



# City of Seattle

---

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

**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES  
OF  
THE WEST SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**  
Meeting Date: April 10, 2008  
Report Date: April 28, 2008

---

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3008656

Address: 4550 38th Av SW  
Applicant: Steve Yoon, for Harbor Properties

Board members present: Deb Barker, Chair  
Christie Coxley  
David Foster  
Joseph Hurley  
Brandon Nicholson

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

---

**VICINITY AND AREA DEVELOPMENT:**

The site comprises the south two-thirds of the western half block bounded by Fauntleroy Way SW on the north, SW Alaska Street on the south, 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW on the west and the north-south alley separating 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW and 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW to the east. The rectangular site measures approximately 319 feet in the north/south direction and 115 feet in the east/west direction. The total area is approximately 36,648 square feet in extent. The 16-foot platted alley intervening between 38<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Avenues SW slopes downwards approximately 14 feet between SW Alaska Street and the north property line of the site. Currently there are two structures on the site which are proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development. The site is zoned Commercial 1 with a 65-foot height limit.



The proposed development is for a six-story commercial/residential building with the ground floor possibly occupied by the Montessori school that will be partially displaced by the development. Approximately 190 residential units are proposed for the five upper floors. Parking will be subterranean and accessed from the alley

This triangular neighborhood, located west of SW 35<sup>th</sup> street and nestled between SW Fauntleroy Way and SW Alaska Street, has until recently been dominated by a variety low commercial buildings and surface parking areas given over to auto service related functions. Other uses in the immediate vicinity include dental clinic, animal clinic, American Legion and VFW Halls and, occupying a newer facility, the West Seattle YMCA. Fire Station Number 32 sits directly south of the proposal site, across SW Alaska Street.

### **ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION**

The presentation by the development team began with brief comments from Denny Onslo of Harbor Properties, the project's developer, indicating how the recent vacation of several of the auto servicing properties opened an opportunity for realizing the kind of mixed-use residential densities foreseen in the City's Comprehensive Plan and the opportunity of creating a vibrant and distinctive neighborhood within this clearly delineated triangular and bowl-like geographical area. As the first larger-scale residential and mixed-use building in the area, the proposed development intended to set a precedent for creative and affordable housing in West Seattle.

The architectural team, represented by Susan Busch of Baylis Architects, then presented an analysis of the immediate vicinity and development site. Three alternate massing models for the site were briefly presented to the Board. The first option established a strong six-story presence on both SW Alaska Street, along the alley and along the north property line, with the mass of the structure eroded and set back in a "U" shape from Avenue SW by providing a west-facing terrace above a series of live/work flats centered at street level within the west-facing façade.

The second option differed from the first primarily by providing above-grade offset terraces on both the alley and 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW sides of the structure. This option would provide for optimizing the city views of the alley-facing units and allow live/work townhouses along the west-facing façade.

The preferred third option showed a more-deeply recessed terrace overlooking the alley, a modulated setback along 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW that allowed for live/work townhouses with courtyard garden terraces at street level and with top floors stepped back to reduce apparent height from the street. In this articulation the building was set back from the north property line in order to provide a mid-block connection from the alley.

### **Public Comments:**

There was sizable representation of members of the public who attended the meeting, many with concerns regarding the future of the Montessori School where some were employed or, in the majority of cases, where their children attended. Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- Would like the design explorations to include the feasibility of an interior courtyard, especially as this might provide for a play area for students “shared” after hours by the residents of the building;
- The massing of the building and the proposed height was “too great” for West Seattle and out of line with existing patterns of development;
- The proposed structure did not take the Montessori school seriously enough, if it was the sincere intention to provide for school functions and activities as shown. The most glaring omission was incorporation of an adequate and secure play area within or adjacent to the structure;
- If courtyards within or adjacent the structure were to be provided they need to be sun-lit spaces;
- The design should take adequate account of how the drop-off/pick-up of children in the alley currently functions and what needs to be done to ensure that same or enhanced functionality with the new structure in place;
- Questioned the desirability of providing a cross-block connector, especially as it would appear to compromise the security of any play area afforded the Montessori students.

### **Board’s Deliberations:**

The Board complimented the development team on its thoughtful presentation. The Board noted that they thought that the preferred proposal was generally appropriate for the neighborhood and the site, but noted that the final design should relate to the specific requirements of the site, notably that it was a very long building and still needed work so as not to overwhelm the street and that the challenge of integrating the school into the scheme of things still had a ways to go. There was concern expressed that retail was being proposed below grade and a desire expressed that every effort be made to have the retail meet the sidewalk.

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, hearing public comment, and addressing their major concerns regarding the proposal, 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 & Commercial Buildings* and the *South Lake Union Design Guidelines* and in *West Seattle Junction Urban Village Design Guidelines* of highest priority to this project.

## **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

### ***A Site Planning***

#### ***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 from the Street***

***Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.***

**A-4 Human Activity**

*New development should be sited and deigned to encourage human activity on the street*

**A-7 Residential Open Space**

*Residential projects should be sited to maximize oportunites for creating usable, attractiove, well-integrated open spaces..*

**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 guidelines above were all chosen by the board to be of high priority. Human activity on the street should be promoted by the interface of sidewalk and the retail spaces (and the interface of sidewalk grade and interior space was essential for success here). Guideline A-7 was cited to re-enforce the Board's concern that children's play space for the school be provided and this needed to be coordinated with open space being provided the residents of the building and to be accomplished heeding the public's concerns about adequacy and security. Guideline A-10 was cited to qualify the design team's importance given that guideline: the Board felt that the building did not need to address the corner at 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street so much as to address the interface of the south façade as it addressed the building's presence along the expanse of the lot's exposure on the arterial, SW Alaska Street.

**B Height, Bulk and Scale**

*Projects should be compatible...and provide for transitions*

There is an inherent potential conflict between any new development and the existing pattern in the neighborhood of lower residential and commercial buildings built on smaller parcels of land. There is an established fabric in the area and this new development should continue to demonstrate sensitivity to that fabric and, given the zoned development potential, to provide for refined transitions in height, bulk, and scale.

**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.*

**C-3 Human Scale**

*The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale*

The Board noted that the project should explore opportunities to achieve a good human scale, especially the way various entrances address the different street fronts.

**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, patterns, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.*

Architectural materials, scale and details should be integrated within a building whose concept is appropriate for the site and its surroundings as well as its programmatic uses. The Board was not prescriptive regarding materials, but would expect to see a choice of durable and sustainable materials and to be presented with samples of proposed colors and materials at the subsequent recommendation meeting. The new development, the first of its kind and size within the immediate vicinity will be setting the precedent and establishing the desirable characteristics for other developments to follow.

## ***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.***

### ***D-2 Blank Walls***

***Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.***

The Board cited this guideline as cautionary and as being in particular applicability, with Guideline D-8, cited below, to the alley façade.

### ***D-8 Treatment of Alleys***

***The design of the alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.***

### ***D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions***

***For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and provide for a visually interesting street front for the pedestrian. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements....***

Serious consideration should be given to providing the courtyard as a through-block public pathway, a neighborhood semi-public amenity, at least for specified hours of the day. Expression should be given to clear path-finding details and to appropriate lighting and signage.

The design team should provide studies of the proposed pedestrian environment along both the streets. The applicant should be prepared to present details for a variety of streetscape and pedestrian pathway amenities, including lighting, overhead weather protection, signage and other elements calculated to generate a friendly and lively environment both within and without the block.

## ***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.***

### ***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. should reinforce the character of neighborhood properties and abutting streetscape.*

Landscaping should be designed with the goal of realizing the prioritized guidelines, should soften the edge conditions where appropriate, and should contribute to an attractive and usable interior open space if contemplated. The design should incorporate specific treatments to provide for the attractiveness and security of a children's play area which seems essential to the successful incorporation of the school within the project. The Board would expect to see a comprehensive Landscape Plan, one that treats not only any on-site open space but the streets' edges as well.

**Departures from Development Standards:**

The architects noted that they had identified no departures from development standards that would be needed for the preferred option. The Board noted that they would be willing to entertain the granting of departures for the project, should such be identified, provided the project proceeded along the promising direction indicated at this schematic stage of design and provided the design responded to the guidelines as set forth as being of highest priority for the success of the project as well as to the other provisions provided in their guidance.

**Staff Comments:**

It is the expectation of the Design Review Board and DPD that the applicant proceed to further design development, which includes a demonstrable response to the guidelines and guidance noted above, and to a Master Use Permit application. Subsequent to a successful application, the proposal will be returned to the Design review Board for a recommendation of approval meeting.