



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Department of Planning & Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

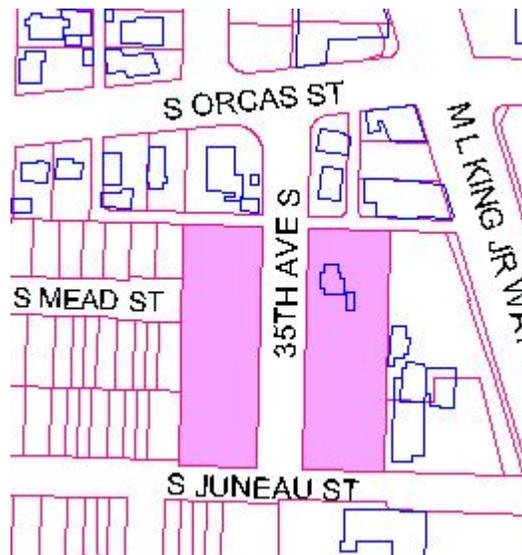
**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES
OF
THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
January 22, 2008**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3005902
Address: 5722 35TH Avenue S
Applicant: Michael Fowler, Mithun Architects, for Thomas Harper and Van Gogh Development Corporation
Board members present: Ann Beeman, Chair
Robert Mohn
Steve Sindiong
John Woodworth
Michele Wang
Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Rainier Valley development site is composed of two lots, one on either side of the unimproved and unopened 35th Avenue S. right-of-way extending one block north of S. Juneau Street. It is bounded on the north by an unimproved L-shaped alley that connects Martin Luther King, Jr. Way S. with S. Orcas Street. The eastern lot lies one short block west of M L king Jr. Way S. and is zoned C1-65. The western lot is zoned Midrise (MR) and abuts Noji Gardens, a 75 unit residential development. Although zoned Midrise as well, with a sixty foot height limit, Noji Gardens consists mainly of two-story duplex and triplex townhouses. Directly to the east of the eastern lot is Katherine’s Place, a multistory residential development with 26 units providing transitional and low-income housing.



The development site is located approximately midway between the Columbia City light rail station (three-quarters of a mile to the north) and the Othello light rail station. There is an existing wetland on the southern portion of the western lot, which, with its buffer, occupies 10,436 square feet of the lot. There is a steep slope environmentally critical area located within the northern portion of the east lot. The development site slopes approximately 18 feet from east to west.

The two lots are bounded on the south by S. Juneau Street. The vehicular portion of this street narrows down to 20 feet along the southern edge of the east lot, providing what is essentially a driveway to development east of the site. The roadway of S. Juneau Street terminates before reaching M L King, Jr. Way. Pedestrian access to M L King, Jr. Way is provided by means of a stair that descends approximately twenty feet from S. Juneau Street.

The west lot measures approximately 103 feet in the east/west direction and 315 feet in the north/south direction, for a total of 32,400 square feet. The east lot is slightly narrower and at 101 feet in width results in a lot of approximately 31,800 square feet.

The preferred proposed development is for a two multistory residential buildings, with the west building containing approximately 51 units in 4 stories over a two-level parking structure. The east building would provide 102 units in a five story building over a two-level parking structure.

ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION

Three alternate massing models for the site were briefly presented to the Board. The first scheme maximized the build-out of the site and consisted of two rectangular buildings, each aligned with the orthogonal grid. The west building had six residential floors over a three-level underground garage. The east building similarly had six floors of residential units, but over a two-level underground garage. Vehicular access in scheme 1 was entirely from the existing alley at the north of the development site. A second scheme explored reducing the overall size of the total development by reducing both units and parking, but the height of each building remained the same. The west building reduced parking by one floor but provided two levels of parking at or above grade. The east building kept two levels of parking but moved one level above grade. The second scheme splayed the southern portions of each of the buildings in a southeasterly direction. A second access point for the east building was provided from S. Juneau St. in this arrangement. The third scheme continued the exploration begun in the second scheme, reducing the overall building heights and reducing the amount of above grade parking. A second vehicular access point from S. Mead Street was introduced into the west building.

Each of the options was presented with non-traditional street improvements within the 35th Avenue S. right-of-way. The street would provide a meandering path for pedestrians with very limited emergency vehicle access. The concept was said to promote improved pedestrian connectivity for the entire surrounding neighborhood, creating an attractively landscaped green corridor that would invite neighbors into and through the site. Any development on the two sites was anticipated by the design team to meet LEED ® Silver certification. The intended clientele of the proposed owner-occupied residential units was said to be workforce-affordable.

After asking a number of clarifying questions following the architect's presentation, the Board elicited comments from members of the public attending the meeting.

Public Comments:

Approximately 25 members of the public attended the meeting and over half chose to make comments regarding the proposal. Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- Several of those attending were residents from Noji Gardens, which likewise is zoned Midrise like the west parcel of the development site with a height limit of sixty feet, but largely developed with two-story duplexes and triplexes. Several noted their appreciation of the opportunity to have their our concerns heard and hoped that the board would appreciate their feelings that the massing of the project overwhelmed the adjacent community and wasn't a good fit in to the existing neighborhood.
- Several noted that they weren't against development of this land but had hoped for a project of less height and bulk.
- A number of the neighbors objected to the notion of taking access to a portion of the parking from S. Mead Street which terminated in a turn-around at the property line of the west parcel of the development site. Others objected to providing access to the east lot from S. Juneau, already too narrow and congested in their estimation to accommodate additional traffic.
- Some members of the public raised issues about public safety, citing speeding and increasing crime in the area.
- Some expressed concerns about shadows and sun blockage for homes directly to the north and west of the proposed project.
- Several members of the public suggested that any structures proposed for the west lot step back more generously from the property line with Noji Gardens to provide height, bulk and scale compatability.

Board's Deliberations:

After hearing the public comments the Board identified two major issues that needed to be satisfactorily addressed by the development team as the project proceeded from this conceptual phase through full design development:

- The first issue was put in the form of a question: *How can this project be a good neighbor to the existing neighborhood?* The proposed project is very large within its context and raises serious challenges about making an acceptable transition to the as-built context to the west (and possibly north) in terms of height, bulk and scale.
- The second issue involves the answer to two questions: *What is the optimal configuration for vehicular access to the site?* The Board noted several constraints, several voiced by the public, inherent in the size, capacities and patterns of use of existing adjacent streets, alley, and the broader local street grid? Given some answers to the optimal configuration of vehicular access to the overall development site, *How should access solutions inform other design decisions?* For example, in the ways that each of the structures and their various facades meet the ground, in the relationship of vehicular to pedestrian entries, in the relationships of vehicular and pedestrian pathways.

Since the west structure would not be allowed to move east beyond the west edge of the 35th Avenue S. right-of-way, the impracticality of any generous setting back of the entire mass of the structure from the west property boundary with the Noji Gardens was noted by the Board. Within the brief discussion surrounding the first question, however, it was generally felt that the west building needed to be pulled to the property line with the right-of-way of unopened 35th Avenue S. and the Board would support a departure from development standards to enable this. To inform their deliberations, the Board would like to see a future demonstration of shadow and sunlight effects of the proposed buildings on their neighbors.

On the second issue, the Board indicated a desire to have the design team explore a “*woonerf*-like” (a real *woonerf* would be a through street used by motor vehicles, bicycles, prams and pedestrians on shared according to an egalitarian basis) opening into the 35th Avenue S. right-of-way at the northern edge of the site. This might provide for additional portals of entry to vehicular parking while providing for an attractive northern terminus of the pedestrian and emergency vehicle pathways.

The Board requested that the development team at the next meeting provide the Board with a more thorough and detailed analysis of the proposed structures to the existing topography of the site and wider neighborhood. To this end, the Board requested that the design team present some additional sectional views and perspective drawings of the proposed structures, studies that would express the wider context of earth and built neighborhood.

The Board noted that the proposed buildings appeared to present a blank wall to pedestrians traversing the 35th Avenue S. pathway. The Board would expect to see, at the next meeting, a great deal more of this courtyard area, with ample details of the façades adjacent to it, of landscaping materials, textures, pathway furnishings and artwork (if applicable) calculated to enhance the *attractive* pedestrian experience that the design team spoke of. (Staff notes that the structure on the east parcel would be subject to the requirements of SMC 23.47A.008, Street-level development standards, including transparency and the prohibition of blank façade segments, as well as inclusion of an intervening use between the façade and parking.)

DESIGN GUIDELINES

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, hearing public comment, and addressing their major concerns regarding the proposal, the Design Review Board members provided the siting and design guidance described below and identified by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle’s *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings* of highest priority for this project. It is to be noted that the final design must respond to all the guidelines (except those clearly not applicable to the site) and not just those singled out as being of highest priority by the Board.

A Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics

The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities.

In citing this guideline to be of highest priority from the proposal, several site characteristics and desirable responses included in *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings* have been singled out for consideration: “reflect, rather than obscure, natural topography...for instance, buildings should be designed to ‘step up’ hillsides to accommodate significant changes in elevation”; “designing the building(s) in relation to topography may help to reduce the visibility of parking garages”; “site buildings to avoid or lessen the impact of development on environmentally critical areas such as steep slopes, wetlands...”; and “design [to]...minimize shadow impacts on adjacent structures....”

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility

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

A-3 Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

A-4 Human Activity

New development should be sited and deigned to encourage human activity on the street.

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 in adjacent buildings.

A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street

For residential projects, the space between the buildings and sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors

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 guidelines above were chosen by the board to be of highest priority for the proposal, noting both the opportunities (a different kind of street experience, for example) and challenges (in particular, height, bulk and scale challenges) of the site, given the actual build out on properties to the north, west and south of the site. The Board considers the activation of 35th Avenue South important to the success of the project. The above-grade parking portion of the proposed structures should be designed to convey the strong impression that a clear design priority is to create a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly streetscape along the length of a street that intends to be totally pedestrian oriented.

B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale

Projects should be compatible with the scale of the development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide aq 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.

There is an inherent potential conflict between any new development and the existing pattern of adjacent residential buildings built to a lower height, with less bulk and at a different scale. There is an established fabric in the area of relatively recent vintage, one that is expected to be the prevailing condition for some time to come, and this proposed development should demonstrate sensitivity to that fabric. This undoubtedly could most easily be accomplished through judicious set-backs and step-backs on the western lot. The building could achieve the appearance of smaller pieces through the application of modulation techniques. The Board encouraged a pedestrian entry and connection to S. Mead Street, especially if any vehicular traffic to and from the site would be off S. Mead Street.

C Architectural Elements and Materials

C-3 Human Scale

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

The two 35th Avenue S. façades should be designed so as to be not without character or pedestrian amenity or interest. If a portion of the façade is screening an above grade or partially above grade garage, special care should be taken to provide a human scale along the sidewalk and to provide an inviting experience that engages pedestrians who make use of this north/south pathway. Provide active, not blank- facades. The proposed structures should not have large blank walls facing the street especially near sidewalks.

As stated above. the two façades along 35th Avenue S. should be designed so as to be not without character or pedestrian amenity or interest. (Staff notes that the west-facing and south-facing facades of the proposed structure on the east lot are subject to the street-level, street-facing development standards of SMC 23.47A. 008 which require transparency, prohibit blank facades and require an intervening use between the façade and parking within. Even if departures are requested from any or all of these development standards, the applicants must be prepared to show how their design proposal better meets the intent of the Code and these *Guidelines*.)

C-4 Exterior Finish Materials

Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.

The Board noted the importance of this guideline for the project without further qualification. The Board was not prescriptive regarding materials, but would expect to see a choice of durable and sustainable materials and to be presented with samples of proposed colors and materials at the subsequent recommendation meeting.

C-5 Structured Parking Entrances

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

Garage entrances should be located where the topography of the site can minimize their dominance of a given façade. Garage entries should be subordinated to pedestrian entries.

D Pedestrian Environment

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.

Design public open space to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for both residents and pedestrians using the 35th Avenue South pathway. Solar access to the intended areas of open space along the public pathway should be especially emphasized. Provide inviting and ample building entries, carefully integrated with the pedestrian path through paving and other features, including lighting and landscaping. Provide clear and visible signage identifying the buildings' (and units') addresses.

D-2 Blank Walls

Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest. (See the remarks under C-3 above.)

D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures

The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities and Service Areas

Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters...away from the street front where possible. ...they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

The Board would expect the applicant to explain in detail where trash dumpsters and containers for recyclable materials would be located, how they would be accessed by tenants, and how they would be serviced.

D-7 Pedestrian Safety

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

D-8 Treatment of Alleys

The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.

D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions

For residential projects in commercial zones, the spaces between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and be visually interesting for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops, and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.

Guidelines D-5, D-7, D-8, and D-12 were cited to be of highest importance for a successful design outcome, but without further comment. D-5 and D-8 should be addressed in consideration of the broader discussion above regarding vehicular access to the site. D-7 and D-12 are clearly related to elements of A-2, A-3 and A-6 on page 5 above and other observations regarding the opportunities for the proposed structures to relate to the unique streetscape that is proposed.

E Landscaping

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.

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 design team should provide studies of the proposed pedestrian environment both along the streets and along the through-block connecting pathway. The applicant should be prepared to present details for a variety of streetscape and pedestrian pathway amenities, including lighting, overhead weather protection at entrances, signage and other elements calculated to generate a friendly and lively environment both at the perimeter of the site and within the 35th Avenue S. pathway.

Landscaping should be designed with the goal of realizing the prioritized guidelines, should soften the edge conditions where appropriate, and should contribute to an attractive and usable interior open space, courtyard area. The design should incorporate specific treatments to provide for attractiveness and an allure to the pedestrian through-site pathway and establish a genuine neighborhood amenity. The landscape plan should incorporate native plantings that will complement and reinforce the wetlands area on site. The Board would expect to see a comprehensive Landscape Plan, one that treats not only the on-site open space but the streets' edges as well. The long-term viability of the existing grove of pine trees as well as other trees

and vegetation on site should be carefully evaluated and weighed in making design decisions regarding the siting of buildings and the location of functions and uses.

The above guidelines have been selected by the Board to be of highest importance for the project. The applicant should note that each of the guidelines contained in Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings, unless clearly inapplicable to the site or to the proposal, is important for a successful design outcome.

Departures from Development Standards:

The architects preliminarily identified the following departure from development standards that would be needed for the preferred option:

- SMC 23.45.056A: which requires a front setback for structures in a Midrise zone and would be applicable to the structure on the western portion of the development site.

The Board, as noted above, indicated a willingness to entertain the recommendation of a departure from this requirement, as they might entertain the recommendation of granting other departure(s) yet to be requested, provided such departure requests were integral to an overall satisfying design and providing that the design development responded adequately to the guidance regarding the desired relationship of the proposed building to the adjacent street/ pedestrian corridor and neighboring properties, as well as to the other provisions provided in the guidelines.

Staff Comments:

The Board expressed a desire to have the development team return for a second Early Design Guidance meeting. DPD has seriously weighed this recommendation of the Board in light of the following considerations.

- The Board exhibited a familiarity with the site, heard substantial Public Comment and had adequate time during the course of the meeting to identify those guidelines that were of highest significance for the site and the project;
- Questions raised by both the Board and the public regarding vehicular ingress and egress from the site and the location of parking within the proposed buildings would benefit from being informed by a comprehensive Traffic Study, a requirement normally expected at the time of MUP application;
- The proposal, at a more refined and developed stage, would benefit from a thorough zoning review which would identify other departures from development standards necessary for any of the proposed alternatives but not identified by the applicant nor presented to the Board for their consideration;
- The proposal involves significant further discussions between the applicant and the City, and determinations by DPD and by SDOT regarding alternative street requirements; it appears that any alternatives will require the submission of designs for the right-of-way for the deliberation and the recommendations of the City of Seattle Design Commission;
- Presentations to the Design Commission for their consideration and recommendations regarding right-of-way improvements have been most successful from a process

perspective when aligned and synchronous with Recommendation Meetings of the Design Review Board since the concerns of each Board can be made available to the other Board and inform the deliberations of each.

DPD has made the determination that in this case the applicant should not return for a second Early Design Guidance meeting but should proceed to further design development, which includes a demonstrable response to the guidelines and guidance noted above, and to a Master Use Permit application. Subsequent to a successful application, the proposal will then be returned to the Design Review Board for a Recommendation Meeting, at which time the applicant must demonstrate the adequacy of the design's response to the stated guidelines and to the Board's earlier guidance.