

Current Development: Vacant. The site comprises four tax parcels located mid-block along 35th Ave S between S. Alaska and S. Edmunds Streets. The nearly square property measures 156' wide by 153' deep. The site slopes from the highest point on the southwest corner to the lowest point on the northeast corner. Total declension equals approximately 18 feet.

Access: 35th Avenue South

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: Located in Columbia City, the site lies surrounded by institutional and residential uses. Several parks, including Columbia Park and Rainier Playfield, are within walking distance of the site. To the east, several single family structures, townhouse and apartment developments, as well as Elder Healthcare Northwest, comprise the majority of land uses. Directly to the west lies the Zion Prep Academy and further west, a light rail station and Rainier Vista complex. North of the subject property is the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Immediately to the south sits a recently constructed townhouse project comprised of a series of three-plex structure.

Rainier Ave S., located about two blocks east of the project, and Martin Luther King Jr. Way S, about two blocks west of the project, form major north/south arterials within close proximity. The site sits midway between S. Alaska St. to the north and S. Edmunds St to the south. Both streets provide key connects to the Columbia City business district and the light rail station.

Columbia City has witnessed considerable new development and maintains significant ethnic and income diversity.

ECAs: No environmental critical areas.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a development of 18 to 24 units in a mix of single family and townhouse structures with a shared driveway accessing parking mostly within structures.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The development team presented several alternative site planning schemes for the small complex of single family and townhouses structures. Option # 1 illustrates four townhouse structures with two units in each building fronting on 35th Ave S. Two driveways connect to four parallel groupings of townhouses (five units in each linear row) that extend east/west on the site. Much of the site comprises driveways linking the individual garages to the street. Open space runs in narrow, linear swaths forming the side yards, rear yard and an area separating the paired rows of townhouses. The design does little to capitalize on the significant grade change.

Option #2 limits the curb cut on 35th Ave S to one. The driveway splits the townhouses facing the street into two groupings of two and seven units each. The driveway leads to two parallel structures of five units each. Directly behind the two unit townhouse facing the street lies two units surrounded by common open space in the site's southwest corner. This design also removes the site's distinctive topography.

Scheme #3A, similar to Option #1, forms a bilaterally symmetrical design with a common driveway midway between the north and south property lines. The grouping of structures occurs in three layers. Moving from east to west, the first layer of two buildings with three units each faces 35th Ave S. Two driveways leading to unit garages connect to the street adding a total of three curb cuts to the complex as a whole. The second layer of units forms a cluster of eight units in five separate structures facing a common driveway. The buildings form an "I" shaped void comprised of driveways. The third and western most layer consists of two structures with two units each. The units connect to the driveways that establish the separation among buildings. A majority of the useable open space is pushed to the rear yard, to most of the side yards with some exception for structures that would sit on the north and south property lines, and to the front yards along the street. Narrow amounts of green or decks line the pathways through the complex. Of the schemes, this option takes advantage of the topography by allowing the layers of units or structures to step up the incline. The applicant also presented a slightly altered version of this scheme at the meeting (not included in the EDG packet). This scheme possesses six single family and five townhouses structures totaling 18 units. Three curb cuts line 35th Ave S. Two walkways link to the right of way near the north and south property lines. This scheme has more space open space surrounding the single family nits near the rear of the site.

Still another version of this scheme, #3B, imagines the site expanded to include the vacant property to the north. This has the same layering of units and an extensive driveway system. Additional units are in single family structures. This option has 24 units in eight single family and seven townhouse structures.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Two members of the public affixed their names to the EDG sign-in sheet. No one spoke.

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.

Using the rise in grade to take advantage of views and provide differentiation within the cluster of buildings makes the most sense. The Board briefly discussed whether an asymmetrical arrangement of units would have better complemented the site's slope.

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

The Board recommended the elimination of the two extra curb cuts on 35th Ave S. See guidance A-4, A-8 and C-5.

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.

With the reduction in driveways on 35th Ave S, the design will do more to encourage human activity along the street.

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.

Eliminating the zero lot line conditions on the north and south proposed by the architect as shown in alternative or revised option #3A increases the distance between the townhouse to the south and future development to the north. The Board preferred this option.

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.

To increase the pedestrian orientation of the streetscape, the two additional curb cuts and associated driveways should be eliminated in favor of unit open spaces facing 35th Ave.

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

The revised option #3A with its increase in open space near the rear of the site appealed to the Board. This scheme also respected the side setbacks by providing open space and pedestrian circulation.

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 recommended only one curb cut from 35th Ave. The two additional curb cuts appeared unnecessary and impediments for a desirable pedestrian experience.

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.

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.

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.

Design of the units and the landscaping should possess a careful consideration of detail and texture.

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.

Provide a colors and materials board for review at the Recommendation meeting.

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 elimination of the two extra curb cuts will relieve the street frontage of parking garages.

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.**

Based on option 3A, the desire to accommodate vehicular access to garages took precedence over an armature of shared or common open spaces.

The Board recommended placing the complex's pathway connections to the street near the north and south property lines. This would also serve to shift two structures away from the north and south property lines.

- 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.**

The desire to have the structures and circulation system step up as the grade rises to the west will possibly require retaining walls. The design of the exposed walls will be a consideration at the next meeting.

- 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.**

Clustering two or more garages has the benefit of reducing the extent of driveways while simultaneously possessing the disadvantage of visually enlarging the size of the garages.

- 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 emphatically dismissed the architect's notion that trash and recycling canisters for 18 units would be lined up along 35th Ave S. on pick-up days. By the next meeting, the proposal will need to show one or more enclosed, temporary storage areas off the right of way during solid waste removal days.

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

Provide a concept lighting plan for the pathways and open spaces for the next design review meeting.

E. Landscaping

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.

By the Recommendation meeting, make clear the type of materials specified for the driveways and parking areas.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board’s recommendation on the requested departure(s) will be based upon the 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 departures were requested:

1. The applicant proposed a departure request from SMC 23.45.518 governing side setbacks. The project would reduce portions of the two side setbacks from a seven foot average and a five foot minimum to a six foot average. Two townhouse structures in scheme 3A would sit at the property line reducing the setback to zero in areas.

The Board noted that it preferred the revision to Scheme 3A that places the stairs and sidewalk at the property line rather than locating structures in the side setbacks.

2. The applicant’s second proposed departure request concerns SMC 23.45.527 governing façade length. Maximum combined length of all facades within 15 feet of a lot line must not exceed 65% of the lot length. For this property, the maximum length would not exceed 99’2”. Based on the several options, the increase in façade length would increase from 12’10” to 15’10” or an increase of 13 to 16 percent respectively.

The Board indicated its preliminary inclination to accept the departure request.

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.

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