

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE NORTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
9 April 2004

Project Number: 3004905
Address: 13023 Greenwood Avenue North
Applicant: Dennis Cope (Mithun) for Foss Home
Board Members Present: Joe Giampietro
Guy Peckham
Brent Seiwert
Elizabetha Stacishin-Moura
Board Member Absent: Lesley Wiscomb
DPD Land Use Planner: Paul Janos

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Site and Vicinity Description and Proposal

The proposal site, entirely zoned Lowrise 3 multifamily residential (L3), consists of most properties owned by either the Foss Home or the Luther Memorial Church between NW 130th and 132nd Streets and Greenwood, 1st, and Palatine Avenues NW. Excepted are the Foss Homes and Village site and the single-family residence sites owned by Foss on the east side of Palatine Avenue NW. These areas, along with most property to the west, are zoned Single Family. Zoning across the street, where a Seattle Public School is located, is also L3.

In contrast to the previous Foss proposal (DPD Project No. 2307013), the main nursing facility along Greenwood (the “1970s building”) and the Foss TCU building areas will be demolished and will be subject to redevelopment. The applicant proposes to construct an underground parking garage serving 250 vehicles cars. Approximately 185 residential units will be constructed on top of the garage. The garage will also serve for parking and vehicular access to a new Luther Memorial Church, to be constructed on the southeast corner of the intersection of Palatine Avenue NW and NW 132nd Street under a separate project (all schemes); the existing church will be demolished. The proposed uses in Foss’s residential project could include an accessory café facing the Greenwood Public Library and an accessory studio workshop facing the corner of 132nd and Greenwood; these common uses will be distributed throughout the structures to encourage movement of the senior residents within the project.

The design presentation included 3 schemes, one emphasizing entry functions along 130th (Scheme 1), one placing the same functions at the west end of the site along 132nd (Scheme 3), and the third making of clear break in project mass at the midpoint along Greenwood (Scheme 2). The proponent preference is for Scheme 3.

Public comments

Approximately a dozen members of the public attended the meeting. Only 3 offered comments. Design-related comments included urged that vehicular access be sited to minimize impacts to the residential development to the south of the proposed access area off NW 132nd Street, that that setbacks be typical for residential zones, and that site circulation relate to the “parks access” across the street in the vicinity of the pedestrian-activated crossing light.

PRIORITIES

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponent, listening to public comments at the meeting on 9 April 2007, the Department presents the

following siting and design guidance, identifying by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle’s “*Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings*” of highest priority.

This large site presents many design challenges, particularly with respect to breaking down the perceived length and width of structures; locating the access for many vehicles to minimize impacts to neighboring residential developments, the library, and the school; placement of open space to reflect typical L3 setbacks and to “green” the project as perceived from outside; maintaining perimeter security for non-project residents while limiting outside human activities on the project edges; and enhancing the streetscape along Greenwood. There are no good models for development of this scale nearby, and the Board conveyed that this project should become a model for future development along Greenwood, taking the street in directions community planning efforts would have it go.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics

The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.

The Board identified the unusual size of the site as a key aspect of design, and indeed as a key challenge. This project differs from the immediately preceding one due to demolition of the structures that continued to occupy the Greenwood frontage under the preceding MUP. Under the new MUP, the entire long Greenwood frontage will be re-developed. That means that there will come into being the ultimate opportunity to appropriately develop this, hopefully re-establishing smaller block structure and the L3 residential building texture and variety associated with multiple-ownership of typically smaller L3-zoned lots.

A-2 Streetscape compatibility.

The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right of way.

The Board comments focused on the string of connected buildings Scheme 3 presents to Greenwood. These were observed to be “unrelenting” in their spacing, setbacks, and sameness. Naturally, some of those impacts are the result of mere envelope-representation of structures yet to be designed. However, the Board strongly directed that design along the 600-foot Greenwood frontage resolve the “block” into a finer grain by employing variety in structures and making the structures look like separate entities; setting back the transparent connectors as far as possible to the west was strongly encouraged. In addition to transparency, Board guidance was to ensure that design make the buildings look like they face and actively engage the street. The Greenwood frontage design **MUST** be engaging as perceived from the street by both pedestrians and vehicle passengers; it is not to be sacrificed to or compromised by internal security concerns.

A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street

Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

The Board urged that the buildings be designed to at least appear as having entrances to the street; this was emphasized with respect to Greenwood. Actual entrances are preferable from a design perspective, and to the degree possible project functionality should be configured to accommodate this design perspective. The Board acknowledged that the senior population served might have special needs for security, but did not expect that this consideration would trump appropriate entrance presentation along the Greenwood façade.

A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites

Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.

The Board asked that a design detail be provided showing the relationship of the main north and south access ramps to the adjacent properties to the west, albeit they all Foss-owned. Details should include plan and elevation details, as well as the most informative perspectives. If the 3-D projection modeling address these areas, that would also be helpful.

A-7 Residential Open Space

Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.

The Board identified this as a priority, and indicated interest in design of the central courtyard. However, design could also encourage use and enjoying of the street-facing setback areas, which if consistent with code requirements will be large enough to serve as front yards for the ground-level units.

A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access

Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties and pedestrian safety.

The Board identified this guideline as a priority, expressing special interest in relationships among the access points and the entry courtyard and the church on the north, and the Foss Village properties on the south. As always, the trenches to underground garage entrances need to be well handled, minimizing impacts of blank walls. The Board strongly discouraged a drop-off function along 130th, due to unsympathetic relationship such function would have to the library across the street.

A-10 Corner Lots

Buildings on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and public street fronts. Parking and automobile access should be located away from corners.

The Board applauded the “gateway” concept for the SE corner, at Greenwood and 130th. It saw great potential in the café element. (A cautionary note was raised that this prohibited commercial use must be documented to be clearly accessory to the principal residential use.) It encouraged development of the open space/plaza concept at this corner, the better to link with the library across the street to the south. At Greenwood and 132nd, the Board also supported development of a visual link with an activity center, namely the art studio that the architect mentioned (or something like it). In any case, the north corner should be designed to be highly engaging in some fashion. The Board strongly encouraged breaking the long Greenwood frontage into two still-large blocks (each 300 feet long) by creating “corners” by design in the mid-block area. Extra separation between buildings could accomplish this, or design of structures to otherwise sign significant separation. The path to Bitter Lake Community Center through the Seattle School District, which begins across the street in this area, and was noted by the architect as a neighborhood feature to be worked with, represents an ideal partner in what could be a successful across-the-street dialogue at this “inner corner.”

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility

Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less-intensive zones. Projects on

zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk and scale between the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

As with the first Design Review MUP project on this site, the Board identified this guideline to be of highest priority. This time the “unrelenting rhythm” along Greenwood is the principal target for design; the uniform bead string shown in concept designs expresses a significant bulk impact, through building excessive length/width. The Board’s clear direction is to break down the development into clearly-perceived small-scale structures, distantly connected if visibly connected at all. A multiplicity of building forms, scales, and finishes were identified as strong design priorities.

C-1 Architectural Context

New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

The Board identified the project as a context-setter – given absence of substantially desirable precedents in the immediate vicinity.

C-3 Human Scale

The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale.

The Board identified this as a priority.

C-3 Structure Parking Entrances

The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.

Again, the Board’s interest is in the design of the entrances to the underground garage at the north and south ends of the property. Details should be provided of these areas (including perspectives).

D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances

Convenient and attractive access to the building’s entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.

The Board identified this as a very high priority, with Greenwood the frontage of greatest concern; however, the frontage along 130th facing the library was also expressly singled out for attention as well. The Board chose not to be prescriptive, but to emphasize its interest in this aspect of design by saying “Think HARD about the pedestrian experience along Greenwood.” Many suggestions are contained among the other guidelines, including breaking up the blocks, creating linkages to points of interest in the surrounding community (e.g. the Bitterlake Community Center path link), corners and “inner corner” treatments, building variety, separations, etc.

The architects oft mentioned the intent of the project to encourage circulation of seniors from their living quarters to the proposed far-spaced activity centers (café, studio, church meeting rooms, open spaces, etc.). The next presentation should include a clear diagram of the internal pedestrian circulation system, highlighting routes and how their use will be encouraged.

The Board expressly directed that fencing not oppose the desire to maintain a high degree of visual accessibility of open spaces to the public realm. All connectors should maximize transparency, not only to minimize building scale, but also to allow for the same high degree of visual access.

D-2 Retaining Walls

Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where high retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscape.

The Board cited this guideline with respect to the cuts required to access the underground garage at both ends of the site.

D-7 Personal Safety and Security

Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.

The Board appeared supportive of staff concern that a largely-de-activated street frontages, occasioned by potential inward-turning design driven by extreme “security” concerns, would likely have adverse security impacts for those in the outside area immediately adjacent to the project – essentially creating a large dead zone. Design should accomplish a reasonable trade-off of internal and external security needs, perhaps utilizing lighting, concentrated areas of internal human activity, features eliciting external human activity, etc.

E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions

The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as high-bank front yards, steep slopes, view corridors, or existing significant trees and off-site conditions such as greenbelts, ravines, natural areas, and boulevards.

The Board acknowledged the presenters’ assertions that the greater project vicinity is characterized by many mature trees, and requested that any existing large trees be preserved if feasible.

E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site

Landscaping including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.

The Board acknowledged the presenters’ vision of the site functioning prominently as a “headwaters of Piper’s Creek,” and requested that the landscape design plan fulfill the promise of this vision. Reduction of impervious surfaces as proposed is a big step in that direction. To the degree possible, the vision should be manifested in areas visible and interpretable from the public edges of the property.

Design Departures

The design team is requesting least two departures, specifically lot coverage (up to 47% vs. code limit of 45%) and to enclose walkways between buildings at the ground level. Options 2 and 3 would require a design departure for building width as well. The Board was favorably inclined to continue entertaining these requests, depending upon demonstration of how the design better meets one or more of the priorities for each option. The Board was also inclined to continue entertaining the building width departures. The Board felt that equal values were pitted against each other with respect to closure of walkways at grade, because pedestrian movement to the wonderful outdoor courtyards could be eliminated, confused, or difficult. It expressed a willingness to continue entertaining this last departure if the connections between courtyards at grade are easy and well-marked.

Request	Standard	Proposal	Rationale	Recommendation
Increase lot coverage	45% of lot area 23.45.010.A.2	Unclear, but small increase	Will allow for enclosed walkways to facilitate internal circulation and sun-shades	Continue entertaining
To enclose walkways at the ground level.	No enclosure at ground level 23.45.010.D.4	Enclose	Protects elderly and infirm patients from exposure to weather	Continue entertaining if truly necessary (document each case), set far back from street, and transparency maximized
Building width	75 feet 23.45.011.A	Hundreds of feet	Protected internal circulation	Entertain only if design fully in accord with all guidelines

In providing guidance for the earlier MUP, for the second presentation to the Board, the Board called for highly developed graphics detailing finish appearances, including, colors, and materials, shade and shadows. Several perspective should be provided, especially depicting views from key locations such as a couple of points along Greenwood (near and far), from the corner of Greenwood adjacent to the library. Views from across 132nd are also warranted. (These in addition to the studies called for at the vehicular access points.)

The Board welcomes additional presentation graphics, including the 3-D projection models suggested by the architects.