

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

September 16, 2025

Re: IAC letter of July 15, 2025

To: Dipti Garg, John Feit and the members of the IAC

Please find our response to the IAC letter of July 15th. We are happy to discuss further at the next meeting.

Lara Branigan
Director of Design + Construction

MIMP and Site Plan comments:

- 1. The schematic design has too many open questions to give the committee confidence that it will form a sound basis for the design development phase.**

The project is still in schematic design; currently we are doing value engineering, and the floor plan and site plan are still evolving. Once the floor plan and massing are finalized, design development will start on key interior operational components such as the design of collection storage while the exterior and site continue in IAC review. The IAC's input on the design is also a key part of finalizing the design.

- 2. Neither the Near-Term nor Long Term Campus Plan contemplate removal of the Lee Center. The Lee Center was not included in the list of buildings that may be demolished; instead, the MIMP indicated the continuation of the Student Life use at the Lee Center site.**

The code allows, but does not require, a Major Institution to describe potential projects and notes in SMC 23.69.030.E.10 that the plan may include "At the option of the Major Institution, a description of potential uses, development, parking areas and structures, infrastructure improvements or street or alley vacations. Information about potential projects is for the purpose of starting a dialogue with the City and community about potential development, and changes to this information will not require an



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

amendment to the master plan.” On page 145 of the MIMP it further notes that the 12th Avenue diagrams in the MIMP are “illustrative and conveys the university’s intentions for development along 12th Avenue. Actual projects may differ from what is depicted so long as they are consistent with the guidelines of this section”.

Circumstances have evolved since the MIMP was drafted. Seattle University now has a generational opportunity to elevate arts education for students through the integration of Cornish College of the Arts at Seattle University and the establishment of the Seattle University Museum of Art. These developments represent a strategic realignment that carries forward the Cornish legacy, enriches student learning and serves the broader community.

The transition of our Theatre program to the South Lake Union campus is part of this vision. While the Lee Center has served our students well, the museum project represents a forward-looking investment in our arts programming, interdisciplinary learning, cultural engagement, and new connections with both the neighborhood and broader Seattle community.

3. IAC members wonder if a strategy to preserve the Lee Center and renovate it to serve the SUMA uses, and include in the new building’s design an expansion to the west that meaningfully engages the Saint Ignatius Plaza was sufficiently explored.

Art museums have rigorous requirements for environmental controls and security. The existing envelope of the building would need to be upgraded extensively to meet current energy code and museum envelope requirements. In addition, the structural system was found to be insufficient to allow for an added story.

4. The IAC recognizes that access to the parking bisects a physical connection to the Chapel and that the parking lot will eventually be changed. In the interim, pedestrian connections to the North-South axis of the campus and the Saint Ignatius plaza could be reinforced by new paving and hardscape and softscape features to make the link. At the



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very least, the architecture of that potential addition could face glazing to the west and the existing plaza.

The connection to the campus malls and the chapel is an important part of the design and is being studied by the architecture and landscape architecture teams. The entry plaza will provide access to the parking area, 12th Avenue and to the Marion mall for access to the lower mall and seal zone. Significant improvements to the Marion mall extending to the upper mall have been permitted and portions have been implemented. The remaining work has been delayed so that it may be coordinated with the SUMA design so that the two projects are integrated.

- 5. The MIMP shows the Saint Ignatius Plaza is an important campus element of (sic) and the university ought to consider avoiding the creation of yet another plaza nearby (the covered open space at Marion and 12th proposed at SUMA) which would compete with it. What considerations were given to reinforcing the Saint Ignatius Plaza instead of diluting it's (sic) importance with another, proximate plaza?**

The St Ignatius Plaza is the area around the reflection pool south of the chapel entry and the sloped lawn beyond. We hold events of a religious nature at the reflecting pool. These are typically memorials, commemorative events or religious services such as the Easter Vigil.

We hold over 150 other outside events on campus each year and do have need for covered outdoor space which this plaza will provide. The MIMP also asks us in Design Guideline 23 to provide “Open Spaces should provide variety in terms of shade and direct sunlight. To date we do not have a covered open space to provide shade or cover from rain on campus. In addition, the MIMP includes City Council Amendment #1.A.13 which requires “That in the design of any Seattle University building, facing either 12th Avenue, Madison, or Broadway, Seattle University designers should strive to provide major entries, possible entry plaza...”

We view this project, including the plaza, as part of a larger vision for creating a more welcoming gateway — one that intersects seamlessly with our campus and neighborhood while also honoring the significance of the Chapel of St. Ignatius and its outdoor gathering space. This vision enhances



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campus connections, supports diverse programming, and fosters deeper engagement with the neighborhood and city.

- 6. While the 12th and Marion open space does offer a view to the Chapel of St Ignatius, the view is compromised by the campus's largest surface parking lot – and most likely will be for decades to come.**

By raising portions of the plaza we not only can mitigate the grade change along 12th Avenue but also can elevate the viewer on sections of the plaza above the parking lot grade.

- 7. The proposed museum design is contrary to the P-zone requirement that “blank segments of the street-facing façade...may not exceed 20’ in width” (SMC23.47A.008). The vast expanse of the proposed void is overhung by the second floor of the museum and exceeds 20 feet in length, making it an (sic) non-pedestrian-friendly, pedestrian-scale plaza.**

As the building design is developing, we are working to ensure that the blank façade code is followed. See page 18 in the presentation for dimensions.

- 8. Instead of facilitating better integration into the surrounding neighborhood, the proposed development is more in the nature of creating a wall and gate between the University and 12th Avenue.**

The Lee Center currently forms a wall between the campus and 12th Avenue along both 12th and Marion. The massing of the new building will provide more transparency and additional pedestrian access between the campus and 12th Avenue. See pages 20 and 21 in the presentation.

- 9. The IAC would appreciate further clarity from Seattle University regarding specific plans for public access and engagement within the museum itself (beyond the café). How will neighbors, passerbys, and the general public be actively welcomed and encouraged to experience the museum's internal exhibits and offerings?**

The Academic Vision for the museum includes:

- Exhibits, activities and events at the museum will provoke reflection, debate and discernment about how to serve the common good of



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

society as well as deepen student and community connections to the university.

- SUMA will have the flexibility to curate impactful experiences for a wide variety of curricular and community-engagement goals from opening day.
- The museum will be a magnet for partnerships with cultural institutions and community organizations across Seattle

10. What will be days of the week and hours of access to SUMA?

The days and hours have not yet been determined as staff have not yet been hired.

11. Committee members have heard community concerns about the impact of student transportation between the university and Cornish and any impact it might have on traffic and transportation. The university needs to address this issue.

The university is working with our students, staff and faculty to make them aware of the multiple options for moving between the First Hill campus and the South Lake Union campus. Our students are barred from owning cars their first two years so most trips will be by public transportation, bikes, walking or a shuttle.

Building and Landscape Design Comments

1. The open corner is SUMA's most important urban design feature, yet surprisingly little – even schematic – information about its design has been presented. **When next presented, the design of the corner should thoroughly address:**

a) Public safety.

Seattle University has public safety officers patrolling the campus 24/7/365. In addition, SUMA will have a robust security system including cameras monitoring all interior and exterior spaces.

b) Building program and urban design function.

The plaza is envisioned as an extension of the museum and an additional covered event space for the campus. There will be sculpture displayed and infrastructure for events such as artist



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

lectures in addition to events such as the President's Welcome, campus tours, orientation events and even our annual trick or treating for local school children. In addition, it provides a front porch for people arriving at the building and the campus – a meeting point for groups, a place to wait out of the rain and prepare for a visit. Please see slides 52-58 in the presentation

c) Accessibility and engagement with the adjacent sidewalks and how that will be achieved by SUMA's proposed elevated open space and the myriad of ramps and stairs required to access the space.

The adjacent sidewalk on 12th slopes down from north to south and Marion slope gently up from 12th to lower mall. The strategy to address the grade change and still provide entry off of 12th and access off of Marion is critical and several options are being explored. Please see slides 49-51 (plaza design option studies) in the presentation.

d) Mitigating the views of the parking lot.

As noted above, one advantage of raising the plaza is mitigating the parking lot view.

e) How the corner plaza's programming and the university's commitment to curation meet the goals for a truly activated and vital open space.

Please see items 5 and 1b above.

2. Building and Landscape Materials

a) Aside from some concepts of glass storefront at the ground level and terracotta cladding on the upper portions, the intended materials are inadequate for a project that is nearing the completion of schematic design.

The design continues to evolve and value engineering is informing material choices. The current proposed materials are shown on the presentation slides.

b) Important elements of the corner plaza such as columns the soffit have apparently not been considered by the designers and must be much further developed.



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

The design continues to evolve and value engineering is informing material choices. The current proposed materials are shown on the presentation slides.

3. Building Plan

- a) **The definition of the “main” entrance is not clearly articulated – there is confusion between the two elements that touch down to the ground. Is the art studio and gallery portion on the north the entrance to the museum?**

The museum entry is separate from the classroom space entry to allow the classrooms to be used outside museum hours. As the design evolves, the museum entry and first floor plan have evolved. See slides 37-38 in the presentation.

- b) **The art studio and gallery on the north side of the plaza is a potentially powerful connection and point of activation but how will this be ensured?**

The academic vision for the museum has continued to develop with the merger with Cornish. The goal is for this to be teaching museum and faculty are already planning to teach in multiple spaces in the building and to use the collection in a variety of academic disciplines in a cross disciplinary manner. An example provided was a University Core course on Water, Climate Change and Global Migration which would use three paintings identified in the collection and covering ideas in Environmental Studies, Biology and Ecology.

- c) **Transparency of the ground level spaces is indicated but its success to activate both 12th and the plaza is unconvincing until the design and programming of those interior spaces is understood.**

The design team is developing the exterior of the building in tandem with program developments.

- d) **The café location is good for the street but does not enhance activation of the plaza. Will yet another coffee shop be viable when there are at least 2 within a block plus the one in the Sinegal Center (which was touted as a connection to the neighborhood community but is very hard to access).**



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

We work closely with our campus foodservice provider to create options for our students and guests. They are working on ideas for this location to differentiate it from other options on campus

Landscape Plan

- a) **No information about the landscape design, other than a raised plaza and its access via stairs and ramps, was presented. This is insufficient given the primacy of these elements.**

The landscape design continues to change as the building develops.

- b) **There is the potential of creating a “plaza to nowhere” from the corner to the northwest. By raising the plaza to block views of the parking lot where does it go when one reaches its northern edge.**

In each option we are studying for the plaza, there will be sloped walks to provide a connection from the parking area to the plaza.

- c) **The juxtaposition of service areas on the north side of the plaza is not clear.**

As the floor plan has evolved, the loading area has changed. The north side design intent is to have the building be as engaging on the campus side as it is on the street side.

- d) **Access to the building from the parking is not clear.**

There will be a ramp from the parking to the plaza. Please see slides 37-38 in the presentation (these are the plaza plan studies and show a few different options to get to the plaza/main entry from parking).

Sketches/Diagrams

1. Diagram One: “Project Goals illustrates SUMA’s most important goals as related by the university to the IAC.

- a) **“Campus Gateway”: SUMA is to be a gateway to the university.**

Marion is the primary gateway to campus. The MIMP calls for SU to enhance the Marion entry and to include in these enhancements “special landscape treatments, signage, and art”. (MIMP pages 142 and 147) The campus gateway is covered in slides 62-69 in the presentation.

IAC questions in this section:



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Is the gateway both floors of the building or only the upper floor (which have (sic) the greater architectural emphasis)?

SU considers the campus gateway as the entire experience entering the campus via Marion; the buildings on either side are one layer of the elements that will reinforce the entry sequence. Slides 62-69 show the layering of these elements.

Could the 1st to 2nd floor interrelationship be reconsidered and have distinct characteristics on the south and east?

Why is the overall building height identical on both streets – or even along 12th as it nears Marion?

Given the small size of the building, it is difficult to vary the height; the second-floor gallery space is the driving factor for the massing.

b) “Chapel View”: SUMA is to frame a view to the chapel

Views from the campus perimeter to the chapel are an important part of the campus plan, dating back to the design of the chapel. Framing views of the chapel are mentioned several times in the MIMP, including at a pedestrian entry to the north of the SUMA project. (MIMP pages 143 and 147)

IAC questions in this section:

Could the first floor be more dynamic and create a greater focus to the chapel?

The enclosed area of the ground floor has been revised, and the view area has been adjusted.

Could the Marion (gateway) first floor do the same? The extra ground floor gateway along Marion may boost the overall ‘gatewayness’.

The building has been extended along Marion at the ground level; see slides 36-38.

c) “Enhance 12th Avenue”: SUMA is to enhance 12th Avenue



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

The MIMP includes a section on Creating a Vibrant 12th Avenue (pages 142 -149) which outlines strategies for 12th Avenue.

IAC questions in this section:

Perhaps the first floor along 12th can be recessed or some other change that lets it have it own, even if secondary – relationship to Marion?

The floor plan of the museum has been changed since the last review meeting. The museum entry lobby and café are now along 12th Avenue.

Perhaps a portion of the 12th Avenue elevation has two distinct floors (pedestrian and neighborhood scale), to distinguish it from Marion where there may be a merging of floors (grander and on a university scale)?

The 12th Avenue elevation is being revised since the museum entry is now on 12th.

2. Diagram Five: Embracing the Plaza: A derivative of “Chapel View”

IAC questions/comments in this section:

Can the soffit, the columns, the paving (or whatever) be biased to enhance the plaza and lend greater focus on the chapel?

The plaza design, including the soffit etc, has evolved since the last meeting.

The chapel side of the plaza could be raised (as is currently proposed and to shield the view of the parking lot), while the Marion and 12th intersection would be at grade. This would create a prospect on the side closer to the chapel (a raised viewpoint that could be connected to the parking side with steps or ramps) and help create a plaza that serves to reinforce the intersection at 12th – a subtle enclosure (embrace) of the intersection (the gateway). The plaza would have direction and purpose as it slopes up to the chapel.

The plaza is still under development, and this could be studied.



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What has the landscape architect proposed? Why did they not join in the evening's discussion.

The landscape architect's design is reflected in the renderings.
We can have them present at meetings.

Major vs. Minor Amendment Comments

- 1. Despite the university's assertion to the contrary, the IAC feels that SAMU (sic) will lead to significantly greater impacts than those contemplated in the adopted master plan.**

The university will address concerns if specifics are provided.

- 2. The proposed open space at the intersection of 12th Avenue and Marion Street in lieu of building frontage is contrary to the goals of street level activation of 12th Avenue and creating a campus gateway.**

The MIMP includes City Council Amendment #1.A.13 which requires "That in the design of any Seattle University building, facing either 12th Avenue, Madison, or Broadway, Seattle University designers should strive to provide major entries, possible entry plaza..." (page136).

- 3. The MIMP is very clear about the importance of activation and cited various examples that did not include open space. Although open space can be designed to be active, this most certainly requires programming and stewardship which constitutes a major impact.**

The university has a professional events team that manages spaces such as this, and they have been involved in the planning for the space so that it will work well for the type of community events we hold.

- 4. The proposal is potentially detrimental to the public welfare as a covered open space creates public safety concerns.**



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SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

The university has public safety officers on site around the clock 365 days a year. The plaza will have cameras monitored by Public Safety and will be patrolled on a regular basis.

- 5. Sustainability is touted as a key aspect of Seattle University's approach yet, the removal of an existing asset is detrimental to the public welfare in that it is a greater impact to the environment than renovation and re-use of the structure. The university included a commitment "to become climate neutral in the near future" and stated that it is developing a Sustainability Master Plan "to guide strategic decisions for campus development." The university needs to share the Sustainability Master Plan and state how the plans for razing the Lee Center and developing the museum on the site is guided by that Sustainability Master Plan.**

The university's sustainability master plan known as the Laudato Si' Action Platform may be found here:

https://issuu.com/seattle_university/docs/seattle_university_s_laudato_si_action_plan_-_issu

Further information may be found on our website:

<https://www.seattleu.edu/institute-for-catholic-thought-and-culture/laudato-si-action-platform/>

- 6. The university's presentation at the last IAC cast doubt on the future development planned for the north part of the block between Marion and Spring. The height allowed in the is block by the MIMP is 105 feet. If the university does not take advantage of the allowed height there will be well over 100,000 square feet of potential development space that will not be used. This could lead to a future justification for the development of an equivalent amount of space in some other area not currently identified.**

At this time development of the northern site is not planned.



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- 7. The IAC recognizes that plans can change over the course of a twenty-year Master Plan, which is why the MIMP calls for periodic public meetings to discuss progress and potential changes. These meetings are different from the regular IAC meetings and are to be widely publicized. Such a meeting has not been held for this MIMP and it should be before the IAC is required to give its final opinion on the museum project.**

SU has been holding annual meetings with the IAC as required in the land use code and MIMP.

The land use code requires:

- "The Implementation Advisory Committee shall meet as necessary but no less than once annually to review the status of the master plan." SMC 23.69.034.I.
- "The Implementation Advisory Committee and organizations directly affected by the actions of the institution, will be notified of Master Use Permit (MUP) applications for Major Institution uses within the Major Institution Overlay (MIO) District and for Major Institution structures outside of but within 2,500 feet of the MIO District boundaries, and shall have an opportunity to review and comment on the applications if there is a discretionary decision and formal comment period as part of the MUP." SMC 23.69.034.H.
- "The institution shall provide an annual status report to the Director and its Development or Implementation Advisory Committee which shall detail the progress the institution has made in achieving the goals and objectives of the master plan." SMC 23.69.034.I.
- "The Advisory Committee shall be given the opportunity to review a proposed minor or major amendment and submit comments on whether it should be considered minor or major, and what conditions, if any, should be imposed if it is minor." SMC 23.69.035.C.

MIMP condition #40 requires:



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- The IAC review and comment on university projects (greater than 4,000sf) prior to submittal of a MUP.



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