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## PARK LANE



ENHANCING THE WALKABILITY OF KIRKLAND'S DOWNTOWN CORE

### MEET *the* TEAM

The design team brings an unusual depth and breadth of experience to the Park Lane project.

**T**he warmest afternoon of 2014 has brought scores of people to Park Lane. Eric Schmidt is categorizing most of them.

He's doing this by tallying the types of vehicles they're driving: sedans or SUVs and the types of handles they are clutching: those of strollers or dog leashes.

#### TO LEARN MORE

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"SUVs are important because it means families are coming to downtown," says the 63-year-old landscape architect and urban planner.

"That's also why I'm looking at strollers versus dogs. Dogs are surrogates for kids. The number of dogs tells you—roughly—the number of older folks who are present."

The mix seemed ideal on March 24: "The strollers and dogs were almost equal, or one more or one less," Schmidt says. "With the



Eric Schmidt, left, Kurt Ahrensfield, center, and Gina Parenteau, see a variety of challenges and opportunities in Park Lane.

vehicles, it was two-thirds sedans to one-third SUVs. So the young families are there for lunch and the older folks are there to enjoy themselves. That brings good social mixing of age and points of view. That's a recipe for a vibrant, en-



A family meets on Park Lane for some treats at Sweet Cakes. Eric Schmidt says Park Lane already has a good mix of age groups, which creates a vibrant atmosphere. “My goal,” he says, “is to make Park Lane the most energized place in downtown.”

energized place.”

And energizing Park Lane is Schmidt’s primary goal. Schmidt, a principal at the Seattle-based Cascade Design Collaborative, is an integral member of the Perteet design team, which will be working with City staff and stakeholders throughout 2014 to craft a new design for Park Lane.

“I want to make Park Lane the most energized place in downtown,” Schmidt says.

He’ll begin in earnest March 31, when Schmidt and the rest of the design team interviews the first of more than 20 business and property owners on Park Lane.

The purpose: to understand how each business interacts with its customers, its employees, its suppliers, its neighbors and with Park Lane as a whole.

The insights he’ll glean will guide the parameters

of Park Lane’s overall design, as well as the construction process that will render it.

And Schmidt will be one of the key team members who will shape Park Lane’s design. To do that, he’ll be relying on his expertise in architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning. He’ll tap into the wisdom he’s accrued on several massive design projects, such as the six and-a-half years he served as Boston’s director of downtown planning and redesign for the \$15 billion Big Dig, which created a tunnel from Boston’s downtown to Boston’s Logan International Airport.

#### **Kurt Ahrensfeld**

Schmidt will participate in many—if not all—of these interviews. But the people leading them—and the street’s redesign—will be Kurt Ahrensfeld and Gina Parenteau. Both are engineers. Both have

amassed exhaustive resumes of impressive projects—Ahrensfeld, 58, has engineered more than 100 different projects, from sidewalks and parking lots to freeways and navy bases.

But this one, he says, is unique. “There’s nothing else quite like it,” he says. “[Park Lane] is like a vein running right down the middle of downtown.”

Both of these engineers had been tracking the Park Lane project since the City of Kirkland first introduced the idea of building a plaza-style street there.

The source of Ahrensfeld’s interest derives from two sources: his relationship with Park Lane. As a 20-year resident of Kirkland, he says he’s walked up and down Park Lane hundreds of times.

“My daughter has gone to school here and will be going to Lake Washington High School next year,” he says.

The other source is his work, at Perteet: “We’re passionate about building communities that are good for people, transportation, and the environment,” he says. “All the right things are in this project. So when you consider all of that, this is a one-chance-in-a-lifetime kind of thing. I can’t think of another one that would be that way. This means so much to me because it’s where I live and it’s the kind of work we do.”

### **Gina Parenteau**

Gina Parenteau’s relationship with Park Lane is different. But her passion for the project is similar.

“I had been in downtown Kirkland a few times,” Parenteau says. “When the [request for proposal] came out, I told



Repairing and improving the walkability of Park Lane is one of the project’s primary purposes.

Kurt: ‘We have to get this project.’ And he said: ‘I agree.’”

Part of Parenteau’s interest in Park Lane derives from the childhood summers she’d spend at her grandfather’s cabin on the banks of western Montana’s Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River.

“My great-grandfather built it,” she says. “You could walk from the cabin to the river. We used to swim in the river all the time.”

There, outside Superior, population 1,500, the U.S. Department of Transportation needed to build massive concrete piers on which

to hoist a new section of freeway—Interstate 90.

“They sold it to the government,” Parenteau, 44, says. “I think I was in fifth or sixth grade.”

Or, just old enough to change the way she looked at the world around her.

That experience introduced an interest in roads and transportation to Parenteau that she has transformed into a career.

Parenteau has re-engineered three of downtown Everett’s main streets, and one in Bothell. She’s reconfigured Oak Harbor’s Pioneer Way.

But the street to which she refers most often is Arlington’s Olympic Avenue, the main commercial street in downtown Arlington.

“Olympic Avenue is a historic street with all of the brick buildings pushed right up to the sidewalk,” says Paul Ellis, Capital Projects Manager of the City of Arlington. “In some cases, the buildings are sitting on the sidewalks. Well, we were redoing the sidewalks. So how do you rebuild the sidewalks without hurting the buildings.”

One of those buildings housed Flowers By George, which, at that point, had operated in the middle of Olympic Avenue’s six blocks for four decades.

“Going into it, we were very nervous,” says David Bolton, who grew up in his father’s flower shop and now runs it. “But we knew it was something that had to be done.”

Very quickly, however, Bolton realized the experience would not be as painful as he and his father had initially imagined.

“The communication was great,” Bolton says. “Each time they shut down a section was six-week period. So we only had gravel in front of our store for six weeks. To compensate, we did different kinds of promotions. We put signs on our backdoors that said ‘we are open for business.’ Everybody put signage in

the back of their doors. We encouraged employees to park several blocks away to leave room for customers to come in. It worked so well.”

The primary engineering issue was ensuring that



Olympic Avenue has thrived since the City of Arlington rebuilt its sidewalks. And in the process of construction, not a single business went out of business, says Paul Ellis, capital projects manager of the City of Arlington.

wheelchair-bound customers could access the businesses front doors, while also ensuring that water drained into the gutter, rather than into the buildings.

“When buildings all have different heights, it’s really hard to maintain that two-percent cross-slope that drains water to the curb,” says Ellis, Arlington’s Capital Projects manager. “So little changes in curb height can create drastic changes in the cross-slope. But Gina [Parenteau] was there all the way through, making changes at elevation from block to block. She was great.”

Not a single business went out of business, Ellis says.

“It was a positive experience for them,” Parenteau says. “A lot of them were actually excited during construction. They were excited to see change.”

And that, she says, is her measure of success.

“The first image that comes to my head is the specific images of people from downtown with whom we are working and when it’s done they say ‘thank you’ with smiles on their faces,” she says. ◀