



City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

Kathy Nyland, Director



Green Dot Public School Seattle Middle School Development Standards Design Departure Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Meeting #1

April 13, 2017

Hillman City Collaboratory
5623 Rainier Ave S.
Seattle, WA 98118

Green Dot Middle School Design Departure Advisory Committee

Members

Blake Herrera

Benjamin Loeffler

Thomas Parker

Lindsey Werkhoven

Ex-Officio Members

Maureen Sheehan,

Department of Neighborhoods

Holly Godard,

Seattle Department of Construction &
Inspections

Members Present

Blake Herrera

Thomas Parker

Lindsey Werkhoven

Benjamin Loeffler

Staff and Others Present

Emily Ehlers

SDOT

Maureen Sheehan

DON

Holly Godard

SDCI

I. Opening and Introductions

The meeting was opened by Ms. Maureen Sheehan from the City of Seattle, Major Institutions and Schools Program. Ms. Sheehan welcomed all in attendance and briefly summarized the agenda. Brief introductions and an overview were followed.

II. Overview of the Process (00:1:26)

Ms. Sheehan stated that this process is governed by the Land Use Code Sections of the Seattle Municipal Code for Public School departures (SMC Title Ch. 23.79), which specifies how the meeting is run. She noted that the City of Seattle does not have a school zone; instead, the City allows schools in all zones, subject to the development standards of the underlying zone. As schools are not single family homes but are often located in single family or multifamily residential zones, they normally do not meet the underlying zoning requirements. Thus, the Land Use Code contains provisions that allow public schools to request exemptions from various development standards or "departures" from provision of the Code.

The Committee is meeting tonight to learn more about the requested departure, listen to public comment, and develop recommendations concerning the WCSDs requested departures from several provisions of the Seattle Municipal Code related to land use.

The Committee receives information on the departures being requested public testimony is taken; and then the Committee discusses the requested departures. The Committee may do one of the following:

- 1) Recommend granting the departures as requested;

- 2) Recommend granting the departures with modifications or specific conditions, or
- 3) Recommend denial of the departures.

She mentioned that assuming the Committee's deliberation can be accomplished at tonight's meeting, the recommendations are due to Seattle Department of Construction & Inspection (SDCI) by May 13th. If the Committee decides to hold additional meetings, the recommendations are due to SDCI by July 12th.

She noted that any conditions or modifications identified must be clearly related to the requested departure and enforceable on WCSD. The evaluation criteria that will be used are set out in the Code and include consistency with the Land Use code and relationship to the surrounding areas including the character and scale of the neighborhood, impacts on traffic noise and circulation, packing, etc.

She noted that the departure WCSD is requesting is for additional building height.

She explained that the Committee may develop recommendations at this meeting. If the Committee concludes they have enough information from the WCSD and there is no further benefit from having additional public testimony, the Committee can determine to move forward at the end of this meeting in establishing their general recommendations; in that case, this would be the only public meeting.

She also emphasized that the Committee's decisions are recommendations. Their recommendations will be put into a report that will be reviewed by the Committee and forwarded to SDCI who will take them into account when issuing a final decision.

III. Presentation (00:06:25)

Mr. Eric Salisbury of Miller Hayashi Architects has been working with Washington Green Dot in developing this project for the past year and a half.

Mr. James Heugas is the project Director of Pacific Charter School Development for Washington and the Bay Area, a nonprofit charter school developer. In Washington, the organization is named Washington Charter School Development ("WCSD"). This will be WCSD's first school in Seattle, and have delivered a school in the Tacoma area. He added that he is excited to partner with Green Dot and for this community to bring an alternative public education program.

Mr. Walter Chen is the principal of Green Dot Middle School. He added that this is a great opportunity to bring this school to south Seattle. He has been in public education for 14 years, and he believes that Green Dot has the potential to bring a high quality school and education for every child, regardless of income, race or zip code, that would prepare them for college and life. He encourages the Committee and the public to hear the design team and their reasons and rationale to have a three-story building over a two-story.

The Project:

Mr. Salisbury began his presentation of the project located at 6020 Rainier Ave. S and summarized the strategies they used to evaluate the need for the departure.

The existing parcel is composed of a church building and office as well as two single-family residence. The surrounding area includes a Fire Station, a 3 story multi-family residence as well as townhouses.

The site is split-zoned (LR3 and SF 5000). The two zones determine the development standards and requirements for the height and lot coverages of the two zone. The setback for the LR3 zone is 15 feet. The setback for the SF 5000 zone is 25 feet.

The design team analyzed how to fit the school's program and meet the development standards. The school has 28 general classrooms, 3 STEM and 2 Special Education classrooms. The total program requires 45,000 sq. ft. of space. The primary driver for the site development is looking at how vehicle circulation would work on the site, getting the kids to school safely, bus loading and unloading, safe parent drop-off and pick-up, and general parking requirements. The team worked with Heffron Transportation to identify circulation access to and from Rainier Ave S. The team determined that a two-story scheme will not work and would have a minimal outdoor play area as well as a congested bus and parent traffic.

A three-story scheme with a condensed footprint can accommodate the full building, minimize bus traffic, outdoor play space, and a safe pickup/drop off area.

Mr. Salisbury presented a diagram that shows the traffic flow and keeping the parent traffic on the site. He also showed how the will accommodate three full size buses entering and exiting the site.

He showed a diagram of the landscape plan around the perimeter of the school that expands the open space and mitigate the building height and a diagram that showed lighting around the area during night time making sure to keep the edges dark so the lighting does not spill along the adjacent residential properties.

He summarized the floor plans of the school that showed school entrance, dining room area and the outdoor recreation play areas.

He summarized the development standards and showed how the project met all the requirements except for building height. The maximum building height allowed is 30 ft., the maximum height allowed for the departure is 60 ft. and the proposed building height is 49 ft. with the departure including mechanical equipment.

He showed a diagram of different views of the site as well as the elevation, and proposed building massing compared to the surrounding buildings. He stated that they believe the building to be appropriate for scale of the surrounding buildings.

He summarized the list of evaluation criteria they used to determine and identify the departure request including the appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding areas, presence of edges, location and design of structures, impacts on traffic and on housing and open space.

Departure Requests

Mr. Salisbury summarized the following departure request:

1. Greater than allowed building height

The maximum height allowed as a departure is 60 ft. The proposed building height is 30 ft. WCSD is requesting a departure of 19 ft. of additional height for a total building height of 49 ft. including mechanical equipment.

IV. Committee Clarifying Questions (00:27:52)

Ms. Sheehan opened the floor for Committee questions.

Ms. Werkhoven asked if there are plans to buy additional parcels. Mr. Salisbury responded that there are no plans to purchase additional parcels. They have approached other property owners, but they were constricted by ownership conditions. Mr. Patrick Ontiveros, a WCSD representative, added that they looked at surrounding parcels, but decided that this is the best balance that would minimize demolishing other single family residences and it fits the programmatic requirements of the school.

Mr. Parker asked if the façade design is definitive. Mr. Salisbury responded that it is a wider format panel that is 9 in. in the center and 8 in. wide module. It is a lighter color that shifts and pulls the bands to reduce the scale. The base is made of concrete, and the white façade is made of metal.

Mr. Loeffler asked about the townhouses across Rainier Ave. S to the west and how they compare to the height of the school. Mr. Salisbury responded that the townhouses are a maximum of 35 ft., and raised up to 5 ft.

Mr. Parker asked if the elevation of the school's roof is equal to the townhouses, and Mr. Salisbury confirmed that the peak will be an equal height due to changes in topography. Mr. Salisbury added that the two-story sketch shows a sq. footage of 40,000 sq. ft., and a three-story sketch can accommodate up to 48,000 sq. ft. He mentioned that the elevation at the south of the building is 33 ft. above the grade.

A question was raised about a site transportation plan, and Mr. Salisbury noted that in the traffic flow diagram, access is preserved two-way and it is currently working with SDOT about the driveway configuration to maintain a wide enough drive to allow the buses to turn.

A question was raised about student drop-off and pick-up, and Mr. Salisbury noted that in their transportation studies, morning drop offs are sufficient in queuing spaces. They are exploring other alternatives on how additional parking spaces could be designated for visitor only spaces and afternoon drop offs and pickups to ensure queuing on Rainier does not occur.

Ms. Werkhoven asked if there will be changes in the crosswalks along Rainier, and Mr. Salisbury noted that they do not anticipate any changes and are not proposing any bus or parent drop off on the street and SDOT and would prefer the buses onsite.

Ms. Jennifer Barnes of Heffron Transportation commented that they are developing a communication and transportation management plan to identify measures for the school to control traffic. It may be an off-duty officer or a certified flagger that will enforce the restriction.

Ms. Werkhoven asked about the hours for pick up and drop offs. Mr. Walter Chen noted that school hours will be from 8:00 am to 3:30 pm. Mr. Salisbury added that there is an extensive after school program that will stagger pick-up times.

Mr. Salisbury commented that the school can accommodate three full size buses to compliment the bus line along Rainier.

He added that the school will be starting at 200 students, but the school will have a 600-student capacity.

A question was raised about the play areas behind the houses and any proposals to mitigate the noise. Mr. Salisbury said that they will provide a solid wood fence and a landscape buffer of shrubs and trees to mitigate disturbance.

He mentioned that the school will have no access signs at certain hours and will not be open to the public to control the use of the green play area during the weekends or after hours.

V. Public Comments and Questions (00:40:50)

Ms. Sheehan opened the floor for public comments and questions.

(Editor's Note: The comments shown below are summaries of statements provided. They are not transcriptions and have been shortened and edited to include the major points raised. Full comments are retained in the files in voice recording (.mp3) form)

Comments from Ms. Maggie Meyers: Ms. Meyers is the communications director for the Washington State Charter Schools Association, a statewide nonprofit organization that advocates for new and better charter schools for the state. She commented that her organization gives full support for Green Dot Seattle Middle School. They have worked with Green Dot at Tacoma, and having this school brings huge value add to any community. She added that Green Dot schools has a track record nationally in delivering its mission to transform public education to prepare students for college and in life. She noted that as shown in this process that the Green Dot model is community-driven where families and the communities get so much input.

Ms. Godard asked Ms. Sheehan to specifically talk about the departure request and not about the program.

Ms. Sheehan mentioned that the focus of this meeting is to discuss about the departure request which is allowing an additional 19 ft. building height that will complement the surrounding neighborhood. She asked that public comments should focus on the departure.

Comments from Mr. James Heugas: Mr. Heugas is the Director for the Pacific Charter School Development for the Washington and Bay Area. He invited for anyone that is interested to learn about the construction period. He is in support of the additional height, and allowing the school to spend their money on educating students.

Comments from an anonymous person: A comment was made if this school will replace Aki Kurose Middle School. Ms. Sheehan responded that the intent is not to replace the school.

Comments from Mr. Martin Saunders: Mr. Saunders is a staff member of the Rainier Avenue Church and he is aware of the additional height the school is requesting and he commented that he is in favor of it.

VI. Committee Deliberation (00:48:16)

Ms. Sheehan opened the discussions for committee deliberation. She reminded the public that they are welcome to stay, and asked them to lower their voices so that the Committee can discuss. She also mentioned that the Committee will not take any questions from the public.

The Committee began their deliberation by discussing the requested departure.

1. Greater than allowed building height

The maximum height allowed as a departure is 60 ft. The proposed building height is 30 ft. WCSD is requesting for a departure of 19 ft. of additional height for a total building height of 49 ft. including a rooftop mechanical equipment.

Ms. Blake Herrera commented that she is in favor of granting the departure since she understands the programmatic and space needs for the classrooms, and from an efficiency standpoint, granting this departure will reduce the overall design cost helping the schools spend money on academic instruction and facilities expenses.

Mr. Benjamin Loeffler commented that he is in favor of granting the departure. He noted that having a three-story building is appropriate since it is consistent with the neighboring buildings around the area. The design team demonstrated a need that a two-story building will not provide them with enough square footage.

Mr. Thomas Parker commented that he is in favor of granting the departure. From his standpoint, there is not much of an impact the surrounding buildings in the area and the design layout and space that was presented was used prudently to accommodate the student's need for education purposes.

Ms. Lindsey Werkhoven commented that she is in favor of granting the departure. She noted that she agreed with the efficient use of space since it is in an urban corridor and building up makes sense.

Ms. Godard commented that an additional height of 19 ft. is a lot. She asked the Committee about their thoughts of having an extra bulk because of the additional height. She suggested that discussing a different type of building material that would make the building less bulky, encouraging heavy landscaping, a two-wall fence, and lighting issues, vehicle noise, or any mitigation that could lessen the potential complaints from the adjacent neighbors.

Ms. Werkhoven noted that she is interested in the design especially ways to get more transparency that could soften the building height.

Mr. Parker commented that he would prefer to see more landscaping and greenery rather than fortifying concrete walls so it is more inviting.

Ms. Werkhoven mentioned transparency at the designated entrance that breaks up the big façade.

Ms. Sheehan reminded the Committee that it is appropriate to grant the departure with conditions that would be beneficial to the surrounding areas.

Mr. Parker commented about the paint and color application and if there are color variations for the building. Mr. Salisbury noted that the material is Trespa and comes in many colors. Mr. Salisbury commented that they have some flexibility with the color scheme. The color that they chose reflects a good relationship to the community and the student body, but it might continue to evolve.

Mr. Parked inquired if Rainier Ave. S will be a 20-mph school zone. Mr. Salisbury responded that it is one of the recommendations from the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), but has not been determined yet.

Ms. Emily Ehlers from SDOT mentioned about the Safe Routes to School program, but she was not sure if a school zone is appropriate. The Safe Routes to School is a program that encourages people to walk and bike to school. She said that the location of the school along Rainier Ave. S is problematic due to its high-street collision rate in the City. She expects that more people will be driving their kids to school instead of walking or biking, but there is a work plan and recommendations in place that will be appropriate for the school.

Ms. Godard commented on a possibility of having large signage that goes up to the top of the building. Mr. Salisbury noted that they would want to stay within the land use code for signage requirement allowed, and there will be no illumination or plans for a reader board.

She noted that as part of the decision process, the Committee's recommendations along with the conditions must be reasonable and related to the departure request.

Mr. Loeffler commented about adding a condition that would set the parapet lower than the requested 49 ft., but allowing specific features of the building reach that 49 ft.

Ms. Sheehan summarized one of the conditions that Mr. Loeffler suggested is to have a maximum parapet height of 44 ft. and the additional height of 49 ft. is available to emphasize aspects of the building.

Mr. Parker commented about adding a condition about ensuring there are plantings and a good number of trees around the school perimeter area.

Ms. Werkhoven mentioned that she could not think of another condition that would address the color without imposing her personal choice to mitigate the bulk of the building. She said that the design team did a good job in breaking up the color, materials, and spacing.

A comment was made about parking spaces and Mr. Salisbury responded that there will be 32 parking spaces and all will be situated behind the building.

Ms. Sheehan asked the Committee if they are in favor of taking Ms. Godard's suggestion about keeping the design elements such as the separation between the bands to offset each other.

Mr. Loeffler commented about adding a condition of having a clear anti-graffiti coating along the concrete band at the ground floor of the building so that it will not have to be painted in the future.

Ms. Godard commented about maintaining full-striving plants to keep the space and provide a buffer for scale around the perimeter.

Ms. Sheehan summarized the following conditions as follows:

1. Maintain the parapet at a maximum height of 45 ft. to differentiate between the mechanical and any façade enhancements that are allowed to go up to 49 feet.
2. Allow the Design Team to keep the design elements such as separation between the bands, offsetting of each of the bands, continue to use materials that show dimension, keeping the color and window frames, contrasting color of the rain screen at the entrances;
3. Allow the Design Team to explore the thickening or contrasting color of the roof cap to match the rain screen;
4. Furnish a clear anti-graffiti coating to avoid painting of the concrete base in the future that would benefit the occupants (focus on the Rainier Ave. facing façade);
5. Maintain full-striving plants to provide scale as a buffer primarily the frontage along Rainier Ave., and secondary along the perimeter where there is residential housing and other properties.

VI. Committee Recommendations

Ms. Sheehan opened the discussion for Committee recommendations and noted that the Committee had deliberated and the options are to go through the requested departure, with the following conditions that were discussed and voted on them.

When the Committee decides on their recommendations, a report will be written and the Committee will review the contents of the report before it goes to the Director of SDCI for a final decision.

Departure #1

Mr. Parker made a motion to grant the departure to allow greater than the allowed building height with the listed conditions; and it was seconded by Mr. Loeffler.

By show of hands, a quorum being present and the majority of those present having voted in the affirmative; the motion passed unanimously.

VII. Adjournment and scheduling of next meeting

No further business being before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned.