



The City of Seattle

## International Special Review District

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ISRD 43/26

### MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, March 24, 2026

Time: 4:30 p.m.

Place: Hirabayashi Place, 442 S. Main St., Donne Chin Community Room (in-person)  
Hybrid Meeting

#### **Board Members Present**

Heather Hargesheimer (HHarg), Chair  
Kyle Jacobson (KJ)  
Adrian Lam (AL)  
Samantha Wong (SW)  
Jade Yan (JY)  
Zhiyun Zhu (ZZ)

#### **Staff Present**

Rebecca Frestedt (RF)  
Nelson Pesigan (NP)

#### **Absent**

Hyan Ho (HH)

#### **Key**

BM Board member  
AP Applicant  
SM Staff member

Chair Heather Hargesheimer called the meeting to order at 4:47 p.m.

#### **032426.1 BOARD CHAIR SELECTION**

The Board elected Samantha Wong as Chair and Jade Yan as Vice-Chair for 2026.

#### **032426.2 PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no in-person and virtual public comments.

#### **032436.3 MEETING MINUTES**

November 25, 2025

MM/SC/HH/KJ

5:0:2

The motion passed. HH, ZZ abstained.

Administered by The Historic Preservation Program  
The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

**032426.4 CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

032426.41 674 S. King St. – Milwaukee Hotel  
Applicant: Vanessa Bell, Fulcrum (property manager)  
Record number: DONH-COA-2003

**Use:** Change of use from retail to office.

Presenter Chris Koh, Coho Real Estate Group, explained that the proposal involves relocating the rental leasing, management, and maintenance offices into the corner space of the Milwaukee Building to increase visibility, improve staff working conditions, and attract potential renters. The intent is to create a professional, street-facing office environment similar to an insurance, accounting, or legal office—where staff can comfortably work and engage with residents, commercial tenants, and prospective tenants. Koh noted that three staff members are on site daily, with maintenance personnel also active in the area, and emphasized ongoing efforts to increase both residential and commercial occupancy.

The new location, situated at the corner of King Street and 7th Avenue, is expected to support these goals by enhancing accessibility and foot-traffic visibility.

Applicant Vanessa Bell, Fulcrum Property Management, explained that the primary goal of the proposed office reconfiguration is to improve visibility and create a more welcoming, functional space for residents, prospective commercial tenants, and staff. The current leasing office is extremely small and does not provide an adequate area for private conversations or resident support.

The proposed layout includes three desks in the front, two in the back, a resident sitting area, and a computer station to assist residents with rent payments and lease signings, particularly for those who lack access to technology. The space, located in a corner unit with windows on both sides, would also include a manager’s office and a small break area. Approximately 12 staff members including maintenance, cleaning, and office personnel—would use the space, which is intended to be open for a minimum of 40 hours per week, with staff presence beginning as early as 7 a.m. and extending into evenings and weekends as needed.

Presenter Brian Steen, Fulcrum Property Management, added that increased visibility in the proposed space would allow staff to maintain extended office hours during community events, such as the Lunar New Year celebration and activities at Hing Hay Park. This presence would help reinforce awareness that safe, affordable housing is available in Chinatown and encourage community members to return and engage with the organization.

SM Rebecca Frestedt noted that the retail core guidelines provide preferences for street-level uses, and office use is not among the preferred categories. For this reason, the proposal requires Board review rather than administrative approval, which would apply to typical retail uses such as restaurants or shops.

SM Frestedt consider the proposed office use appropriate due to the high level of pedestrian activity and the frequent movement of residents in and out of the space and added that this type of office use could enhance visibility and contribute positively to the vibrancy of the residential community.

Chair Wong asked for clarification regarding the prior use of the space.

Presenter Koh stated that the space has been vacant for approximately three years and emphasized that the organization is selective about commercial tenants to ensure a diverse business mix rather than adding another restaurant.

Presenter Koh noted the desire to bring more people into the area and foster a greater sense of comfort and community.

Vice-Chair Jade Yan thanked the applicant for providing the mock-up of the proposed office frontage and noted that the space has been vacant for an extended period, with many community members expressing a desire to see it activated. Vice-Chair Yan emphasized the value of having office space located close to residential units to support accessibility and in-person communication for residents who benefit from direct interaction.

BM Lam expressed appreciation for the initiative, noting that the Board's existing street-level use categories do not always reflect the community's evolving needs and stated that the proposal is thoughtful and well-aligned with those needs.

BM Lam inquired whether signage or other informational elements are planned to help the community understand the function and programming of the proposed office.

Presenter Bell explained that the organization plans to provide clear identification of the new office through multiple channels, including updates to their website and signage on the door and noted that while current tenants already recognize the organization, additional visibility will help inform the broader community.

Presenter Bell added that, pending approval of the proposed use, the next step would be to design updated signage for the existing corner flag sign, which would reflect the purpose of the space.

BM Hargesheimer expressed appreciation for the innovative approach to activating the street-level space and thanked the applicants for their efforts and emphasized the importance of ensuring that all tenants are well-informed so they can fully benefit from the new office and its services.

BM Hargesheimer also voiced support for the plan to maintain extended hours during neighborhood festivals and events, noting that such accessibility would be valuable for the community and concluded by expressing enthusiasm for the proposal.

Chair Wong expressed support for activating the long-vacant corner space and noted her familiarity with the location as a former resident of the Milwaukee Building and acknowledged the value of creating a central, accessible point of contact for surrounding

apartments but also raised broader considerations about balancing changes of use within the district.

Chair Wong questioned whether increasing office conversions could reduce opportunities for small retail businesses in the future, even though this particular space has remained vacant for several years and emphasized the importance of maintaining options for active street-level uses elsewhere in the neighborhood. While noting that temporary uses are not within the Board's purview, she encouraged continued awareness of long-term impacts.

BM Hargesheimer agreed with Chair Wong's broader concerns about preserving opportunities for small retail uses but noted that this situation appears to be a special case due to the space's long-term vacancy and the applicant's creative, community-oriented proposal and suggested that, if the Board chooses to approve the change of use, the motion could specify that the approval applies only to this particular circumstance.

BM Jacobson acknowledged the community's preference for active street-level uses such as retail and restaurants but noted that the Board's authority is limited to approving or denying applications and cannot influence the economic conditions that make such businesses viable and emphasized the need to consider each proposal individually while also being mindful of the district's long-term direction and the original intent behind its guidelines.

BM Lam suggested adding language to the motion noting that the proposed change of use specifically serves the community and emphasized that, although the use is categorized as office, the program and function of the space go beyond typical office use and provide direct community benefit.

SM Frestedt clarified that the Board's discussion will be reflected in the official record regardless of whether additional language is added to the motion and noted that if Board members wish to formally incorporate such language, they may propose a friendly amendment, but the comments made during deliberation will serve as part of the basis for the Board's decision.

BM Jacobson noted that the Board's role is limited to making a recommendation to the Department Director, and that the Director of Department of Neighborhoods will consider the Board's discussion as part of that review and agreed that the meeting minutes should sufficiently document the Board's reasoning for supporting the proposal.

Action:

BM Jacobson move that the International Special Review District Board recommend approval of a Certificate of Approval for change of use to office for use by the building's property management company, per the submitted application materials.

The Board directs staff to prepare a written recommendation of approval, based on considering the application submittal and Board discussion at the March 24, 2026, public

meeting, and forward this written recommendation to the Department of Neighborhoods Director.

This action is based on the **following applicable sections of the International Special Review District Ordinance and relevant Standards:**

**Seattle Municipal Code (SMC)**

SMC 23.66.030 – Certificates of Approval – application, review and appeals

SMC 23.66.320 – Permitted uses

SMC 23.66.326 – Street-level uses

SMC 23.66.336 – Exterior building finishes

B. Asian Design Character District

4. Transparency Requirement

MM/SC/KJ/HH

6:0:0

The motion passed and approved unanimously.

**032426.5 STAFF SUMMARY AND BOARD BUSINESS**

SM Frestedt provided a brief update on several administratively reviewed applications and reported that the non-original corner monument sign at the RDA Building, now a self-storage facility at Maynard and Dearborn, was removed due to structural issues, with approval granted because the building already has other signage.

SM Frestedt also noted the installation of new signage for the Kin-On facility at 715 South Lane, the addition of security gates at the Thai Binh Apartments at 913 South Jackson, and pavement restoration underway at South Lane.

SM Frestedt added that current construction along Dearborn is related to the installation of additional decorative streetlights, acknowledging the temporary disruption but emphasizing that improved lighting will benefit the area once completed.

SM Frestedt reported that inquiries and potential applications for new wayfinding signage are increasing and reviewed the range of existing sign types, as well as emerging short-term and community-driven proposals and emphasized ongoing concerns about inconsistency among wayfinding systems, uneven neighborhood representation, and the lack of cohesive design across sign types.

SM Frestedt encouraged the Board to keep these issues in mind as future applications come forward and invited members to share input that could help guide community groups and city agencies in the absence of formal wayfinding guidelines.

Chair Wong asked whether there is a visual reference available that shows the types of wayfinding signs currently installed in the neighborhood, noting that such a comparison would be helpful for understanding the existing conditions.

Vice-Chair Yan recommended that applicants submitting wayfinding proposals include not only their proposed designs but also examples of existing nearby signage to help the

Board understand the broader visual context and emphasized the importance of addressing past concerns about disconnects between community identity and wayfinding systems. Vice-Chair Yan encouraged applicants to incorporate community engagement into their design process, citing the CID Business Improvement Area's recent street-pole banner competition featuring over 140 submissions and community voting for FIFA-related designs as a strong example of inclusive, community-driven design.

BM Jacobson reflected on the Board's role and noted that while members typically respond to agenda items prepared by staff, nothing prevents the Board from offering broader guidance to the Department of Neighborhoods when appropriate and suggested that the Board could, for example, recommend that future wayfinding applicants document nearby signage to help evaluate context and consistency.

SM Frestedt offered to compile photo examples of existing wayfinding signs in the neighborhood to provide the Board with helpful visual references and noted that while no wayfinding applications are immediately scheduled for review, she anticipates that several may come before the Board in the coming months, particularly in connection with upcoming events such as FIFA-related activities.

Chair Samantha Wong adjourned the meeting at 6:03 p.m.