



**Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks**

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23 June 2016

Landmarks Preservation Board  
PO Box 94649  
Seattle, WA 98124-4649

Dear Landmarks Preservation Boardmembers:

As an organization dedicated to the preservation, restoration, and protections of Seattle's Olmsted Brothers park and boulevard system, we would like to offer our shared perspective on the proposed expansion of the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park. As a preface to our remarks, we would like to emphasize that the museum is a valued part of the park and we understand its need to remain viable. We are confident that a win-win solution for the museum and the park can be achieved through careful design.

Our primary concern is to minimize park land taken for the footprint of the addition. As you know, this park is in its entirety a landmarked Olmsted Brothers landscape. Any taking goes well beyond a simple loss of park land by affecting the design character of this nationally recognized cultural landscape. It is important to find a balance among providing functional interior space, protecting the park's capacity to serve the public, and limiting the building's intrusion into the park. We would like to ensure that all options for where and how far the expansion will extend into the park are carefully evaluated from this perspective. The proposed schematic design provides one concept but may not embody the optimal solution to minimize landmark impacts.

The primary impact of this expansion will be on park users. A dialogue with users regarding how the impact can be mitigated is essential to limit the potential negative effects of the expansion. This part of the park has struggled since the original construction of the museum in 1932 because circulation patterns, sightlines, and plantings were disrupted. SAM should seek input from park users regarding how this area could be improved and how the building could be more effectively integrated into the park. This is particularly appropriate since the building is a Park-owned building and any work should ultimately benefit the public. As mitigation the project should provide public amenities, such as public restrooms accessible to the park users, enhanced circulation, appropriate lighting, and landscape improvements.

We would particularly like to focus on how the east side of the museum could be more effectively integrated into the park. Currently it is a hodgepodge of accretions "out back," whereas it could be a welcoming element, drawing people into the park. The proposed patio, which we have recently learned may be dropped from the design, is potentially problematic because park users don't particularly want or benefit from a shady paved sitting area in the greensward. It would be a further incursion into the park landscape that adds impervious surface and detracts from landscape continuity. In order to justify the taking of park land for its footprint, it needs to be a clear amenity for park users and fit into the historic character of the park.

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There is potential for making the east side of the building an actual amenity for the park and correct the errors of the past additions. The design should not turn its back on the park or “privatize more space” but rather enhance the park experience in a way that respects the historic design of the park and engages the park users.

If the footprint of the museum is going to be extended further into the park than it is now, it is important to identify the minimum space needed for art museum purposes and minimize the impact on the most useable park space. For example, on the southeast corner, the existing exterior of the building is unattractive and all would agree it would benefit from redevelopment. What we would like to see is a proposal that fits both in scale and design into the historic park context.

This question also arises with the new freight elevator, which will not be an inconsequential presence, rising at least as high as the building and blocking visibility toward the east greensward where beautiful trees frame the view. The elevator is a fundamental programmatic necessity for SAAM and is likely a justifiable intrusion, but we would ask that every opportunity for limiting its impact on the landscape and views be taken.

Finally, we are concerned about the impacts on the historic features and landscape during construction. We want to be assured of the full protection of the significant trees on the site and full restoration of the landscape and paths.

Thank you for taking our concerns under consideration as you review the SAAM proposal. We have had conversations with SAM and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate in identifying solutions that will maximize positive elements of this project while minimizing any negative effects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Ott".

Jennifer Ott  
Vice President

cc: Priya Frank, Seattle Art Museum  
Michael Shiosaki, Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation