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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community Package Coalition Secures Historic \$82M Investment for Seattle

Washington State Convention Center agrees to fund affordable housing, open spaces, and transportation improvements commensurate with scale of the three-block WSCC Addition project.

Seattle, WA – October 16, 2017 The Community Package Coalition (CPC) today announced they have reached a tentative agreement with Pine Street Group, on behalf of the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Addition, for a historic package of public investments for the community valued at over \$82 million, four times the amount initially proposed by the developer.

In January 2017, an alliance of community organizations serving neighborhoods adjacent to the three-block WSCC Addition came together to ensure that the \$1.6 billion expansion—to be built on publicly owned land, by a public entity, and using public funding—provide a package of public benefits commensurate with its size, scale and impact.

The City of Seattle requires public benefits in exchange for the transfer and development of public streets and alleys. The WSCC has petitioned to vacate 1.28 acres of surface and subterranean right-of-way in the Denny Triangle neighborhood to enable a 2.4 million square foot development on three sites, including a new meeting and exhibition facility, a residential tower, and an office tower.

The Coalition advocated for approximately \$61 million of improvements and experienced success beyond that with a total of over \$82 million, which includes other projects independently proposed by Pine Street Group. A \$5 million affordable housing payment required by King County and a \$4.3 incentive zoning payment to the City of Seattle are above and beyond the \$82 million total.

“From the beginning, our coalition has been clear: we want to see our downtown businesses and hospitality industry succeed. We also want to ensure the Convention Center provides a package of public investments in our community commensurate with the impact this project will have on our city,” said Alex Hudson, Executive Director of the First Hill Improvement Association. “Today, we are proud to announce a historic package of public investments that demonstrates what is possible when development and community groups work together to realize a shared vision to build a well-connected, accessible, people-centered city with transportation options, quality public open space, and housing opportunities that benefit all.”

The \$82M in investments is four times the amount initially proposed by Pine Street Group and includes interconnected investments advocated for by the Coalition including public open spaces, safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, and homes affordable to working families.

The package includes more than \$16 million of improvements for people walking and bicycling in the Pike-Pine corridor, making this important connector between neighborhoods safer and more welcoming.

“Safe and accessible transportation options are critical to the success of our city”, said Gordon Padelford, Executive Director of Seattle Neighborhood Greenways. “The proposed projects will bridge critical gaps in the transportation system by creating safer and more comfortable places to walk and bike on Pike and Pine Streets and Olive Way across I-5 and 8th Avenue. Even with the poor existing infrastructure, 22 percent of people walk to jobs in South Lake Union and 20 percent of morning traffic on Pine is people on bikes. With these additional safety investments, we can expect significant growth in people who are able to walk and bike along these corridors.”

The package also includes more than \$15 million to help improve and expand desperately needed public open spaces in our city center, including funding to build the Terry Avenue Promenade, creating critical public open space in the dense First Hill neighborhood. First Hill has no parcels available for new parks, and this project will convert a street into usable open space.

The package commits funds to improve Freeway Park, downtown’s largest public space, and make it more safe, accessible, and enjoyable for residents and visitors alike. The project has already received a recommendation from the Seattle Design Commission. A related project will be funding for a feasibility study of expanding Freeway Park and lidding more of Interstate 5, a concept with rapidly growing support to knit together neighborhoods divided by the freeway. The study will be city-led and analyze construction methods, finance options, urban design opportunities, and recommend a phasing strategy as the state considers major transportation investments in the I-5 corridor.

“Quality public parks and open spaces in our city center are good for the physical and mental wellbeing of everyone that interacts with them,” said Riisa Conklin, Executive Director of the Freeway Park Association. “The investments secured by the Coalition create a more livable Seattle both now and in the future. Investing in public assets like Freeway Park, spanning over a major freeway, and studying an expansion is the way forward with limited public land amid rapid growth.”

The package also includes a total of \$29 million dedicated to affordable housing, nearly six times what was originally proposed by the developer. This amount does not include any additional contributions the developer could make as part of the City’s Mandatory Housing Affordability program.

“Our vision for the community was grounded in equity. We were thinking about the thousands of new hospitality workers this project will bring and where they and their families will live,” said McCaela Daffern, Sustainability Manager at Capitol Hill Housing. “This is a win for anybody who cares about making sure our city remains affordable to people of all income levels. Each dollar committed in this package can be leveraged three to one with public dollars to build more than 300 affordable homes that our city desperately needs.”

While the agreement is huge step forward, remaining steps include review by the Seattle Design Commission and its recommendation to the Seattle City Council. Council will consider the Commission’s findings and may add its own conditions for approval, and is expected to make a final vote in early 2018.

“The community has taken the ball to the five-yard line. Now the Seattle Design Commission and City Council have the opportunity to carry it forward and represent the collective vision of the community,” said Hudson. “The Coalition expects to remain involved in the process to ensure the fair deal we’ve negotiated is fully implemented.”

The public improvements will be implemented through both the traditional public benefits process in addition to alternative memoranda of understanding between the WSCC and the City. Approximately \$50 million of these improvements are expected to qualify with Seattle Design Commission (SDC) as public benefits associated with requested alley and below-grade street vacations. The public benefits for the vacations ultimately will be approved by the City Council.

The total funding will come in three tranches: Funding from the WSCC through the City’s public benefits process and other commitments; funding made available through a state legislative change to remove an exemption in the existing lodging tax; and, an agreement to provide funds after completion of the Addition.

The deal between the WSCC and the Coalition represents what can be achieved when developers and community groups work together. The Coalition also acknowledges the support from City staff and the mayor’s office in facilitating this positive outcome for the long-term success of Seattle.

“This historic agreement will expand Seattle’s wildly successful convention center while creating more open spaces in the surrounding neighborhood, safer routes for pedestrians and bicyclists, and more affordable housing,” said Mayor Burgess. “Thousands of hospitality industry jobs are likely to be created as a result of this project, and so our partners in labor are also launching a training program to help workers prepare for these coming jobs. Legislation clearing the way for this project will most likely be sent to the City Council in January. I urge the Council to quickly review and act so this project can move forward.”

More information on the agreement and the projects advocated for by the Community Package Coalition can be found at www.communitypackage.org/

Summary of WSCC Addition Public Benefits and Investments	
Item	\$ MM
<i>Community Package Projects</i>	
Freeway Park Improvements	\$10.0
Lid I-5 Study	\$1.5
Pike-Pine Bicycle Improvements	\$10.0
Olive Way Pedestrian Improvements	\$0.5
8th Ave Bicycle Improvements	\$6.0
Terry Ave Promenade	\$4.0
Affordable Housing	\$29.0
<i>Subtotal</i>	\$61.0
<i>Other Public Benefits (current estimate)</i>	
Pike-Pine Renaissance Pedestrian Improvements	\$10.0
9th Avenue Pedestrian Improvements	\$0.6
Public Art	\$1.9
Historic Building Lighting	\$1.0
On-Site Features	\$8.1
Improvements to Olive Way	\$0.2
<i>Subtotal</i>	\$82.8

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About the Community Package Coalition

We are a coalition of eight nonprofits, community organizations, and advocacy groups serving neighborhoods adjacent to the Washington State Convention Center (WSCC) Addition. We collectively represent thousands of Seattleites who are dedicated to a more attractive, safe, livable, and affordable city center. Members include: Capitol Hill Housing, Cascade Bicycle Club, Central Seattle Greenways, First Hill Improvement Association, Housing Development Consortium, Freeway Park Association, Lid I-5, and Seattle Neighborhood Greenways. Learn more at CommunityPackage.org.