



# City of Seattle

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

**DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF  
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD  
September 11, 2007**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3007582  
Address: 811 Fifth Avenue  
Applicant: Carl Shumaker, Daniels Development Company

Board members present: Wilmot Gilland  
Jim Falconer  
Kelly Mann  
Marta Falkowska  
Dana Behar  
Matt Allert

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

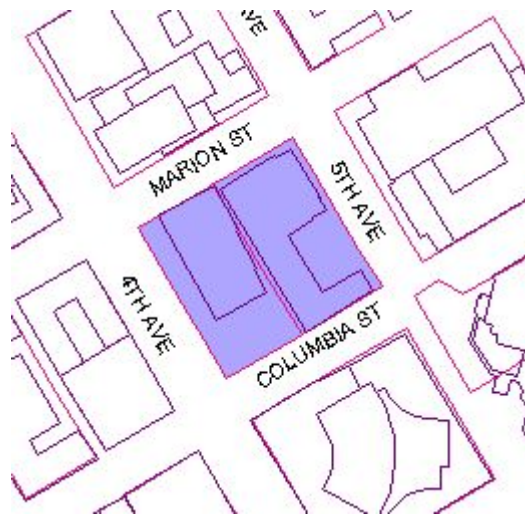
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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Downtown Seattle site comprises the entire block bounded by Marion Street on the north, Columbia Street on the south, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the east and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the west. The site measures approximately 240 feet in the north/south direction and 250 feet in the east/west direction. The total area is approximately 59,300 square feet in extent. Although originally platted with an alley intervening between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues, the alley was vacated by ordinance before the turn of the last century.

Currently there are two existing structures on the site which will remain, the Rainier Club and the sanctuary building of the First United Methodist Church. An office and service extension to the church sanctuary added in 1950 is proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development.

The zoning is Downtown Office Core 1 (DOC1).



The current proposal is for the development of a 41 story, 760,000 square-foot office tower with below grade parking for 290 vehicles, to be constructed on the southeast corner of the site currently occupied by the office and service wing of the church.

The Rainier Club (1904, with an extensive expansion, 1926-1929), was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Washington State Heritage Register in 1976. It became a City of Seattle Landmark in 1986. The sanctuary building of the First United Methodist Church was nominated to become a Seattle Landmark in 1985. The designation was never approved since the nomination was appealed and the potential designation challenged in court.

MUP #2200399, a proposal for a 33 story office tower occupying the eastern half block on Fifth Avenue, between Marion and Columbia streets, went before the Downtown Design Review Board four times between July, 2002 and February, 2004. A Decision was published in July, 2004. Following an appeal and further activity in the Superior Court of the State of Washington, a Master Use Permit was issued by DPD in March of 2005. A component of that MUP was the demolition of the existing First United Methodist Church. The new proposal locates a forty-one story office tower at the southeast corner of the site and preserves the sanctuary portion of the FUMC.

Although Project #3007582 is a new Master Use Permit (MUP) for a new office tower at 811 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the project will piggy-back on an earlier issued MUP (#2200399) decision, utilizing the Early Design Guidance of the Board for that proposal. The review of the current project is commencing at the Recommendation stage, with a new MUP already submitted to DPD.

As in the original proposal, the actual development site for the project is the entire block between Marion and Columbia streets and between 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> avenues. This includes, beside the FUMC sanctuary, the half block occupied by the Rainier Club, a designated Historic Landmark. Concurrently, the Rainier Club is proposing an addition to its facility and underground parking servicing both the Club and the new office tower will be located under the parking lot south of the Rainier Club building. The addition to the Rainier Club is not under the purview of the Design Review Board but rather the Landmarks Board. As a for “information-only” regarding the Rainier addition, the architecture firm of NBBJ prepared a packet which was provided to the Design Review Board prior to the September 11, 2007 scheduled meeting of the Board.

### **Architect’s Presentation**

Allyn Stellmacher of the architectural firm of ZGF presented the proposal on behalf of the development team after briefly recounting the project’s goals and priorities, as well as the neighborhood and contextual analysis, including the expansion plans of the Rainier Club. A major challenge for the designers was the need to achieve a viable office floor plate given a site footprint limited by the two historic buildings which were to be retained on site. The solution was to increase the size of the floor plates as the building moved upward, meaning that the upper levels of the proposed structure must lean over the tops of the Rainier Club and the church sanctuary. Having dismissed the idea of relying on basic cantilevers to increase the size of the floor plates, the design development had explored three different design directions, what were identified as “curved,” “canted” and “faceted” massing alternatives. The preferred and proposed

design was the “faceted” expression which incorporated a lateral structural bracing system at the perimeter of the building. This solution allowed for the expanded floor plates extending into the air space above the existing sanctuary and the expanded area of the Rainier Club and resulted in a unique and dynamic formal expression to the proposed tower. The top of the building would constitute another distinctive facet and one intended to incorporate alternative on-site power generating capacities.

Following the design team’s presentation, the Board asked several questions, among which answers from the design team were the following clarifications:

- The east-west orientation of the main lobby and elevator core provided for a better alignment with below-grade loading and vehicle circulation and allowed the core to stand further away from the south façade of the sanctuary;
- The variance for providing less than the code-required open space was necessary since, among other restrictions, the court between the church and tower did not qualify as open space since it would be “covered” and the Code did not provide for a Design Review departure from the requirement.;
- The peripheral diagonal bracing was driven by structural logic since seismic bracing systems that were based upon the core only would demand a prohibitively thick core-wall thickness.

### **Public Comments:**

Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- A representative of the Seattle Community Council Federation: Opposed any cantilever over the church because of the need to maintain the historical character of the building; noted that the current building access to the church from both Marion St. and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. should be maintained
- John Schack, the great, great grandson of church architect James Schack, indicated he would like to see the tension relieved between the church wall and tower façade and suggested using cues from church to inform the treatment of the tower base and ground plane and court to achieve a more tactile and intimate environment.
- Michael Godfried, president of the group, Save Our Sanctuary, applauded the saving of the sanctuary and indicated it should be preserved for some public use with deep civic importance
- Another member of the same group urged that the tower not block views of the dome of the existing sanctuary and that the development team work earnestly to make the courtyard a special, public space.
- Another member of the public affirmed the judgment that the proximity of the tower’s north facade to the south wall of the church needed relief, i.e greater separation; commended the Design team in its attitude of respect for historic structures, and stressed that addressing the above situation should be made integral to that attitude; commented that, although DPD standards might be overly prescriptive, there should be a concern about the length of the façade requested as a departure from the requirement.
- Another member of the public commented that the proposed courtyard between the tower lobby and church has potential to be a grand space connecting the new and the old, but that it should be a public space.

- A written comment received by DPD asked that the 65-foot tall sequoia growing at the site be integrated into the design or saved and moved elsewhere.

### **Board's Deliberations:**

The Board chair commended the design team on the quality of the analysis and presentation in the packet that been prepared for the meeting and on the clear, rational presentation at the meeting itself. That the sanctuary was to be saved and that the parking would be located below grade were components of the design that were to be applauded. Various Board members noted their satisfaction with the tower itself, with the choice in structural system and the choices made for the architectural expression of larger facets at the skin of the structure. The perimeter structural bracing created a sense of “increasing velocity” as the tower extended skyward; where the diagonal braces met the grade at the northeast corner of the structure, at the narrow courtyard created between the new structure and the existing south façade of the church, they formed a portal into the space that was potentially dramatic.

What the Board found still unresolved in the design and in need of further exploration was twofold: first, the integration of elements and expression at the rooftop, especially as the rooftop facet would be perceived from the surrounding vistas, including the streets, and second, and most important, how, as one Board member put it, the “pure, clean volume of the tower” set itself down “amidst the miscellany at its base.”

In general, the tall, light-weight transparent base-volume of the tower was thought to work well vis-à-vis the adjacent historic structures. Nonetheless, the attempt by the design team to maintain viable floor plates while providing for an adequate separation between the skin of the tower on its north side and the south façade of the church structure produced, in the judgment of the Board members, an inadequate separation as presented. The pinching and restricting of the interval of space between the two façades produced a sense of clash that was both aesthetically jarring and slightly vertiginous. It was clear that there was still a need for the design team to explore strategies for creating a greater gap between facades and to investigate in greater detail ways of getting more light into the space and, finally and importantly, creating within this 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue street wall interstice a unique and engaging urban space, one filled with delight and a sense of vibrant drama.

### **Departures from Development Standards**

The architect identified the following departures from development standards needed for the proposed development:

- SMC 23.49.058: to exceed the upper level façade length limits of the tower—between 161 and 240 feet, allowed 125 feet, requested 139 feet; between 241 and 500 feet, allowed 100 feet, requested 137 feet five inches; above 500 feet, allowed 80 feet, requested 125 feet 5 inches.
- SMC 23.49.018D: to allow overhead weather protection that exceeds a maximum of fifteen (15) feet above the sidewalk.
- [SMC 23.54.035: required number of loading berths to be reduced from 8 to 7.]

- [SMC 23.54.035: reduce required length of loading berths from 35 to 25 feet]

Staff noted that the reduction in length of the loading berths was an administrative decision of the Director and not a subject for departure. In addition, the Board could not grant a departure from the required number of loading berths but that they could grant a departure for one of the eight loading berths to be less than the minimum 25 feet in length, in effect to be a regular vehicle space dedicated for loading only. Thus, the third requested departure should be: SMC 23.54.035: departure to allow one loading space to be less than twenty five (25) feet in length.

Having visited the site, having considered the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, having solicited public comment regarding the proposal, and having addressed their major concerns regarding the proposal, the Design Review Board members recommended conditional approval of the design of the proposal and approval of the requested departures from development standards as corrected above to three. The condition of approval was that the design team would continue to work with the Land Use planner at DPD to: 1) address the Board's concerns regarding the top facet of the tower as the actual rooftop components are determined, 2) to arrive at a satisfactory strategy to allow for a greater separation between the north façade of the new tower and the existing south façade of the church structure, and 3) to arrive at a design for the courtyard between tower and church that provided a vibrant, inviting space that met the expectations regarding the space that had been voiced at the meeting.

### **Staff Comments:**

It is the expectation of the Design Review Board and DPD that the applicant proceed to further design development and work with DPD to provide a demonstrable response to the guidance and conditions noted above.