



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3012615

Address: 4029 7th Avenue Northeast

Applicant: Nicholson Kovalchick Architects

Date of Meeting: Monday, October 17, 2011

Board Members Present: Salone Habibuddin
Joseph Hurley
Christina Pizana
Martine Zettle

Board Members Absent: Peter Krech

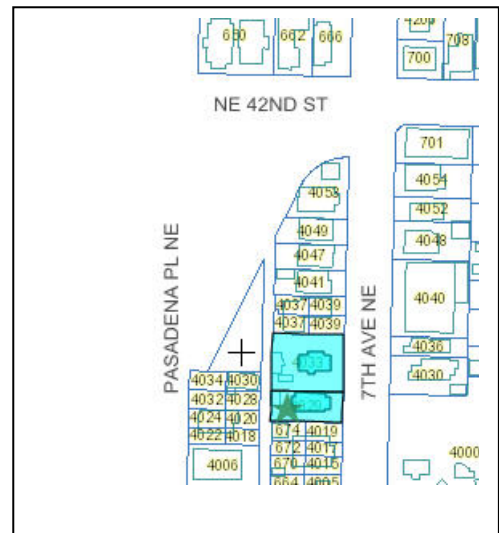
DPD Staff Present: Bruce P. Rips

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Lowrise Three (LR3)

Nearby Zones: North: LR 3 to NE 45th St.
South: South of Burke Gilman trail, zoning changes to Major Institutional Overlay with an Industrial Commercial (IC) underlying zone.
East: Zoning changes to Commercial One with a 65 height limit east of 9th Ave. NE
West: At I-5, the zone changes to Single Family (SF 5000)

Lot Area: 10,695 square feet.



Current Development: A duplex and triplex sit on the two properties.

Access: Vehicular access occurs on the alley to the west of the site.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: The University District is a diverse neighborhood with a wide array of building types. The immediate vicinity of the proposal includes single family houses, townhouses and mid-size residential buildings. To the west of the project site across the alley, lie newly constructed three-story townhouses. Similar development occurs on adjacent properties to the north and south. On the east side of 7th Ave NE, a four-story apartment building, University P-Patch and a King County Metro facility occupy several parcels. The western edge of the University of Washington sits three blocks to the east. Major arterials include NE 45th St. to the north, I-5 a block to the west, and NE 40th to the south. 7th Ave. NE is classified as a minor arterial.

ECAs: No Environmentally Critical Areas of the properties.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to build a five-story structure housing approximately 78 dwelling units with nine parking spaces accessed from the alley.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The three schemes vary in their approach to massing, yet, share several qualities. Vertical and horizontal circulation is placed on the exterior creating upper level walkways and staircases open to the sky. For the most part, each of the schemes sits close to the Seventh Ave. NE right-of-way and at a distance from the alley or rear property line. Scheme One forms two, parallel five-story structures connected by open walkways along the north/south axis. The vertical circulation systems (i.e. stairs, elevator) occupy the space between the two volumes. The design provides a shared, landscaped open space at-grade along the alley behind the structure. This scheme would not provide parking. Scheme Two resembles a “J” shape in plan. The bulk of the mass lies parallel to 7th Ave. rising above the neighboring townhouses. The open space formed by the perpendicular masses occupies the site’s northwest corner. A staircase and elevator sit between the open space and the northern most units. Nine parking spaces line the alley.

The “C” shaped massing for Scheme Three places the parking between the alley and the building mass. The three wings of the building embrace a void that forms an outdoor amenity area with its open end facing the parking lot. Exterior stairs and walkways encircle two sides of the open space along with an elevator.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 13 members of the public affixed their name to the Early Design Review meeting sign-in sheet. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- The alley is a single lane and incapable of handling more vehicles.
- People park in the alley and block access to the townhouses. People also use the WSDOT property for parking.
- Some of the townhouses face onto the alley.
- The proposal will double the population in the area.
- Five stories are too tall. The building will be larger than anything in the immediate area.
- The building will block views from the adjacent buildings and sunlight entering into people's homes. (This was repeated several times during public comment.)
- The development will cause more bike, pedestrian and vehicular traffic. A traffic study should evaluate this impact.
- The height and size of the building is out of character. It will block views to the lake.
- The height of the structure will be two stories above the third floor of the adjacent unit.
- The concept designs ensure a lack of privacy for the neighbors.
- The development will block access to wireless communication.
- All surrounding properties are three story townhomes. The proposal is too massive and too tall.
- In the long run, the project will not contribute to the neighborhood as it provides housing for renters and not homeowners.

DPD received one letter focused on the impacts on the neighborhood due to a lack of on-site parking spaces, to congestion on certain intersections and the lack of on-site loading. The letter also discusses the proposal's height and character of the building ascertaining the structure will be out of place and too tall. Other issues include the potential preservation of a tree, bulk and massing, relationship of retaining walls to the neighbors and noise impacts.

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.

The Neighborhood specific guidelines are summarized below. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

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.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: The pedestrian-oriented street streetscape is perhaps the most important characteristic to be emphasized in the neighborhood. The University Community identified certain streets as “Mixed Use Corridors”. These are streets where commercial and residential uses and activities interface and create a lively, attractive, and safe pedestrian environment. The Mixed Use Corridors are shown in Map 1. Another important site feature in the University Community is the presence of the Burke Gilman Trail. The primary goal is to minimize impacts to views, sunlight and mixed uses while increasing safety and access along the trail.

Guideline: For properties facing the Burke Gilman Trail, new buildings should be located to minimize impacts to views of Mount Rainier, Cascade Mountains and Lake Washington, and allow for sunlight along the trail and increase safety and access for trail users.

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

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: Reinforcing the pedestrian streetscape and protecting public view corridors are particularly important site planning issues. Stepping back upper floors allows more sunlight to reach the street, minimizes impact to views, and maintains the low- to medium-rise character of the streetscape. Roof decks providing open space for mixed-use development can be located facing the street so that upper stories are, in effect, set back.

Guideline - Solar Orientation: Minimizing shadow impacts is important in the University neighborhood. The design of a structure and its massing on the site can enhance solar exposure for the project and minimize shadow impacts onto adjacent public areas between March 21st and September 21st. This is especially important on blocks with narrow rights-of-way relative to other neighborhood streets, including University Way, south of NE 50th Street.

See Board guidance A-3 and A-6.

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

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: Another way to emphasize human activity and pedestrian orientation, particularly along Mixed Use Corridors, is to provide clearly identifiable storefront entries. In residential projects, walkways and entries promote visual access and security.

Guidelines:

1. On Mixed Use Corridors, primary business and residential entrances should be oriented to the commercial street.
2. In residential projects, except townhouses, it is generally preferable to have one walkway from the street that can serve several building entrances.
3. When a courtyard is proposed for a residential project, the courtyard should have at least one entry from the street.
4. In residential projects, front yard fences over four (4) feet in height that reduce visual access and security should be avoided.

The Board would like to see a larger and more visible entry on 7th Ave. NE. Programming of the entry should accommodate bicyclists. The design of the entry (and the entry sequence from the sidewalk) should engender a strong connection between the proposed buildings and the life of the street.

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

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: Pedestrian orientation and activity should be emphasized in the University Community, particularly along Mixed Use Corridors. While most streets feature narrow sidewalks relative to the volume of pedestrian traffic, wider sidewalks and more small open spaces for sitting, street musicians, bus waiting, and other activities would benefit these areas. Pedestrian-oriented open spaces, such as wider sidewalks and plazas, are encouraged as long as the setback does not detract from the “street wall.”

Guidelines: On Mixed Use Corridors, where narrow sidewalks exist (less than 15’ wide), consider recessing entries to provide small open spaces for sitting, street musicians, bus waiting, or other pedestrian activities. Recessed entries should promote pedestrian movement and avoid blind corners.

See A-3 guidance.

- 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.**

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: This Citywide Design Guideline is particularly important where a building's back side, service areas or parking lots could impact adjacent residential uses. Map 2 (page 8) shows potential impact areas—these are where Lowrise zones abut commercial zones.

Guideline: Special attention should be paid to projects in the zone edge areas as depicted in Map 2 to ensure impacts to Lowrise zones are minimized as described in A-5 of the Citywide Design Guidelines.

Due to recent City Council approved changes in the Lowrise chapter of the Land Use Code and introduction of new height measurement techniques, the proposed structure looks quite different than the surrounding townhouse developments. The applicant proposes an apartment building that is potentially taller than the townhouses. All three design concepts show unenclosed hallways with open stairs and elevators on the exterior of the structure.

The Board discouraged the placement of open hallways and stairs on the structure's northern side as shown in Option #3, urging the architect to move the circulation to the central outdoor court. Having the open circulation systems adjacent to the neighboring townhouse raised privacy issues and brought the building mass closer to the adjacent building.

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.

The Board discussed the merits of placing open space between the entrance and the street. Members of the Board felt that this project needs to be an urban building and thus have the bulk of the building mass located close to the street edge.

Interestingly, the townhouses flanking the site have their open spaces on 7th Ave. setting back the structure from the street above and behind fences and retaining walls. The effect creates an estrangement between the townhouses and the streetscape.

Attention to the design of open space between the entry and the street is critical. The design needs to keep in mind the frequency of pedestrian and bike activity in the neighborhood. The Board encouraged the architect to strive for a design that consciously recognizes communal activities such as the P-patch across the street.

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

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: There is a severe lack of both public and private open space in the community. Small open spaces—such as gardens, courtyards, or plazas—that are visible or accessible to the public are an important part of the neighborhood's vision.

Therefore, providing ground-level open space is an important public objective and will improve the quality of the residential environment.

Guidelines:

1. The ground-level open space should be designed as a plaza, courtyard, play area, mini-park, pedestrian open space, garden, or similar occupiable site feature. The quantity of open space is less important than the provision of functional and visual ground-level open space.
2. A central courtyard in cottage or townhouse developments may provide better open space than space for each unit. In these cases, yard setbacks may be reduced if a sensitive transition to neighbors is maintained.

Each design option represents a very different approach or idea about open space. Due to the Board's open mindedness about the building's form, no one attitude toward open space prevailed. Option 1 treats the open space as a buffer between the building and the alley, the added distance to I-5 perhaps useful for mitigating noise. The corner open space in Option #2 provides greater access to light and air and maintains more privacy for the townhouses to the north. The three wings of the structure flank the open space in Option #3. This alternative potentially creates a better communal space but as the Board noted the proximity of the open space and the parking would necessitate a landscape design that carefully separates the outdoor amenity area from the parking lot. The programming of this communal space is important.

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.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: In Lowrise residential developments, single-lane driveways (approximately 12 feet in width) are preferred over wide or multiple driveways where feasible.

If the applicant chooses to provide residential parking, access would need to occur from the alley.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

- 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 anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: The residential areas are experiencing a change from houses to block-like apartments. Also, the proximity of lower intensive zones to higher intensive zones requires special attention to potential impacts of increased height, bulk and scale. These potential impact areas are shown in Map 4 . The design and siting of buildings is critical to maintaining stability and Lowrise character.

Guideline: Special attention should be paid to projects in the following areas to minimize impacts of increased height, bulk and scale as stated in the Citywide Design Guideline.

The Board did not endorse a specific design option. Each option appeared to have its advantages and disadvantages. Namely, the Board members requested that the building mass respect the adjacent townhouses to the north and south. The architect should address the preservation of light, air, and privacy for the adjacent townhouses on the north. On the face of it, Option #2 most closely accomplishes this goal. However, revisions to Options #1 and #3 (see A-5 guidance) may also achieve this goal.

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.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: Buildings in the University Community feature a broad range of building types with an equally broad range of architectural character. Because of the area's variety, no single architectural style or character emerges as a dominant direction for new construction. As an example, the University of Washington campus sets a general direction in architectural style and preference for masonry and cast stone materials, however, new buildings on and off campus incorporate the general massing and materials of this character, rather than replicating it.

Guidelines:

1. Although no single architectural style or character emerges as a dominant direction for new construction in the University Community, project applicants should show how the proposed design incorporates elements of the local architectural character especially when there are buildings of local historical significance or landmark status in the vicinity.
2. For areas within Ravenna Urban Village, particularly along 25th Avenue NE, the style of architecture is not as important so long as it emphasizes pedestrian orientation and avoids large-scale, standardized and auto-oriented characteristics.
3. On Mixed Use Corridors, consider breaking up the façade into modules of not more than 50 feet (measured horizontally parallel to the street) on University Way and 100 feet on other corridors, corresponding to traditional platting and building construction.
4. When the defined character of a block, including adjacent or facing blocks, is comprised of historic buildings, or groups of buildings of local historic importance and character, as well as street trees or other significant vegetation (as identified in the 1975 Inventory and subsequent updating), the architectural treatment of new development should respond to this local historical character.
5. Buildings in Lowrise zones should provide a “fine-grained” architectural character.

The Board did not attempt to endorse a specific stylistic or aesthetic design.

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

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Guidelines:

1. New buildings should emphasize durable, attractive, and well-detailed finish materials, including: Brick; Concrete; Cast stone, natural stone, tile; Stucco and stucco-like panels; Art tile; Wood.
2. Sculptural cast stone and decorative tile are particularly appropriate because they relate to campus architecture and Art Deco buildings. Wood and cast stone are appropriate for moldings and trim.
3. The materials listed below are discouraged and should only be used if they complement the building’s architectural character and are architecturally treated for a specific reason that supports the building and streetscape character: Masonry units; Metal siding; Wood siding and shingles; Vinyl siding; Sprayed-on finish; Mirrored glass.

4. Where anodized metal is used for window and door trim, then care should be given to the proportion and breakup of glazing to reinforce the building concept and proportions.
5. Fencing adjacent to the sidewalk should be sited and designed in an attractive and pedestrian oriented manner.
6. Awnings made of translucent material may be backlit, but should not overpower neighboring light schemes. Lights, which direct light downward, mounted from the awning frame are acceptable. Lights that shine from the exterior down on the awning are acceptable.
7. Light standards should be compatible with other site design and building elements.

Signs

Context: The Citywide Design Guidelines do not provide guidance for new signs. New guidelines encourage signs that reinforce the character of the building and the neighborhood.

Guidelines:

1. The following sign types are encouraged, particularly along Mixed Use Corridors – Pedestrian oriented shingle or blade signs extending from the building front just above pedestrians; Marquee signs and signs on pedestrian canopies; Neon signs; Carefully executed window signs; such as etched glass or hand painted signs; Small signs on awnings or canopies.
2. Post mounted signs are discouraged.
3. The location and installation of signage should be integrated with the building’s architecture.
4. Monument signs should be integrated into the development, such as on a screen wall.

The preliminary sketches of the elevations indicated the intention of using significant amounts of metal siding. DPD Staff and the Board noted that the University District guidelines (item # 3 above) discourage copious use of metal siding.

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 discussion for Guideline D-5.

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.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: The University Community would like to encourage, especially on Mixed Use Corridors, the provision of usable, small open spaces, such as gardens, courtyards, or plazas that are visible and/or accessible to the public. Therefore, providing ground-level open space is an important public objective and will improve the quality of both the pedestrian and residential environment.

Guidelines:

1. On Mixed Use Corridors, consider setting back a portion of the building to provide small pedestrian open spaces with seating amenities. The building façades along the open space must still be pedestrian-oriented.
2. On Mixed Use Corridors, entries to upper floor residential uses should be accessed from, but not dominate, the street frontage. On corner locations, the main residential entry should be on the side street with a small courtyard that provides a transition between the entry and the street.

Placing useable open space on the alley creates security concerns. The Board anticipates reviewing this amenity area's programming and design at the Recommendation meeting.

- 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.

Preliminary sketches of the design did not indicate that blank walls would face the street.

- 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.

Several neighboring townhouses as well as the existing houses have retaining walls along 7th Ave. It appears that the proposed design will not have retaining walls facing 7th Ave. but would likely need them at the side property lines.

- D-5** **Visual Impacts of Parking Structures.** 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.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Guidelines:

1. The preferred solution for parking structures is to incorporate commercial uses at the ground level. Below-grade parking is the next best solution for parking.
2. There should be careful consideration of the surrounding street system when locating auto access. When the choice is between an arterial and a lower volume, residential street, access should be placed on the arterial.

3. **Structured parking façades facing the street and residential areas should be designed and treated to minimize impacts, including sound transmission from inside the parking structure.**

The applicant requested a Land Use Code departure from a regulation requiring enclosure of parking. In an Urban Center, the applicant is not required to provide residential parking. Two concept schemes showed approximately nine surface spaces along the alley. The third scheme did not have parking.

- 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 adamantly requested the placement of a loading area off the alley.

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

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

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.**

A detailed landscape plan will be needed for the Recommendation meeting.

- E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as high-bank front yards, steep slopes, view corridors, or existing significant trees and off-site conditions such as greenbelts, ravines, natural areas, and boulevards.**

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Context: The retention of existing, large trees is an important consideration in new construction, particularly on the wooded slopes in the Ravenna Urban Village. The 17th Avenue NE tree-lined boulevard is an important, visually pleasing streetscape.

Guidelines:

- 1. Retain existing large trees wherever possible. This is especially important on the wooded slopes in the Ravenna Urban Village.**
- 2. The 17th Avenue NE (boulevard) character, with landscaped front yards and uniform street trees, is an important neighborhood feature to be maintained.**

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board’s future recommendation on the requested departure(s) will be based upon each departure’s potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s). The Board’s recommendation will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following preliminary departures were requested:

- 1. SMC. 23.45.527B Maximum façade length within 15 feet of a lot line.**
- 2. SMC. 23.45.510C.3 Enclosed parking in Urban Center. (Note: DPD staff will determine whether unenclosed parking is a departure if the applicant seeks a higher FAR limit.)**

BOARD DIRECTION

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.

The Board requested specific drawings that show the building in its context. The applicant will need to illustrate the relationship of the building with its neighbors, specifically enabling the Board to evaluate and compare building height and setbacks. Cross sections and elevations that include the adjacent buildings will be helpful. In addition, the Board also asked for perspectives of the building from street and alley views.