



City of Seattle  
 Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

**Department of Planning and Development**  
 D. M. Sugimura, Director

**CITY OF SEATTLE  
 ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR  
 OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Application Number:** 3008330  
**Applicant Name:** Brent Bird for the University of Washington  
**Address of Proposal:** 4333 Brooklyn Avenue NE

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Land Use Application for a special sign exception to replace two Safeco signs on the east and west upper facades with two “University of Washington” signs. Project also includes two new “W” signs on the north and south facades.

The following approval is required:

Special Sign Exception - Chapter 23.55.040, Seattle Municipal Code.

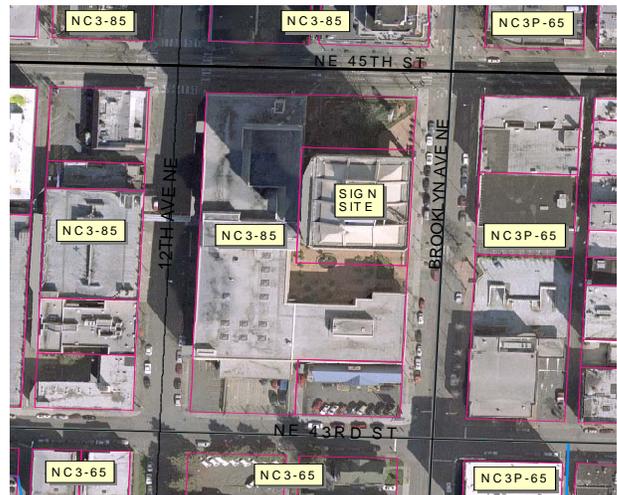
**SEPA DETERMINATION:**  Exempt  DNS  MDNS  EIS  
 DNS with conditions  
 DNS involving non-exempt grading or demolition,  
 or involving another agency with jurisdiction

**BACKGROUND DATA**

**Site and Vicinity Description**

The University of Washington owns the entire block bounded by NE 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn Avenue NE, NE 43<sup>rd</sup> Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Most of the block is occupied by a mid-rise office building with an associated 22 story office tower. The signs that are the subject of this exception request are located at the top of the office tower.

The project site, as well as the properties to the north and west, are zoned Neighborhood Commercial (NC3-85). The NC3 zoning extends to the south and east with a 65 foot height limit.



### Proposal

The project is to reflect the new ownership of the Safeco Tower by the University of Washington by replacing and adding to the signage on the site. The tower parapet is approximately 293 feet high, significantly higher than currently allowed in the NC3-85 zoning. The signs in question are located 6 and 9 feet below the parapet line of the building. Therefore they are non-conforming to the current height limit and replacement and addition of new signs at this level requires a special exception.

### Public Comment

The public comment period ended on January 23, 2008 and one written comment was received. The commenter, writing on behalf of the University District Community Council, thought that the new signs would be out of scale with existing signage in the University District and that the light impacts of the signs should be studied since the signs that would be replaced are not illuminated.

### ANALYSIS

Pursuant to SMC Chapter 23.55 this request for modification to sign code requirements must be evaluated against the criteria shown in italics below.

#### **SMC 23.55.040 Special exception for signs in commercial and downtown zones.**

*The Director may authorize exceptions to the regulations for the size, number, type, height and depth of projection of on-premises signs in neighborhood commercial, commercial, downtown office core, downtown retail core, downtown mixed commercial and downtown harborfront zones as a special exception pursuant to Chapter 23.76, Procedures for Master Use Permit and Council Land Use Decisions, except that no special exception may be authorized for a sign using video display methods. When one (1) or more of the conditions in subsection A of this section have been met, the characteristics described in subsection B of this section shall be used to evaluate the merits of the proposal. Proposals must also meet the intent of the Sign Code as specified in Section 23.55.001, Intent. An exception shall not be granted for roof signs or signs prohibited in Section 23.55.003. In downtown zones, the Director shall consult with the Seattle Design Commission before issuance of the special exception decision.*

#### *A. Conditions. One (1) or more of the following conditions shall be met:*

- 1. The proposed sign plan shows an exceptional effort toward creating visual harmony among signs, desirable streetscape features, building facades and other architectural elements of the building structure through the use of a consistent design theme;*
- 2. The proposed sign plan will preserve a desirable existing design or siting pattern for signs in an area;*
- 3. The proposed sign plan will reduce views of historic landmarks designated by the Landmarks Preservation Board no more than would be permitted by a sign permitted outright without a special exception.*

Two of the proposed signs would continue the signage location established by the existing Safeco signs. The two new signs would be similarly located on the currently

unsigned north and south facades. Since they will all be flush mounted to an existing building they will have no effect on views in the area.

*B. Desired Characteristics. All the following desired characteristics shall be used to evaluate applications for a special exception, and at least one (1) must be met. The proposed sign(s):*

- 1. Unifies the project as a whole or contributes positively to a comprehensive building and tenant signage plan;*

In addition to the signs proposed under the exception, two additional building signs of a similar design, though non-illuminated, are proposed at the lower building level.

- 2. Is compatible with the building facade and scale of building in terms of size, height and location;*

The size of the “University of Washington” signs will be slightly smaller than the “Safeco” signs that they will replace. The “W” signs on the north and south facades will be new, but smaller than the proposed signs on the east and west. While these signs will exceed the height allowed under the current zoning the visual impact will be modest given the scale of the tower and the muted design of the signs. There is no area limitation for wall signs in this zone, SMC 23.55.030 D 3 a (2). The signs will be centered on the existing architectural elements of the building façade.

- 3. Adds interest to the street level environment, while also identifying upper level businesses;*

This criterion is not applicable to the proposed signs because they will be most visible from a distance rather than the adjacent streets.

- 4. Helps orient pedestrians and motorists at street-level in the vicinity of the subject building;*

This criterion is not applicable to the proposed signs because they will be most visible from a distance rather than the directly adjacent streets. They will help to reinforce the identity and location of the University District from other areas of the city.

- 5. Integrates support fixtures, conduits, wiring, switches and other mounting apparatus into the building architecture to the extent feasible.*

This will be accomplished by the proposed design. The signs will be mounted onto a metal panel that will conceal the structural attachment and the lighting will be located behind each of the letters.

**SMC 23.55.001 Intent.**

*The intent of the standards in this chapter is:*

*A. To encourage the design of signs that attract and invite rather than demand the public's attention, and to curb the proliferation of signs;*

The proposed signs are simple in design with a single color and indirect nighttime lighting. While the proposal would add two additional signs to the building, the total number proposed is much fewer than the 39 wall signs allowed under the sign code.

*B. To encourage the use of signs that enhances the visual environment of the city;*

The signs will add some color to the monochromatic concrete building and the nighttime lighting will be a feature in the skyline.

*C. To promote the enhancement of business and residential properties and neighborhoods by fostering the erection of signs complementary to the buildings and uses to which they relate and which are harmonious with their surroundings;*

The height of the tower sets it apart from its context and it serves as a landmark in the University District. The new signage will identify the tower as part of the University of Washington institution. The location and materials of the proposed signs will be similar to that of the existing Safeco signage.

*D. To protect the public interest and safety;*

The visibility of the signage on the tower will enhance its function as a way finding device. The different signs on the east-west and north-south facades will provide a visual cue to the cardinal directions. Due to the height of the signs they will not pose a distraction to drivers in the vicinity of the site.

*E. To protect the right of business to identify its premises and advertise its products through the use of signs without undue hindrance or obstruction; and*

The change of signage will allow the University to make visible its presence in the building.

*F. To provide opportunities for communicating information of community interest.*

This is not applicable to the proposal.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The proposed sign replacement and addition of two new signs would increase the area of non-conformity by approximately 100 square feet. However the existing building is already above the 85 foot height limitation in the zone, sign size is not limited in the zone, the visual presence of the signs would be muted and they would be in scale with the tower facades.

