

**INITIAL
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NORTH EAST
SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
TO DPD DIRECTOR**

March 3, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3006480

Address: 8501 15th Ave. N.E.

Applicant: Runberg Architects for Greg Kappers

**Board Members Present: Sue Jensen
Tom Nelson
Craig Parsons
Shawna Sherman**

Board Member Absent: Tricia Reisenauer

DPD Representatives: Vince Lyons and Scott Kemp

BACKGROUND:

The project was the subject of a Pre-Design Public Meetings on March 23, 2007, August 6, 2007, and September 10, 2007 at which time early design guidance was offered to be considered in the final proposed design. A record of that guidance can be found in the MUP file for this application. The applicant has applied for a Master Use Permit with a Design Review component. On March 3 2008 the Design Review Board convened for a Public Meeting regarding this project. At this meeting site, floor and elevation plans, and landscape plans multi-family development were presented.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposal is for 39 ground related residential units in single unit and duplex buildings arranged around pedestrian landscaped areas and preservation of most of a grove of evergreen trees along the east extent of the site. Parking for 48 vehicles (43 spaces towards zoning code count as some are tandem spaces counting as 1.5 spaces) is provided in an underground parking garage and in residential structures facing adjacent streets.



As proposed there are four driveway entries to the site from N.E. 85th St; one to the underground garage, two serving dual garages in duplex structures and one serving a single unit structure. On N.E. 86th St. the applicant proposes a single driveway serving two side-by-side, but not attached, units.

A water garden, designed to function as part of the stormwater drainage system would run under a slightly elevated “boardwalk” along a north/south pedestrian “spine” through the project. Architecture is “Northwest Modern” with use of wood siding materials in pitched roofed units with small porches at pedestrian entry points to each unit.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment was received from the approximately 60 people present. Comment was organized to be presented by a few individuals. Among the comments made were the following. Density of the proposal, at 25 units per acre, is out of scale with the surrounding context of development at 9 units per acre. Tree protection should incorporate non-disturbance zones five feet beyond the drip lines of protected trees and should include a 10 year bonding to insure long-term protection. Expansion of the underground parking by seven spaces would allow structures around the perimeter of the site, which now have individual parking garages within them, to be lowered closer to street level, thereby lessening their height, bulk and scale impact and making them appear less tall and narrow; increasing their compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. All driveways should reach sidewalk grade a car length in from the sidewalk to assure pedestrian safety past the site. Garbage and recycling areas should be designed to minimize smell, pollution and visibility into them and they should be adequately sized to incorporate the addition of yard waste recycling in anticipation of it being added to the assortment of items recycled. Fences, which are anticipated along the reservoir, should be about hip level in height. Several prior requests of the Board have not been adequately provided including: a request that more trees be included; that setbacks be varied along the reservoir side; that additional traffic information be provided to provide the board a better understanding of pedestrian safety issues; that some or all perimeter buildings be lowered; that there be increased views afforded into the site; and that there be a variety of building massings. Between four and seven units are causing most of the loss of existing trees in the current plan and a reduction in number or consolidation of units would yield great results. Pedestrians have crossed the site for more than eighty years and they should continue to be allowed to do so. Departures should not be granted without strong foundation and excellence of design. The tree canopy proposed for preservation is still in jeopardy due to loss of edge trees providing wind protection to the interior. The proposal looks gated and exclusive; not engaged with the surrounding community. Window treatments in proposed designs are out of character with the neighborhood character. A “synthesis” between the views of the neighborhood and the developer should be obtained before any permits are issued.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

After considering the site and context, hearing public comment, reconsidering the previously identified design priorities, and drawings showing the proposal, the Design Review Board members reached the following initial conclusions without recommending approval of the proposal as a whole (all recommendations were by all members agreeing,

unless otherwise indicated). The comments summarized below were based on the plans submitted at that meeting.

Board Deliberations

The Board complemented the applicant team on the quality of their materials and general level in which they responded to the early design guidance given. The Board did, however, find some areas where additional design work is thought necessary before a recommendation is made.

The appearance of the units along N.E. 85th St. and N.E. 86th St. are not close enough in character to the single family areas. The fact that some of them are duplexes does not help in this regard as it creates a doubly wide structure. Trading duplexes on the interior for single family structures on the interior should be considered. Also, the presence of garage levels approximately a half story below street level adds to the apparent height of the street facing units. Some or all of these units should make use of parking in the underground garage and be lowered closer to street level.

The design still does not provide the level of “porosity” of sight into the interior of the site the Board would like to see. Trading single family units to the exterior could help with that as well.

Ridge lines in the current design tend to be aligned and parallel to the front and back walls of the units with the result that the side yards, many six feet wide, have the gable ends above them adding to the narrow, dark appearance there. Ridge lines should be varied to provide variation in side yard aspects with some roofs sloping into them. For example facing hipped roof structures would provide more light and air between structures as well as breaking up monotonous high ridge lines.

The Board discussed whether garages on driveways backing across sidewalks should be eliminated or modified to avoid backing across sidewalks and concluded the impact on pedestrians using sidewalks would not be detrimental enough to limit them for that reason.

The existing Douglas Firs, near to proposed residential buildings, slated to be preserved must be shown through an arborists report and preservation plan to be sufficiently far from new development to be preserved in a healthy condition.

Recycling and trash facilities remain a concern. They need to be shown in a form which provides screened areas which are large enough to handle yard and food waste as well and which are located so as to be reasonably convenient for residents and which service providers will pick up from.

Fences around the site need to be shown. They should not “wall off” the site from exterior vantage points; the reservoir park and surrounding streets. Along the existing

water treatment facility a City owned fence is expected to remain and an appropriate why to address its institutional aspect may be to landscape on the project side of it.

Development standard departures were requested.

1. To reduce identified interior setbacks to six feet where ten feet is required. While the Board indicated that they think they will be able to recommend this departure, the design is not yet refined to the point where they are willing to do so. Architectural measures to reduce the apparent and real height of structures on either side of these setbacks still need to be implemented. A primary one, mentioned at a prior meeting, which must be considered, is to align roof lines so that roof pitches go down towards the side yards. Along street frontages the presence of structures is heightened by the necessity to bring the garage floor elevations up to lessen driveway steepness. Redesign of these units to eliminate or change to configuration of garages must be considered.
2. To allow a 16 foot wide driveway into the parking garage rather than the 20 required. The Board recommends this departure be granted.
3. To allow curb cuts which serve two residential units to be 16 feet wide rather than the code required 10 feet. The Board declined to recommend in favor of this departure at this time. Methods to lessen the appearance of building height must be developed before a favorable recommendation will be forthcoming. These methods might include elimination or consolidation garages, lowering units or creating one story building expressions.
4. To allow eaves to project 24 inches, rather than the code limited 18 inches, into required setbacks where that setback is 10 feet or greater. The Board recommended approval of this departure as it would add to architectural interest in the development.
5. To allow porches or steps to extend into required setbacks. The Board recommended approval of this departure as it would add to architectural interest in the development and it also helps to develop in the constrained portions of the site which remain after preservation of the wooded eastern portion.
6. To allow the minimum amount of private usable open space to be reduced to zero for two units (building 23) and to 185 sq. ft. on one unit (building 22) and to reduce the average amount to 280 sq. ft. The Board recommended this departure be granted as a measure to create large areas of common open space in this proposed development.
7. To allow building openings which directly face the open space of another unit or the shared open space without screening. The Board recommended approval of this departure as it is a necessary consequence this approach to common open space with residences clustered around and careful placement of living spaces should appropriately preserve individual privacy.

A second Recommendation Meeting of the Design Review Board was called for by the Board in order to address their requests for more updating of the design. DPD agrees with this request.

