



City of Seattle

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

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE
OF
AREA 4, THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**Meeting Date: September 9, 2008
Report Date: September 15, 2008**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Number: 3008584
Address: 9245 Rainier Avenue South
Applicants: Bruce Hayashi, Miller Hayashi Architects, LLC, for owner Neighborhood Care (formerly Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Centers) with Lorig Development as Development Project Managers
Board Members Present: John Woodworth, Chair and Development Community Representative
Robert Mohn, Local Business Representative
Michelle Wang, Design Profession Representative
Brett Conway, Local Residential Representative
Board Members Absent: Steve Sindiong, Community Representative
DPD Planner: Art Pederson

PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposed project is to construct a two-story approximately 14,300 square foot medical and dental clinic. Surface parking for approximately 44 to 75 vehicles is sought (depending on development scenario pursued).

The project site fronts two streets: Rainier Avenue South (Rainier Avenue) to the north and Sturtevant Avenue South (Sturtevant Avenue) to the east. The site slopes downhill gradually from the south to the north and has a steep grade change along its southwest property boundary. The southeast corner of the project site contains a small portion of wetland on the Sturtevant Ravine to the south.



The site is zoned Neighborhood Commercial 3, with a 40-foot height limit (NC 3-40). The zoning and general uses surrounding the project site are as follows: to the north and east along

Rainier Avenue the zoning is also NC 3-40 and contains a mix of uses (to the north and east: restaurants, bank, supermarket, and to the northwest: the Seattle Housing Authority's Barton Place apartment building and the Rainier Beach Public Library). The NC 3-40 zoned parcel directly to the west and fronting principally on 51st Avenue is vacant and not included in this proposal. To the southwest and southeast of the site the zoning is L 2 and contains principally older single and multi-family residential structures. Abutting the project site to the south is City of Seattle Parks Department property, Sturtevant Ravine, containing Mepps Creek. The creek is in a natural "day-lighted" condition for most of the Parks Department property, but enters a culvert a short distance south of the project site. Mepps Creek runs below the project site and north under Rainier Avenue in a culvert. The Parks property contains a wetland (*Environmentally Critical Area- ECA*) that is directly abutting the project site with possibly a small portion of the wetland on the project site. To the south beyond the L 2 zone the zoning changes to L 1 and contains a use and structure mix similar to the L 2 zone. The site and surroundings are within the Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village.

ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

The project architect presented the neighborhood context, as outlined in *Project and Site Description* above, discussed the mission of Neighborhood Care and the purpose of the proposed development, displayed a number of projects designed by his firm exemplifies the general design direction of this project, and presented three possible development schemes. The lead project development manager, Bruce Lorig, spoke briefly about Neighborhood Care's long-term plans for the site.

According to the applicant, Neighborhood Care has been involved with providing affordable health and dental care in the Seattle area for 35 years through approximately 16 clinics. The proposed clinic is planned to replace the existing clinic at South Cloverdale Street and Rainier Avenue South, which at 7,000 square foot is undersized for their current needs, and the New Holly clinic, which is scheduled for closure in approximately two years.

Three development alternatives were presented. All were similar in proposing a two-story structure fronting the existing sidewalk and extending the length of Rainier Avenue with surface parking to the south and fronting on Sturtevant Avenue. The main building entry would be at the corner of Rainier and Sturtevant Avenues. The parking area proposed in all alternatives would be primarily for the proposed clinic, but also the location of a possible future residential building (four stories with approximately 45 units). This structure was originally part of this development proposal but due to the urgency to construct the clinic and different funding issues between the two different uses, the residential structure is not part of this proposal. Overall design objectives common to all alternatives are to add a strong pedestrian supportive architectural presence along Rainier Avenue and in the Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village, and provide adequate daylight and comfortable workspaces in an integrated medical and dental facility. Because of examine room privacy needs along both street frontages, a *Design Departure* from the street level transparency requirements will likely be requested for any alternative.

Bruce Lorig spoke briefly about these two development plans. Now as proposed, he noted that the site is being "seriously underdeveloped" by leaving the south half to two-thirds of the site for parking. Because of the time constraint of having a new clinic operating before the closure of the New Holly clinic in two years and the need to do the market research on the demand for this type of residential building the residential portion is not certain. However, if built, it would

likely be a four level building with most of the proposed parking within the structure on the ground level with three levels of units above. Because of the zone height limit, this would require a 10-foot floor-to-floor height for the first level. The parking demands of both uses could be jointly accommodated through a possible shared parking arrangement whereby some parking would be used during the day by the clinic and then used at night by the residents.

Alternative One is a Land Use Code complying scheme (not requiring *Design Departures*). It proposes an “L” shaped structure that extends along approximately one-half of the Sturtevant Avenue frontage. It would provide 44 parking spaces and leave an area adjacent to the wetland for the Code required wetland buffer. This alternative is not considered desirable because it does not allow adequate space for future housing development or parking for the clinic if that housing is developed. (Planner Note: A preliminary assessment of the wetland gives it a rating as Category III with moderate function. Per SMC 25.09, this type of wetland requires a 60-foot buffer, with the possibility of reduction to 40 feet but with no reduction of buffer area. Code required parking for a 16,000 square foot medical and dental building is 1 space per each 500 square feet of space, or 32 spaces.)

Alternatives 2 and 3 were devised to better accommodate future housing development on the southern portion of the site. Both alternatives would require a *Design Departure* from the limitation of a maximum of 60-feet of at-grade street-facing parking to the side of a structure. Alternative 2 proposes approximately 180 lineal feet of parking along the street frontage for approximately 83 surface parking spaces, while Alternative 3 proposes approximately 140 lineal feet of parking along the street frontage for about 64 surface parking spaces. Alternative 2 proposes a 13,000 square foot almost rectangular structure that does not extend along Sturtevant in an “L” configuration. Alternative 3 proposes an approximately 14,300 square foot reduced “L” shape, with the “L” portion extending the approximately 40-foot difference in proposed parking frontage between these two alternatives. Both alternatives are considered desirable because they allow space for future housing development on the southern portion of the site.

Alternative 3, the applicant’s preferred alternative, would provide an adequate footprint area and, because of the “L” configuration, create a strong street wall at the corner and on both avenues. (Planner Note: Both Alternatives 2 and 3 assume an extensive wetland buffer reduction is possible to accommodate the proposed surface parking within 20 feet of the south property boundary. Preliminary analysis indicates minimum 40-foot buffer is required per the wetland information above.) *Design Departures* from the maximum length of street facing parking and transparency requirements are required.

In response to Board clarifying questions the project architect offered the following additional information:

- The applicants would like to do the required wetland buffer improvements on the Seattle Parks site to the south, since keeping the already paved area on site paved is no increased impact to the wetland;
- The electrical power lines that extend across the site’s north boundary could likely be moved if a constraint on the building location and size;
- The programmatic constraints for privacy on transparency require less than fully transparent glass below eye level at the street, such as fritted glass, and could result in a maximum of 30% transparency;

- A future residential building along Sturtevant Avenue would need at least 60 to 75 feet of width, hence the *Design Departure* request for the extensive street facing parking width;
- This *Design Departure* request is temporary, in that it will allow for the sequential development of the site, while the Code assumes, by design, that all sites are developed at one time;
- A residential use was considered for above the clinic, but the height limit, ownership considerations, and timing and loan constraints for each would not allow the clinic to open on schedule;
- “40+” massing alternatives and locations for a residential use were considered and the separate location of the residential building facing the park is the optimal;
- Although the bend in Rainier Avenue is a significant site feature, the proposed entry orientation toward the Rainier and Sturtevant corner is the best for the building program and interaction with the street.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

Two *Design Departures* were requested for Alternative 3. A third possible departure request for setbacks adjacent to a residential zone was presented. However, under the clinic only proposal, no building would be located adjacent to the L2 zone, hence no *Design Departure* appears necessary.

SUMMARY OF THE DEPARTURE REQUESTS

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed	Rationale for Request	Board Comments
Transparency. 60% of a structure’s street level façade between 2’ and 8’ shall be designed and maintained to allow unobstructed views from the outside into the structure. (SMC 23.47A.008.B.)	Possibly reduce the amount of transparent glazing to 30 percent.	The programmatic needs of a medical clinic for privacy, but at the same time, extensive day light, conflict with the transparency requirements. The same sense of external to internal connection that is the goal of the transparency requirements would be achieved through other design methods.	30% percent transparency is well below what the Board would entertain as a reduction. Priority guidance is to encourage human activity and support safety on the street. A space plan that responds to this guidance must be presented in order to verify that any reduction is truly driven by defensible design constraints.
Width of Street Facing of Parking. Street facing parking located to the side of a building shall not exceed 60’ of lineal street frontage. 23.47A.032.B.1.c).	Allow up to 140 lineal feet of parking fronting Sturtevant Avenue with Alternative 3.	To allow for future housing development on the southern half of the site.	The Board was not supportive of this request as presented (see discussion in A-8 and A-9 below). If a small increase in length were recommended it would have to include parking parallel to the street and extensive landscape screening.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ten members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting and offered the following comments:

- There are more nearby multi-family housing units available than the applicant contended, such as Seattle Housing Authority's Barton Place Building across 51st Avenue South.
- The project site is a "flagship" parcel for the neighborhood due to its strategic corner location. Any building design should bring vibrancy to the street. The need for examine room privacy should not result in minimal transparency along the street level; the possible use of opaque glass will aggravate this problem.
- A concern that a health clinics hours would result in an empty building and quiet street front during evenings and weekends. (The Director of. Neighborhood Care responded that the clinic would have early evening and Saturday hours.)
- The Rainier Beach business district has been in existence since the late 1800's.
- The architect is incorrect in stating that Mepes Creek, which runs through Sturtevant Ravine, is a "former" creek; it is very much alive upstream of the project site, although it is in a culvert from the project site to its outfall at Lake Washington.
- If either Alternative 2 or 3 are chosen, which propose extensive impervious surface and minimal or no wetland buffer, extensive environmental remediation should be required.
- The applicant's intention to create a strong presence on Rainier Avenue is appreciated.

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 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 and Commercial Buildings*" of highest priority to this project.

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-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 site has a number of important characteristics: a prominent visual frontage as seen when approaching from the north on southbound Rainier Avenue; a corner at Rainier and Sturtevant Avenues; a elevation change at its southwest boundary with the adjacent L2 zone; and frontage on an ECA wetland and Sturtevant Ravine, an undeveloped City Park. Consequently, the project design should:

- Include an "event" that responds to the small triangle shaped "Welcome to Rainier Beach" area. Although the building's main entry is proposed for the corner of Rainier and Sturtevant Avenues, which the Board supports, there could be a possible secondary pedestrian entrance, modulation in the building massing, and / or unique architectural treatment at the northwest "corner".
- Provide a visually vibrant west facade. This façade will be highly visible from the 51st

Avenue and Barton Place intersection. The design should include modulation or stepping of the massing to allow human scaled fenestration in this area.

- Minimize negative visual impacts to the adjacent and uphill L2 zone to the west from back of building functions and the parking lot design (use of materials, amount of landscaping / trees). This applies whether or not any residential development / second structure is not a part of the expected MUP (Master Use Permit) for this proposal.
- Use the site's adjacency to the wetland and buffer as an asset to the site and its users. For example, by creating opportunities and places for viewing the park from other than parking spaces.

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-9 Location of Parking on Commercial Street Fronts. *Parking on a commercial street front should be minimized and where possible should be located behind a building.*

The Board was not comfortable the *Design Departure* request for a substantial increase in the lineal street frontage of parking. Although the goal of eventually maximizing the site's development potential with the addition of a residential structure is good a recommendation of approval for a *Design Departure* to allow parking well above the Code requirement does not better respond to any Design Guideline. Additionally, this plan has not fully addressed the wetland buffer issue (per Code a minimum of 40 feet) that conflicts with a portion of the expected parking and the conceptual residential development plan seems to "design in" the need for its own *Design Departures*, such as a reduction in ground level floor to floor height and separation street level parking separation from a street level façade by an allowed use.

If greater certainty regarding these issues is presented with this proposal, the Board would consider a small increase in the parking lot street frontage if it accompanied an exceptional screening plan and included parking parallel to the street, not perpendicular.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

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 façade walls.*

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 building design concept and use of quality materials should extend to all facades, not just the three street facing facades (the west façade essentially faces 51st and Barton Place) since these will be visible from the south and Sturtevant Ravine either across a surface parking lot or will be a highly visible façade for residents of a future residential structure. Also, see A-1 and A-10 above regarding the structure's west façade.

The Board is confident that the proposed design will be of a high quality if based on Miller Hiyashi's previous projects.

D. Pedestrian Environment

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.*

D-3 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 the impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscape.*

D-7 Personal Safety and Security. *Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.*

See Bullet #2 under A-1 and A-10 above.

A retaining wall along the site's southwest property boundary will be visible from the street and proposed parking lot. The wall should include design elements (reveals, stepping, green wall) to reduce its visual impact.

The entire site and all building frontages should be designed to maximize visibility for surveillance and pedestrian and tenant safety.

D-10 Commercial Lighting. *Appropriate levels of lighting should be provided in order to promote visual interest and a sense of security for people in commercial districts evening hours.*

Lighting should be designed with the above safety concerns in mind. However, it should not spill over onto the adjacent residential lots or the Park and wetland areas.

D-11 Commercial Transparency. *Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.*

The clinic internal program and proposed design may include a Design Departure request for reduced street facing transparency. At the same time, maximizing transparency is important for activating the street and personal safety. Any proposed reduction in transparency must still accomplish these goals.

E. Landscaping

E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites. *Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.*

The "Welcome to Rainier Beach" triangle should continue to be a "gateway" for the commercial area but also relate to the proposed structure and its street frontage.

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 proposed surface parking area should include treatments to soften its heavily impervious character as seen from the adjacent residential zone and the street.

Also see A-9 regarding screening of the parking lot frontage with or without a *Design Departure*.

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.*

See A-1 above regarding responding to the wetland and expected buffer restoration.

Staff Comments

If the proposed project is expanded to include a residential (or any second) structure for MUP application, the proposal will have to be seen by the Board for a second EDG meeting (This was also the direction of the Board). If the project continues as the clinic only, the design should follow the guidance given to assure the building and site designs meet the applicable *Design Guidelines* as a stand-alone project in the event a second structure is not constructed.