



## FIRST EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3017071

Address: 10733 Meridian Ave N

Applicant: Brenda Barnes, Clark Design Group

Date of Meeting: Monday, July 21, 2014

Board Members Present: Martine Zettle, Chair  
Ivana Begley  
Eric Blank  
Julia Levitt  
Christina Pizana

Board Members Absent: none

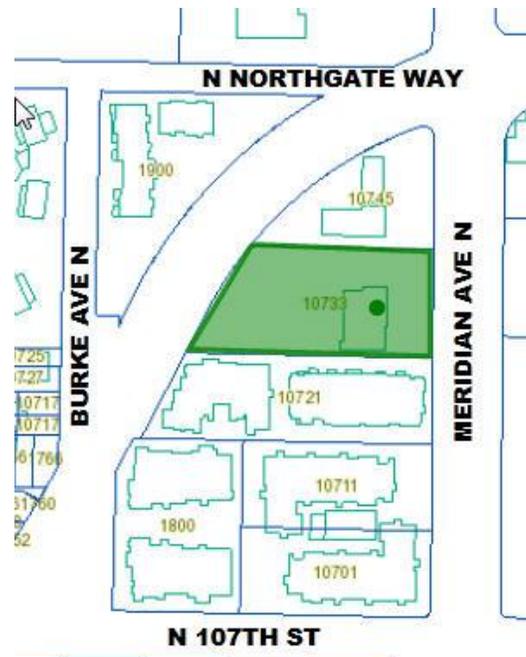
DPD Staff Present: Scott Ringgold, Land Use Planner

### SITE & VICINITY

Site zone: Neighborhood Commercial 3, with a 40' base height limit (NC3-40)

Nearby zones: (North) NC3-40  
(South) residential Midrise and Lowrise 3 (MR and LR3)  
(East) NC3-85  
(West) LR3

Lot area: 29,375 sq.ft.



**Current development:**

Single-story restaurant with surface parking

**Site, surrounding development and neighborhood character:**

The site is elongated east-to-west, with about 125' of street frontage along Meridian Ave N and roughly 140' along N Northgate Way. It slopes gradually down to the west and south, about 10' in all. There are no exceptional trees, though some mature trees along the northern property line might be retained.

Directly to the north is a gas station. Directly to the south are apartment buildings 3-5 stories tall, with principal entries focused inward toward heavily landscaped private open space, limited windows or pedestrian entries facing rights of way, and a wide driveway from Meridian Ave N directly along the shared property line. To the east across Meridian Ave N are 3-5 story office buildings set far back from the street, and surrounded by surface parking. Across N Northgate Way to the west is a townhouse development built in the last decade, and farther to the west is a single family neighborhood characterized by large treed lots and postwar single family homes.

Adjacent to the site, Meridian Ave N and N Northgate Way are heavily trafficked, with improved sidewalks but somewhat limited pedestrian amenities. Street trees exist along N Northgate Way, but the planting strip is narrow, and the eastern sidewalk terminates to the south of the site. Meridian Avenue North is characterized by mature street trees in a landscape strip of standard width. A bus stop exists to the north of the site.

**Access:**

The site fronts on Meridian Ave N and N Northgate Way. Proposed vehicular access to the site is along both frontages, subject to Design Review recommendation.

**Environmentally Critical Areas:**

none

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

A 5-story hotel building containing 140 rooms. Parking for 149 vehicles to be provided below grade. Existing 1-story structure to be demolished.

## FIRST EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE July 21, 2014

The applicants' [design packet](#) includes materials presented at the meeting, and is available online by entering the project number (3017071) via this link: <http://bit.ly/DesignReviewProjects>.

The packet is also available to view in the file, by contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD:

**Mailing Public Resource Center**  
**Address:** 700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000  
P.O. Box 34019  
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

**Email:** [PRC@seattle.gov](mailto:PRC@seattle.gov)

### DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Lauren Nestrud of Clark Design Group presented the project and its design concept. The project is a five-story hotel intended to cater to travelers along the Interstate 5 corridor. The site has good visibility from the high-traffic intersection at North Northgate Way and Meridian Ave N. The preliminary siting would locate the project's "public uses" along Meridian and hotel rooms at grade along Northgate Way.

A goal is to accentuate the main entry along Meridian with sidewalk canopies and landscaping at the sidewalk. Along N Northgate Way the intent is to step the design back to respond to the geometry of the site and provide opportunities for substantial landscaping.

Ms. Nestrud presented three alternative massing concepts: a "Bar building", a "T building", and a "U building". The "Bar" is the preferred concept; it would set back from the north property line, the "T" would present a strong façade along Meridian Ave N and center the building along the site's east-west axis, and the "U" would orient the massing along both street frontages and the north property line, creating an open space on the site's south side.

#### Alternative Concepts



Concept A - Bar Building (Preferred Scheme)



Concept B - T Building



Concept C - U Building

Ms Nestrud discussed benefits and disadvantages of each concept, also listed in the design packet. The Bar provides some separation from the apartments to the south and opportunities for screening and landscaping along the north property line, with an “urban garden” at the site’s northeast corner. The T-shaped scheme also steps away from the south line, but Ms. Nestrud stated it doesn’t enhance the entry sequence for pedestrians along Meridian Ave N. The U-shaped scheme maximizes solar gain and offers a landscaped plaza on the south side, but the proximity to the gas station is less desirable.

Regarding site access, the design team considered various options: along the north side, along the south side, from both streets, and from just one. Driveway access along the south side would be less apparent to visitors and might create confusion with the adjacent driveway for the neighboring apartments. If the design were to limit itself to a single driveway, the turnaround scheme would be complicated, and might conflict with pedestrian movements. The preferred design scheme therefore involves a requested development standard departure, to allow through-site vehicular access along both streets.

A further requested departure relates to street-level development standards along North Northgate Way. The site slopes down to the west and south. Assuming no break in the floor plates, this presents a disconnect between ground floors on each street frontage. The preferred design seeks to present the project’s more active, public functions along Meridian Ave N, and to notch back the hotel rooms along N Northgate Way to provide a landscaped buffer and visual access to the street, with parking behind. The departure would allow the street-level street-facing façade to be lower than the required 13' along N Northlake Way.

Design Review Board members asked the following **clarifying questions**:

*Any trees on the site?* No exceptional trees. There will be excavation for the parking. We'll look to keep the tree adjacent to the gas station.

*Please clarify how the preferred driveway accesses would work.* Right turn only and maybe enter only on Meridian. Potentially exiting would be right only onto Northgate. It's a use oriented to vehicles, so we think most cars will come from I-5.

*Please clarify which concept is Code compliant.* The T-shaped scheme provides Code-compliant driveway access, and compliance with street-level development standards would involve breaking the floor plates to address N Northlake Way.

*Are each of the options comparable in gross floor area?* They're similar in size.

*Are there any concepts that would break the floor plate and step down to N Northlake Way?* We did that thinking early on, but we're trying to locate all the elevators where the public space is. To break floor plates would likely involve multiple cores.

*Please clarify required setbacks.* On the south side, the design must step back 10' above a height of 13'. In our preferred concept, it would step back 15'.

*How far would the facade be from back of sidewalk?* Along Meridian, the intent is to locate the structure right at the property line.

*Please detail what are the “public” uses you describe.* Lobby, restaurant, fitness, pool, overhead weather protection, entry registration to your right. Bars and restaurant would be along the sidewalk, with the fitness and pool located behind.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Five members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting on July 21, 2014. Their spoken comments are as follows:

The City’s arborist is very protective of the tulip poplars. Considering the bus stop, this portion of Meridian Ave N is a confusing traffic space. Turning left into the site is nearly impossible, unless it's after 10 at night. Right turners coming around the buses won't help.

As part-owner of the buildings to the south, I ask that you take steps to mitigate the effects on our property. Please address light access, bulk and scale, particularly at the northwest corner of our property and the southwest corner of this one. I can't tell how many feet above existing grade it will be: looks like 4-5 stories. Please consider stepping the building down, I don't know what's reasonable, but light, noise and bulk would be my concerns. I'd prefer the driveway on the north side, for my purposes that would be best.

DPD received one comment letter, written by the same neighbor who provided the second set of comments above. The letter substantially reflects the same above comments.

## **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.

### **FIRST EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE July 21, 2014**

The priority Citywide and Neighborhood guidelines identified by the Board as Priority Guidelines are summarized below, while all guidelines remain applicable. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

## CONTEXT & SITE

### ***Northgate Supplemental Guidance:***

#### **DC1-I Retain Existing Natural Systems and Site Features as Landscaping**

**DC1-I-i. Natural Features:** Consider design strategies to preserve existing on-site natural habitats, significant vegetation or other natural features .... For example, consider retaining natural features such as existing vegetation ... that are aesthetically pleasing, ... and can create a pedestrian friendly environment by providing natural areas of interest. Also, features such as larger planting strips located adjacent to sidewalks can be used for landscaping to enhance the site and can effectively separate pedestrians from the impacts of traffic.

**If feasible, the Board identified as a high priority the retention of existing trees on the north side of the site.**

### **CS2 Urban Pattern and Form: Strengthen the most desirable forms, characteristics, and patterns of the streets, block faces, and open spaces in the surrounding area.**

#### **CS2-D Height, Bulk, and Scale**

**CS2-D-1. Existing Development and Zoning:** Review the height, bulk, and scale of neighboring buildings as well as the scale of development anticipated by zoning for the area to determine an appropriate complement and/or transition.

**CS2-D-2. Existing Site Features:** Use changes in topography, site shape, and vegetation or structures to help make a successful fit with adjacent properties.

**CS2-D-3. Zone Transitions:** For projects located at the edge of different zones, provide an appropriate transition or complement to the adjacent zone(s). Projects should create a step in perceived height, bulk and scale between the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zone and the proposed development.

**CS2-D-4. Massing Choices:** Strive for a successful transition between zones where a project abuts a less intense zone.

**CS2-D-5. Respect for Adjacent Sites:** Respect adjacent properties with design and site planning to minimize disrupting the privacy of residents in adjacent buildings.

**Considering the Lowrise-zoned apartments adjoining the site to the southwest, the Board indicated that the T-shaped massing scheme would appropriately address this guideline. Board members requested sections to show locations of adjacent windows at the southeast corner, with privacy in mind.**

**CS3 Architectural Context and Character: Contribute to the architectural character of the neighborhood.**

**CS3-A Emphasizing Positive Neighborhood Attributes**

**CS3-A-2. Contemporary Design:** Explore how contemporary designs can contribute to the development of attractive new forms and architectural styles; as expressed through use of new materials or other means.

**CS3-A-4. Evolving Neighborhoods:** In neighborhoods where architectural character is evolving or otherwise in transition, explore ways for new development to establish a positive and desirable context for others to build upon in the future.

***Northgate Supplemental Guidance:***

**CS3-I Streetscape Compatibility**

**CS3-I-i. Response to Context:** The architecture of individual buildings should relate to their surroundings. This does not necessarily mean a historical approach, but rather one that is sensitive to the surrounding urban built and natural environments. In areas zoned for mixed-use development outside the retail core area, orient and design the commercial facade at street level to be compatible with the streetscape of the surrounding residential neighborhood. Compatibility can be accomplished through a combination of the following:

1. The overall proportion of the facade;
2. Building setbacks;
3. Placement of windows and bays;
4. Location of entries; and
5. Exterior materials.

**The Board identified these as relevant and priority guidelines, but reserved comment until the project's recommendations meeting.**

**PUBLIC LIFE**

**PL1 Connectivity: Complement and contribute to the network of open spaces around the site and the connections among them.**

**PL1-A Network of Open Spaces**

**PL1-A-2. Adding to Public Life:** Seek opportunities to foster human interaction through an increase in the size and quality of project-related open space available for public life.

**PL1-B Walkways and Connections**

**PL1-B-3. Pedestrian Amenities:** Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian oriented open spaces to enliven the area and attract interest and interaction with the site and building should be considered.

**PL1-C Outdoor Uses and Activities**

**PL1-C-1. Selecting Activity Areas:** Concentrate activity areas in places with sunny exposure, views across spaces, and in direct line with pedestrian routes.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board identified the existing street trees along Meridian Ave N as a major asset providing a defining quality to the site and vicinity. They provide a relative sense of pedestrian scale. Seattle’s Department of Transportation (SDOT) identifies these as tulip trees ([\*Liriodendron Tulipifera\*](#)).

While Board members recognized a reasonable design intent to engage the sidewalk, they felt that locating a building right up against the eastern property line would likely conflict with the existing street tree, involving substantial pruning along its west side. In the next design iteration, they requested some buffering of the existing street tree, by pulling the Meridian façade back into the site and possibly providing more space for the urban garden identified by the design team.

If it’s also possible to retain the two existing on-site trees along the site’s north end, the Board would welcome it.

**PL2 Walkability: Create a safe and comfortable walking environment that is easy to navigate and well-connected to existing pedestrian walkways and features.**

**PL2-B Safety and Security**

**PL2-B-1. Eyes on the Street:** Create a safe environment by providing lines of sight and encouraging natural surveillance.

**PL2-B-2. Lighting for Safety:** Provide lighting at sufficient lumen intensities and scales, including pathway illumination, pedestrian and entry lighting, and/or security lights.

**PL2-B-3. Street-Level Transparency:** Ensure transparency of street-level uses (for uses such as nonresidential uses or residential lobbies), where appropriate, by keeping views open into spaces behind walls or plantings, at corners, or along narrow passageways.

**PL2-D Wayfinding**

**PL2-D-1. Design as Wayfinding:** Use design features as a means of wayfinding wherever possible.

The Board identified these as priority guidelines. They offered no further comment in this regard.

**PL3 Street-Level Interaction: Encourage human interaction and activity at the street-level with clear connections to building entries and edges.**

**PL3-A Entries**

**PL3-A-1. Design Objectives:** Design primary entries to be obvious, identifiable, and distinctive with clear lines of sight and lobbies visually connected to the street.

**Northgate Supplemental Guidance:**

**PL3-III Street Level Transparency**

**PL3-III-i. Visual Connections:** Provide direct visual connection into street level facades. The following are examples of less desirable design treatments that should be discouraged:

1. windowless walls;
2. mirrored or non-transparent glass;
3. glass block;
4. display cases;
5. narrow windows not meeting the intent above;
6. windows located above waist level to persons outside the building on the sidewalk;
7. windows into areas that are too small, shallow, or narrow to support normal human activity (e.g. the back of a tall display case, a narrow hallway)
8. any interior wall, equipment, or functional layout that hampers the intent of transparency stated above.

**The Board identified these as priority guidelines. They offered no further comment in this regard.**

**PL4 Active Transportation: Incorporate design features that facilitate active forms of transportation such as walking, bicycling, and use of transit.**

**PL4-A Entry Locations and Relationships**

**PL4-A-1. Serving all Modes of Travel:** Provide safe and convenient access points for all modes of travel.

**PL4-A-2. Connections to All Modes:** Site the primary entry in a location that logically relates to building uses and clearly connects all major points of access.

**In relation to the existing bus stop on Meridian Ave N, the Board identified this as a relevant guideline.**

**DESIGN CONCEPT**

**DC1 Project Uses and Activities: Optimize the arrangement of uses and activities on site.**

**DC1-A Arrangement of Interior Uses**

**DC1-A-1. Visibility:** Locate uses and services frequently used by the public in visible or prominent areas, such as at entries or along the street front.

**DC1-A-2. Gathering Places:** Maximize the use of any interior or exterior gathering spaces.

**DC1-A-4. Views and Connections:** Locate interior uses and activities to take advantage of views and physical connections to exterior spaces and uses.

**DC1-B Vehicular Access and Circulation**

**DC1-B-1. Access Location and Design:** Choose locations for vehicular access, service uses, and delivery areas that minimize conflict between vehicles and non-motorists wherever

possible. Emphasize use of the sidewalk for pedestrians, and create safe and attractive conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers.

#### **DC1-C Parking and Service Uses**

**DC1-C-1. Below-Grade Parking:** Locate parking below grade wherever possible. Where a surface parking lot is the only alternative, locate the parking in rear or side yards, or on lower or less visible portions of the site.

#### ***Northgate Supplemental Guidance:***

##### **DC1-I Design of Parking Lots Near Sidewalks**

**DC1-I-i. Landscaping:** Interior landscaping, in addition to perimeter landscaping, should be installed to help soften the visual impact of surface parking and enhance natural site drainage. To meet this objective, consider the following:

1. Interior landscaping: Use landscaping to break large areas into a series of smaller areas. Plant low landscaping in left over portions of parking areas.
2. Site landscaping strategically to minimize stormwater run-off;
3. Innovative drainage control measures such as swales or treatment islands or pervious pavements;
4. Plant enough trees, which at maturity form a canopy over large portions of the parking area with trees interspersed between parking spaces;
5. Select tree species that do not obscure signage, amenity features, or opportunities for surveillance;
6. Plant a mixture of evergreen and deciduous trees for year-round greenery. Select types of trees, such as sapless trees, that do not impact parked cars.

##### **DC1-IV Parking and Vehicle Access**

**DC1-IV-i. Minimize Pedestrian/Vehicle Conflicts:** Site and design driveways to minimize conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. This is especially important along Northgate Way, .... Minimize the number of curb cuts and width of driveways and curb cuts along these streets.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board addressed initial issues of vehicular access to the site. They expressed preliminary support for through-access, with appropriately-scaled driveways along both frontages. This scheme would alleviate complicated turning onto busy arterials, and it would likely move exiting away from the Meridian side. Board members encouraged the design team to consider a right-turn only sequence.**

**Board members also supported locating the driveway on the north side, with appropriate landscaping.**

**DC2 Architectural Concept: Develop an architectural concept that will result in a unified and functional design that fits well on the site and within its surroundings.**

**DC2-A Massing**

**DC2-A-1. Site Characteristics and Uses:** Arrange the mass of the building taking into consideration the characteristics of the site and the proposed uses of the building and its open space.

**DC2-A-2. Reducing Perceived Mass:** Use secondary architectural elements to reduce the perceived mass of larger projects.

**DC2-B Architectural and Façade Composition**

**DC2-B-1. Façade Composition:** Design all building façades—including alleys and visible roofs— considering the composition and architectural expression of the building as a whole. Ensure that all façades are attractive and well-proportioned.

**DC2-B-2. Blank Walls:** Avoid large blank walls along visible façades wherever possible. Where expanses of blank walls, retaining walls, or garage façades are unavoidable, include uses or design treatments at the street level that have human scale and are designed for pedestrians.

**DC2-E Form and Function**

**DC2-E-1. Legibility and Flexibility:** Strive for a balance between building use legibility and flexibility. Design buildings such that their primary functions and uses can be readily determined from the exterior, making the building easy to access and understand. At the same time, design flexibility into the building so that it may remain useful over time even as specific programmatic needs evolve.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board directed the design team to pursue the T-shaped massing scheme: it provides the desired setbacks from south and north; it allows for a covered vehicular entry; and it presents a tall northeastern corner that could be applied as a wayfinding feature.**

**DC4 Exterior Elements and Finishes: Use appropriate and high quality elements and finishes for the building and its open spaces.**

**DC4-A Exterior Elements and Finishes**

**DC4-A-1. 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.

**DC4-B Signage**

**DC4-B-1. Scale and Character:** Add interest to the streetscape with exterior signs and attachments that are appropriate in scale and character to the project and its environs.

**DC4-B-2. Coordination with Project Design:** Develop a signage plan within the context of architectural and open space concepts, and coordinate the details with façade design, lighting, and other project features to complement the project as a whole, in addition to the surrounding context.

## **DC4-C Lighting**

**DC4-C-1. Functions:** Use lighting both to increase site safety in all locations used by pedestrians and to highlight architectural or landscape details and features such as entries, signs, canopies, plantings, and art.

**DC4-C-2. Avoiding Glare:** Design project lighting based upon the uses on and off site, taking care to provide illumination to serve building needs while avoiding off-site night glare and light pollution.

## **DC4-D Trees, Landscape, and Hardscape Materials**

**DC4-D-1. Choice of Plant Materials:** Reinforce the overall architectural and open space design concepts through the selection of landscape materials.

**DC4-D-2. Hardscape Materials:** Use exterior courtyards, plazas, and other hard surfaced areas as an opportunity to add color, texture, and/or pattern and enliven public areas through the use of distinctive and durable paving materials. Use permeable materials wherever possible.

**DC4-D-3. Long Range Planning:** Select plants that upon maturity will be of appropriate size, scale, and shape to contribute to the site as intended.

**DC4-D-4. Place Making:** Create a landscape design that helps define spaces with significant elements such as trees.

### ***Northgate Supplemental Guidance:***

#### **DC4-I Design Signage Compatible with Human Scale and Consistent with Architectural Concept**

**DC4-I-i. Signage:** Signage should be designed so that it is appropriate for the scale and character desired in the area. Signs should be oriented and scaled for both pedestrians on sidewalks and persons in vehicles on streets within the immediate neighborhood. Signs should add interest to the street level environment. They can help unify the overall architectural concept of the building, or provide a unique identity for an individual business within the larger structure. While regulatory sign review is not in the purview of design review, integration with the overall architectural expression of a building and appropriate scale and orientation are important design considerations. Franchises should not be given exceptions to these guidelines. The following types of signs are encouraged:

1. Pedestrian-oriented blade signs
2. Signs integrated into the design of the building: along a sign band, on canopies and marquees, located in windows.
3. These types of signs are discouraged: Large illuminated box signs (backlit “can” signs) and Post-mounted signs.

**At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board recognized that the legibility of the vehicle entry sequence is important. They questioned whether this visibility is necessarily wedded to the preferred massing scheme, or whether such visibility trumps the appropriate choice of alternative schemes. Alternatives might include a vertical fin element, or well-integrated signage.**

Board members stated that at recommendations they would focus intently on how the project relates to these DC4 guidelines. The design team should provide color samples and material boards. The lighting design should demonstrate attention to any glare effects on the residents to the south. Signage should be thoughtfully designed and integrated. The landscape planning should address opportunities for ample planting at ground level and along the south side.

## DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

At the time of the **FIRST** Early Design Guidance the design team requested the following departures:

1. **Street level development standards (SMC [23.47A.008 B3](#)):** The Code requires that non-residential uses at street level have a floor-to-floor height of at least 13'. The applicant proposes that the 13'-high story extend from Meridian Ave N to N Northgate Way, but as the site's topography falls away to the west, that floor is at the second story on the site's west side.

The Board indicated they were comfortable with this recommendation, assuming that the street level along N Northgate Way would include occupied space, not parking.

2. **Vehicular access (SMC [23.47A.032 C](#)):** The Code requires driveway access from a single street, likely Meridian Ave N in this case. The applicant proposes to locate vehicular access on both frontages.

The Board indicated they were inclined to recommend approval of this departure, considering how it would better facilitate smooth vehicular access to and from the site across adjacent sidewalks. They initially expressed support for a scheme that would result in right turns only.

## BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the First Early Design Guidance meeting, the Board recommended that the project move forward to Master Use Permit application.