

ASIAN ART MUSEUM RENOVATION AND PROPOSED EXPANSION

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why does the Seattle Asian Art Museum need to renovate and expand?

The landmark, city-owned building is on the National Register of Historic Places and is the original home of the Seattle Art Museum. It has not been substantially renovated or restored since it was built in 1933. A major renovation is needed to address infrastructure issues, including climate control system and seismic upgrades, as well as to increase ADA accessibility to the museum.

After careful evaluation of what the Seattle Asian Art Museum required to remain viable in Volunteer Park, it was determined that a modest expansion was also necessary. The proposed expansion will offset a loss of space in the existing building created by the addition of new mechanical equipment for heating and cooling systems, as well as address the critical need for new programming and gallery space.

The entire project will increase access to a world-class cultural resource and allow the museum to better serve the needs of the people of Seattle. It will also greatly enhance Volunteer Park and the underutilized area directly east of the museum.

What is the project's benefit for the community?

The renovation and proposed expansion will strengthen the museum's ability to serve as a community resource—a gathering place to be used by all—and a cultural focal point for Volunteer Park, Capitol Hill, and the entire city.

New gallery space will enable the museum to more regularly showcase art from all of Asia—not only its original collection featuring works from China, Japan, Korea, but also its growing South Asian collection.

Education is a major part of the museum's mission, and addressing the needs of thousands of K-12 students in the area through special programming and learning opportunities is a high priority. The proposed expansion will enable the addition of a dedicated space for educational activities.

We also believe the museum's expansion will help increase racial equity and cultural diversity by enhancing the museum's ability to celebrate and raise awareness of the cultures of Asia, including those representative of a fast-growing South Asian community in the Seattle area. The updated museum will be a better reflection of the diverse community it serves.

What is the scope of the project?

The renovation and proposed expansion goals include preserving the historic building and its Art Deco façade, improving the museum's infrastructure, protecting the collection with climate control and seismic system upgrades, adding vital gallery and education space with a modest expansion, and enhancing ADA accessibility and the museum's connection to Volunteer Park.

What is the design process for the project?

The current proposed design under consideration is the product of years of research, discussion, and meetings with the museum's board of trustees, executives, curators, museum members, architects, project partners, the City, parks groups, and the community.

The design process began with our museum board and staff, determining critical museum needs and defining project goals. From its early stages, the design exploration has been informed by feedback and guidance from the City's Landmarks Preservation Board. Those meetings continue as the design evolves.

Once we felt confident that we had something substantial and well-researched to show for consideration, SAM hosted the project's first community feedback meeting on July 16, 2016, with subsequent meetings in 2016 on August 20, September 10, October 15, November 19 and December 10. An additional meeting to discuss project updates will be scheduled for winter/spring 2017. Future meeting information and an online project feedback form can be accessed by visiting seattleartmuseum.org/inspire.

Community feedback and input from other stakeholders is reflected in the current design evolution. Construction is not scheduled to begin until September 2017 or later (pending final approval by the City), so there is still time for public comment.

How will the project affect Volunteer Park?

The proposed expansion is modest, increasing the museum's footprint in Volunteer Park by roughly 3,600 square feet—less than one quarter of one percent of the park's 48-acre total area.

One may recall that SAM's Olympic Sculpture Park transformed an industrial site into a beautiful nine-acre green space for all to enjoy. We value green space and the decision to explore a small museum footprint increase in Volunteer Park has not been made lightly.

Steps have been taken in the design evolution to protect the park's significant trees, in addition to aesthetically improving an unsightly east-facing exterior. The museum is working closely with landscape architects Walker Macy, contractor BNBuilders, and a local arborist to implement a plan to ensure the health and safety of all significant trees near the museum.

The museum is giving back and restoring historic Olmstedian paths as part of the Asian Art Museum project. In consultation with Seattle Parks & Recreation and local parks groups (Volunteer Park Trust and Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks), we decided it would be advantageous to restore the Olmstedian paths stretching east from the museum. These paths will better connect the elements within the park, including the museum, and facilitate access to the park from its perimeter.

We believe that the improvements we are exploring at the Asian Art Museum will enhance visitors' enjoyment of Volunteer Park.

How has the design been altered in response to public feedback?

Design revisions have been made in response to public feedback received during community meetings to discuss the Asian Art Museum renovation project. Examples of how the design has changed include: minimizing the physical profile of the proposed addition, repositioning a staircase to make it less visible from the outside, moving the freight elevator to reduce its profile and maintain clear sight lines on the north side of the building, and removing proposed landscape terracing and seating in favor of an Olmstedian lawn/greensward, echoing the park's original plan.

Why can't the expansion be below the building?

It is not possible to expand below the building because excavating under the landmark building's foundations would put the historic building at risk. Other concerns include the difficulty of waterproofing an excavated space from one side, and the fact that the lower ceiling height of the existing first level of the museum would not satisfactorily accommodate the needs of gallery, education, or public spaces.

Can the Asian Art Museum expand elsewhere?

It would be difficult for the Asian Art Museum to expand elsewhere. Not only is it not economically feasible to add an additional location to SAM's existing three locations, but the museum is also a historic and vital part of Volunteer Park. To move completely or divide the museum's collection and offerings would be a disservice to the community.

SAM does own several additional floors in its downtown expansion building. This space is leased until 2031. The current lease payments repay debt incurred when the building was constructed in 2007.

What steps have been taken to assess Initiative 42?

The Seattle City Council adopted proposed voter Initiative 42 by enacting Ordinance 118477 in 1996. That legislation prevents land and facilities held by the City “for parks and recreation purposes” from being “sold, transferred or changed from park use to another usage” unless certain conditions were met. Fundamentally, use of City park land and facilities for public museum purposes is a widely accepted park and recreation use and therefore Initiative 42 is not implicated in the modest expansion of the existing Seattle Asian Art Museum within Volunteer Park. In 1932, when adopting its Ordinance 61998 providing for the construction of the original Seattle Art Museum in Volunteer Park, the City Council described “a building . . . suitable for museum and other park purposes and for use as an adjunct to . . . (the) Park.” Clearly, from its inception, the City has always considered the museum a park purpose. Consequently, expanding the museum will not change park property from “park use to another usage.” Other City Council precedents confirm that Initiative 42 does not apply to museum projects undertaken within City parks. Although there are other earlier examples, several projects undertaken since enactment of Initiative 42 also reflect this position. These include the provision of park facilities and land to the Center for Wooden Boats for its Education Center and the Museum of History & Industry for its new Armory location. That museums are park and recreation uses also is the overwhelming prevailing view of courts in Washington and elsewhere.

What is the project timeline?

The design phase for the Asian Art Museum renovation and proposed expansion is currently underway. The museum will close its doors starting Monday, February 27, 2017 to begin making preparations for the renovation and expansion.

Construction is planned to begin September 2017 or later (pending final City approval of the project) and will last approximately one year, followed by an additional six months needed for moving the art back into the building. The museum will reopen in 2019.

How much will the Asian Art Museum project cost and how is it being funded?

The estimated cost of the renovation and expansion is approximately \$49 million dollars (subject to change based on the final renovation plans). The City of Seattle and King County have already committed funds to the project, but SAM expects to raise a significant share of the funds privately. A museum capital campaign is underway.

If you would like to donate to the campaign, please visit seattleartmuseum.org/inspire and click on the “donate” button at the bottom of the page.

City funding for the project was initially included in the voter-approved 2008 Parks & Green Spaces Levy. The project was delayed, and the levy funds were reprogrammed for other purposes. Honoring the original partnership between the city and SAM on this project and recognizing the needs and scope of the project have changed in the past decade, Mayor Ed Murray has allocated funds for the project in his 2017/2018 budget.

The Asian Art Museum is not significantly subsidized by the city. The museum building was donated by the Seattle Art Museum to the city in 1933. While the city does contribute some funds for building utilities and upkeep, the significant costs associated with running the Asian Art Museum are covered by SAM.

How has SAM shared information about the project?

We felt that it was important—prior to presenting something for public consideration—that we discuss project concepts with key park stakeholders, such as the Volunteer Park Trust and Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks. Once we felt confident that we had something substantial and well-researched to show for consideration, we hosted the project’s first community feedback meeting on July 16, 2016. To date, we have hosted six community feedback meetings to discuss the project (July 16, August 20, September 10, October 15, November 19, December 10) with an additional meeting scheduled for winter/spring 2017. The Museum has had meetings with the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board and its Architectural Review Committee. These meetings were open to the public.

We have been working to get the word out about the community meetings. All of the meetings are listed on SAM’s website and are also featured in our bi-weekly SAM News email which goes out to over 90,000 museum members and other interested parties. Meeting dates are also posted on a sign in front of the Asian Art Museum. We always share information about the meetings on our social channels, including Facebook and Twitter. Digital advertisements have run in outlets including Capitol Hill Seattle Blog, International Examiner, and KCTS eNews. SAM’s online events calendar features the meetings, and calendar listings have been running in media outlets including The Stranger and The International Examiner, with frequent media coverage of the project also mentioning upcoming community meetings. A postcard promoting the November 19 and December 10 community meetings was distributed to families in the neighborhood around Volunteer Park by Seattle Parks & Recreation.

The project itself was featured in the summer 2016 issue of SAM Magazine, with nearly 40,000 recipients, and was again highlighted in the fall 2016 and winter/spring 2017 issue.

How can I get involved?

For more information, to donate to the campaign, or to provide feedback on the project, please visit seattleartmuseum.org/inspire

If you are excited about the project, we’d love to hear from you.

Also, please consider expressing your support for the Seattle Asian Art Museum as an important park use and cultural hub by sending an e-mail to the City:

Seattle Parks & Recreation Superintendent, Jesus Aguirre, at PKS_info@seattle.gov.
Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board at erin.doherty@seattle.gov.

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