



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

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTMENTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

LAURELHURST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DESIGN DEPARTMENTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

April 2015

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 Laurelhurst Elementary school located at 4530 46th Avenue NE Seattle, WA.



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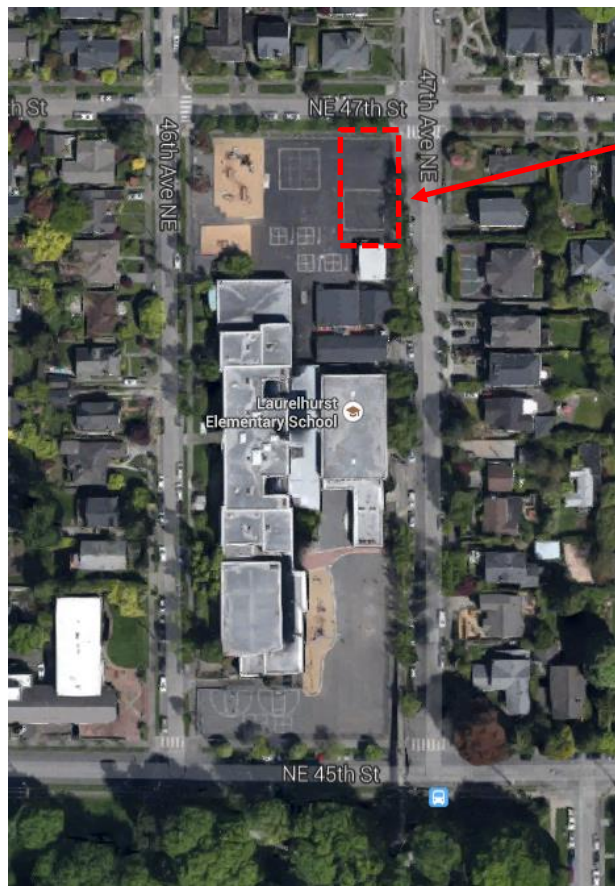
Appendix Meeting Notes (Not provided with this version)

Laurelhurst Elementary Schools Design Departure Advisory Committee Final Report and Recommendations

Section 1. Background

1.1 General Departure Proposals

In October, 2014, the Seattle School District No. 1 submitted a request for departures from certain Seattle Municipal Code Development Standards to accommodate the location of up to four additional portable classrooms at Laurelhurst Elementary School located at 4530 46th Avenue Northeast in Seattle Washington. Portable classrooms would be placed on the hard surface play area located on northeast section of the school site.



Approximate area for possible location of added portables

Illustration 1
Aerial View of the Existing School Site and Possible Portable Location

The Seattle School District is proposing to add up to four portables on the existing playground at the existing building as shown in Illustration 1 above.



Illustration 2 General Neighborhood

The school site is located in the northeast portion of Seattle in the Laurelhurst neighborhood from which the school takes its name. With only a few exceptions, the broader neighborhood is exclusively zoned single family. Lot sizes vary from 5000 square feet to 9,600 square feet-family with a minimum lot size of 5000 square foot lots. The neighborhood is almost fully developed with a combination of moderate and larger sized single family home. The neighborhoods abuts the shores of Lake Washington and Union Bay and was mainly largely developed in the 1920's as the nearby University of Washington expanded. Buildings in the neighborhood enjoys views of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountain Range.



Relatively typical Development in the Core of the Neighborhood

The neighborhood is one of Seattle’s premier residential areas. Both incomes and home values are at least double the City average with 2011 median income almost \$135,000 and median home values at \$1,200,000. The area has well maintained streets and sidewalks and mostly underground electric utilities

There are virtually no vacant building sites in the area and new housing is almost exclusively the result of demolition and re-building of larger homes on lots. Even this is limited due to how well built the homes were initially, as well as high levels of maintenance which limits available lots for new construction.

With limited new development and a stable housing stock, neighborhood population is stable. Growth, or lack thereof, is mainly the result of broader trends in family size, and neither driven new infill development nor conversion of lower-density development to greater –density development

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 (DON) 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 Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD) from DON.

Following completion of the Committee Report and its transmittal to the DPD, that department will produce a formal report and determination. The Director of DPD will determine the extent 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 November, 2014, DON sent notices to residents within 600 feet of the proposed new schools and to a list of individuals and organizations that had shown interest in other community issues in the vicinity of Laurelhurst 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:

Appointed Members and Alternates

Richard Ruidl	Person residing and/or owning property within 600' of Laurelhurst School
Mia Wise	Person residing and/or owning property within 600' of Laurelhurst School
Anne Hicks-Thompson	Representative of the General Neighborhood (Also residing or owning property within 600' of Laurelhurst School)
Peter Varretto	Representative of the General Neighborhood (Also board member of LASAR))
Joel Domingo	Representative at large to represent city-wide education issues
Kaylene Anderson	PTSA Representative
Carin Town	PTSA Representative (Also resident within 600' of Laurelhurst School)
Mike Barrett	Seattle School District
Mark Thompson	Alternate #1 (Resident within 600' of Laurelhurst School)
Karen theirs	Alternate #2 (Pst President of the PTSA)

Ex-Officio Members

Steve Sheppard	City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (Non-voting Chairperson)
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Holly Goddard

City of Seattle, Department of Planning and
Development

Section 2. Departures

2.1 Specific District Requests



Illustration #3 Possible Portable location

The above is illustrative only. The actual design of the possible portable was not known at the time of the meeting.

The District is proposing to locate between one and four portable classrooms on the hard-surface play on the northeast portion of the site. This would not be a totally new situation. In past years portables have come and gone as the school population has changed. In the early 1960's, four portables were located in the approximate area that is the subject of this departure. The arrangement of the portables at that time is shown below.



Location of portables in the past and approximate location proposed.

Due in part to changes over time, the current building already exceeds the maximum 35% lot coverage. Lot coverages given various portable locations are as show below:

Maximum Allowed by Code	35%
Current Building Configuration	38.5%
One Additional Portable	39.0%
Two Additional Portables	39.8%
Four Portables	41.3%

The District is requesting a departure to allow up to 45% lot coverage. This number was chosen as it would be the lot coverage allowed if the School were one story and would allow for future flexibility.

The District's rationale for the departure request relates to its calculations of need for classroom space. During the public meeting the District stated that the need for this request was driven by the following factors:

- To accommodate enrollment growth
- To accommodate special education programs
- To retain before and after school Child Care (LASAR)
- To allow continued Parks Department joint use of the gymnasium

In addition, while currently not fully delineated by the State, changes related to the McCleary School funding decision may result in a reduction in the maximum number of children allowed in each of the K-3 classrooms leading to a possible need for more classroom space.

During Committee deliberations, District staff disclosed that their more recent student enrollment projections indicated that little or no student growth was now projected and that the District was considering the location of only one portable, or even no additional portables, if current arrangements with the care operator (LASAR) could be extended.

2.2 Committee Review and Recommendations

2.2.1 Process and initial Meeting

The Committee was convened in a public meeting held on March 17, 2015 at Laurelhurst Elementary School. The meeting was very heavily attended with 130 people at the meeting, 105 of whom indicated that they wanted to provide public testimony. Fifty four people provided public comments. All of those who spoke were opposed to the proposal. No one spoke in favor of granting the request. The main points raised in public testimony were:

- This is a stable area without projected Laurelhurst-driven student population growth
- The loss of play-space would both burden students and harm the broader neighborhood
- Accommodation of out-of neighborhood uses (special needs) was an undue burden on this school site, given that this is the smallest and most constrained site in the broader area. Other nearby schools should be considered for these programs.

- Other options should be exhausted first, including renovations and expansion of the existing building and/or enclosing the covered area between the gymnasium and school

The room was polled by a show of hands and those in attendance asked if they favored, opposed or were neutral concerning this request. All attendees who participated, were opposed. Three petitions against granting the departure were presented from three groups. The first was the *Save Laurelhurst Elementary School Playground* with an attached list of 381 nearby residents and property owners opposed to the proposal, the second was from the Laurelhurst PTA including the results of a polling of all parents which showed that 82% did not support the departure request, and the third was from 201 of the 421 students currently attending the school urging retention of the playground..

2.2.2 Review Criteria

Section 23.79 of 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 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.

Section 23.51.002 contains further restriction related to single family and other low-rise residential zones.

2.2.3 Application of Review Criteria to Requested Departures and Committee Recommendations

In reviewing this request, the committee determined that the following criteria were applicable: 1) Relationship to the Surrounding Area Sub sections (1) and (5): and, 2) Need For Departure, the most critical being need.

a. Overall need for Departures

The Seattle Municipal Code envisions granting departures from the requirements of the Code to accommodate the educational needs of the programs to be located in the proposed buildings. In the case of the Laurelhurst School, the Seattle School District listed five criteria driving the need for the departure:

- To accommodate enrolment growth
- To accommodate special education programs
- To retain before and after school Child Care (LASAR)
- To allow continued Parks Department joint use of the

Members concluded that the District had not provided a compelling educational need. Both current enrollment and projected student projections from the Laurelhurst neighborhood were flat and the District stated that it could project no future growth in student population that would present a compelling reason for the placement of additional portables. Given the stable nature of the neighborhood and the lack of future conversions from single to multi-family development, members concluded that the District’s projections were likely accurate over the short and midterm.

Public testimony noted that the school was not over capacity of students from the neighborhood. However Laurelhurst Elementary School is the assigned location within the cluster zone for all SM3 special education students. The school does not appear to be over capacity with students, but is over capacity with overall programs.

Absent projected growth from within the neighborhood, future need appears to be driven by the other stated criteria. However, the Committee determined, that given the overwhelming opposition to the proposal, these other criteria were not sufficient to justify support of the departure. The Laurelhurst site is the smallest in the Northeast cluster with the greatest lot coverage. The current site is too small given the current design and lot coverage and provides sub-standard outdoor play space, and no on-site parking. The portables are not special facilities but simply general classroom sites. If no portables were allowed, and additional growth in student population from the neighborhood materialized, other options could/should be explored including transfer of some special programs to other nearby schools with less constrained sites, use of the community center for pre- and after school childcare, or fill-in development between the gymnasium and main school building.

b. Relationship to Surrounding Areas:

Members also considered the impacts of portable location on the surrounding area.

(1) Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area, and (3) Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk.

Both the existing portables and any additional ones are out of character with both the school and adjacent neighborhood. The design and location of the portables conflicts with the brick school and presents an unattractive face to the neighborhood. Given the lack of demonstrated need, there is no reason to add to the eclectic character of the site or add additional bulk and scale to an already overly dense site.

(5) Impacts on housing and open space. -

One of the major impacts of this request would be on open space. Location of additional portables would further reduce already constrained open space. The site is heavily used both during school hours and at other times during the week. The amount of play space on this site is already below District standards and does not meet educational standards for desired outdoor play space. A further reduction would require re-configuration of the site exacerbating an already constrained situation. The use of the space is already difficult and school staff reported that various outdoor play activities often conflict with each other

Of the 11 Northeast Cluster elementary schools, Laurelhurst currently has the smallest site (2.7 acres versus the average of 5.7 acres for other school); and the highest percentage lot coverage. It also has the lowest amount of open plan space per child with 171 square feet compared to 438 square feet per child average over the other schools. Absent a compelling need, a further reduction of outdoor below standards does not appear justified.

For the reasons stated above, the Laurelhurst Elementary School Design Departure Advisory Committee recommends

Recommendation 1 - The request of the Seattle School District to modify the lot coverage requirements for the Laurelhurst Elementary School site, from 35% to 45%, or any amount above 35%, should be rejected in total. No increase in required lot coverage should be granted and no additional portables located on this site.

For the Committee

Steve Sheppard



Non-Voting Chair