



## Department of Planning and Development

Diane Sugimura, Director

### Early Design Guidance West Design Review Board

June 2, 2010

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**Project Number:** 3011312

**Address:** 501 Eighth Avenue North

**Applicant:** Victoria Buker, Vulcan Inc.

**Board Members:** John Rose Jr., Chair  
Jill Kurfirst  
Mark Garrell  
Dan Foltz (substituting for Lipeka Mukerji)

**DPD Staff:** Scott Kemp, Senior Land Use Planner

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### Background Description

The proposal site, located on two-thirds of a block in the South Lake Union area of Seattle, is bordered by Mercer Street to the north, Republican Street to the south, Eighth Avenue North to the east and Dexter Avenue North to the west. Zoned Seattle Mixed 65 with an Urban Village Overlay, the site slopes downward approximately 13' from north to south. Ordinance #123215, approved January 11, 2010, allows the maximum height of buildings on this block to increase to 120 feet (with an additional 15 ft. of height for rooftop mechanical space). The ordinance also requires the following:

- The street-facing façade along Eighth Avenue North is required to have a minimum of ten percent occupied by general sales and services;
- The Floor Area Ratio cannot exceed 5;

- The maximum number of floors cannot exceed 8;
- The applicant is to strive to achieve a LEED Gold rating or better and at a minimum earn Silver;
- 20 percent of the lot area is required to be ground level, useable open space with public art;
- The landscaping is to achieve a Seattle Green Factor score of .30 or greater;
- The Master Use Permit is to include a Transportation Management Program with no more than 40 percent of the trips using single-occupant vehicles; and
- The MUP is to include an Energy Management Plan.

**Proposal Description:**

UW Medicine Phases 3.1 and 3.2 would consist of approximately 295,560 square feet of new research laboratory space on the southern portion of the block. The project would have one level of below-grade research space and two levels of below-grade parking with two research structures above (7-story on the east side of the site and 8-story on the west side of the site). The central courtyard's access to mid-day direct sunlight is maximized through a north/south orientation of the buildings. The connection between UW Phase 3 and UW Phases 1 and 2, located immediately to the east across Eighth Avenue North, would be strengthened by a continuation of the cross-block connection established in Phase 2. The plaza spaces would be designed and operated to encourage pedestrian use, both by those working in the buildings and by the public.

Phasing: Phase 3.1 is to be completed before 3.2. In the interim, the area above the below-grade garage where 3.2 would eventually be located would be landscaped with a permeable surface that would allow for the collection of water, which would be deposited in a holding tank for irrigation use.

The building massing is articulated as multiple volumes of different widths and heights, similar to the vocabulary that was established in Phase 2. The building height increases as it comes closer to Dexter Avenue North, which is a larger-scale, wider street. Modulations and recesses in the buildings at the south end of the site invite pedestrians on Republican Street to enter the courtyard. Pedestrian circulation is activated through the location of a transit stop on Dexter Avenue North, multiple site entrances, cross block plaza/connections, and a proposed retail space.

The project in its entirety would exhibit a consistent architectural concept, but each elevation would be articulated differently in response to the character of the adjacent streetscape. Materials would be similar to those that were used at the adjacent Phase 2 site, and would be utilized in a way that responds to both to solar orientation and to surrounding street frontages. Building canopies and the placement of transparent building elements (highly fenestrated

building forms) would occur along the ground-level façade at Eighth Avenue North, with a focus on engaging the pedestrian at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Republican Street.

Building corner elements adjacent to street intersections would be expressed with highly transparent glass and particularly tall, fifteen to eighteen foot, architectural expressions stepping out from the main façade and providing a particularly open look into activity within the buildings.

A retail space is proposed at the northeast corner of Phase 3.1, at the public sidewalk, adjacent to the cross-block connection and the entrance to the 3.1 building and plaza area. The placement of retail and a building entrance in this location would provide a diversity of uses and character in street façade along Eighth Avenue North and enhance the cross-block connection.

#### Departure Request

The Applicant requests one departure from SMC 23.48.010. This request would allow the mechanical penthouses to be aligned with the Eighth Avenue side of Phase 3.1 and the Dexter Avenue side of Phase 3.2, rather than being set back 10 feet from the edge of the roof.

#### Landscaping Plan

The site slope from north to south is proposed to be used to create distinct levels with intimate areas for seating and gathering. These areas would be heavily landscaped to encourage pedestrian use. The proposed water feature responds to the art requirement in the text amendment, and may be similar to that at the Seattle Opera House, where a thin sheet of water flows along the paving surface to reflect light. A widening of the walking surface at the south end of the courtyard encourages pedestrians on Republican Street to enter the courtyard. Permeable paving, street trees, and open tree pits would be provided at sidewalks on Eighth Avenue North, Republican Street, and Dexter Avenue North. Curb bulbs would occur at the mid-block crossing of Eighth Avenue North, and the sidewalk width would be increased to improve the pedestrian environment. The scale of the plantings on Dexter Avenue North would be consistent with the larger scale of the street.

#### Public Comments

Public comment was received at the meeting and a letter of comment to the Board was summarized at the request of the author who could not attend the meeting. Comments included the following. The street level concerns regarding interactivity, engagement and pleasant setting have not yet be adequately addressed or solved. The departure if granted would move increases in shadow and height closer to street property lines increasing the already substantial height of the buildings as seen from exterior streets. Transparency into the building as a measure to connect with the pedestrian environment has failed in Phase 2 due to the dark glass used there. The interesting landscape elements are located on the interior of the site in the courtyard without adequate visibility from the public realm. There has been little, if any, response to the comments

made five months ago. The open space is very narrow in comparison to the height of the buildings and could be characterized as a cave along the bottom of a canyon.

One person, a resident in the area who walks through or by the site daily, offered that the existing mid-block crossing on the Phase 1 and 2 block is a great, functional amenity and that the proposed one would continue in this vein. She mentioned that she never sees people sitting outside in the existing courtyards of Phase 1 and 2, perhaps because they are not designed well for that purpose. The best place for the retail space, she stated, would be at the corner of Eighth and Republican as it would then be accessible and visible to people beyond those who work within the site. The landscape plan should look to the future of the area, especially as shown in neighborhood planning efforts and street improvement plans. The design should “bring the pedestrian focus up.”

The citizen letter summarized to the board made many of the same points as those above. The requested departure to allow an additional 15 feet of height for mechanical equipment along the building perimeter causes the building to appear taller when it will already be much taller than the immediate context. The design incorporating a parapet and using a departure to move the equipment penthouse to the edge seems to be tall at the edges and step down the middle, just the opposite of Phase 2 which steps down toward the outside. Light may be very restricted in the interior courtyards given the narrowness of the courtyards in relation to the height of the buildings as proposed.

### **Priorities Identified:**

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 on this project. The guidance and recommendations made were agreed to by all the Board members present, unless otherwise noted. While the notes below indicate the area the Board found most important, all of the Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings apply.

**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 features.**

The full block site which is very long in the north/south direction, and rises about 13 feet across its full length presents the possibility that first floor heights may diminish along street facing facades. This should be avoided and the height of first floors above grade should be kept high, providing an adequate, attractive base to the proposed buildings.

**A-2 Streetscape compatibility - The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.**

The Board indicated this guideline applies without adding specific information.

**A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street - Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.**

Building entrances should be visible from the surrounding streets even when not placed directly along them.

**A-4 Human Activity - New Development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.**

Location of retail. The Board discussed whether the retail would work best at the cross-block connection, where it is currently proposed, or at the corner of Eighth and Republican, where it could enliven the corner and better draw customers from and provide added engagement with the surrounding area. The University representative responded that their consultants have advised them that retail/commercial use along Eighth Ave. is unlikely to be successful and that locating it at the corner of the mid-block crossing and Eighth Ave. would be the best because it could serve persons in the UW Medicine buildings and pedestrians crossing through the blocks. The Board concurred that the mid-block location would be acceptable, but wanted the space designed to be visible from the south. The Board wanted the retail space to be very inviting, in order to draw people in from surrounding areas. It should also be located close to the sidewalk along Eighth Ave., not set back in beyond an open space.

**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 proposed driveway on Republican St. would be adjacent to the public courtyard entryway from the south. This adjacency should be addressed in its design and that of the adjacent courtyard so that the additional width between buildings is utilized to provide increased comfort and visual interest to pedestrians using the courtyard and to preserve pedestrian safety to users of the public sidewalk past the site.

**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.**

Orientation to the two corners along Republican should be accomplished with tall architectural elements with high levels of transparency into interior uses and some degree of projecting out from the building as a whole. Human activity should be clearly visible within the building at these corner locations in order to provide a sense of engagement with the surrounding areas such as might have been provided by entrances, lobbies, common uses or commercial/retail uses at these locations.

**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.**

One Board member noted that both Dexter and Mercer are very wide rights-of-way and the ratio of building height and ROW width are almost 1:1. Locating the penthouse areas along the roof edges at these streets is consistent with the scale of those wider streets.

Architectural measures should be utilized to limit the apparent height, bulk and scale of the proposed buildings.

**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 Board acknowledged that it is important to look at UW Phase 2 and at buildings in the South Lake Union area for contextual reference for Phase 3.

**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 facade walls.**

The Board appreciated that the design for Phases 3.1 and 3.2 shows a continuation of the “laminations” concept that was established in UW Phase 2. The Board requested that the pedestrian bridges between Phases 3.1 and 3.2 connecting levels 2 and 3 and 5 and 6 be clearly presented at future meetings and that they be evaluated as part of the shadow study (described below).

The pedestrian bridges present an opportunity for a powerful architectural presence carrying forward the forms and styles expressed in the buildings being connected.

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

The Board expressed support for the elevation study drawings shown of the corner elements at Eighth and Republican, Dexter and Republican, and at the northwest corner of the Phase 3.2 building at the midblock crossing. These tall elements, set out in a different plane from the building facades, are shown as highly transparent, displaying activities within and incorporating

wide canopies over adjacent sidewalks. They should be incorporated into the final design of the building. The Board noted that the use of canopies to bring down the scale of the building at the pedestrian level and to provide a strong architectural connection surrounding sidewalks should be incorporated in the final design.

**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.**

Materials, especially in the pedestrian realm are important elements to creating a successful architectural environment. They should convey warmth as well as permanence and should be attractive.

**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.**

See the comments under A-8 above. A successful design of the parking structure entry would minimize its appearance, instead adding to the apparent presence of the adjacent pedestrian courtyard.

**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.**

The Board noted that there are no entrances on exterior, street-facing corners, and that this could create a "UW-only" feel to the building. The Board liked the activation on Eighth Avenue North with the transparent conference room at the corner. The Board expressed appreciation of the "rooms" aspect of the east/west courtyard, the water feature and path along the north/south courtyard, and the landscaped setback along Eighth Avenue. Lighting should be incorporated into open space areas, sidewalks and entry points so as to increase pedestrian safety. Ample sized covered areas should be provided at building entrances.

**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.**

No further guidance was offered relating to blank walls.

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

Landscape and lighting of pedestrian paths needs to take safety and security into considerations. Lighting elements should be shown on the site and landscape plans.

**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.**

The Board indicated that this guideline applied to the proposal and the measures called for should be incorporated into the proposal.

**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 Board requested a large proportion of clear glass at grade. It was noted that the glass used at UW Phase 2 appears to be much too dark.

**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.**

This guideline should be applied in consideration of both landscapes around other newer buildings in South Lake Union and the existing phases of the UW Medicine project.

**E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site - Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen wall, planter, site furniture and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.**

One Board member liked the planting and distinct differences in the Phase 2 courtyard as one moves through it and recommended that this be repeated in the proposed courtyard associated with Phases 3.1 and 3.2. Spaces should be provided in the courtyard where people can pause and gather – the Board liked the concept of ‘outdoor rooms’.

### **Departure Request**

The Applicant requested one departure: To allow the mechanical penthouses to be located at the edge of the roof on Eighth Avenue North for 3.1, and the edge of the roof on Dexter Avenue North for 3.2, rather than set back 10 feet from the edge of the roof, as required by SMC 23.48.010. The applicant noted that the proposal for Phase 3.1 has a building height of approximately 105 feet, plus a 15-foot penthouse, bringing the total height to 120 feet. The text amendment allows for a building height of 120 feet, plus an additional 15 feet of mechanical

penthouse height. Obtaining a departure to move the equipment to the outside edge of the roof would allow the green roof to be located in one contiguous area, and would strengthen the architectural concept of placing taller 'laminations' at the edges of the site. It was noted that the Board was agreeable to this departure at the last EDG.

The Board requested a lighting/shadow study to support the applicant's request for a departure. Shadows created across the street from the project will be assessed and compared to the proposal without the departure. The Board indicated continued support the departure request, subject to the outcome of the studies. Parameters of the shadow study are the equinox periods and summer solstice with shadows depicted for 9AM, noon, and 3 PM on each of these key solar days.

### **Next Steps**

The Board approved moving ahead to the Recommendation Meeting.