City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE
NORTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

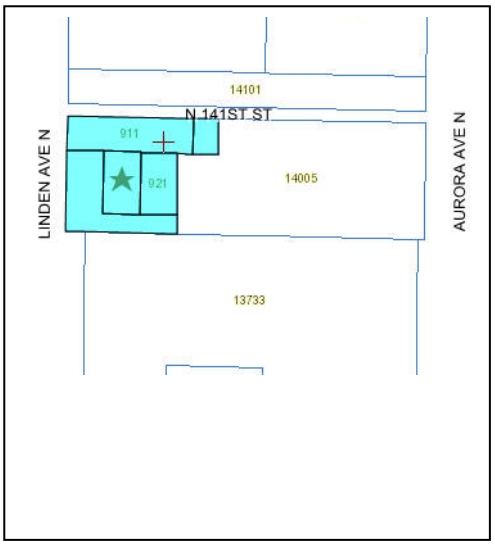
Project Number:	3012485
Address:	911 N. 141st Street (also referenced as 14002 Linden Avenue N.)
Applicant:	Jean Morgan, Morgan Design Group LLC, for Interurban Senior Living Associates Limited Partnership (SHAG)
Date of Meeting:	Monday, September 12, 2011
Board Members Present:	Ted Panton (Chair) Mike DeLilla David Nieman Jerry Coburn
Board Member Recusant:	Jean Morgan
DPD Staff Present:	Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: C2-65'

Nearby Zones: (North) C2-65'
(South) C2-65'
(East) C2-65'
(West) SF 7200

Lot Area: The site is irregular in shape , relatively flat and totals 34,970 square feet in size.



Current Development:	The site is currently occupied by a commercial demolition and excavation company. There are two storage sheds, a larger shop building, and two former single family residence s now used as commercial buildings on site.
Access:	Current access is from both 141st Street NW and from Linden Avenue N.
Surrounding Development:	Directly to the west across Linden Avenue N. is the Bitter Lake Reservoir. There are multifamily apartments and condominium buildings north and south of the reservoir. To the east, between the subject site and Aurora Avenue N. is a retail car dealership with abundant car storage space. Directly to the south is a car storage lot for another auto dealership. Further to the south along Linden Avenue N. are located other multifamily apartment developments. To the north, across N. 141st Street are some smaller commercial buildings and further to the north a large mixed-use building with residential units above commercial spaces at street level. The entire area is located within the Bitter Lake Hub Urban Village.
ECAs:	There are no identified environmentally critical areas on or abutting the site. The site is general level along Linden Avenue N, but rises approximately 14 feet to the east across the entire site.
Neighborhood Character:	The site lies on block to the west of Aurora Avenue N., also known as Washington State highway 99 and as Pacific Highway 99, a busy arterial that connects with the Canadian border to the north and to state highways 99 in Oregon and California that eventually crosses into Mexico. Development along Aurora Avenue N. in Seattle is that of "strip" commercial development, situated to serve customers arriving in vehicles. The pattern of development is characterized by discontinuous, low-slung lodging and commercial buildings perched as islands on seas of asphalt-paved parking lots easily accessed by vehicles from the arterial. A series of improvements along Linden Avenue N. are attempting to maintain and establish its character as a pedestrian and bicycle pathway. Efforts are being made to include it as part of the development of a multi-jurisdictional "Interurban Trail," with improvements already made and underway north of Seattle north in Shoreline, Edmunds and Everett, within and near the Interurban Railroad right-of-way that had connected Seattle with Bellingham to the north.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a seven-story residential building containing approximately 178 one and two-bedroom apartments for low-income seniors above a ground floor containing residential amenity spaces and administrative office space. Parking for approximately 105 vehicles will be supplied within the structure. The single-use residential development will require Conditional Use approval by the Department of Planning and Development.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: September 12, 2011

DESIGN PRESENTATION

John Parsaie of Morgan Design Group LLC Architects made the presentation to the Board and members of the public attending the meeting. After explaining opportunities offered and constraints of the site and the general objectives of the intended program, he identified individual design guidelines which the design team thought of special importance for the proposal: A-4, A-6, A-7, B-1, C-3, D-1, D-7, and D-12. The Bitter Lake Hub Urban Village has not developed neighborhood-specific guidelines that are to be applied to the site.

Three different massing schemes were then presented by the applicant. The first was described a "doughnut-shaped." While maximizing the unit count, the design allowed only minimal daylight into the well-like courtyard at the buildings center and was thought to place an overweening amount of bulk along Linden Avenue N.

A second scheme was a "C-" or "U-shaped" design with an inner court arranged to face due south. This would allow a maximum amount of mid-day sun into the courtyard and maximize the number of south-facing units with potential views of Mt. Rainier and the downtown. This scheme was acknowledged, like the first scheme, to place a great deal of its bulk along Linden Avenue N., however, and, since there would be no way to control development on property to the south, could suffer willy-nilly the de-illumination of the courtyard that had been the problem with the previous "doughnut" scheme.

A third scheme with a deep courtyard facing due west, although allowing for a reduced number of units, allowed for late day sunlight into the courtyard and the units around it and minimized the upper bulk along Linden Avenue N. Combined with an entry to the parking from 141st Street N. rather than from Linden Avenue N., the scheme was felt to provide a kinder, gentler pedestrian experience along its frontage and one less disruptive to the dedicated bike lanes intended for the west edge of an improved Linden Avenue N.

The applicant noted that this scheme would require granting a departure from SMC 23.47A. 005 C2, the Code provision that allows no more than 20 percent of residential uses along the street-facing façade. All the uses intended for the sidewalk level would be accessory to the principal residential use of the structure.

PUBLIC COMMENT

After asking some clarifying questions of the applicant, the Board elicited comments from members of the public (five signed in to become parties of record) attending the Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- DPD long range planner, David Goldberg, spoke about the plan for the area, which included multi-family projects without commercial uses north of N 135th Street along Linden Avenue N., which is what the project is proposing. The project should promote the pedestrian experience; the community vision reinforces safety as major concern. The southwest corner of the building will be a prominent corner and needs to be interesting and have visual interest. He thinks that the design of the project aligns with the community needs and plans for the area.

- Personal safety and "walkabilty" in the neighborhood: more lighting and more eyes on the street are encouraged. Parking is an issue in the neighborhood as there is not felt to be enough. Commenter likes the vehicle access location on N 141st Street, the building frontage and balconies, and would like to see a walkway on N 141st Street.

- The entrance looks good and makes a statement. Security and safety for residents and the community is an issue in the area. Pleased with more parking than what is required, but concern that there is not enough for guest and all the residents. The project needs to have as many eyes on the street as possible and the applicant should work with the North Precinct of the Seattle Police Department early to make sure the project is doing whatever it can to create a safe environment. She wants to make sure that what is shown at the Design Review Recommendation meeting is what really gets built, especially in terms of colors and materials.

- Attendee from Department of Neighborhoods spoke about importance of east-west connections and a walkway to connect Linden Ave N. to Aurora Ave N. on N 141st. He spoke favorably about the community spaces on the street-facing façade as those using the spaces will provide light and eyes on the street during evening hours, unlike commercial spaces that are often dark in the evening.

- An owner of properties across N. 141st Street to the north of the project stressed the need for security and safety and increased lighting along N 141st Street, as it is a narrow, dark road with limited sight lines.

- General concerns about the situation along N. 141st Street and negative impacts of increased traffic on N 141st Street.

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 of highest priority for this project.

A. Site Planning

A-1 **<u>Responding to Site Characteristics</u>. 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.**

The corner of the building at N 141st & Linden Ave North needs to be more prominent and blank walls are discouraged. The board expressed concern with the uses at the N.W. corner. More transparency is needed.

A-2 **<u>Streetscape Compatibility</u>. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.**

The project appears to respect the relationship with Linden Avenue N. and is encouraged to continue in this direction.

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

The proposed location of the entrance is prominent and visible from the street. The Board looks forward to seeing more details of the entry.

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

The applicant had chosen this to be a priority. The board would like to make sure that there are more eyes on the street from the upper units and the courtyard .

A-6 **<u>Transition Between Residence and Street</u>. 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.**

The applicant had also chosen this to be of high priority in guiding the design. The Board had briefly discussed the tension between a more suburban (set back from the street) front façade and one that hugged the street (more urban in appearance), a tension complicated by a need for "eyes-on-the street" contravened by utility setback dictates.

A-8 **<u>Parking and Vehicle Access</u>. Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties, and pedestrian safety.**

The security of the garage, safe passage from parking to the street, and garage entry as part of an attractive and not totally utilitarian façade would be key issues for this challenging design refinement of the proposal.

A-10 <u>Corner Lots</u>. 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 Board felt that the applicant should look at the northwest and southwest corners of the structure as true corner lot situations. This would mean carefully addressing questions regarding "wrapping" the corners and activating the corners with appropriate interior uses in order to encourage human activities and provide a better transition between the building and the street. The Board felt that the treatment of the northwest corner would be a key decision in redirecting the development of the street-level façade all along N. 141st St.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 <u>Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility</u>. 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 anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

The Board was agreed that the best scheme was that of the preferred design, but members raised the question of whether the perceived demands of a symmetrical façade prevented adjustments or erosions of the south-facing façade that might allow greater amounts of sunshine from entering the courtyard during the day.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-1 <u>Architectural Context</u>. 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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the lack of any "well-defined and desirable character" along Linden Avenue N. but wondered whether there might not be some elements from newer structures along the street which might be taken into consideration in the design.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that questions of scale were closely related to discussions of safety, particularly along N. 141st Street.

C-4 **<u>Exterior Finish Materials</u>. 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.**

One board member expressed concern about using horizontal lap siding in the project: "shy away from beveled siding," he cautioned.

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

The Board was particularly concerned about the façade along N. 141st Street, that it be activated and not include blank walls and be treated as a merely functional alley.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 **<u>Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances</u>. 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.**

This was one of the applicant's priority guidelines and Board members and public commented favorably on what had been shown of the entry on Linden Avenue N.

D-2 **<u>Blank Walls</u>. 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.**

The Board considered this to be particularly applicable to the design of the street-level façade along N. 141st Street.

D-5 **<u>Visual Impacts of Parking Structures</u>. The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.**

In choosing this Guideline as one of highest priority, the Board expressed concern for the appearance of the parking garage and how it would relate to the entire façade expression and experience of comfort and safety along N. 141st Street.

D-6 **<u>Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas</u>. 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.**

While screening of these service elements was deemed important by the Board, their precise location and relation to the corner expression at N.141st Street and Linden Avenue N. and the overall N. 141st Street façade was determined to be critical to the success of the proposal.

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

In light of extensive public comments and discussion regarding the safety in the neighborhood in general and security and safety along N.141st Street in particular, the Board regarded this Guideline to be of particular importance to the success of the final design.

D-8 **<u>Treatment of Alleys</u>. The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.**

This should be considered in light of other comments of the Board regarding the security and safety, comfort and attractiveness of the alley-like N. 141st Street.

D-10 **<u>Commercial Lighting</u>. 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.**

Lighting as a means of heightening security and safety was of paramount importance to the success of the project and the Board would like to see at least the highlights of a proposed lighting scheme presented at the next meeting.

D-11 **<u>Commercial Transparency</u>. 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.**

This was directed by the Board to the "storefronts" proposed for residential amenity areas along the street level facades.

E. Landscaping

E-1 **<u>Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites</u>. Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.**

There appears to be plenty of landscaping proposed around the base of the building, and street trees are encouraged along both Linden Avenue N. and N. 141st Street. The applicant is encouraged to work with SDOT regarding the landscaping in the buffer between the sidewalk and Linden Avenue N. and at the southwest corner of the building where some kind of landscaped niche seems desirable.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departure was requested:

The Code requires that the street-level residential spaces in the commercial zone not exceed 20 percent of the street frontage **(**SMC 23.47A.024B**).** The applicant proposes an exclusively residential building with street-level ground floor spaces devoted to uses accessory to the residential use.

The Board indicated they would look favorably toward the departure providing the applicants provide more details regarding the actual design of these spaces and respond favorably to the Board's other requests for design development that addresses the Guidelines noted to be of highest priority for the project.

BOARD DIRECTION

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

At the next meeting the Board would expect to see much more fully developed and detailed renderings of the basic massing scheme shown the Board as the preferred alternative. In particular, the presentation should clarify and address the following major concerns of the Board:

- The structure has two conspicuous, highly visible corners, one at the corner of N. 141st Street and Linden Avenue N. and the other at the southwest corner where the building fronts onto the Linden Avenue N. right-of-way along two faces and is highly visible as one approaches the site from the south. In particular, the northwest corner needs to strike a greater balance between utilitarian and aesthetic demands; it seems heavily weighted toward the utilitarian at the present.
- In keeping with the above observations regarding the northeast corner treatment, the street-level façade along N. 141st Street, despite a set of functional demands, needs to be more than an "alley" façade; additionally, the treatment of the right-of-way along the south side of N. 141st Street needs more than alley-like treatment.
- Explore architectural gestures and techniques to maximize the amount of south sun that is able to penetrate into the courtyard.

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