

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE PRIORITIES  
OF THE  
NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**Meeting Date: May 23, 2007**

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**Project Number: 3006480**

**Address: 8511 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE**

**Applicant: Brian Runberg for Prescott Development LLC**

**Board Members Present: Susan Eastman Jensen  
Tom Nelson  
Shawna Sherman  
Tricia Reisenauer**

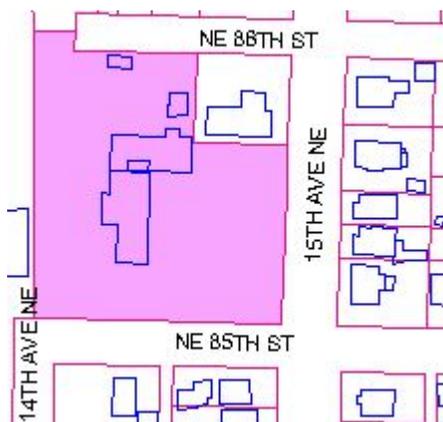
**Absent: Craig Parsons**

**DPD Staff Present: Scott Kemp, Land Use Planner**

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**BACKGROUND & VICINITY INFORMATION:**

The applicant has applied for Design Review to develop a mostly rectangular-shaped site in the Maple Leaf neighborhood with a 40-unit, cottage development with parking for more than 50 vehicles.



The 71,182 sf site is located at 8511 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NE in the Maple Leaf neighborhood. It abuts the Maple Leaf reservoir to the west. It currently houses the offices of the Camp Fire USA Puget Sound Council in a building located roughly in the middle of the site, with more than 22,000 square feet of paved surface to the west of it and a large number of established conifers to the east. The topography slopes down from the northwest corner to the southeast, a total of 22 feet change of grade—from 412' to 434'—over 600 feet. The steepest grade is found adjacent to the sidewalk in the southwest corner of the site where the grade changes 8 feet over only 20 feet. The east side of the site adjacent to 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue is currently used

informally by the neighbors as a picnic area and dog walk. This public access also sometimes leads to unsafe and illegal activities after hours.

The site is zoned L-2 (Lowrise 2). The site is surrounded on three sides by single family residences in an SF-5000 zone. The Lowrise-2 zone containing the project site also encompasses

two parcels to the north. On the south side of 86<sup>th</sup> Street there is a one-and-a-half story office building on the same block at the proposal site with the same L-2 zoning.. Across 86<sup>th</sup> Street to the north is a two-story multifamily triplex on the corner at 15<sup>th</sup> Ave. N.E. which is also zoned L-2.

The Maple Leaf Reservoir is located directly to the west of the site. The water tower is visible from a large part of the neighborhood. The reservoir is slated to be covered and converted to recreational uses by 2010. Until then, the area is surrounded by a chain link security fence. To the south of the reservoir is the Maple Leaf Playground, which includes playing fields, picnic areas, play equipment, and accessory structures.

Vehicle traffic is concentrated along 15th Avenue NE, an arterial that serves as a link between commercial areas to the south and residential neighborhoods to the north. Traffic tends to move quickly along 15<sup>th</sup> because there are no traffic signals for many blocks. The intersection of 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE 86<sup>th</sup> Street has limited sight lines to the north and south.

15<sup>th</sup> Avenue has one lane of traffic going each direction and parallel parking on either side except in bus zones. There are sidewalks on both sides of 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 85<sup>th</sup> Street, but none on 86<sup>th</sup> adjacent to the site. Several bus lines travel along 15<sup>th</sup>, and there is a bus stop located on the site itself.

There is no commercial development along this portion of 15th Ave NE. The nearest amenities are along Lake City Way to the south and east and along Roosevelt to the west.

## **ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION**

The proposed project would include 40 units of cottage-style housing arranged around shared open spaces with minimal surface parking and an underground parking garage.

With the aid of a photomontage the architect, Brian Runberg, presented the vicinity's architectural context, the site's challenges and opportunities and character studies conducted. Massing schemes for typical stacked apartments, townhouses, and 3 cottage schemes, were presented. He also summarized the findings of the arborist's report on the existing trees on the site. He referenced this in presenting three options for the project's site plan and massing. Each option contained 40 homes and most of its parking in a 32-space underground parking garage accessed from drives on NE 85<sup>th</sup> and NE 86<sup>th</sup>.

Option 1 (identified as Alternative 2, page F.2 of the design packet) features an equal number of detached and semi-detached homes arranged around three shared open spaces. In addition, there is a common house at the approximate center of the site. The homes and open spaces are all connected by a series of paths that enter the site from 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue and from the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> and proceed organically through the site from southeast to northeast where a connection is anticipated to the future reservoir park.

Option 2 (identified as Alternative 3, page F.3 of the design packet) also has an equal number of detached and semi-detached homes arranged around three shared open spaces. The common house is located within one of the open spaces, and the pathways and homes are in a fairly formal

arrangement. The path enters the site on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue and continues directly to the west where it could eventually connect to the future reservoir park.

Option 3 (identified as Alternative 4, page F.4 of the design packet) has fewer detached homes and larger combinations of homes than the previous two. There are two four-plexes in this option, where the others had no more than two homes attached. In part because of the greater density, this option also preserves the most existing trees.

Parking would be provided in an underground garage. Anticipated departure requests would be to allow additional curbcuts on 85<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup>, and to allow a reduction in driveway width for the garage.

Brian Runberg then responded to questions from board members regarding the underground garage, the public spaces, and the proximity of structures to the existing trees.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Approximately 20-30 members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting. Public comments included:

- Several members of the public present feel strong support for the merits of the historic landmark proposal for the existing building and would like to see the developer explore reusing the existing building in order to accommodate some of the development goals.
- Site Planning should be of the highest priority; the site is unique and will have a strong impact on this single-family neighborhood. The site is very visible from both arterials.
- The residential open space in all 3 cottage schemes has an inward-focused character, which serves to “privatize” the site, rather than truly integrating it into the surrounding neighborhood. Neighbors who live immediately opposite the site are concerned that the houses turn their backs on the street.
- The L-2 zone is anomalous in this neighborhood of SF zoning. The development will have a much greater density than the rest of the neighborhood (25 du/acre compared to 9 du/acre).
- Consider how the other buildings in the neighborhood meet the street, and how they are located relative to each other.
- The design departure for the number of curb cuts and the location of the curb cuts poses a pedestrian safety concern. There was a fatal traffic accident on 85<sup>th</sup> a few years ago. The alignment of the alley and the project driveway will encourage drive-through use of the alley to the south. Adding density to this neighborhood will only exacerbate an already dangerous condition. Do the adjacent streets have as many curbcuts on a single block?
- Several members of the public would like the City and the developer to work out a land swap arrangement, where some of the proposed reservoir park land could be traded for open space where the existing grove of trees currently stands.
- The applicant should explore locating the residential open space where the existing grove of trees currently stands on the eastern extent of the site.

- Six feet between the cottages does not seem like enough space; the single-family houses in the neighborhood have more space between the buildings.
- The neighborhood is not homogeneous; the design of the project should include cottages that have different materials from each other and lessen the visual impact of the entire development. Avoid “cutesy” and “matchy-matchy.”
- Neighbors believe there is an underground stream nearby and are concerned about future flooding.
- Cottages will be too small for long-term residents.
- The community members would like to see the report prepared by the developer’s arborist. 54 trees are currently on one-third of the property, the site design should preserve more trees.

### **DESIGN GUIDANCE PRIORITIES:**

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provide the following siting and design guidance to be considered in the development of the site. The highest design guideline priorities for this project are identified by letter and number in accordance with the siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle’s “*Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commercial Buildings*,” November 1998.

#### **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.*

***A-2 Streetscape Compatibility.*** *The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.*

***A-3 Entrances Visible to the Street.*** *Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.*

***A-7 Residential Open Space.*** *Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.*

***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.*

***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 indicated the above as high priorities. They wanted to see the new homes oriented to the street and the corner in order to foster interaction with the existing neighborhood. They were interested in seeing other options for the siting of open spaces in order to take advantage of the existing site characteristics, including the stand of trees. They want to see a site plan which preserves the entire stand of trees on the western approximately one third of the site. This plan could make use of the stand of trees as open space for the residents of the site. They thought the land swap was an interesting idea, but understood it may not be feasible. Given that the adjacent reservoir site will be converted to open space in 2010, the Board wanted the design to address that proximity and create connections to the open space.

An issue was raised as to whether the southern site driveway should align with the alley in the

block to the south, thereby encouraging residents to use it to reach N.E. 85<sup>th</sup> St. or whether it the driveway should be offset from the alley. Even in an offset arrangement, the alley and driveway could lend themselves to use as an access to N.E. 85<sup>th</sup> St. Lining the two up may have advantages from a traffic safety perspective and might lessen the impact of lights of vehicles using the alley upon residents of the proposal. It may be that traffic calming measures in the alley itself would be a more effective measure. The applicants are asked to study this issue in consultation with their transportation engineer and return with their considered proposal.

***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.***

***C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency - Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its facade walls.***

The Board indicated the above as a high priority. They thought the project should look more like the rest of the neighborhood and perhaps the design could include a variety of architectural styles in order to emulate the diversity that exists in the area.

#### **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.***

The Board felt that the pedestrian environment should be better integrated with the neighborhood.

#### **E. LANDSCAPING**

***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 thought more open space could be allotted to the existing trees in order to protect them and to create transition from the neighborhood to the new homes. Members found the idea of a land swap interesting and were curious about its plausibility. The Board wants to see a site plan which preserves the grove of trees at the next DRB meeting for this project.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board has not yet offered any preliminary advice with regard to the requested development standard departures outlined below.

**Development Standard Departure Summary**

<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>APPLICANT'S JUSTIFICATION</b>
<b>Setbacks SMC 23.24.014</b>	<p>Front setback = the average of setbacks of structures on either side; in no case less than 5 ft. or more than 15 ft.</p> <p>Rear setback = 25 ft. or 25% of lot depth, whichever is less</p> <p>Side setback = no less than 5'</p> <p>10 ft. between interior facades</p>	<p>Front setback = 10 ft.</p> <p>Rear setback = 10 ft.</p> <p>Side setback = 5 ft.</p> <p>6 ft. between interior facades or 10 ft. where facing facades include an entrance</p>	<p>The requested setbacks allow for open space to be consolidated into shared common areas.</p>
<b>Driveways SMC 23.54.030.D</b>	<p>Driveways shall be min. 10 ft. wide.</p> <p>Driveways serving 30 or more parking spaces shall be min. 10 ft. wide for one-way traffic and 20 ft. wide for two-way traffic.</p>	<p>Driveways to 32-stall garage = 12 ft. and 16 ft.</p>	<p>The north driveway is restricted to 12 ft. in order to preserve an exceptional tree. The south driveway would have less impact on the pedestrian areas if it is narrower.</p>
<b>Curbcuts SMC 23.54.030.F</b>	<p>Allowed based on street frontage:</p> <p>0 – 80 ft. = 1 curbcut</p> <p>81 – 160 ft. = 2 curbcuts</p> <p>161 – 240 ft. = 3 curbcuts</p> <p>240 – 320 ft. = 4 curbcuts</p>	<p>7 curbcuts on 85<sup>th</sup> Ave. with 270 ft. frontage.</p> <p>3 curbcuts on 86<sup>th</sup> Ave. with 133 ft. frontage.</p>	<p>Driveways to homes that face the street ensure that parking can be kept to the perimeter of the site and reinforce the style of many nearby homes.</p>

Next Steps:

The applicants are invited to return for a second EDG meeting to further explore site planning alternatives and to consider requested development standard departures.