

**PUBLIC SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT  
STANDARD ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE<sup>1</sup>**

**RAINIER BEACH HIGH SCHOOL  
DESIGN DEPARTURE  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Project #3037700-SD**

**March 28, 2022**

This report is produced pursuant to the City of Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 23.44.006 F and 23.79) (the “Code”). The intent and purpose of this report is to document public comment and make recommendations to the City for modifications to development standards to facilitate construction of the new Rainier Beach High School located at 8815 Seward Park Avenue S, Seattle, WA 98118.



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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Ordinance 126188, which will remain in effect for the duration of the COVID-19 civil emergency declared by Mayor Durkan in March 2020, the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods is authorized to submit this recommendation report to the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections in lieu of an advisory committee process.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Project Description




On July 2, 2021, Seattle Public Schools (SPS) submitted a request for departures from four (4) Code Development Standards to demolish the existing Rainier Beach High School and construct a new high school at 8815 Seward Park Avenue S, Seattle, WA 98118.

The new high school would encompass 291,000 square feet and provide capacity for 1,600 students.

## 1.2 Building History

SPS purchased the school site from the City of Seattle in 1958. In the fall of 1960, Southeast Seattle Junior/Senior High School opened doors to grades 7-12. By 1967, the school was overcrowded and staffed urged for the separation of junior and senior high school students. In 1970, junior high school students were moved into portables on site and later received their own permanent building off site know as South Shore. The school changed its name to Rainier Beach High School in 1972. Many innovative and experimental programs started and grew from Rainier Beach High School.

the Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board reviewed SPS' current development proposal and determined NOT to designate the school as a historic landmark on September 16, 2020.

-  Proposed Building  
Size: 291,000 SQ. FT.  
Student Population: 1600
-  Existing Building to be Demolished  
Size: 102,424 SQ. FT.  
Student Population: 1200
-  Existing Building to Remain

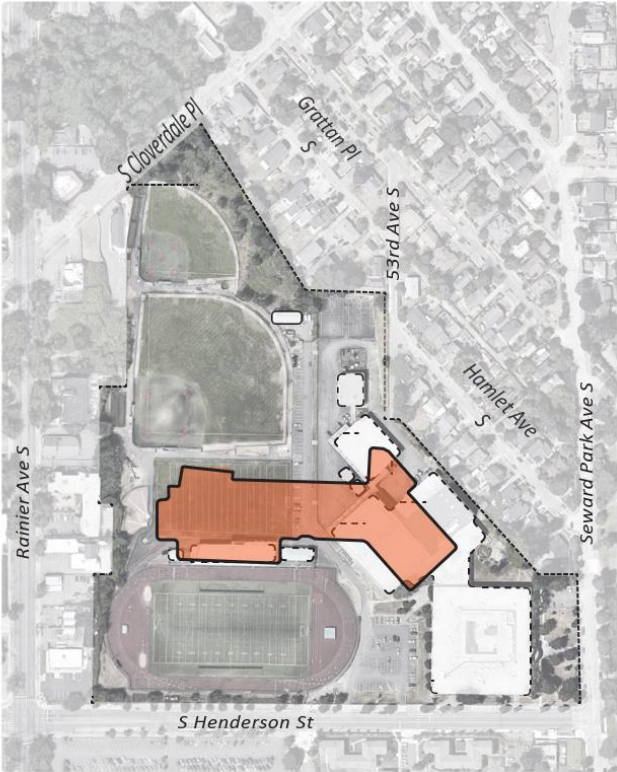


Exhibit 1 Proposed Site Plan

### 1.3 Neighborhood Characteristics

The proposed project is located at 8815 Seward Park Avenue S, Seattle, WA 98118. The site is in the Rainier Valley, southeast of downtown Seattle and is in a low-rise zone. The nearby neighborhood amenities include Beer Sheva Park, the Atlantic City Boat Ramp accessing Lake Washington, and the Rainier Beach Urban Farm, all of which are just east of the site across Seward Park Avenue S.

The Rainier Beach Community Center, South Shore K-8, South Lake High School, and the Rainier Beach Playfield share the block just west of Rainier Avenue S. between S. Henderson and S. Cloverdale Streets. Dunlap Elementary is also directly adjacent to that shared block.



### 1.4 Requests for Departures and Process

The City initiated the Development Standard Departure Process, pursuant to SMC 23.44.006F and 23.79. The Code requires that the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) convene a Development Standard Advisory Committee (hereinafter as the Committee) when SPS proposes a departure from the development standards identified under the Code. These standards are popularly referred to as the “zoning code.”

The purpose of the Committee is 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 Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) from DON. (SMC 23.79.008)

Due to public health mandates on social distancing and limited public gatherings related to COVID-19, the Seattle City Council approved, and Mayor Durkan signed, Ordinance 126188 in

October 2020. The ordinance allows certain City land use processes to be handled administratively for the duration of the COVID-19 civil emergency declared for the City of Seattle in March 2020. Thus, the DON Director is temporarily authorized to submit this recommendation report to SDCI in lieu of a public advisory committee process. The content of the report is informed by public comments solicited and reviewed by DON staff.

Following completion of DON’s recommendation report and its transmittal to SDCI, the Director of SDCI will issue a formal report and decision. The SDCI Director will consider the report’s recommendations and determine the extent of departure from established development standards that may be allowed. identify all mitigating measures which may be required. The SDCI Director’s decision is appealable.

## 2. Departures

### 2.1 Specific District Requests

To accommodate the educational program for this project, SPS requested the following departures from the development standards found in SMC 23.51B.002.

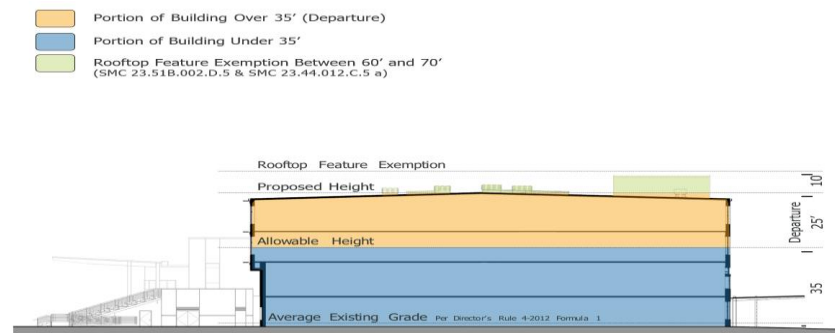
#### Departure #1 – Greater than Allowed Building Height

Existing Standard: SMC 23.51B.002.D.1.b

Allowed Building Height: 35 feet (23.51B.002.D1b)

Proposed Building Height: 60 feet (maximum departure allowed per SMC 23.51.B.002.D3)

A 35’ building height would only allow a two-story building; effectively doubling the amount of required space on site. This would necessitate the removal of play fields and/or parking. This would be detrimental to both the functioning of the school and the play fields as a public amenity.



**Exhibit 2 Proposed Height**

**Proposed Departure Requested:** 25 feet to allow a 4-story building.

## Departure #2 – Bus loading/unloading

Existing Standard: SMC 23.54.015 (Table C – Row N)

Allowed: (SMC 23.51B.002 I) Bus and truck loading and unloading.

4. When a public school is remodeled or rebuilt at the same site, an existing on-street bus loading area is allowed if the following conditions are met:

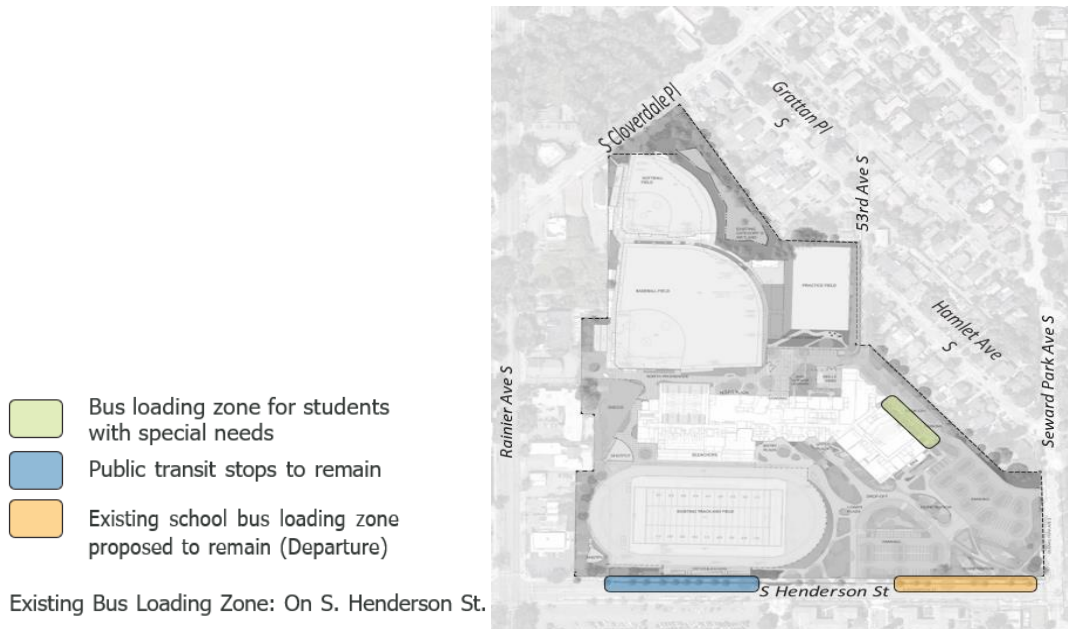
- a. The school site is not proposed to be expanded;
- b. The student capacity of the school is not being expanded by more than 25 percent; and
- c. The location of the current on-street bus loading remains the same.

Existing student capacity: 1,200

Proposed student capacity – 1,600 (33% increase)

Much of the student population uses public transit as their primary transportation to school. Public bus stops along S. Henderson Street are available for student use and public bus service to the area is not expected to increase due to the student population increase. Transportation for students with special needs to be on site.

The proposed bus lane is 500+ feet in length, allowing up to five buses to use the loading zone. The lane also acts as additional parking for after hour events.



### Exhibit 3 Proposed Bus loading/unloading

**Proposed Departure Requested:** Maintain existing on-street bus loading on S. Henderson Street.

### Departure #3 – Message Board Sign

Allowed: One electric, double-faced sign.

Existing: One pole mounted, double-sided, electric changing image message board sign on S. Henderson Street.

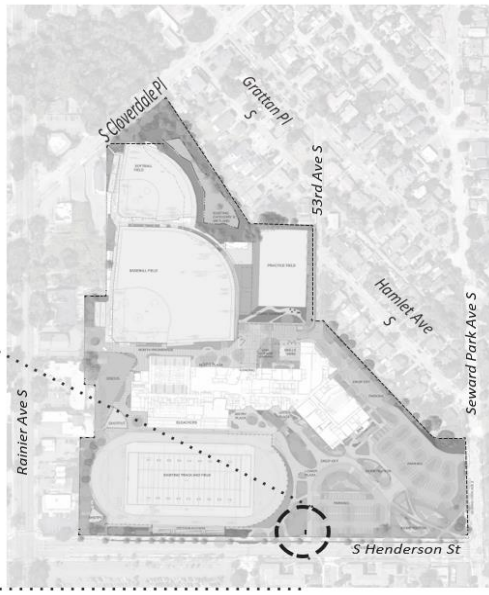
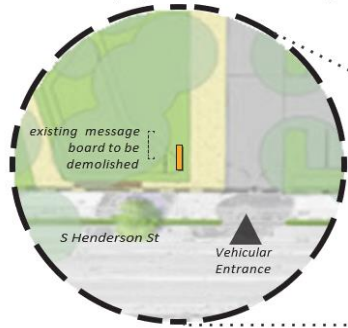
 Electronic Message Board

Allowed: One electric, double-faced sign.  
Message board signs not allowed.

Existing: One pole mounted double-sided,  
electric changing sign on S. Henderson St.

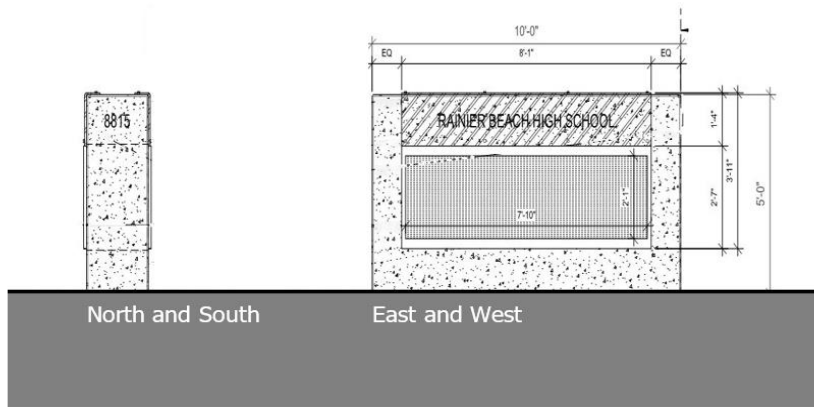
Proposed: One double-sided, electric changing  
image message board sign on S. Henderson St.

**Departure Request: To replace existing sign  
and allow changing image electronic sign**



Proposed Sign:

- Single Color Letters
- No Tumbling Images
- No Flashing
- No Scrolling
- No Video Display



**Exhibit 4 Proposed Message Board Sign**

**Proposed Departure Requested:** One double-sided, electric changing image message board sign on S. Henderson St.

**Departure #4 – Structures (Fences) in Setbacks**


Existing Standard: SMC 23.45.518 I 7.

Allowed: Fences up to 6 feet in height in a required setback.

Existing Fence: Various height fences along perimeter.

Proposed Fence: Replace the existing fence with a new 8 foot fence along S. Cloverdale Pl.

SPS has requested an 8 foot fence along S. Cloverdale Pl. for security and safety concerns.

 Proposed 8' Fence in Setback



**Exhibit 5 Proposed Structures (Fences) in Setbacks**

**Proposed Departure Requested:** 2 ft. over the 6 ft. maximum height for fences.






## Departure #5 – Structures (Retaining Wall) in Setbacks

Existing Standard: SMC 23.45.518 I 8

Allowed: Retaining walls up to 6 feet in height in a required setback.

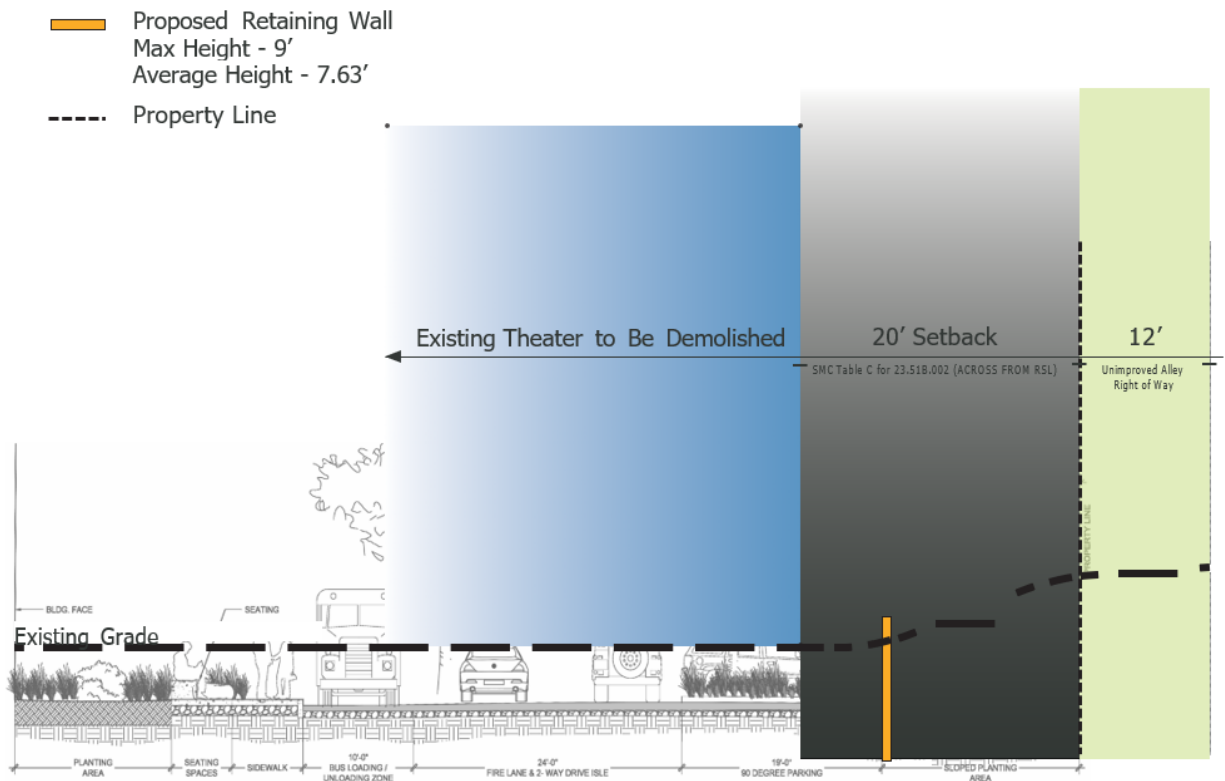
Existing: School Theater within setback

Proposed: New retaining wall up to 9 feet

-  Retaining Wall over 6' in Height
-  Property Line
-  20' Setback
-  12' Unimproved Alley Right of Way
-  Existing Buildings to be Demolished







**Exhibit 6 Proposed Structures (Retaining Wall in Setbacks)**

**Proposed Departure Requested:** 3 feet over the allowable 6 feet height maximum for retaining walls.

## 2.2 DON Review and Recommendations

### 2.2.1 Public Comment

The public comment period extended from September 28 through November 5, 2021. DON also sent a press release directly to media outlets. On October 27, 2021, DON sent out another press release in Spanish and Vietnamese translation and extended the public comment period through November 19 to better accommodate community members for whom English is not their primary spoken language. DON also sent postcards about the public comment period to addresses within approximately 600 feet of the school and created a webpage where the public could submit their comments. In addition, DON had signs posted at the perimeter of the school and published a notice of public comment opportunity in the City's Land Use Information Bulletin (LUIB).

A total of one public comment was received via email submission.

### 2.2.2 Review Criteria

In lieu of an Advisory Committee process, Section 23.79 of the Code currently allows the DON Director to evaluate requested school departures for consistency with the general objectives and intent of the Code, and to 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 physical requirements of the specific proposal and the project's relationship to educational needs shall be balanced with the level of impacts on the surrounding area. Greater departure may be allowed for special facilities, such as a gymnasium, which are unique and/or an integral and necessary part of the educational process; whereas a lesser or no departure may be granted for a facility which can be accommodated within the established development standards.

### 2.2.3 Application of Review Criteria to Requested Departures and Recommendations

Code departures may be granted to accommodate the educational needs of public school programs located in single family zoned neighborhoods. For Rainier Beach High School, SPS has demonstrated it cannot accommodate the necessary educational programs without development departures for: 1) height, 2) bus loading and unloading, and 3) an electronic message board, 4) setbacks for fencing, and 5) setbacks for retaining walls.

#### Need for Departures

DON received one public comment via email. The comment expressed the following: 1) the proposed height increase should be denied because it is out of proportion to the surrounding neighborhood; and 2) the proposed message board should be denied because it presents visual distractions for pedestrians and drivers. The comment also suggested that the new building needs to conform to its surroundings, i.e., across the street from a park and lakeshore, with single family homes along Seward Park Ave.

DON recommends the following conditions to help mitigate impacts on the surrounding neighborhood.

#### DEPARTURE #1 – GREATER THAN ALLOWED BUILDING HEIGHT

- 1) **Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON had concerns about the school's increased height having an impact on its relationship to the surrounding neighborhood.
- 2) **Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the school's increased height having an impact on the transition in scale.

- 3) **Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the school's increased height having an impact on the appearance of bulk.
- 4) **Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered, and DON did not have concerns about the school's increased height having an impact on traffic, circulation, and parking in the neighborhood.
- 5) **Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON had concerns about the school's increased height having an impact on housing and open space, including single family homes along Seward Park Avenue.

DON received one comment on this departure. The comment was critical of the increased height and contended it would be out of proportion to the surrounding neighborhood.

Altering the color scheme of the façade would help the building blend into the landscaping and surrounding neighborhood and visually reduce the bulk and scale of school's appearance.

After consideration of the above, DON recommends:

**Recommendation 1 – That the departure to allow greater than allowed building height be GRANTED as requested by SPS with the following conditions:**

- 1) **SPS reconsider the façade to include warmer tones that blend into the landscaping and surrounding neighborhood to create an appearance of camouflaging the building.**

#### **DEPARTURE #2 – BUS LOADING AND UNLOADING**

- 1) **Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about bus loading and unloading having an impact on its relationship to the surrounding area.
- 2) **Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale** was considered and DON did not have concerns about bus loading and unloading having an impact on edges.
- 3) **Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about bus loading and unloading having an impact on the appearance of bulk.
- 4) **Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered and DON did have concerns about bus loading and unloading having an impact on traffic, circulation and parking the neighborhood.
- 5) **Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON did not have concerns about bus loading and unloading impact on housing and open space.

DON received no comments regarding the bus loading and unloading departure request. SPS' request is to maintain the existing on-street bus loading area on S. Henderson Street.

After consideration of the above, DON recommends:

**Recommendation 2 – That the departure to allow existing on-street bus loading on S. Henderson Street be GRANTED as requested by SPS with the following conditions:**

- 1) A robust School Transportation Plan (STP):** Prior to the school opening, SPS and the school principal should establish a STP to educate parents and students about the preferred access and circulation model. The STP should encourage supervised walking (such as walking school buses), carpooling, and school bus ridership for those eligible. The plan should define clear procedures and travel routes and preferred load/unload locations.
- 2) Engage Seattle School Safety Committee:** SPS should engage with the Seattle School Safety Committee (led by SDOT) to review walk routes and determine if any changes should be made to crosswalk locations, signage, pavement markings, school zone speed limits or crossing guard locations.
- 3) Develop a Neighborhood Communication Plan for School Events:** SPS and school administration should develop a neighborhood communication plan to inform nearby neighbors of events each year. The plan should be updated annually (or as events are scheduled) and should provide information about the dates, times, and rough magnitude of attendance to be posted at the school website. The communication would be intended to allow neighbors to plan for the occasional increase in on-street parking demand that would occur with large events.

#### **DEPARTURE #3 – MESSAGE BOARD SIGN**

- 1) Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board sign having an impact on 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** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on the presence of edges.
- 3) Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on the location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk.
- 4) Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area.
- 5) Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on housing and open space.

DON received one comment that was critical of this departure due to the flashing sign message sign that could present a visual distraction to pedestrians and drivers.

DON recommends:

**Recommendation 3 – That the departure to replace the existing sign and allow a changing image electronic sign be GRANTED as requested by SPS with the following conditions:**

- 1) **The sign should be lit only when school is in session, and not used on the weekends.**
- 2) **to the sign should turn on no earlier than 7 a.m., and turn off no later than 7 p.m., except for special school events such as family nights and school programs, during which it can stay operational until 9 p.m.**
- 3) **Sign illumination should be limited to one color with a dark background.**
- 4) **No flashing, scrolling, or moving images.**

#### **DEPARTURE #4 – STRUCTURES (FENCES) IN SETBACKS**

- 1) **Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (fences) in setbacks having an impact on 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** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (fences) in setbacks having an impact on the presence of edges.
- 3) **Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (fences) in setbacks having an impact on the appearance of bulk.
- 4) **Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (fences) in setbacks having an impact on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area.
- 5) **Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (fences) in setbacks having an impact on housing and open space.

DON did not receive any comments regarding this requested departure.

DON recommends:

**Recommendation 4 – That the departure to allow fences to extend 2 feet above the 6-foot height maximum be GRANTED as requested SPS.**

#### **DEPARTURE #5 – STRUCTURES (RETAINING WALL) IN SETBACKS**

- 1) **Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (retaining wall) having an impact on the site's relationship to the surrounding area.
- 2) **Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (retaining wall) in setbacks having an impact on the transition in scale.

- 3) **Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (retaining wall) in setbacks having an impact on the appearance of bulk.
- 4) **Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (retaining wall) having an impact on traffic, circulation and parking the neighborhood.
- 5) **Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON did not have concerns about structures (retaining wall) in setbacks having an impact on housing and open space.

DON did not receive any comments regarding this requested departure.

DON recommends:

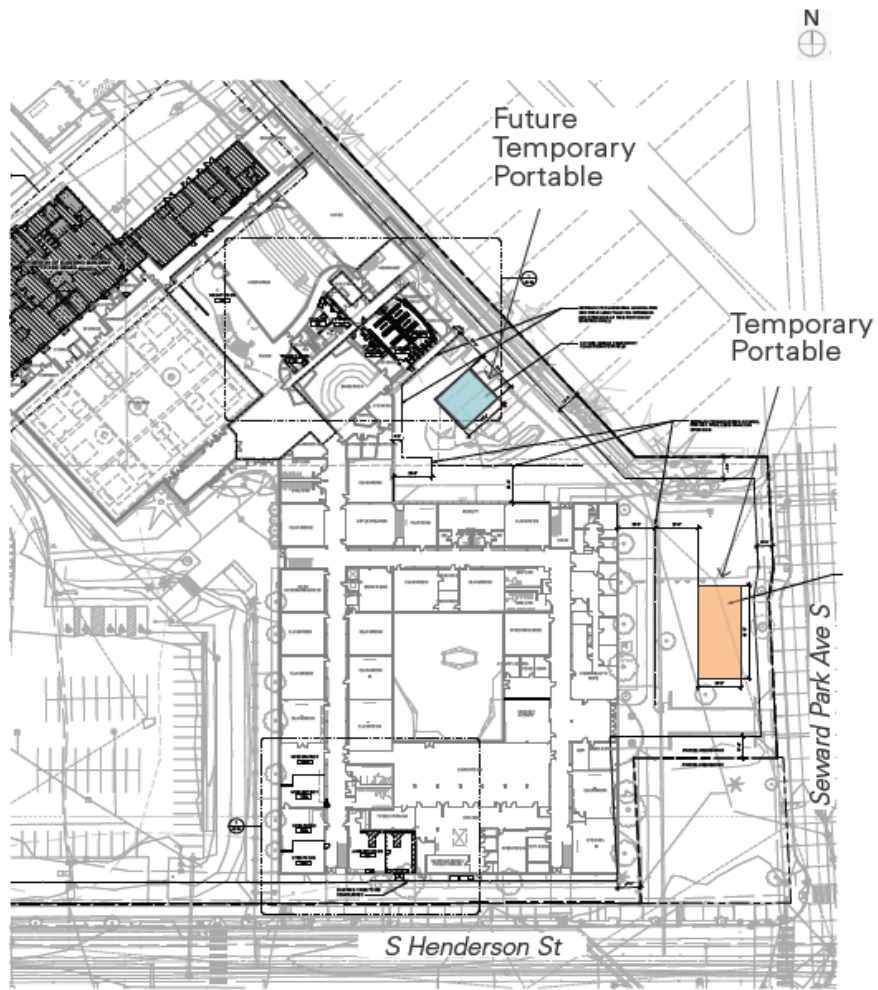
**Recommendation 5 – That the departure to allow retaining walls to extend 3 feet above the 6-foot height maximum be GRANTED as requested by SPS.**

### **3. Site Plan Revision**

#### **3.1 Specific District Requests**

SPS submitted the following site plan revisions requests to SDCI after the conclusion of the departure review process for Rainier Beach High School. Per SDCI, no further departures from zoning code are required to approve these new proposals.

- 1) To accommodate and provide additional classroom space during the construction of the new building, SPS requested one temporary double classroom portable be placed at the front of the school, on Seward Park Avenue S (see Exhibit 7). Installation of the portable is proposed for summer 2022 and removal in late 2024. A temporary single classroom portable, was also proposed for installation in summer 2023 and removal in late 2024;however, it may not be needed.
- 2) A Visitor Ticketing, Concessions & Restroom building is proposed for an area near the proposed visitor bleachers (see Exhibit 8). The structure is requested to provide visitor amenities and help with crowd control during school events.



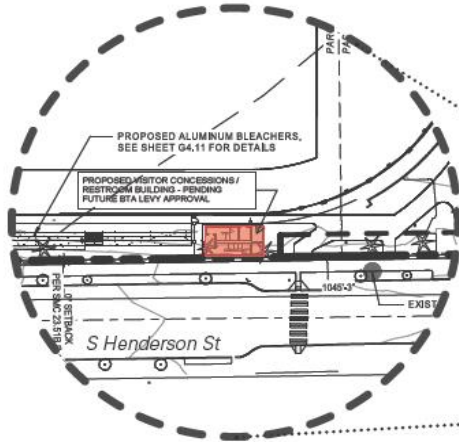
**Exhibit 7 Proposed Future and Temporary Portable Sites.**

One proposed Visitor Ticketing, Concessions & Restroom building to be located near the proposed visitor bleachers.

Building to be one-story in height.

This building was requested by Rainier Beach High School after the Departure presentation was completed.

No Departure from zoning code required.



**Exhibit 8 Proposed Visitor Ticketing, Concessions & Restroom Building**

## 3.2 DON Review and Recommendations

### 3.2.1 Public Comment

On January 25, 2022, SDCI informed DON that SPS had amended its proposed site plan for the Rainier Beach High School site. Although approval of the proposed amendments would not require a departure process, SDCI and DON determined an additional public comment period would be an appropriate way to inform the public about the site plan additions.

On February 9, 2022, DON initiated a public comment period that extended through February 25, 2022. To increase awareness of the public comment opportunity, DON sent a related press release directly to media outlets, produced translated outreach materials in Spanish and Vietnamese, sent postcards to addresses within approximately 600 feet of the school, and established a location on DON's website where the public could submit their comments.

DON did not receive any comments from the public regarding the proposed site plan revisions.



### **3.2.2 Review Criteria**

As proposed in the plans provided by SPS, the two portables and Visitor Ticketing, Concessions & Restroom building do not require zoning code departures.

DON did not initiate the recommended review criteria for the proposed two portables and the Visiting, Concession & Restroom building.

### **3.2.3 Recommendations**

DON recommends allowing the proposed temporary portables for the existing school to help address anticipated space needs during construction with the following conditions:

- a. Informing the neighborhood about the installation and removal of the portables.

DON recommends allowing the proposed Visitor Ticketing, Concessions & Restroom building be located near the proposed visitor bleachers to provide a separate visitor amenity to help with crowd control during school events.

Nelson Pesigan,  
Department of Neighborhoods