

AIA Seattle Issue Brief: No on Initiative 123

Issue Brief

Issue

Seattle Central Waterfront: No on Initiative 123

Our Priorities for the Waterfront

- Support the city's ongoing design process
- Create urban connections
- Accentuate the water's edge
- Develop a distinct district
- Sustain the ecosystem
- Promote diverse uses and activities
- Engage history
- Create a framework for continued development

Description

Initiative 123, on the Seattle ballot in August 2016, would create a new mile-long elevated public park on Alaskan Way. The measure would establish a public development authority (PDA) to build and operate the park and other amenities along the waterfront. The new park would integrate one block of the existing Alaska Way Viaduct into its design. More info can be found [online](#).

AIA Seattle vigorously opposes I-123. It would take funds currently dedicated to the city's designed street-level improvements and move those funds to the exclusive control of a non-elected PDA. The new elevated park, if feasible to build, would take the place of the waterfront park currently in design. An elevated park would be costly to build and maintain.

Replacing the city's current waterfront design with a new elevated park would contradict several of AIA Seattle's priorities for the waterfront. It would circumvent the city's design process. It would hamper urban connections by moving activity away from street level. It would de-accentuate the water's edge in favor of long-distance views. It may have adverse impacts on the waterfront ecosystem, and may hamper diverse uses. Most significantly, it would move a major public project into the private control of a non-elected group.

AIA Seattle Action

Advocacy Goals

Defeat I-123

Actions

Educate members about I-123 through a presentation at the Center for Architecture & Design and posts in AIA Seattle's enews; provide members with talking points

Participate in "No on 123" publicity campaign through digital ads on our website, postings in our enews, social media posts, and a prominently displayed sign

Solicit AIA Seattle members to train as part of a speaker corps to attend neighborhood meetings over the summer

Endorse the "No on I-123" campaign

Prepare an Op Ed supporting the "No" campaign

Key Messages

Initiative 123 is a privately sponsored initiative, not the city's waterfront plan. The initiative was sponsored by a small group of individuals. It does not have city support, and it would undo the city's design plans for the central waterfront.

I-123 is unfunded and financially irresponsible. The initiative hands power to a self-appointed board to control millions of dollars in public funds. The measure would require the city to divert funds from other sources, including the general fund, to pay for this undefined project. It would also require the city to transfer control of unused or under-used city property that could otherwise be used for affordable housing, neighborhood parks, and other public benefits. Ongoing maintenance costs for an elevated park would be much higher than those for the city's planned surface-level park.

I-123 is vague about both design and costs. The group sponsoring the initiative has not completed any conceptual design work, and has no cost estimates. Yet the initiative would give a new waterfront board the authority to require the city to fund a new design, regardless of the cost.

Building a new elevated structure will cut the city off from it's greatest asset, the waterfront. We are removing an elevated structure to reconnect the city with its waterfront, create strong urban connections to the water, and develop a distinct district. I-123 would be a new barrier between downtown and the water.

I-123 does not save the viaduct, and it will not create a new Highline. Initiative supporters recognize that the existing viaduct is a significant safety hazard, so I-123 only calls for incorporating 1 block of the existing viaduct into the new park. This is not a Highline-type project reusing existing infrastructure.

I-123 has no stakeholder input. The current waterfront plan is the result of many months of planning and participation from 1000s of community members. I-123 would replace that vetted plan with a vague, unvetted and undeveloped design concept.

Background

Member Input

AIA Seattle has been active in waterfront advocacy since 2006, when it developed a set of Waterfront Guiding Principles. Since then, AIA members have been active in every phase of waterfront planning, and have served on all of the city's waterfront planning groups.