighborhood across the Sellwood Bridge west of the Willamette River and the inner southeast neighborhoods of Sellwood and Westmoreland. All of these areas would be within the desired three mile service zones of a Sellwood Park full service community center. SE Grand Avenue is an essential element in the pedestrian and bicycle transportation system. Vacation of a portion of this street should be a non-starter.

SE Grand Avenue between Spokane and Tacoma currently is little more than a half street; it is a cul-de-sac that provides a pedestrian drop off point at the foot of the Sellwood Bridge. The half-street improvements consist of a sidewalk on the west side of the street, half-street pavement with a tight turn around, some diagonally striped parking spaces and a storm water retention facility. A fairly new mixed use building was built on the west side of the street along with its frontage improvements, and another mixed use building is expected to be built along the undeveloped frontage on the east

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side of Grand Avenue. Presumably the east side frontage improvements will be constructed when the new mixed use building is constructed.

Recently Multnomah County constructed a fairly steep bike ramp from the end of the Sellwood Bridge to the motor vehicle turning area at the south end of Grand Avenue. That was the low cost means of reconnecting bicycle access from Grand Avenue to the Bridge. It will mix the anticipated heavy volume of bicycle traffic and some pedestrians with motor vehicles – a poor solution. As an interim accommodation, it is understandable. A better solution would have been a bikeway or multiuse pathway along the east side of Grand Avenue, but that would have required shoring up the adjacent site. Since the community expects a four story mixed use building to be constructed on that site in the near future, waiting for a permanent pedestrian/bike path solution was a wise use of public resources. When the privately owned property is developed, the pathway will be constructed. I can envision a deep foundation wall will be needed along the property line to carry the weight of four story building and to absorb the lateral seismic forces anticipated in a major earthquake. When the building foundation is constructed, the existing embankment in the street right-of-way will no longer be needed and a mixed modal pathway with a gradual slope can be constructed from SE Tacoma to SE Spokane Street, within the current SE Grand Avenue right-of-way.

Since a request to vacate public right-of-way should be approved only when there is no current or potential future need for the right-of-way, and we would be hard pressed to conclude there is no potential future public need for the Grand Avenue right-of-way, what can be done? I would think that the vacation request needs to be denied. But that is not a wholly satisfactory response. The adjacent property owner has by all appearances has been a good civic citizen. She regularly attends neighborhood association meetings and is liked and trusted by many. Since she owns the city block on both the north and south side of Tacoma Street that is closest to the Sellwood Bridge, she has the potential to make a very significant contribution to the Sellwood neighborhood image. Please work with her for the benefit of all. Thank you.

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