

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE  
of  
SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

Meeting Date: February 10, 2009

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3009571  
Address 7700 Rainier Avenue South  
Applicant: Michael Vanderhoff, Architect, for Urban Impact  
Board Members Present: Brett Conway  
Robert Mohn  
Steve Sindiong, Chair  
Michele Wang  
John Woodworth  
Staff Members Present: Bruce P. Rips, AICP

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**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

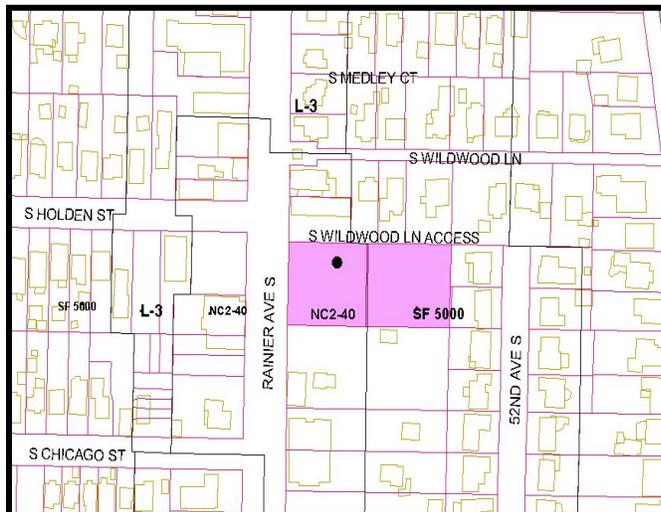
The applicant proposes a four-story, mixed-use structure on the east side of Rainier Avenue south between South Holden Street and South Chicago Street. Fronting onto Rainier Ave. S., the first floor would include approximately 6,100 square feet of commercial use. The three upper floors would house an estimated 60 to 70 residential units. A garage containing an estimated 93 parking spaces would extend behind the commercial space recessed into the slope of the hillside.

In order to accommodate the number of residential units planned, the applicant proposes a contract rezone for the site's eastern portion, which currently has a zoning classification of Single Family 5000 (SF 5000), to conform with the parcel fronting on Rainier Ave. The western half of the site has an existing zoning of Neighborhood Commercial Two with a forty foot height limit (NC2-40). The applicant does not request a zoning change for the parcel adjacent to Rainier Ave. S. As part of the future MUP application, the development team proposes to rezone the eastern half of the four parcels to the south. These lie behind an athletic facility, Rainier Health and Fitness, and the Emerald City Bible Fellowship. A five phase development would include a new health and fitness facility, housing and offices for Urban Impact.

Site and Vicinity

The area proposed for the mixed-use building is a 38,610 square foot rectangular site divided into two parcels with a slope that ascends roughly 24 feet from west to east. Most of the topographic change occurs on the site's eastern half. A partially paved parking lot lies closest to Rainier Ave. S. The western parcel remains vacant.

The site lies along the Rainier Ave. S. north of the Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village. The corridor comprises commercial and multi-family structures for several miles north and south of the proposal site. Zoning in the immediate vicinity consists of NC2 40, Lowrise Three (L3) and Single Family 5000 (SF 5000). The NC2 40 zone begins on the north end at South



Wildwood Lane and extends towards South Kenyon Street. North of S. Wildwood, the zoning changes to L3 as it does south of Kenyon St. This pattern of alternating NC and L3 zones continues along Rainier for several miles. The zoning boundary parallel to Rainier Ave for the NC zones extends only a parcel deep on the east side of the avenue. To the east of the NC zone, the zoning is single family. On the west side of Rainier Ave., the L3 zone often creates a transition between the NC2 and the Single Family residential zone further to the west.

Recent construction in the immediate vicinity includes the Emerald City Bible Fellowship (church and social service provider) and a three unit townhouse structure on the north side of S. Chicago St. An older, one-story commercial building with storefronts facing the project lies immediately to the north of the subject site. S. Wildwood Lane access road services the businesses occupying this structure. Six single family homes border the property on the northern and eastern edges.

The parcels lie within the Rainier Beach Planning area boundary covered within the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan (Rainier Beach 2014) adopted in 1999; however, the site is not within the Urban Village.

### Design Concepts

The architect presented three options with the similar programmatic approaches. Each has a commercial use on the first level fronting onto Rainier Ave. S. with a large, level parking garage extending back into the hill side toward the east property line. The configuration of the residential and open spaces varies among the schematic options. Option #1 depicts three roughly equal cubic volumes along an east / west axis connected by a linear hallway. In plan, four relatively narrow open spaces separate the three, three-story volumes. The second option resembles a U-shape or C-shape with residential units surrounding a large, south facing courtyard. In this scheme, most units would likely face the adjacent properties to the north. The applicant's preferred option (#3) is a large, three-story, rectangular volume with residential units accessed from a double loaded corridor that extends along an east west axis. The bulk of the mass sits close to the north property line near adjacent commercial and single family properties. Additional drawings presented at the Early Design Guidance meeting illustrate three courtyards carved from the south façade facing toward the athletic facility and the Emerald City Bible Fellowship building. In this scheme, access to the courtyards would occur from an exterior stair

leading up from Rainier Ave. or from an internal central residential lobby area. In each of the three schemes, proposed vehicular access would occur from Rainier Ave. S.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

Seventeen members of the public signed in at the Early Design Guidance meeting. The following outlines their comments.

- Screen the top of the roof on the eastern portion of the proposed structure or add greenery to it.
- Preserve trees.
- Rainier Beach 2014 Plan is a catalyst for Urban Impact's on-going development.
- Ensure that the increase in density will result in safety for the neighbors and residents.
- Development could aid the development of the nearby light rail stops by using feeder lines to transport people to the station.

## GUIDELINES

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponent, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provided the siting and design guidance described below and identified the highest priority concerns by letter and number from the guidelines found in the City of Seattle's "Design Review: Guidelines for Multi-family and Commercial Buildings".

## PRIORITIES

### 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.

Responding to the proposed concept for an upper level blank façade facing Rainier Ave. S., the Board strongly emphasized the need for more glazing to create a pedestrian friendly street presence.

The Board acknowledged the developer's long term plan for creating a mixed use building and maintaining the athletic facility to the north of the Emerald City Bible Fellowship building.

**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 designed to encourage human activity on the street.

The Board discussed the possibility of having the structure extend along Rainier Ave. S. within the Neighborhood Commercial zone rather than stretch back into the existing single family zone since the applicant plans to develop the parcels to the south as well. This would entail demolition of the athletic facility, potentially requiring the facility's temporarily closure until completion of the new building. (Note: The architect mentioned that the developer did not want a temporary closure of the facility.) The Board did not request an alternative showing scheme along Rainier Ave. S.

**A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites. Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.**

The Board strongly recommended that the proposed complex's density should decrease as it extends toward the single family zone on the north and east. Greater physical relief (modulation, open space) should occur along the north elevation in order to reduce the mass and bulk close to the single family homes. The mass of the northern portion appears too rigid along its length; the facade should be eroded considerably to preserve light to the single family homes and reduce the amount of overall bulk. In addition, the design should have a pedestrian pass through connecting the northern and southern portions of the property approximately one-half or two thirds of the site's length back from Rainier Ave. This would not necessarily require splitting the complex into two volumes at grade but would provide a pedestrian connection for the tenants between one of the courtyards on the south and a less active open space on the north.

Option #3 appears to better respect the houses to the east of the complex due to the ascending slope. Following-up on a public comment, the Board urged that the roof on the east side be adequately screened or have plantings to provide greenery.

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

The Board preferred the three courtyard scheme over the scheme with a single large courtyard. These courtyards should be especially child-friendly in order to accommodate the families the applicant expects to reside in the proposed complex.

**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.**

The Board preferred the vehicular access design shown on page 14 of the EDG packet. The garage entrance should be close to the site's southern edge.

**B. Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility**

**B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility.** Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less-intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk and scale between the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

The general massing of the proposal should transition to a lower residential scale near the single family zone on the north. As stated in guidance A-5, the density of the complex should decrease as it approaches the northern portion of the site. Setbacks should be greater than those shown in the options presented; the mass should ensure adequate light to the single family homes and should provide visually less bulk by use of discreet open space(s) and greater modulation along the facade.

**C. Architectural Elements and Materials.**

**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.

The area along Rainier Ave. lacks a homogenous context of similar structures and materials. The Board recognized the architect's stated desire to create a new precedent along Rainier Ave. S. and viewed the larger master plan for the two acres to the south.

The proposed structure along the north and east should possess an architectural vocabulary sympathetic to the single family neighborhood that will surround it.

**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.**

The Board will review the architectural concept and its consistency at the Recommendation meeting. However, the Board strongly recommended a plan and program that visually embodied less residential density on the eastern portion of the site near the single family zone.

A design with flat roofs appeared okay with the Board members.

**C-3 Human Scale.** The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale.

Creating an intimate sense of human scale is critical to the project's success due to its huge size. Areas of particular importance are the Rainier Ave. façade, the facades closest to the courtyards, and the north elevation near the single family homes.

**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.

**C-5 Structured Parking Entrances.** The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.

The garage entrance should be as discrete as possible and the curb cut as narrow as possible in order to create a safer pedestrian environment.

#### **D. Pedestrian Environment.**

**D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrance.** 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. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.

Do not create any blank walls facing Rainier Ave. and the homes to the north.

**D-3 Retaining Walls.** Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where higher retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscapes.

Due to the architect's desire to cut into the slope to reduce the appearance of height, the proposal will likely create a series of retaining walls. These internally facing walls should be well detailed, at a human scale and textured.

**D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, utilities and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

The Board requested a concept plan for waste and recycling storage for the next meeting.

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

Provide a coherent plan addressing safety and security concerns at the next meeting.

**D-9 Commercial Signage.** Signs should add interest to the street front environment and should be appropriate for the scale and character desired in the area.

Provide a commercial signage concept plan for the next meeting.

**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 during evening hours. Lighting may be provided by incorporation into the building façade, the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, in landscaped areas, and/or on signage.

Provide a commercial and residential lighting concept plan for the next meeting.

**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.

## **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 landscaping plan should tie into the series of proposed retaining walls near the adjacent properties

Ensure adequate screening between the proposal and the adjacent houses to the north and to the east.

**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.

Provide a comprehensive landscaping plan for the Recommendation meeting.

## **REQUESTED CODE DEPARTURES**

The applicant did not present any departure requests at the EDG meeting.

## **REQUESTS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Please contact the planner when the MUP intake appointment has been scheduled. It is the responsibility of the architect to submit a digital file (pdf) of the Recommendation Meeting packet to DPD five days prior to the public Design Review meeting.