



City of Seattle

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

**RECOMMENDATION MEETING
OF
AREA 4, THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**Meeting Date: February 24, 2009
Report Date: March 11, 2009**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

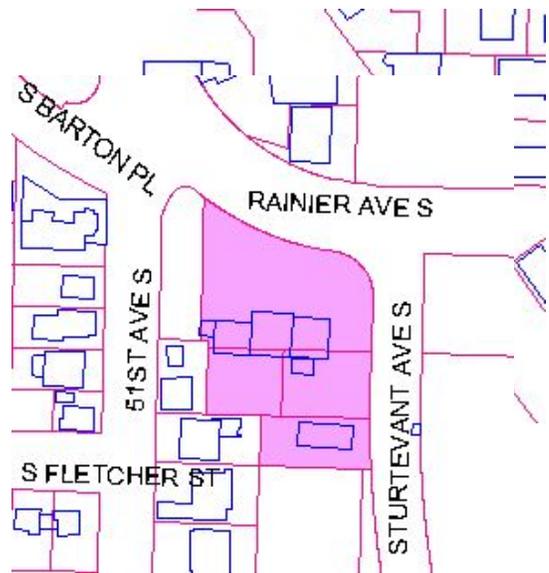
Project Number: 3008584
Address: 9245 Rainier Avenue South
Applicants: Bruce Hayashi, Miller Hayashi Architects, LLC, for owner Neighborhood Care (formerly Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Centers) with Lorig Development as Development Project Managers
Board Members Present: John Woodworth, Chair and 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 26,000 square foot medical and dental clinic. Surface parking for approximately 66 vehicles is sought. All existing structures will be demolished.

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 - RECOMMENDATION MEETING

Project architect Bruce Hayashi described the project development based on Alternative 3, which was presented at the September 9, 2008 EDG meeting and in response to that design guidance and planner direction.

The building is proposed to be three to four feet above the Rainier Avenue sidewalk grade, due to the site slope. The building will also be setback from the sidewalk approximately 19 feet at the main entrance and approximately 60 feet at the building's west end, due to the requirement to keep the a minimum distance from the Seattle City Light (SCL) above ground power lines that are within an easement coinciding with the triangular area that is a portion of vacated Rainier Avenue and the curve of the street itself. Along Sturtevant Avenue the building's modulated facade will be set-back between 3 and 4 feet from the sidewalk. The setback areas along both facades will be extensively landscaped per the presented landscape plan and brief description by the project landscape architect.

The proposed Rainier Avenue facade will be in three sections: a long center section substantially glazed with an aluminum store-front window system above a low concrete base wall at the first level and a second level of burgundy colored composite wall panels with smaller aluminum windows of a varied sizes and light configurations. The second level will extend out toward the street past the first level façade. The flat roof will then extend beyond the second level. This center section will be book ended on the east and west ends by brick "towers", containing entrances, stairways, and roof top mechanical equipment behind parapets extending above the center section roof (Planner Note: an eight foot extension was shown in the MUP plans, but reduced in the Recommendation meeting materials). The main building entrance will be at the east end of the middle portion by the corner with Sturtevant Avenue; an employee entrance in the west end "tower". The end section materials will be mostly brick and glass, but with some metal panel cornices above the glazed portions. The brick will be a golden color, not a traditional "red-brick".

The Sturtevant Avenue façade will continue the same brick, glazing with aluminum frames, and metal panel materials previously described for the Rainier Avenue "towers". This façade will be comprised of three sections: at the south end aluminum frame glazing will extend to a brick parapet and be vertically divided by a section of metal panel and horizontally broken by flat canopies. The center section will be brick from the ground to the cornice and punctuated by small windows for the restrooms behind. The northern most third, which contains the dental and

medical reception areas on the first and second levels respectively, will be extensively glazed without a vertical metal panel section, and extend to a metal panel parapet above.

The south façade (facing the parking lot and Sturtevant Ravine) will roughly mirror the Rainier Avenue façade in proportions and material. A second entry from the parking area will connect to the front entry and the shared main reception area. A staff entrance will be at the west end. The west façade will be entirely brick masonry with cable supported vine “green wall” screening.

The site’s southwest corner steep upward elevation change to the adjacent L 2 zone will be supported by a steel beam and wood lagging shoring wall. It will be screened by extensive landscape plantings at the base and bordered by a 6-foot fence at the top. The two aisle parking lot will have a treed landscape island through its center. Where the parking lot borders the required wetland buffer for the Sturtevant Ravine Category III wetland, there will be a viewing and rest area. The wetland buffer will be extensively landscaped. (Planner’s Note: A 40’ buffer may be allowed through the buffer averaging provisions of SMC 25.09.160 provided the applicant’s receive approval from the City of Seattle Parks Department to permanently increase the wetland buffer on Parks property by the amount reduced on the project site, and this agreement is also approved by DPD.)

The project’s three *Design Departures* were presented (see *Design Departure* table at the end of this document for details). The project seeks to increase the length of the street facing surface parking area from the allowed maximum of 60 feet to approximately 98 feet. According to the applicant, this is necessary to locate the expected clinic parking demand (approximately 66) at the surface; structured parking is cost prohibitive. To achieve the intent of this Code limitation, the project proposes extensive landscape screening with a minimum depth of 17 feet between the sidewalk and expanded parking area.

Street Level Façade Transparency: Because of the grade change between the proposed building location the first floor will be three to four feet above the sidewalk grade. Code requires transparency between two and eight feet above sidewalk grade for 60 percent of the facade. The applicants are proposing to provide approximately 65 percent and 47 percent transparency on each respective façade when measured from the finish floor elevation.

According to the applicants, it is necessary to locate the first level at this higher elevation because of two interrelated factors: the site’s natural uphill gradient between Rainier Avenue and the south property boundary and the required building set-back from the SCL easement. If the building could be located at or closer to the sidewalk grade, the rear of the structure would be below the parking lot elevation, thus requiring extensive grading for the parking lot and retaining wall along the wetland buffer boundary and a bigger retaining wall at the already sloped southwest property boundaries, or having a retaining wall grade change where the parking lot and building would meet. The Sturtevant façade is also constrained by topography, but also the need to locate mechanical and some service uses behind this façade, which is not compatible with transparency.

Street Level Blank Facades. The applicant’s are asking to exceed the 20 foot width limitation for blank facades. Along Rainier and Sturtevant Avenues brick clad portions of these façades would be approximately 28 feet and 30 feet respectively. According to the applicant these areas

are necessary for interior programmatic needs but are appropriate in scale relative to the remainder of their respective facades and the amount of glazing on each.

In response to Board questions the architect provided the following details.

- The upper course of glazing on the Rainier Avenue first level is not clear, but fritted. This interstitial area will contain mechanical piping and duct work.
- Parking lot rain water infiltration is not possible due to area constraints.
- The existing “Welcome to Rainier Beach” sign will be relocated approximately 20 to 30 feet to the west, but will probably be lit and will still face Rainier Avenue.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

Three Design Departures have been requested as part of the MUP proposal. (At the time of the EDG meeting two Design Departures were requested.) See Design Departure matrix at the end of this document for details.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Five members of the community attended the Recommendation meeting; two individuals submitted these comments and concerns:

- The sidewalk along Sturtevant Avenue has a dangerous slope and should be replaced as part of this development (DPD Comment: The sidewalk, along with curbs, planting strip, and street trees will be brought up to current City standards.)
- The design is very “suburban” in appearance. Even with the understandable building setback along Rainier Avenue because of the power lines, the extensive landscaping and ground level windows above the sidewalk grade don’t seem like they will create a vibrant street frontage.
- The western wall (facing the adjacent vacant lot and 51st Avenue) should have attractive materials due to its visibility from off-site.

DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES, EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING.

The Early Design Guidance meeting was held September 9, 2008. After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, the Design Review Board members identified by letter and number the following 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-1 Responding to Site Characteristics
- A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access
- A-9 Location of Parking on Commercial Street Fronts
- A-10 Corner Lots
- C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency
- C-4 Exterior Finish Materials
- D-2 Blank Walls
- D-3 Retaining Walls
- D-7 Personal Safety and Security
- D-10 Commercial Lighting
- D-11 Commercial Transparency
- E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design continuity with Adjacent Sites
- E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and / or Site

E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions

The detailed EDG Guidance is included below in *Italics* followed by the Board's Recommendations on the presented Master Use Permit design response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the February 24, 2009 *Recommendation* meeting the Design Review Board reviewed the design submitted in response to the EDG and further developed in conjunction with the project planner and discussed the three requested *Design Departures*. Following clarifying questions and deliberation the Board provided the following additional guidance and recommendations. The Board's comments and recommendations follow the EDG Guidance that is in *Italics*.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.*

Recommendation Meeting:

The presented design proposes the following features: A secondary entrance with a walkway and landscaping has been added to the west end of the Rainier Avenue façade: The retention of the "Welcome to Rainier Beach" sign and relocation to a visually attractive location in the proposed

landscaping, with possible lighting; A cable stayed green screen for the 51st Avenue facing façade; and a well designed south building façade and parking lot landscaping. Based on these the Board finds the design presented at the Recommendation meeting meets the Early Design Guidance given and ***Recommends Approval*** with the inclusion of lighting for the “Welcome” sign.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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, (however) 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The Board finds that the submitted parking configuration, which requires a Design Departure to exceed the maximum parking frontage of 60 feet by 37.5 feet, has been substantially landscaped to screen the additional parking frontage along Sturtevant Avenue. Additionally, the visual width of the parking lot from Sturtevant Avenue is reduced by the central landscaped / and tree island. Parking spaces along this street frontage are parallel to the street. Consequently, the Board finds the design presented meets the Early Design Guidance given and ***Recommends Approval*** of the *Design Departure* requested.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The building's "street face" design has been continued to the south "interior" façade. An attractive green screen on the west façade is proposed. Quality materials and attractive colors are also proposed. Consequently, the Board finds the design presented at the Recommendation meeting responds to the Early Design Guidance given and **Recommends Approval**.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The Early Design Guidance given did not anticipate blank facades on walls other than the west façade. The design proposes blank façade segments that exceed the allowed maximum length of 20 feet for each segment on the two street frontages, which requires a *Design Departure*. The proposed design does include substantial landscape screening for the southwest property boundary retaining wall. Extensive glazing on the two street frontages and parking lot façade is proposed.

The Board finds the design presented for the retaining wall and opportunities for surveillance and safety meets the Early Design Guidance given. The Board also finds that the blank façade

segments that exceed the maximum length (by 8 and 10 feet on Rainier and Sturtevant Avenues respectively) are clad with a high quality of materials and by their position create a balanced massing for each façade. Consequently, the Board ***Recommends Approval*** of the *Design Departure* requested.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The Board questioned why no lighting plan was presented. After discussion of the architects intent to meet the Early Design Guidance given, the Board ***Recommends Approval*** of the project subject to the following ***Conditions***:

- Submit a conceptual lighting plan to the project planner for review and approval. The plan should address the following:
 - Explore the use of down lighting on the north and south side second level overhangs,
 - Lighting of the ADA ramp,
 - Better illumination of the landscaping, possibly from the building.
 - Parking lot security that does not cast light onto the wetland and Park property or the surrounding residential properties.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The site topography, required power line set back in the SCL easement, and practical limitation on pursuing underground parking determine the building's proposed elevation above the sidewalk. These conditions then make the provision of the required street level transparency difficult. Additionally, the Rainier Avenue character of higher traffic speeds at this curved road section would not be strongly conducive to a building location very close to the street.

However, the setback from and height above the sidewalk are successfully addressed by the extensive and quality landscaping along the Rainier Avenue frontage and extensive glazing proposed for this facade. Along Sturtevant Avenue, extensive glazing is also provided this shorter façade. Consequently the ***Recommends Approval*** of the *Design Departure* requested.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

The “Welcome” sign will be placed in the landscaped frontage to be visible from the street. The Board finds this meets the Early Design Guidance given and **Recommends Approval** with the **Condition** that lighting is included for sign illumination.

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.

EDG Meeting: 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.

Recommendation Meeting:

Based on the Board comments under A-9 above, the Board finds the design presented at the Recommendation meeting responds to the Early Design Guidance given and **Recommends Approval**.

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.

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

Recommendation Meeting:

The proposed site design includes an extensively landscaped 40 foot wetland buffer (proposed plantings will be approved by DPD’s wetland ecologist) and the provision of a wetland viewing / seating area between the buffer and parking lot. Consequently, the Board finds the design presented at the Recommendation meeting responds to the Early Design Guidance given and **Recommends Approval**.

SUMMARY OF THE DEPARTURE REQUESTS

| Land Use Code Standard | Proposed | Rationale for Request | Board Comments |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Transparency. 60% of a structure's street level façade between 2' and 8' above sidewalk grade shall be designed and maintained to allow unobstructed views from the outside into the structure. Applies to both street frontages. (SMC 23.47A.008.B.2)</p> | <p>Sturtevant Ave: provide approximately 31%, Rainier Ave: provide approximately 40%, both in roughly the upper 2-3 feet of the required 6-foot band of transparency.</p> | <p>Because of the site's downward slope from south to north the optimal elevation for the first floor is above sidewalk grade. This results in the 2'-6' transparency band being mostly below the proposed first floor level with the upper area as previous stated. The design proposes transparency of 47% and 65% respectively from the proposed first floor level. <i>D-11</i></p> | <p>The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.</p> |
| <p>Blank Facades. Blank street facing façade portions between 2' and 8' above sidewalk grade may not exceed 20' in length. (SMC 23.47A.008.A.2)</p> | <p>Sturtevant Ave: A 30' length of brick wall separates two extensively glazed wall sections, Rainier Ave: A 28' brick wall will at the end of another extensively glazed wall section.</p> | <p>Behind the blank wall sections are mechanical and storage uses that are best concentrated and not disbursed along the street facing facades. This allows the otherwise extensive glazing provided. <i>D-2</i></p> | <p>The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.</p> |
| <p>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).</p> | <p>Allow up to 98 lineal feet of parking fronting Sturtevant Avenue.</p> | <p>The clinic's parking demand requires a number of parking spaces above what could fit in a 60' wide area and cost prohibits structured parking. However, Sturtevant Ave is not a commercial street in character and the extra 38' area will be setback 17' from the street and extensively landscaped. <i>A-9, E-2</i></p> | <p>The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.</p> |

BOARD RECOMMENDATION

The Board finds that the project design successfully responds to the design guidance given, with the *Recommendations* and *Conditions* in this document.

The Board unanimously *Recommends Approval* of the three *Design Departure* requests.

Staff Comments

The MUP plans must be updated to reflect the design elements and details presented at the Recommendation meeting for final zoning approval prior to MUP permit issuance. The conceptual lighting plan should first be submitted to the project planner for review and approval (electronically by pdf is preferable), prior to MUP decision publication. The approved conceptual elements should then be included in the MUP plans.

The updated sheets must also demonstrate how access to the presented wetland viewing area will be achieved from the parking lot. The December 12, 2008 plans show a retaining wall and three foot elevation gain between the parking lot and proposed viewing area.