



City of Seattle  
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods  
Bernie Agor Matsuno, Director

# SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

# GENESEE HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DESIGN DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

November 2013

This report is produced pursuant to the City of Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 23.44.17 and 23.79). The intent and purpose of this report is to document public testimony and make recommendations to the City for modifications to land use code development standards in order to facilitate construction of a new Genesee Hill Elementary School located at 5012 SW Genesee Street, Seattle Washington





# Genesee Hill Elementary School Design Departure Advisory Committee Final Report and Findings

## Section 1. Background

### 1.1 General Departure Proposals

On July 26, 2013, the Seattle School District No. 1 submitted a request for departures from certain Seattle Municipal Code Development Standards to accommodate the demolition of the current Genesee Hill Elementary School and the construction of a replacement school to accommodate approximately 650 students at 5012 SW Genesee Street in southwest Seattle.



**Illustration1  
Aerial View of the Existing School Site**

The Seattle School District is proposing to demolish the existing single school shown above and replace it with a 650 student multi-story building. The project is being funded under the \$694.9 million Building Excellence IV (BEX IV) Capital Levy that was approved by more than 72 percent of Seattle voters in February 2013. It supports the District's long-range plans to upgrade and renovate aging school facilities and address enrollment growth. Since 1998, the BEX I, BEX II and BEX III voter approved levies have allowed the District to replace or renovate 37 buildings.

Seventeen major building projects will result in new schools, replacement schools or modernized schools, Genesee Hill bring one of these.

## 1.2 Neighborhood Characteristics

The Genesee Hill school site is located between 51st Avenue SW, 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, SW Dakota Street and SW Genesee Street. The site encompasses approximately one and a half blocks. Surrounding development is consistently single family homes on modest 5,000 square foot lots. There are no multi-family or commercial uses nearby.

The area is characterized by obvious high pride of ownership and is both a stable and improving area. This is a highly desirable, middle to upper middle income area within the highly desirable West Seattle neighborhood. It can be assumed with almost 100% certainty that the predominant use will remain single family for the foreseeable future.

## 1.3 Requests for Departure and Committee Formation

The City initiated the Development Standard Departure Process, pursuant to SMC 23.44.17 and 23.79. The code requires that the Department of Neighborhoods convene an Advisory Committee (Development Standard Advisory Committee) when the School District proposes a departure from the development standards identified under the code. These standards are popularly referred to as the “zoning code”.

The purposes of the Development Standard Departure Advisory Committee are: 1) to gather public comment and evaluate the proposed departures for consistency with the objectives and intent of the City’s land use policies to ensure that the proposed facility is compatible with the character and use of its surroundings; and 2) to develop a report and recommendation to the City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development from the Department of Neighborhoods.

Following completion of the Committee Report and its transmittal to the City Department of Planning and Development, that department will produce a formal report and determination. The Director of the Department of Planning and Development will determine the amount of departure from established development standards which may be allowed, as well as identify all mitigating measures which may be required. This decision is appealable.

In September 2013, the Department of Neighborhoods sent notices to residents within 600 feet of the proposed new school and to a list of individuals and organizations that had shown interest in other community issues in the vicinity of Genesee Hill Elementary School requesting self-nominations for membership on the Development Standard Departure Advisory Committee, and the Committee was formed. The Committee is composed of eight voting members with a City non-voting Chair.

After receiving nominations, the Committee was appointed as follows:

Jeffery McCracken	Person residing and/or owning property within 600’ of Genesee Hill Elementary School
Hannah Nerbog	Person residing and/or owning property within 600’ of Genesee Hill Elementary School
Sidney L. Porter	Representative of the General Neighborhood(also residing or owning property within 600’ of Genesee Hill Elementary School)

Melissa Pemberton	Representative of the General Neighborhood (also residing or owning property within 600' of Genesee Hill Elementary School)
Kathleen P Allen	Representative at large to represent city-wide education issues
Shane Doig	PTSA Representative
Ellen McHugh	PTSA Representative
Eric Becker	Seattle School District
Steve Sheppard	City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (Non-voting Chairperson)

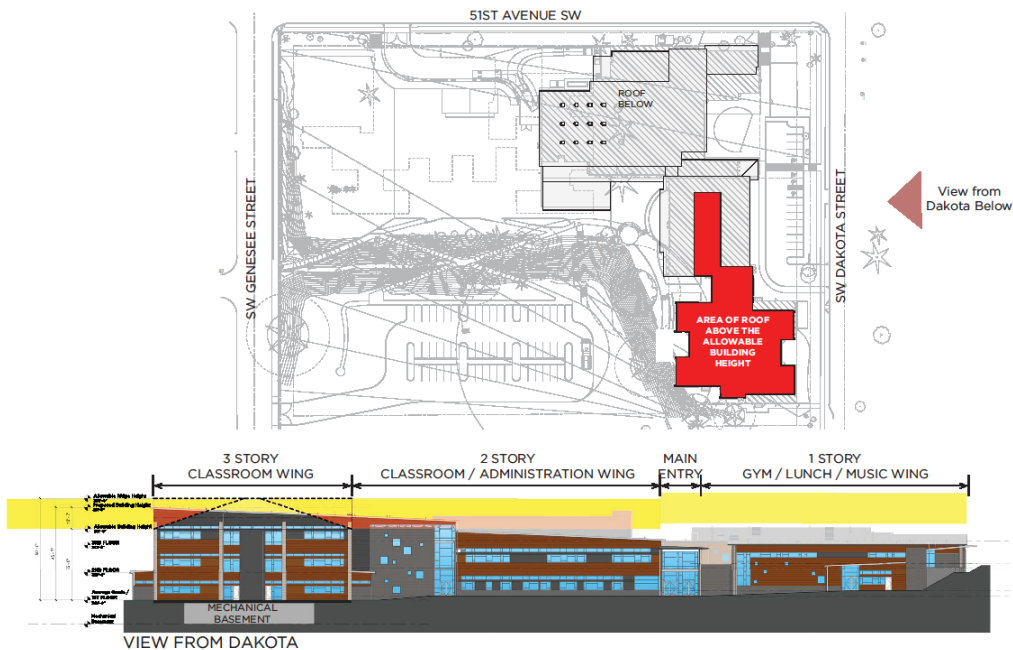
## Section 2. Departures

### 2.1 Specific District Request

Genesee Hill Elementary School sits on land zoned Single Family 5000. Allowable height within this zone is governed by Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 25.51B.002D1c - Public Schools in residential zones which states:

For new public school construction on existing public school sites, the maximum permitted height is 35 feet plus 15 feet for a pitched roof. All parts of the roof above the height limit must be pitched at a rate of not less than 4:12. No portion of a shed roof is permitted to extend beyond the 35 foot height limit under this provision.

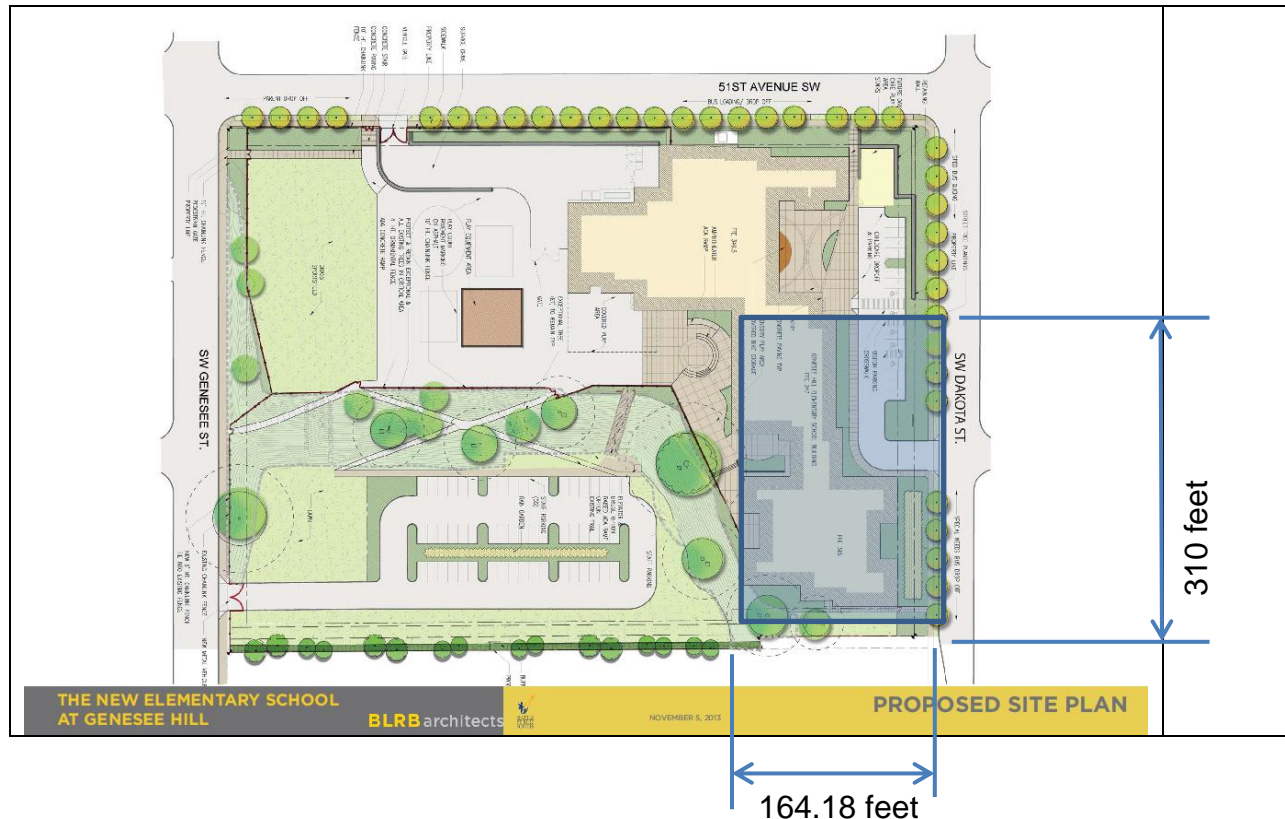
The District Has designed a school on the site that contains portions that are up to 3 stories in Height.



## Illustration 2 Area of Proposed Building Exceeding Allowable Height Under Current Zoning.

The total Site is only slightly irregular with dimensions of approximately 445 feet by 611 feet - 271,879 square feet (6.24 Acres). The school building itself is “L” shaped with the longest facade fronting SW Dakota Street, running the entire length of that street. The Eastern portion of the proposed school along SW Dakota Street would exceed the allowable height by approximately 12 ½ feet to a maximum height of about 47 ½ feet. This would include a story of classrooms.

In order to accommodate the height of the three story portion of the building, the District requested a departure from the conditions in 25.51B.002D1c to allow a maximum height of 50 feet for that portion of the building site lying east of the center line of the right-of Way for the alley lying between 50<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Avenues SW and North of the of a line extending east from the south lot line of Lot 27, Block 1 of O. B. Williams Addition to the City of Seattle (or sufficient to cover the area shown as exceeding the allowable height on illustration 2 above).



**Illustration 3  
Area for Height Increase to 50 feet**

## 2.2 Committee Review and Recommendations

### **2.3.1 Determination that Resolution of the Issue Required only a Single Meeting**

The Committee was convened in a public meeting held November 5, 2012 at the Schmitz Park Elementary School Library. After a full review of the departure request and consideration of all public testimony and correspondence received, the Committee voted unanimously that the issue was not overly complex, no additional technical information was needed, and that additional public testimony would simply re-enforce already known positions. Therefore, the Committee concluded that only one meeting was necessary and determined their recommendation at that meeting.

### **2.3.2 Review of Departure Request in Relationship to Approval Criteria**

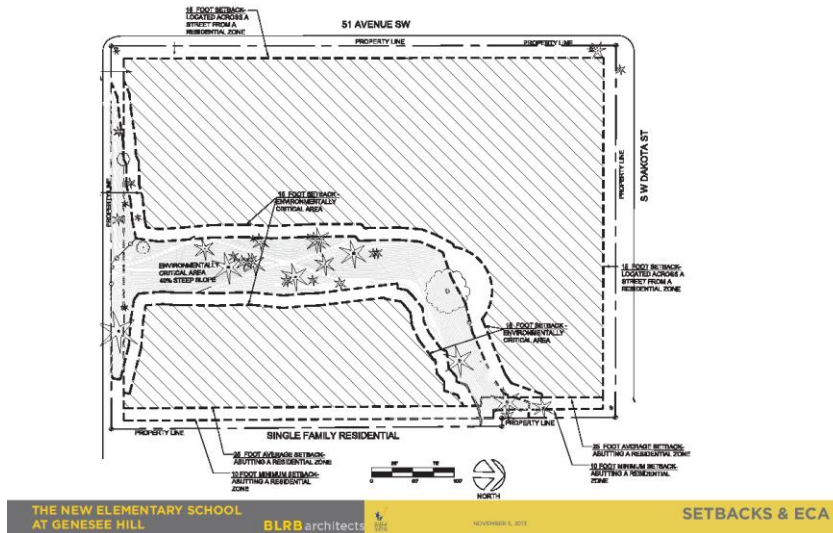
The Seattle Municipal Code directs the Advisory Committee to evaluate the requested departures for consistency with the general objectives and intent of the City's Land Use Code, and balance the interrelationships among the following factors:

- a. Relationship to Surrounding Areas.
  - (1) Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area
  - (2) Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale.
  - (3) Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk;
  - (4) Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation and parking in the area; and
  - (5) Impacts on housing and open space.
- b. Need for Departure

The following is the Committee's Evaluation of these factors.

- a. Relationship to Surrounding Areas. The advisory committee shall evaluate the acceptable or necessary level of departure according to:
  - (1) Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area  
As noted earlier, surrounding development is consistently single family with residents displaying obvious high pride of ownership and is both a stable and improving area. As is the case for almost all schools, the proposed new Genesee Elementary School would be much larger and of a different character than the surrounding single family development. However, the Committee concluded that locating an Elementary School within the neighborhood it serves, even if that neighborhood is lower density, does not constitute so great a conflict that flexibility in modifying development standards intended to apply to small scale single family residential development should be denied.
  - (2) Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale.

The site slopes down from 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue Southwest towards the rear lot lines of those single family homes fronting the west side of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southwest. The site is



### Illustration 4

#### Upper and Lower Plateau and Environmentally Sensitive Area

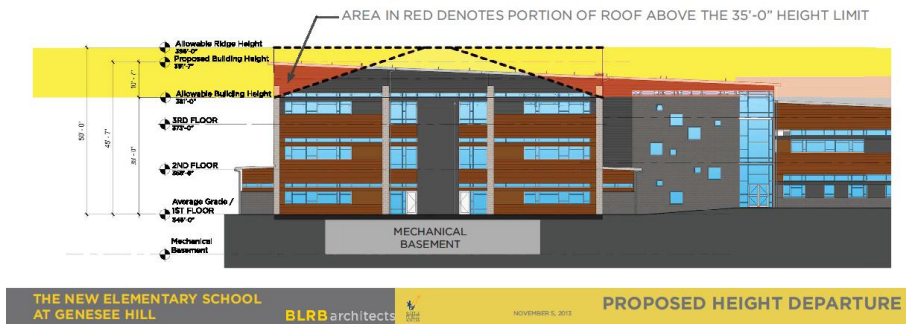
essentially split into two plateaus: 1) an upper portion fronting SW Dakota Street and 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue SW and a lower Plateau backing to those homes on the west side of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. These two areas are separated by a sensitive steep slope area. The upper plateau generally separated from adjoining single-family development by the widths of 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue SW and SW Dakota Street

The school building occupies the upper plateau and thus primarily fronts 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue SW and SW Dakota Street. This provides separation from adjacent development. The width of the lower plateau and the intervening steep slope landscaped areas similarly provides separation for most of the homes backing to the site on 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW.

There are, however, and exceptions to the above, specifically those homes on the east side of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW from 4117 north to S.W. Dakota Street. In this area the school structure back to the rear yards of those homes. The District has included an expanded 25 foot setback, rather than the required 10 foot setback, along this east property line. This somewhat mitigates the impacts of the homes noted above. However, the Committee discussed the above and concluded that some special attention to landscaping within the expanded setback to further mitigate the impact of height bulk and scale on those properties was warranted.

- (3) Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk





From information presented to the Committee, the District appears to have gone to some length to reduce the appearance of height and bulk, especially for the tree story portion of the new building. Under the Land Use Code, the District could utilize sloped roof provisions to exceed the 35 foot limit without the need for a departure. By utilizing a flat roof system, the District not only achieves more easily utilized spaces but is able to reduce overall height of that portion of the building by almost five feet. In addition, the district has placed its mechanical functions (normally enclosed in rooftop mechanical penthouses) in a basement mechanical Room, thus further reducing height and bulk.

(4) Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation and parking in the area. - N/A

(5) Impacts on housing and open space.

The site presently included hard and soft surface open space as well as a steep slope environmentally sensitive zone. The environmentally sensitive zone is moderately treed. The proposed plan shifts the location of the open space from along Dakota to generally along 51<sup>st</sup> Street, but retains a similar amount. The plan similarly retains the environmentally sensitive area, while providing better pedestrian access across that area between the upper and lower plateaus. The committee had no major concerns with the location or amount of open space.

b. Need for Departure.

The Seattle School District identifies the need to replace the aging Genessee Hill Elementary School with a new and slightly larger building. The Committee considered this District determination valid and operated on the assumption that a new school was both needed and a general benefit to the neighborhood.

### 2.3.3 Committee Recommendations and Conclusions

Given the analyses above, a majority of the Genessee Hill Elementary School Design Departure Committee concluded that the overriding need for the School, and other

factors, justified granting the departure request. However the Committee also concluded that that granting the District's request should be conditioned. The Committee voted unanimously to make the following recommendation:

**That a departure from the conditions in SMC 25.51B.002D1c to allow a maximum height of 50 feet for that portion of the Genesee Elementary School site lying east of the center line of the right-of Way for the alley lying between 50<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Avenues SW and North of the of a line extending east from the south lot line of Lot 27, Block 1 of O. B. Williams Addition to the City of Seattle as shown on illustration 3, page 5 of this report, or sufficient to cover the area shown as exceeding the allowable height on illustration 2 page 4 of this report, be granted in order to accommodate the construction of the three story portion of the proposed new Genesee Hill Elementary School Subject to the following condition:**

- (1) That significant landscaping be located in the 25 foot setback along the boundary of the Seattle School District property and the rear lot lines of those properties lying on the east side of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue S.W. intended to soften views of the proposed three story portion of the new school from those properties.**



Steve Sheppard  
Non-Voting Chair