



City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3011372

Address: 2915 Rainier Ave S

Applicant: Douglas Ito of SMR Architects

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, May 24, 2011

Board Members Present: Brett Conway (Chair)
Sam Cameron
Amorena Miller

Board Members Absent: Tony Case
Stephen Yamada-Heidner

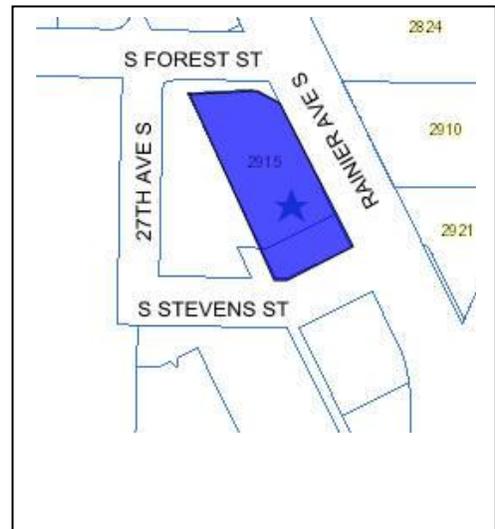
DPD Staff Present: Colin R. Vasquez, Senior Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Neighborhood Commercial 3P-65 (NC3P-65)

Nearby Zones: (North) NC3P-65
(South) NC3P-65
(West) NC3P-65
(East) NC3P-65

Lot Area: 23,369 square feet



Current Development: The site is currently an unoccupied single story commercial building (former Firestone Tire Company) with an abutting paved surface parking area. Rainier Ave S is relatively flat between S Forest St and S Stevens St, with a slight slope up to the west toward 27th Ave S.

Access: n/a

Surrounding Development: The Mt. Baker Light Rail Station and public plaza area are located directly to the west and south of the site. North of S Forest St is a one-story commercial building (Pawn X-Change) and East of Rainier Ave S is are two one-story commercial buildings (US Bank and Starbucks Coffee) and Franklin High-School.

ECAs: Liquefaction Prone Area.

The Rainier Valley is located in southeast Seattle and lies between the east slope of Beacon Hill and the west slope of Mount Baker Ridge. The valley has a north/south orientation and is named after the view of Mount Rainer in the south.

In the 1999 neighborhood plans, this area was envisioned as a North Rainier HUB Urban village. In 2010, the plan was updated with the goal: “To create a thriving, safe, attractive, pedestrian and transit-friendly residential/commercial center, which serves as a gateway to Southeast Seattle: supports the residents and businesses currently in Southeast Seattle”.

Neighborhood Character: The updated plan envisions the area as a new transit oriented town center, with the same neighborhood priorities of the initial plan: developing a neighborhood core, creating housing, catalyzing commercial development, offering services, promoting living wage employment opportunities, and offering access to transit and non-motorized travel choices.

In the past year, the City and neighborhood have been meeting to create an urban design framework (UDF), from which a number of recommendations come, including: creating a connected neighborhood and a walkable town center, improving the pedestrian landscape, and reconnecting Cheasty and Mt Baker Boulevards.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed four-story building includes commercial and community space at the sidewalk level, 51 residential units would be located in the upper three stories and green roof plantings—including raised planter beds for urban farming. Vehicular access is from S Forest St.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Three development options were presented — the ‘Single Boxcar’, ‘Two Boxcar Passing’, and two boxcar passing with a ‘Shaped Leading Edge’. However, all three use a common scheme for the massing and structure siting. The initial massing for the building is a single boxcar. Then, the mass is split into two boxcar masses. A central corridor mass is placed between these two masses to further imply autonomy. To imply direction, the two masses are then shifted in opposite directions from one another. To imply movement on a curved track, the leading corner edges of each mass are tapered, giving the illusion that the building is curving parallel to the adjacent light rail track. On the opposite end of the mass, the exterior walls extend beyond the main boxcar mass giving the impression of the back end of a train. The Mt Baker Station’s visual rhythm of vertical brick piers alternating with open-air breezeways inspired a series of vertical brick piers alternated with transparent storefront glazing on the first floor of the building. These vertical piers provide a strong base to the building and evoke an image of boxcars sitting atop a station track. A horizontal recessed shadow line is placed between the boxcars on top and the track below to emphasize the relationship.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Four members of the public commented at the Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Excitement about the project and request that the design include more transparency through the building as well as weather protection.
- Pleased with the life and activity the project will bring to the area. Support for the concept, massing and the “spill-out” onto the plaza of the commercial spaces and weather protection along Rainier.
- One Lighthouse for the Blind representative appreciated how efforts to design the site to be friendly to the sight impaired. He was concerned with the need for a clear buffer between the pedestrian sidewalk and the heavy traffic on Rainier. He suggested that a more defined pathway helps with wayfinding for the blind. He expressed a need for early warning strips between the sidewalk and the street, especially where there is a bus stop. He also suggested clearly defining the transition between the building site and the public plaza in some way. He also stated that site lighting that isn’t irritating to the blind is also important.
- One Sound Transit representative shared that on other projects near light rail stations, licenses have been obtained to use portions of the light rail plazas by private businesses.

PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

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 following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the Citywide Design Guidelines & Neighborhood specific guidelines (as applicable) of highest priority for 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-2 Streetscape Compatibility. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the applicant expressed concerned that the current location of the bus stop my need to be moved north/south of the building to improve the visibility of the commercial spaces. The Board was concerned that the proposed curb cut along S Forest St would reduce important sidewalk space.

The Board recommended incorporating wayfinding for the transit station into the proposed design.

More direction about this issue is found in Guideline A-3.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board was concerned that the residential entry shown was too diminutive. The Board recommended that the entry design make more of a statement and be distinguished from the rest of the building.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board requested exploration of including overhead weather protection along the street fronts. The Board stated that the corners are the preferred retail locations for businesses and the ability to lease these spaces relies upon a design that encourages human interaction and pedestrian activity.

Generally, the Board was concerned with the visibility of the station from the corner of Rainier and Forest.

The Board recommended consideration of outdoor areas access for the SE corner commercial space at the plaza.

At least one Board member expressed a preference for the plaza as the main entry.

A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street. For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board asked that two options for residential entry be shown at the next meeting, one at Rainier Ave S façade and one at the S Forest St façade of the building – with both option including a clearly defined entrance.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board express reservations with the proposed short term commercial parking proposed along Rainier Ave S and potential conflict with Metro’s ability to stack busses. Vehicle speed and peak volumes make this an unsafe proposal. The board was not supportive of the proposed curb alignment.

Since the design review meeting the applicant has been notified by Seattle’s Department of Transportation that the pull-out parking design would not be approved through the street improvement process.

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 facade walls.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that the residential portion of the building does not appear to display a defined residential composition. More direction about this issue is found in Guideline C-4.

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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that at the next meeting, they would like to review more options on the metal siding composition, as well as for the fenestration pattern. The Board did, however, support the proposed panel windows should at the end of the building and these should be retained (see D-11 guideline). The Board also was supportive of the rhythm of glazing and columns along the alley.

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 creative lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that additional plaza enhancements, such as outdoor seating, should be explored and presented.

- D-2 Blank Walls. Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near the sidewalks. Where blank wall are unavoidable, they should receive design treatments to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board expressed an interest in seeing art added to the bike storage exterior wall and the NW corner wall.

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

More direction about this issue is found in Guideline D-10.

- D-8 Treatment of Alleys. The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrians' street front.**

- 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.**

At the next meeting, the applicant should present examples of the commercial signage being considered.

- 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board expressed an interest in seeing exterior lighting that gives consideration to the Lighthouse for the Blind's needs.

- 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 wall should be avoided.**

More direction about this issue is found in Guideline D-2.

- 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 privacy for residents and be visually interesting for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops, and other elements that work to create a transition to the public sidewalk and private entry.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board expressed an interest in seeing 'enhanced' entries at the S Forest St and S Stevens St ends to activate the street and street plaza. If the Rainier Ave S residential entry is retained, it needs to be enhanced to be clearly differentiated from the commercially entries.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

No development standards were proposed.

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.