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# PARK LANE



ENHANCING THE WALKABILITY OF KIRKLAND'S DOWNTOWN CORE



The Park Lane design team unveiled this rendering of the new Park Lane at the Sept. 2 City Council meeting.

## PERFECTING *the* PROTOTYPE

Years of temporary-fixes have chipped at Park Lane's charm and walkability. This year, the community participated in a design-process that will bring those two qualities back.

**W**hen Kirkland's planners asked its residents this year to write down a single word that describes their ideal for their city, one in five chose one of three words:

Walkable. Vibrant. Green.

That one-in-five includes Kirkland's most business-focused residents, as well as its most neighborhood-focused resi-

dents. It includes teenagers and senior citizens; thought-leaders on transportation, development and social services.

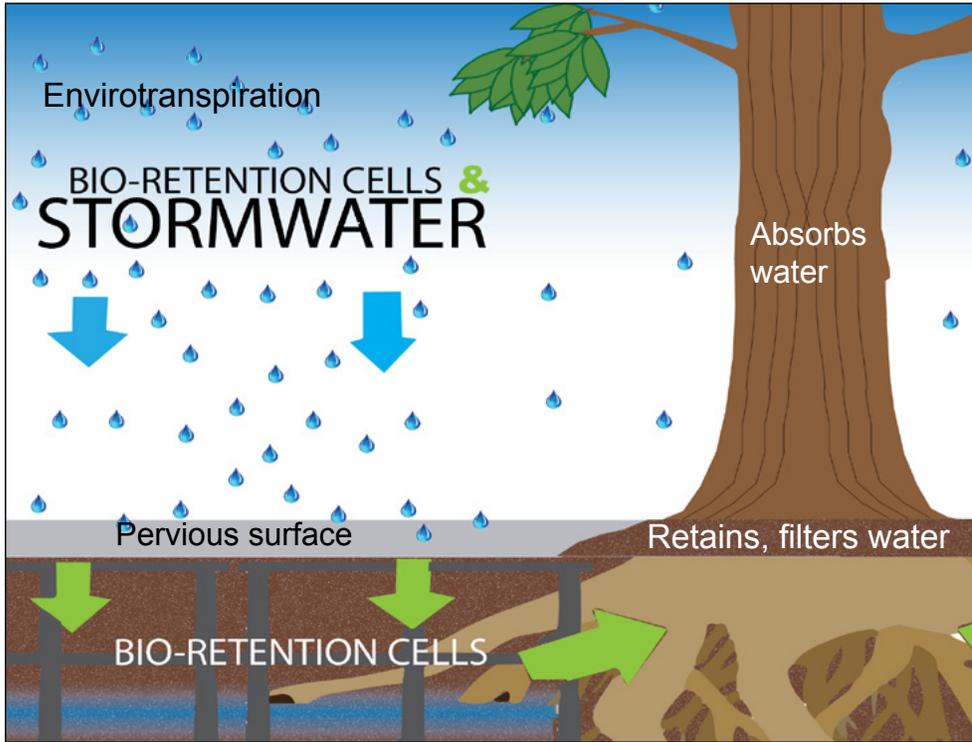
These residents were idealizing about the Kirkland of 2035. But they could have been idealizing about a place in Kirkland in the year 2015. That place: Park Lane.

By then, you see, the City of Kirkland

### TO LEARN MORE

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Silva Cells prevent roots from buckling sidewalks by providing them with loose, moist and aerated soil. **BELOW:** Workers install Silva Cells along Park Lane near the King County Pump Station at Third Street.

will have completed an ambitious \$3 million makeover of the downtown plaza.

The new road will be the most visible component of the makeover, which also includes replacement of the 59-year-old concrete water main. On this new road, walkers and drivers will travel along the same surface. Rather than using a six-inch concrete curb and elevated sidewalks to separate walkers from drivers, Park Lane’s new street will separate them with landscaping, bollards, surface textures, rain gardens and street furniture.

This could allow Park Lane’s galleries and restaurants to absorb the streetscape into their storefronts as their customers absorb summertime sunshine while dining or shopping. With a few automobile-blocking bollards, the street could transform into a Euro-

pean-style plaza for community events. And on most days, drivers will still be able to meander through the corridor.

The point is to create a street people go to, not just through.

**The 2014 objective**

How to do that specifically is what 2014 has been all about.

Throughout the year, the Park Lane project staff has worked with design consultants and the community to create a place in downtown

*“The point is to create a street that people go to, not just through.”*

Kirkland, where people can gather, shop, dine and stroll.

The place will feature

a one-level surface of red and beige brick pavers. It’ll use trees, rain gardens, street furniture and bollards to separate walkers from drivers. To reduce conflicts between walkers and drivers, it will close the Lake Street parking lot’s exit onto Park Lane. And with a few bollards placed on each end of it—on special occasions—it’ll become a car-free, pedestrian mall. The City Council approved these concepts on Sept. 2, 2014.





City of Kirkland Urban Forester Deb Powers discusses tree health on Park Lane during a fall 2008 stakeholder workshop. Through a series of workshops and design charrettes in 2008, business-owners, property-owners and community leaders agreed on a preferred concept for Park Lane.

### What about construction?

Another objective for the year 2014 has aimed to answer one question: How can we ensure the steady flow of commerce to Park Lane remains steady during construction?

To answer this question, the project team has planned for a construction period that reconsiders nearby parking lot policies, that ensures pedestrian access to each of Park Lane's 23 shops, that compresses the time of construction and picks the least impactful season of construction—winter.

## \$1.6 M

The contribution of two grants to the Park Lane project from the Transportation Alternatives Program and the Department of Ecology.

The project team has also explored ideas to increase visitation during construction through a series of field trips that will capitalize on the rare real-time opportunity to demonstrate—to students, stewards and engineers—the green-technology tools Kirkland will install on Park Lane. Those green-tech tools will help protect Lake Washington from the stormwater Park Lane sheds, and the street, itself, from sidewalk-buckling tree roots. To achieve this, contractors will build stormwater gardens. They'll use pervious surfaces that allow stormwater to seep through them into the soil below. The City will also plant trees in a network of Silva Cells that

## Guiding principles for Park Lane

Through a series of workshops and surveys, stakeholders devised five basic principles to guide the Park Lane project.

- Develop visual connections along Park Lane
- Enhance Park Lane as regional destination
- Encourage economic vibrancy and diversity
- Ensure equitable access for all
- Create high-performance green spaces

# Coming into **FOCUS**



The new Park Lane will feature a one-level, plaza-style street of red and beige brick pavers, on which people can walk, ride or drive. The street will use trees, street furniture, bollards and storm gardens to separate the drivers from the walkers. On special events, the community can open up the entire street to walking. To build this street, however, the City of Kirkland will have to replace many of the trees along Park Lane with more disease-resistant, appropriately sized species. This map details that plan.



# LEGEND

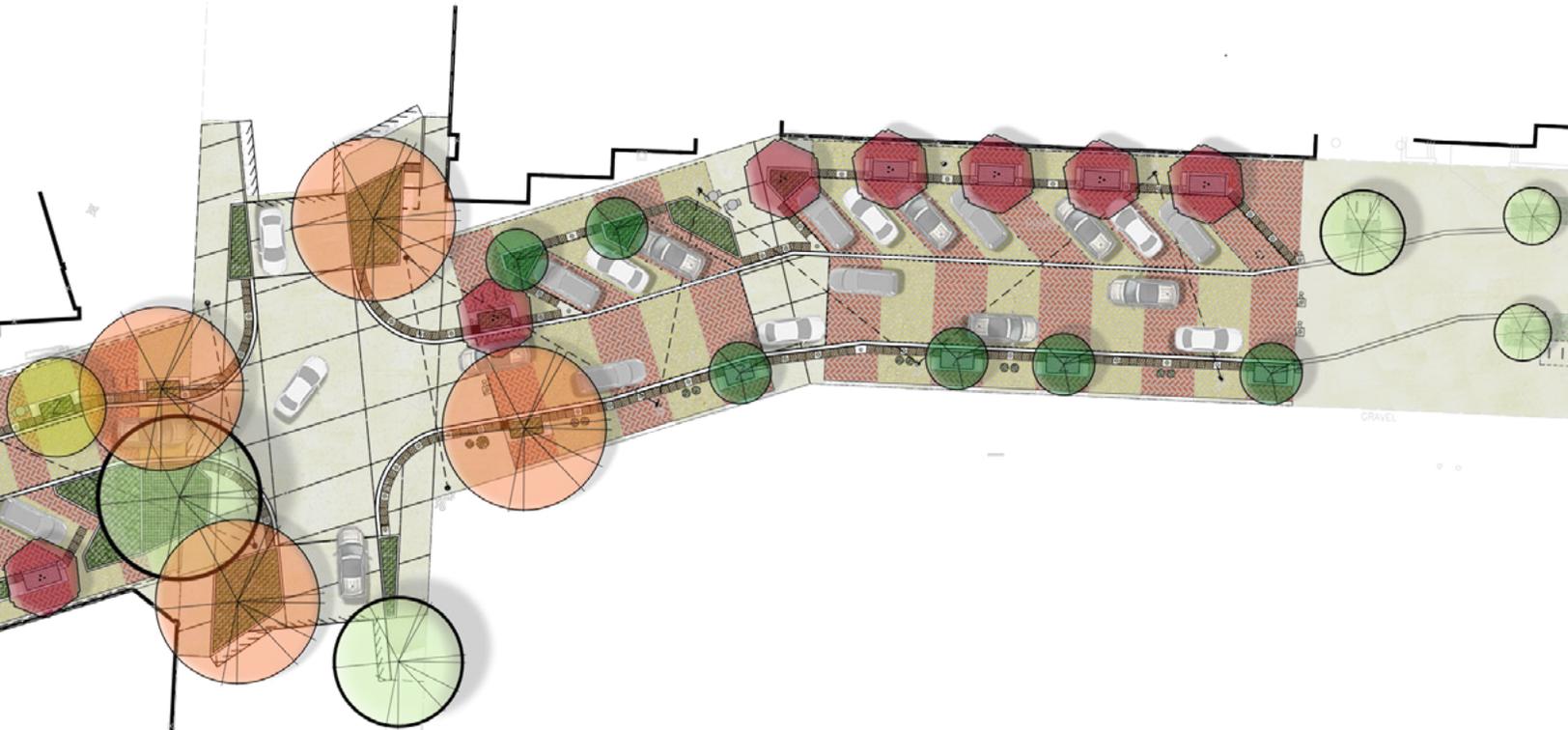
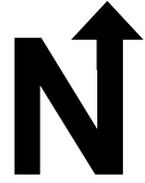
 Existing tree to remain (10 trees)

 Red Maple (8 trees)

 Zelkova (7 trees)

 Katsura (10 trees)

 Musashino (11 trees)





Commercial Avenue was a typical street before property owners taxed themselves \$140,000 to transform it. **BELOW:** The cover of Local Improvement District No. 117.

ensure tree roots will grow down—rather than up—by providing its roots with loose soil that can, in turn, absorb substantial amounts of storm-water.

To make this all possible, the Washington state Department of Ecology awarded Kirkland in 2012 with a \$739,000 grant.

### On Commercial Avenue

This isn't the first time the street has been at the intersection of 'Need' and 'Opportunity.'

"In 1976, the real problem downtown was not enough parking, from day 1," says Bob Neir, author of "A City Comes of Age" and Kirkland's mayor from 1974 to 1979. "It was all parking. And that was it. The

only problems downtown was parking. It was always parking. Parking, parking, parking. For many years. People didn't ride bikes in those days."

And to solve that problem, City leaders began creating parking where they could and when they could. One of those places was along a two-way street known as Commercial Avenue.

"It was not a very pretty street," Neir says.

The solution, proposed by Kirkland's hired consultant, was to reduce Commercial Avenue's two-way street to one and use the remaining lane's worth of space to transform the Avenue's character from a typical downtown street into a "curvilinear" streetscape, which would meander through an urban park-like setting. This would also create pockets of angled parking.

The most ambitious idea was to capitalize on a stream that still meanders through Everest Park underneath Sixth Street South and the Cross Kirkland Corridor, along the Parkplace property and into a concrete pipe buried beneath Kirkland Avenue.

"The consultants suggested that stream be brought to the surface," Neir says. "And that Commercial Avenue should be redone as a semi-mall with sidewalks, trees, benches and art. This stream would be a major attraction. And that's what they recommended. There was going to be a price tag.

The only way to pay for this is if the downtown property owners got together."

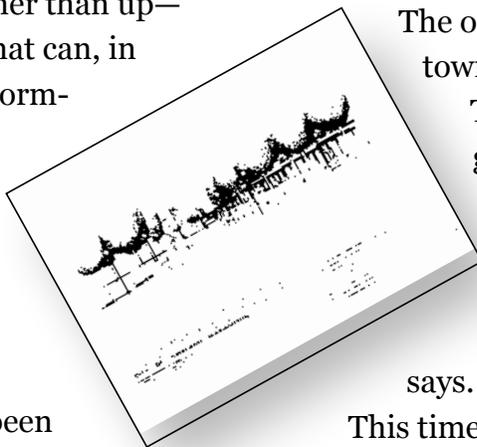
The downtown property owners did get together—to vote 'no.'

Three years later, the parking problem had worsened.

"All of the sudden they decided something had to be done," Neir says.

This time the property owners said yes—to a \$140,000 levy that would help create the wide sidewalks of exposed aggregate, and the curvilinear streetscape, lined with trees, benches and art.

"After that, they said 'we can't call it 'Commercial Avenue,'" Neir said. "Not after we've beautified it." They called it Park Lane.





A couple enjoys a stroll Jan. 14 along Park Lane. The Kirkland Downtown Strategic Plan said Park Lane was one of two foundations for walkability in downtown.

### Foundation of the pedestrian environment

Very quickly, Park Lane fulfilled its objective as a street to go to, not just through. And the benefits of Park Lane's new role extended throughout all of downtown.

In the summer of 1999, for example, the City Council appointed 31 of Kirkland's most active thinkers on land-use. Their task: Develop a strategy for continuing downtown development. For the next 18 months, the team collected data. It interviewed scores of community leaders, organized a city-wide forum, and delivered presentations to business, senior, youth and neighborhood groups.

The result was the 12-page *Kirkland Downtown Strategic Plan*, which repeatedly highlighted the importance of a functioning Park Lane to the rest of downtown and as the best connection from Park Lane to Marina Park.

"The downtown has many positive pedestrian

features," the 2001 report says. "The small block grid pattern and Park Lane are two of the foundations of this comfortable pedestrian environment."

### Time, money and opportunity

Time, however, has eroded some of Park Lane's charm and replaced it with a patchwork of temporary solutions: Tree roots buckled sidewalk panels, forcing the City to replace sections of exposed aggregate with temporary rubber panels. Some of the trees have died and disappeared. Automobiles have worn wheel ruts, alligator cracks and potholes into the street's pavement. The edges of the sidewalk curbs are cracking. And beneath this eroding surface are the World War II-era concrete pipes that deliver drinking water to downtown and 100-year-old gutters that gush untreated stormwater directly into Lake Washington.

"Maintenance was becoming such an issue down there," says Kirkland Streets Manager Ray Steiger.



The corner of Park Lane and Lake Street reveals the effects of a decades-worth of quick-fixes: Three sidewalk surfaces and a tree stump.

“And every time we maintained it, when we put in the rubber sidewalks, or cut down a tree or graded a lifted sidewalk panel with black asphalt, it chipped away at the overall feel of Park Lane.”

In 2008, Steiger, added the Park Lane renovation to a list of more than 100 other Capital Improvement projects in need of funding.

That funding came in two rounds: First from the Washington State Department of Ecology in 2012, then from the Transportation Alternatives Program in January 2014 for \$857,479.

“Your project was one of 16 projects approved by the Puget Sound Regional Council’s Executive Board in December ...” wrote Josh Brown, the Puget Sound Regional Council’s executive director in a January 2014 letter

to Kirkland Mayor Amy Walen. “There was strong demand for this round of funding, with 62 project proposals, totaling nearly \$70 million.”

Kirkland’s City Council accepted the grants and agreed Jan. 7 to resume progress on Park Lane’s new design by allocating the remaining \$1.4 million to the project.

### The prototype for 2035

Of course rebuilding a street into a prototype for the walkable, vibrant and green city so many residents have envisioned requires more than money and heavy machinery.

It requires imagination, curiosity and commerce. Those are the essentials. And providing them is a calling for all those who share that vision and for the thousands

## Five principles for downtown

The Downtown Action Team developed five principles to guide the recommendations of the 2001 Downtown Strategic Plan, which would guide land-use decisions:

- Maintain pedestrian orientation
- Balance the need for vehicular circulation with downtown’s vital pedestrian character
  - Acknowledge Parkplace as an integral part of downtown by establishing clearly defined pedestrian connections with the core area and the waterfront
- Enhance core area of downtown by assuring ... a human scale for any development
- Celebrate the waterfront by re-orienting downtown to the lake

of residents who already shop and dine on Park Lane.

That sounds daunting. But really, it’s not. To build the prototype for the Kirkland of 2035, all they have to do is keep coming to Park Lane. ◀