



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

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THORNTON CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DESIGN DEPARTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

August 2014

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 Thornton Creek Elementary school located at 7711 43rd Avenue Northeast in Seattle, WA



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Section 1. Background

1.1 General Departure Proposals

On October 3, 2013, the Seattle School District No. 1 submitted a request for departures from certain Seattle Municipal Code Development Standards to accommodate the construction of a new Thornton Creek School to be located immediately to the west of the existing old Decatur Building at 7711 43rd Avenue Northeast in Seattle Washington. The School would include 92,500 gross square feet and is currently planned to provide space for 660 elementary school students.

Existing portables to be removed

Existing buildings to be retained



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

The Seattle School District is proposing to remove five existing portables to the west of the old Decatur Elementary School but retain the Decatur Building and its associated Annex. The existing site is 9.91 acres.

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 build new schools and upgrade and renovate existing aging school facilities to 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, and the Thornton Creek project is the biggest BEX IV project.

The existing Stephen Decatur building will be retained and re-purposed to provide reserve capacity for other District needs. The building itself has a long history. The structure was built in 1961 on land acquired from the federal Shearwater Housing Project. Its initial K–5 enrollment was 326. Additions were made in 1966 with enrollment increased to 477. However over the ensuing seven years enrollment declined and in July, 1974, Decatur was identified for possible closure. It was not closed and instead became home to the Alternative School #2 which was renamed the Thornton Creek Program at Decatur. The Thornton Creek Program will move into the new facility when completed and Decatur will be repurposed.

1.2 Neighborhood Characteristics

The school site is located in the northeast portion of Seattle in the Wedgewood neighborhood. With only a few exceptions, the broader neighborhood is exclusively zoned single family with a minimum lot size of 5000 square foot lots. The neighborhood is almost fully developed with moderate -sized single family homes. The majority of homes were constructed in the immediate post World War Two era, many by a single developer (Balch Homes) in a Cape Cod bungalow style to provide housing for young upwardly mobile families with children. In recent years there has been an increase in the substantial upgrading of the original bungalow homes and the construction of newer and larger homes.

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’s 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 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 2013, the Department of Neighborhoods 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 Thornton Creek 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

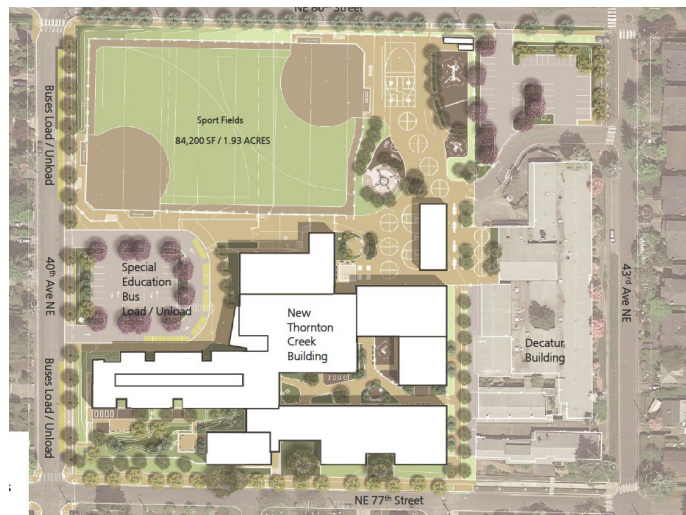
Cathy Cosca	Person residing and/or owning property within 600' of Thornton Creek School
Leigh Stevens	Person residing and/or owning property within 600' of Thornton Creek School
Brenda Gamb	Representative of the General Neighborhood (also residing or owning property within 600' of Thornton Creek School)
Louisa Rose	Representative of the General Neighborhood (also residing or owning property within 600' of Thornton Creek School)
Edward Schwartz	Representative at large to represent city-wide education issues
Catherine Reidy Lierman	PTSA Representative
Nichole Rose	PTSA Representative
Mike Skutack	Seattle School District
Joel Domingo	Alternate #1
Beverly J Ikeda	Alternate #2

Ex-Officio Members

Steve Sheppard	City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (Non-voting Chairperson)
Holly Goddard	City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development

Section 2. Departures

2.1 Specific District Requests



**Illustration #2
Proposed School Site Plans**

The District is proposing development on the site as shown in Illustration # 2 above. The District proposal is to retain the old Decatur building that currently occupies the eastern third of the site and construct a new school to the west as shown above. The new school would be two stories with approximately 92,500 gross square feet of development. The school would be designed for a maximum of 660 students.

In order to accommodate the educational program for this program, the District requested the following departures from various provisions of the Seattle Municipal code:

Departure #1 -Greater than Allowed Building Height – The zoning code restricts the height of development on the site to 35feet plus an additional 15-feet for a pitched roof, if pitched at a rate of not less than 4:12. The District requested a departure to allow the Elementary School to exceed this standard to a total height of 43 feet or 8 feet above the maximum allowed to accommodate tan enclosed mechanical penthouse. The building itself without the enclosed mechanical equipment would be below the 35 foot height limit.

Departure #2 - Less than Required Off-street Parking – When a school is rebuilt the code requires that the District provide parking which in this case would require 162 spaces. The District requested a departure to allow 91 spaces on site or 73 fewer spaces than required.

Departure #3 - Continued On-street Bus Loading and Unloading – The zoning code directs that when a new school is built or an existing school expanded that bus loading and unloading occur on site and not on the street. Section 23.51B I-1 allows use of yards and setbacks for this purpose and Section I-3 stipulates that departures from the requirements and standards for bus and truck loading and unloading areas and berths may be granted or required pursuant to the procedures and criteria set forth in Chapter

23.79 only when departure would contribute to reduced demolition of residential structures. In many cases the District loads and unloads its buses on the street adjacent to the School. The District requested a departure to load and unload school buses along 40th Avenue NE.

2.2 Committee Review and Recommendations

2.2.1 Process and initial Meetings

The Committee was convened in a public meeting held June 3, 2014 at Thornton Creek Elementary School. The meeting was well attended, and attendance overflowed the space available.

Public testimony and comment dominated the meeting. Commenters mostly expressed concerns that: 1) the District proposal to build a new 660 student school on the site was too large and would bring too many cars and buses into the neighborhood; 2) that the District's decisions to retain the existing Decatur building without a projected future use complicated the proposal and led to concerns that the site would be even more greatly impacted than stated in any District proposal; 3) that there was insufficient mitigation in the form of street and sidewalk improvements to warrant granting departures, and 4) that departures for on-street bus loading and unloading may not even be allowed under the provisions of the Seattle Municipal Code. Other speakers commented that either retention of the existing building including its renovation and incorporation into the new design or its demolition and shifting the new building to the east would be preferable.

Two additional meetings were held on July 9 and July 23. Comments at these meetings were similar to those received at the previous meetings

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

a. Overall need for Departures

The Seattle Municipal Code generally envisions granting departures from the requirements of the Municipal Code to accommodate the educational needs of the programs to be located in the proposed buildings. In the case of the Thornton Creek School, the Seattle School District stated:1) that both the construction of the new school and retention of the existing school were needed to accommodate future projected increase in student populations in the North portion of Seattle; 2) that the location of two schools and the concomitant educational outdoor open space standards present significant challenges and that without granting the departures for greater height, less parking and on-street bus loading and unloading those standards could not be met and that therefore some combination of greater heights, reduction in on site non-educational activities (parking and bus loading) would be necessary. Without some departures, the alternatives would be either further reductions in critical open play space, ~~or reductions~~ or reductions in the proposed size of and educational program provided at the school.

Some in the neighborhood clearly questioned and opposed the decision of the District to retain the old Decatur building and locate two schools on this site. Some Committee members concurred with this position. However, it was noted that the authority of the Committee was limited to consideration of the departures for the proposed programs and not reconsideration of the original School District decisions ~~concerning facilities~~ concerning facilities plans.

After considering the overall design and program requirements, the Committee generally determined that in the event that the proposed educational programs were located on this site some departures would likely be needed. This decision was not an open endorsement of the two-school program decisions, but instead a recognition that this decision lies with other jurisdictions.

Recommendation 1 - Given the Seattle School District's current proposal that retains two ~~buidlings~~ buildings on the ~~site,~~ that site that some departures from the provisions of the underlying zoning would be needed in order to facilitate the construction of the new Elementary School at the Stephan Decatur site.

b. Review of Departures against Departure Review Criteria 1 through 5.

Departure #1 -Greater than Allowed Building Height

The District requested a departure to allow the Elementary School to exceed this standard to a total height of 43 feet or 8 feet above the maximum allowed to accommodate an enclosed mechanical penthouse. The building itself without the enclosed mechanical equipment would be below the 35 foot height limit.

Area of Requested Height Departure



**Illustration #3
Height Departure Location**

The Committee considered the height departure request for the elementary school appeared to be relatively minor and related mostly to enclosing the mechanical equipment located on the roof. This equipment would be allowed and no height departure required if the mechanical equipment was not enclosed.

In evaluating this departure, the Committee noted the setbacks from the street and location set back from the streets were major mitigating circumstances.

Recommendation 2 - That the departure to allow greater than allowed height be approved as requested by the Seattle School District without modifications and without conditions

Departure #2 - Less than Required Off-street Parking and Departure #3 - Allowance of On-street bus loading and unloading.

The Committee determined that the departures for on street bus loading and unloading were closely inter-related and determined that a single set of conditions should be applied to the granting of both. In the case that the City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development chooses to allow only one of the two departures to go forward, The Committee recommends that the full range of conditions established below be applied to the remaining departure.

Analysis

Less than Required On-site Parking

Both Committee members and members of the public offered comments. The Committee was concerned with the lack of parking and strongly considered either denying in total or recommending some additional parking with the total number still below code requirements. Both the public and Committee members noted that parking can spill over onto adjacent streets. These concerns were exacerbated by the uncertainty over the future use of the existing Decatur building.

The current School site provides 45 off street parking spaces to accommodate the approximately 250 student planned capacity of the existing building.



Illustration #4 Existing Parking Locations and Amounts

With the new school added to the site, it was clear that additional parking would be required. With total student capacity upward of 900, almost four times the number of parking spaces would seem appropriate or approximately 180 spaces. The District provided detailed calculations that code required minimum parking required would be ~~164~~ 164 spaces. The District initially proposed that 91 spaces be provided as shown in Illustration 5 below.

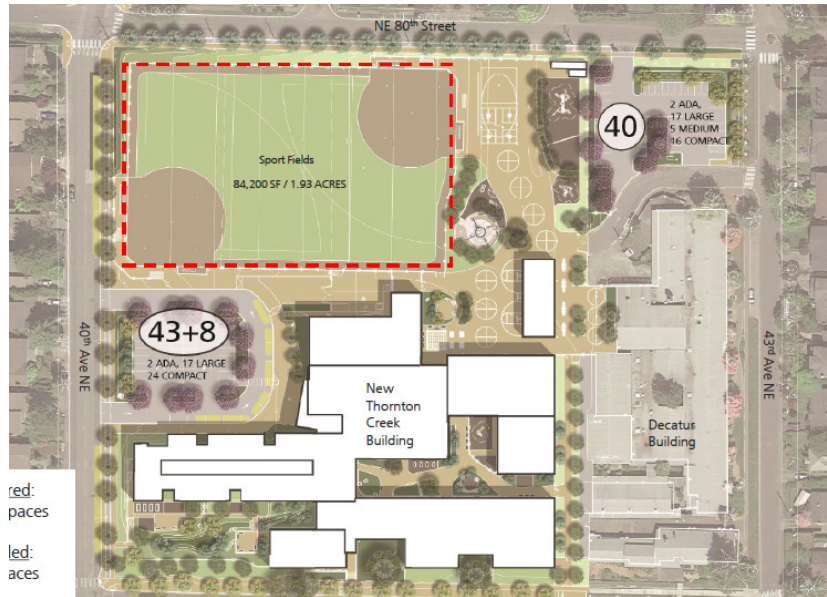


Illustration #5
Initial Parking Locations as Proposed by the District in their
Departure Request

Initially many Committee members appeared willing to consider either a partial or full denial of the Departure for less than required on-site parking, and asked that the District provide them with a code-compliant design which would accommodate all parking on-site. The District did so at the second meeting and the Committee considered the implications of that design both at that meeting and at the third meeting.

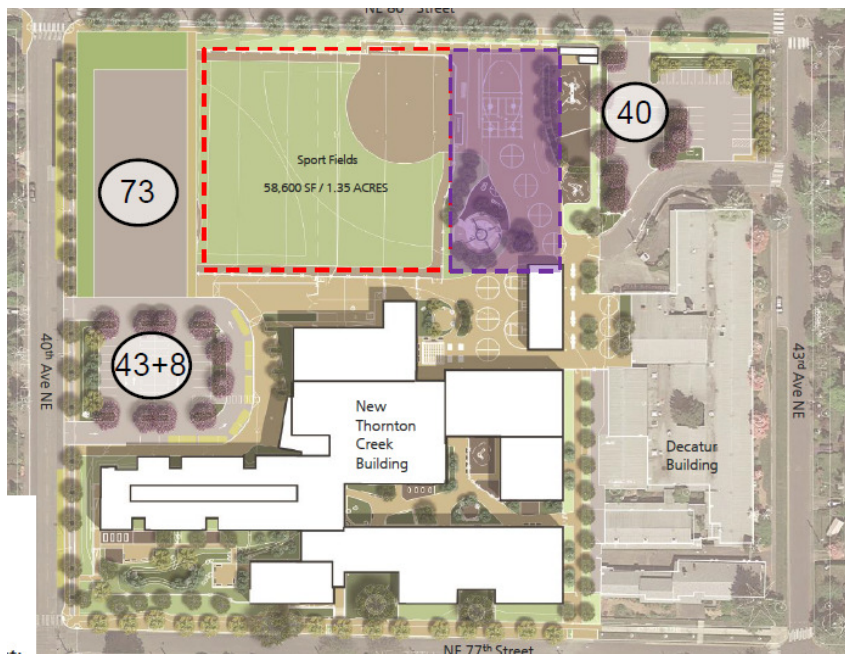


Illustration #6 Code Compliant Parking Proposal

Committee members determined that the above code-compliant parking proposal sacrificed too much outdoor play space and was therefore not acceptable. Members struggled with the implications of having two buildings and up to 910-students on-site; however, given the District's decision to proceed in that direction, the Committee explored other options. Ultimately members coalesced around a proposal to demolish the Annex ~~building and building~~ and its site used either for parking or possibly additional play space with parking the preferred use. The Committee proposal is as shown below.



Illustration #6 Committee Parking Proposal

The Committee proposal would provide between 109 and 116 on-site parking spaces. While still less than required members believed this was preferable to either loss of additional open space or the lesser parking proposed by the District.

On-street Bus Loading and Unloading

The zoning code directs that when a new school is built or an existing school expanded that bus loading and unloading occur on site and not on the street. Section 23.51B I-1 allows use of yards and setbacks for this purpose and Section I-3 stipulates that departures from the requirements and standards for bus and truck loading and unloading areas and berths may be granted or required pursuant to the procedures and criteria set forth in Chapter 23.79 only when departure would contribute to reduced demolition of residential structures.

The Seattle School District requested that bus loading and unloading occur along 40th Avenue Northeast as shown below

At the time the Committee determined its recommendations, the City had not determined whether the requested departure for on street bus loading met the criteria in the Code directing that such a departure request was allowable only in the event that it led to the avoidance of the demolition of housing. Committee members concluded that this determination was within the purview of the City, and not the Committee. Members therefore decided to offer a recommendation and identify conditions related to possible on-street bus loading and unloading in the event that the City Department of Planning and Development determines that the Code would allow the District to request this departure.

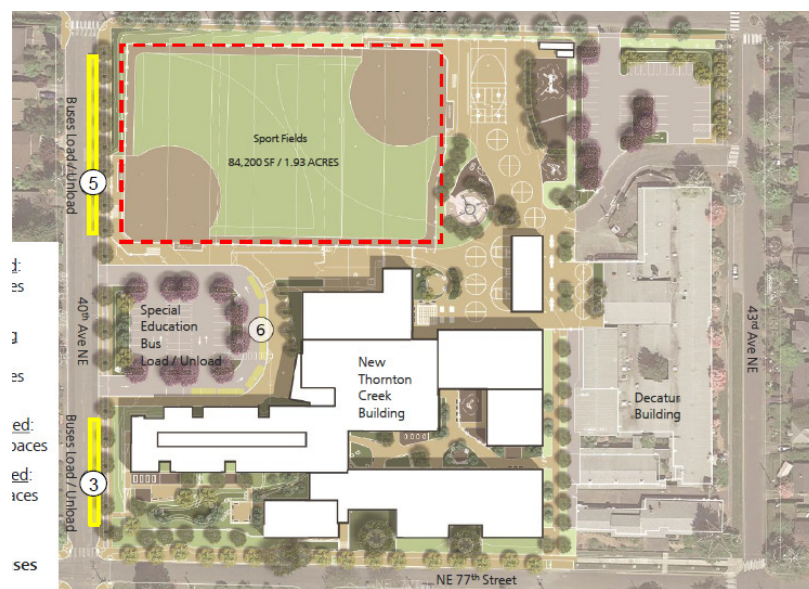
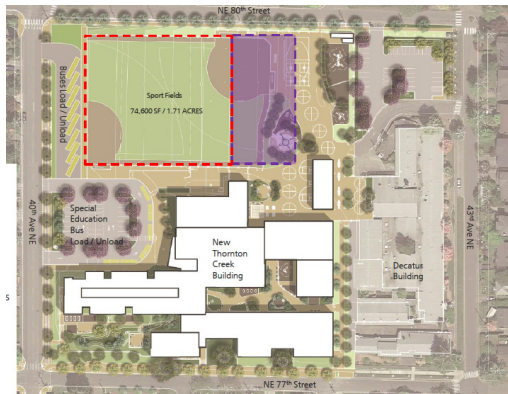


Illustration #7 On-street Bus loading and unloading as proposed by the District

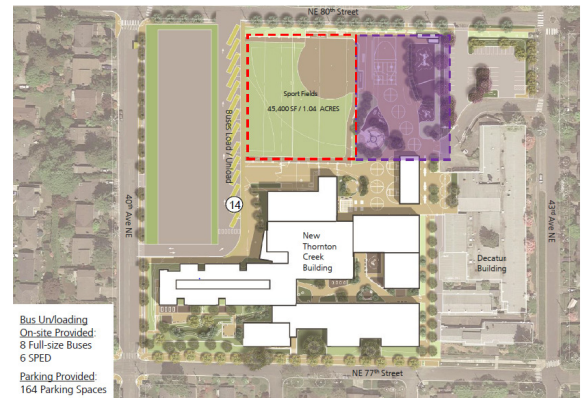
The Committee struggled with this departure request. Concern was expressed that the location of bus loading and unloading along 40th Avenue Northeast would create congestion and traffic safety problems during load and unload periods. It was noted that this is the only arterial street serving the immediate neighborhood and that the combination of a reduced widths associated with bus loading and unloading and increased traffic associated with the greater student count at the school would exacerbate already difficult situations along this street.

However, as with the departure for parking, the Committee balanced the effects of allowing on-street bus loading and unloading against the need to preserve critical open space. As with off street parking, the Committee asked that the District provide a code-compliant design that would accommodate bus loading and

unloading on site and one that was totally code compliant for both parking quantity and on-site bus loading and unloading. Those two designs are shown below.



Bus loading and unloading on site



All Bus loading and unloading on site and code required on-site parking

Illustration # 8

Both proposals would severely reduce open space. The District noted that open space is already below the amount recommended in educational standards. Committee members considered the reduction of open space as unacceptable.

Rationale for combined Conditions

The conditions noted in recommendation three below are intended to mitigate the impacts of the District Proposal. The intent of the recommendations is to:

- 1) Firmly limit the student population on the site to no more than a combined 910 students through a variety of actions including the prohibition of the addition of portable classrooms on site.;
- 2) Allow the addition of between 18 and 25 more parking spaces utilizing the old Annex site bring total parking provided closer to the code required minimum. (Note that the Committee understood that there are issues related to gaining funding for this demolition from the State and this action may be delayed and whether this was a reasonable proposal under the code.)
- 3) Reduce traffic impacts associated with both the additional traffic associated with the school and with the addition of bus loading and unloading along 40th Avenue NE.

Given the above the Committee offers the following recommendation:

Recommendation 3 - That the departures for less than required on-site parking and continued on-street bus loading

and unloading (if determined to be allowable under the Code) should be approved with the following conditions:

1. That the Old Decatur Annex, located at the northeast corner of NE 77th Street and 43rd Avenue NE, be demolished and its site re-used either for added parking, children's play space or general open space with a preference for additional parking.

2. That with any re-purposing of the Old Decatur Annex site, the existing mature trees shall remain and that additional major plantings remain within any code-required landscaped buffer. Note: the Committee prefers that there be a 15 foot landscaped buffer, if feasible.

3. That the Transportation mitigation measures contained in the Transportation Technical Report for the New Thornton Creek Elementary School prepared by Heffron Transportation Inc., dated March 11, 2014, as outlined on pages 37 and 38 of that report, be filed and approved by DPD prior to the issuance of any permit, and made conditions of the issuance of any building permit and remain in effect for the life of the new school and that the plan include details concerning student safety. (See Appendix 1)

4. That the total student capacity for all schools or programs on the combined Thornton Creek/Old Decatur site be limited to a maximum of 910 students.

5. No portable classrooms be allowed on the combined Thornton Creek/Decatur site so long as the old Decatur building remains.

6. That in order to assure sufficient capacity for thru traffic along 40th Avenue NE no parking be allowed on the west side of 40th Avenue NE between NE 77th and 80th Streets during the AM and PM bus loading and unloading periods.

7. That, if both the new Thorntown Creek and Old Decatur Buildings remain and are in use, staggered start and stop times be established for each and that no changes to those times that would eliminate the staggering be allowed without notification of the broader neighborhood, such notification to include at least one public meeting to receive neighborhood comment.

8. That the area along the eastside of 40th Ave NE where bus loading is prohibited be extended into additional 40 feet north by either extended proposed curb bulb or by striping.

9. That a Transportation Management Plan (TMP) be developed for the school with the participation of neighbors

and that a resident of each perimeter street be included in discussions concerning the development of the TMP.

For the Committee

Steve Sheppard
Non-Voting Chair

Appendix 1 - Excerpt from the Transportation Technical Report for the New Thornton Creek Elementary School.

TRANSPORTATION TECHNICAL REPORT

For

New Thornton Creek Elementary School

PREPARED FOR:
Seattle Public Schools

PREPARED BY:

heffron
transportation, inc.

6544 NE 61st Street, Seattle WA 98115
ph: (206) 523-3939 • fx: (206) 523-4949

March 11, 2014.

~~4. FINDINGS~~ 4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (RECOMMENDATIONS)

(From pages 37 and 38)

The following summarizes the findings of the analysis:

- The new Thornton Creek Elementary School is expected to accommodate a student capacity of 660 and have about 62 full-time (FT) and 13 part-time (PT) employees.
- The existing Decatur Buildings would be maintained for potential future use as a separate elementary or K-8 school, for which a program has not yet been defined. Enrollment ~~capacity~~capacity for the school in the Decatur Buildings would be 250 students after the portables are removed. The District estimates the school in the Decatur building would have 22 employees.
- The combined schools are projected to generate a net increase of 390 trips during the morning peak hour and 268 trips during the afternoon peak hour.
- Traffic conditions will continue to be busy along the roadways that surround the site—NE 77th Street, NE 80th Street, 40th Avenue NE and 43rd Avenue NE in the morning before school begins and in the afternoon when school is dismissed.
- New traffic generated by the two schools is expected to add some delay to the study-area intersections during the peak 25 minutes before and after school. Movements at all but two of the intersections are forecast to operate at LOS D or better with the project.
- The NE 75th Street/40th Avenue NE intersection currently operates at LOS F during the morning peak hour. It would continue to operate at LOS F without or with the Thornton Creek Elementary School project. However, the school-related traffic would add delay to this LOS F condition. During the afternoon peak hour, new school-related traffic would degrade the intersection from LOS E to LOS F.
- During the afternoon peak hour at the NE 80th Street/35th Avenue NE intersection, eastbound movements are forecast to operate at LOS E without or with the school project. Westbound movements are forecast to be degraded from LOS D to LOS E due to the project. However, the project-related delays that would be added are relatively small—less than 3 seconds per vehicle for both movements.
- The two schools are expected to generate a combined midday parking demand of about 119 vehicles. Most of the midday parking demand (83 vehicles) could be accommodated within the on-site parking lots; the remainder (about 36 vehicles) is expected to occur on-street along roadways adjacent to or near the two schools.
- During the evenings when large events are held at the school (expected to be once or twice per month at each school), on-street neighborhood parking demand is expected to increase. However, the additional demand could be accommodated with on-site and on-street spaces.

Based on the above findings, the following measures are recommended to reduce the traffic and parking impacts associated with the Thornton Creek Elementary School project.

- A. Prior to the school opening, the District and school principal should establish a Transportation Management Plan to educate parents and students about the revised access and parking elements for the new school site layout. The effort should encourage school bus ridership, ~~carpooling,~~ carpooling, and supervised walking (such as walking school buses). The plan should define clear procedures and travel routes for parent vehicles, including the planned clockwise circulation pattern for the drop-off/pick-up locations on NE 77th and 80th Streets.
- B. If SDOT determines that the NE 75th Street/40th Avenue NE intersection should be signalized, it would be appropriate for the District to contribute to the costs for signalization. Since the intersection already meets some signal warrants, a proportional share of the costs of signalization based on net new traffic expected from the project would be reasonable. During the morning peak hour, the net increase in traffic due to the school project would represent about 12% of the total entering volume at the intersection; during the afternoon peak hour, new school traffic would represent about 7% of the total entering volume.
- C. The District should work with SDOT to confirm the locations, extent, and signage of parent-vehicle load/unload zones along the north side NE 77th Street and the south side of NE 80th Street as well as and school-bus load/unload zones along 40th Avenue NE (for Thornton Creek Elementary) and 43rd Avenue NE and NE 77th Street (for the school in the Decatur Buildings).
- D. The District should continue its discussions with the Seattle School Safety Committee (of which SDOT is a member) 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.
- E. The District should continue to coordinate with the City to identify potential improvements and funding to eliminate gaps in the existing pedestrian facility network near the school.
- F. The event calendars at both schools should be actively coordinated to ensure that large events are not held at both schools simultaneously.
- G. The District 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. 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.
- H. The schools should develop transportation and parking management plans for large events to minimize the traffic and parking impacts associated with large events at both schools.
- I. The roadway frontage improvements along 40th Avenue NE and NE 80th Street should be designed to ensure that adequate sight lines are available for drivers exiting the site driveways on these two roadways.
- J. The District should require the selected contractor to develop a construction management ~~plan~~ (CMP) that addresses traffic and pedestrian control during school construction. It should define truck routes, lane closures, walkway closures, and parking disruptions, as necessary. To the extent possible, the CMP should direct trucks along the shortest route to arterials and away from residential streets to avoid unnecessary conflicts with resident and pedestrian activity. The CMP may also include measures to keep adjacent streets clean on a daily basis at the truck exit points (such as street sweeping or on-site truck wheel

cleaning) to reduce tracking dirt offsite. The CMP should identify parking locations for the construction staff; to the extent possible, construction employee parking should be contained on-site.

Appendix 2 Meeting Notes

Thornton Creek Elementary School Design Departure Committee

Members

Beverly Ikeda
Brendan Gamb
Catherine Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose
Nichole Rose

Ex-Officio Members

Steve Sheppard – DON
DON Holly Godard – DPD

Thornton Creek Development Standards Departure Advisory Committee Meeting #1 Meeting Notes June 3, 2014

Members Present:

Brendan Gamb
Cathy Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose

Staff Present

Mike Skutack
Steve Sheppard

Others Present

See Attendance Sheet

I. Opening of Meeting and Introductions:

The meeting was opened by Steve Sheppard from City of Seattle, Major Institutions and Schools Program. Mr. Sheppard welcomed all in attendance and noted that he would facilitate tonight's meeting and participate as a non-voting ex-officio member. There was a brief introduction of committee members.

II. Brief Description of the Process:

Mr. Sheppard stated that this process is governed by the Seattle Municipal Code Section 23.68 which specifies how the meeting is run. Mr. Sheppard gave a brief overview of the process. He noted that Seattle does not have a school zone; instead, the city allows schools in all zones, subject to the development standards of the underlying zone. Since most schools are in residential neighborhoods and are zoned "single family", this can present challenges. The schools are not single family homes and cannot meet the underlying zoning requirements. Thus, the Land Use code contains provisions that allow the Seattle School District (District) to request exemption from the provisions of the Land use Code. They may request exemptions or "departures" from many of the provision of the code.

The Committee is meeting tonight to develop a recommendation concerning the District's requested departures. Mr. Sheppard briefly went over the Committee membership.

The Committee will take public testimony; after which it will begin its deliberations. The Committee may do one of the following: 1) recommend granting the departure as requested; ~~2) recommend approving the departures but with either modifications or specific conditions, or~~ 2) recommend approving the departures but with either modifications or specific conditions, or 3) recommend denial of the departures. Mr. Sheppard noted that any conditions identified must be clearly related to the requested departure and enforceable on the District.

Mr. Sheppard emphasized that the Committee's decision tonight is a recommendation only. The decision will be put into a report form that Mr. Sheppard will produce and circulate to the Committee for ~~its~~ its approval. It will then go to the director of DPD (Department of Planning and Development) who will issue the decision. The decision is appealable both to the Hearing Examiner and from the Hearing Examiner to the Superior Court because the type of decision involves changing the Land Use law. The Committee may develop recommendations at this meeting, or if either time does not allow, or if there is additional public testimony desired or additional information needed, the Committee may hold up to two additional meetings. If the Committee concludes, they have enough information from the District the Committee can establish their recommendations at this meeting; in that case this would be the only public meeting.

III. Presentation on Departures Being Requested:

Mr. Robert Evans from Heery International and the construction manager for this project provided a brief update on the Thornton Creek construction. The new elementary school will be constructed to accommodate 660 students for the Thornton Creek program. The project includes improvements on immediately abutting streets, retention of the existing Decatur Building and playground improvements. There have been a separate District design and review process including members of the neighborhood from the beginning of the project. The goal of the design is to accommodate the current and future needs of the neighborhood and the Decatur building, minimize traffic issues by instituting traffic mitigations, studies and analysis.

Mr. Evans then listed the departures as follows;

- A. **Building Height** – the code state that for a single-family, low rise zone for a new school on an existing school site has a maximum of 35 ft. plus a 15 ft. for a pitch roof. The elementary school building height is 34.5 ft. at the gymnasium, and everywhere else except for the penthouse is below that; the only part of the building that exceeds the 35 ft. limit is the mechanical penthouse. A departure request of 8 ft. above the maximum zoning limit of 35 ft. is for the mechanical penthouse on top of the two story classroom wing. The goal of the penthouse is to keep the overall bulk of the building low and the scale consistent across the street from single family residential houses.
- B. **Parking** – The calculation for the number of parking spaces goes back to the code; taking four assemblies (gymnasium and the commons); the area of the gym and the north commons and divided the area by 80 sq. ft.; this result of giving 78 parking spaces for the gymnasium, 36 parking spaces for the commons area as one calculation. The code requires that the child care facility provide 1 space for each 10 children or 1 space for each staff, whichever is greater. The one space for each 10 children is the greater number and requires 5 parking spaces, plus an additional 1 loading and unloading space for each 20 children.

The total required of 78, 36, 5 and 3 add to 122 spaces, carrying over, 119 parking spaces for the new Thornton Creek building. The total parking required of 119 spaces for the existing Decatur Building, and the total parking required for off street parking will be 154 spaces. The

total parking provided in the plan is 91 parking spaces on site. A departure request of 63 parking spaces less than the code required.

- C. **Bus loading and unloading** – The departure request for off-site bus loading and unloading, 5 buses and 3 buses along the east side of 40th Ave NE; not requesting departures for special education buses.

Mr. Skutack introduced Todd McBryan a principal from Hefron Transportation to discuss about the traffic studies and analysis for this project. The analysis started in May and June t involved input from the community and the design team. The analysis recommended: 1) that 40th Ave be used for a temporary bus drop off, loading and unloading zones for an hour or two; then buses will return to public parking for the rest of the day; 2) in order to reduce congestion, staggered start and dismissal time be established for each of the schools on the site; and 3) that a Transportation Management Plan (TMP) be established that can identify crosswalk locations, safety routes, and pedestrian crossings, walk routes improvements around the school as well as reconstruction of curbs and improvements along the south site of 80th.

With regards to parking, the analysis focused on parking supply and demand that includes a number of parking spaces and the methods of parking; there are 25 stalls in the lot, 43-45 stalls are existing on site; 43 stalls are proposed plus the 40 stalls in the Decatur Building for a total of 83 stalls. The demand for parking on school days is huge due to the amount of staff and volunteers that will be on site. The analysis shows that parking demand is about 92 vehicles in Thornton Creek and about 27 vehicles for the Decatur Building for a total of 119; large school events will generate a lot of parking demand on top of a large school enrollment.

Mr. McBryan also briefly went over parking utilization studies which indicated that there were sufficient on-street parking spaces available in most cases. That study looked at available parking within 800 ft. Members asked if there would be sufficient street width to allow traffic to easily use 40th Avenue NE when busses were present. Mr. McBryan responded that this appears to be the case.

IV. Public Comments and Questions:

Mr. Sheppard asked the general public if they were aware of the general school design and has attended the previous design meetings; Mr. Sheppard indicated that about 60% of the public were aware. He then opened the meeting to public comments.

Comment from Steve Clayton: Mr. Clayton noted that there are no sidewalks where he can walk and it is not safe during the morning and afternoon hours because people do not drive slowly even though the streets are narrow; he has not heard any mitigation regarding this issue.

Comment from Jim Moran: Mr. Moran stated that he has been a homeowner on 77th block for the last 34 years and would like to know that Metro buses stops on 40th and 77th going northbound and southbound and the children will be coming to the school from these Metro buses; where would these buses stop; and who will monitor the drop off and pick of these children. Will people be following the drop off and pick up signs; they will be taking space in the driveways by using neighborhood streets to park there. Also, would like to know about possible traffic in the streets along 80th and 81st, there are no curbs, no parking and what is going to happen there.

Comment from Chris Jackins: Mr. Jackins stated that he is the coordinator for the Seattle Committee to Save Schools outlined five points that: 1) the departures should not be granted as the impacts are too great on the neighborhood; 2) the required environmental threshold analysis has not been provided which limits the neighbors and Committee's ability to fully evaluate impacts; 3) That the large square footage of the proposal is not being driven by the educational needs of the District; 4) that the retention of the Decatur building was not noted in the notices for this process; and 5) the departure

request for continued on-street bus loading and unloading is allowed only if it contributes to the retention of housing and that per other recent analysis this is not the case for this site. He urged the Committee to deny the departures.

Comments from Norm Procter: Mr. Procter noted that he is a 34 year resident on 43rd Ave South and stated that he considered the departure requests to be an abominable. Mr. Procter agreed with the comments of Mr. Jackins. Mr. Procter noted difficulties concerning parking and traffic and particularly noted that area driveways are blocked by parents and teachers and the residents of the neighborhood could not get out. He questioned the conclusion of the parking study and stated that the current situation is very bad and will only get worse with the introduction of 660 more students on site. He stated that he has sometimes needed to call the -police to move the cars that are blocking the driveway.

Comment from Ruth Fruland: Ms. Fruland made a comment that she has been a resident for 17 years. She complimented that architects for their job with the constraints presented to them. Ms. Fruland stated that the problem was with the program as defined by the District. She noted that no one has discussed the future uses for the existing Decatur building. On-site parking and use projections appear to be for the Decatur building only and discount what will happen with the existing building. Her interest is the safety for the students because there has been some horrific and tragic accidents happened last year.

Comment from Scott Tennican: Mr. Tennican stated that he is opposed to granting the departures. The proposed school is simply too large. It will bring almost three times the students and staff to the neighborhood as the present school. In addition he stated that as the school appears to be intended for use by students from outside of the neighborhood, use of buses would appear to be greater than for a neighborhood school. He noted ~~th~~that there has been no information presented concerning the combined use of the existing building and the proposed new student. Therefore the Committee is being asked to make recommendations with no information concerning what will occur on one third of the site. He advocated reconsidering the entire design.

Comment from Martin Kaste: Mr. Kaste expressed concern about the condition of the sidewalks along the school. She noted that she has raised this issue previously to the City but seen no progress. He stated that he has no problem with granting the height departure, but opposes granting the parking and bus loading departures. The District did a nice job on the building structure but not on parking.

Comment from Sharon May: Ms. May stated that it is unacceptable to put 1000 students on this site.

Comment from Beverly Ikeda: Ms. Ikeda stated that she does not oppose to the height proposal or the mechanical roof, but does not agree having 63 parking spaces outside the school; the parking area is out of control; would like to see a two block radius of special permit for residents who lived in the area so they can park in the street and have it restricted.

Comment from Satcha Graham: Ms. Graham stated that Thornton Creek Elementary is in good hands and that she does not worry about her daughter's education; her issues are the sidewalk congestions.

Comment from Henry Berman: Mr. Berman made a comment about the issue on parking, congestion, the danger on the north and south streets; would like to see a resolution on potential traffic congestions; zone parking are potential good solutions and issue about cars that are parked on both sides of the streets.

Comment from Karen Selboe: Ms. Selboe lives on 45th Ave NE and asked a question to the planning committee about emergency vehicles that pass through the roadway; it is difficult for cars to get through.

Comment from an anonymous person: The commenter expressed disappointment that the District was attempting to disregard the rules that are in place to protect the neighborhood from adverse impacts from school development and urged the Committee to deny the departures.

Comment from an anonymous person: The commenter noted that there are \three buildings that are currently on site. The commenter noted that each of these buildings can be eliminated independently;

Members of the audience asked if Residential Parking Zones (RPZs) could be located around the school site. Mr. Sheppard responded that a RPZ parking can be applied by the neighborhood; but the City has to do a traffic analysis and the neighborhood had to pay for parking permits.

VI. Committee Deliberations:

Mr. Sheppard noted that the time for adjournment had passed and that there clearly was insufficient time to develop Committee positions. Mr. Sheppard asked the committee members for a motion to have another meeting to further discuss the departure; Mr. Leigh Stevens made a motion to have another meeting and Ms. Cathy Lierman seconded. The vote to conduct another meeting was unanimous.

Mr. Stevens noted ~~th~~that retention of two schools on the site was a major issue and asked whether it is reasonable to ask the District to discuss future plans for the existing building at the next meeting. Other members agreed that this was needed. Members therefore formally requested that the District address this issue at the next meeting.

Committee members also requested that an SDOT representative be available at the next meeting to discuss traffic safety and the City associated traffic improvements in the area as well as bus stop locations.

The Committee members also requested that the District address safety around the perimeter of the school, greenways and its function, access routes, bus patterns as they go in and out of the streets as well as further discussions regarding parking and parking spaces at the next meeting

VII. Adjournment:

No further business being introduced before the Committee; the meeting was adjourned.

Thornton Creek Elementary
School Design Departure
Committee

Members

Beverly Ikeda
Brendan Gamb
Catherine Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose
Nichole Rose

Ex-Officio Members

Steve Sheppard – DON
DON Holly Godard – DPD

Thornton Creek Development Standards Departure
Advisory Committee

Meeting #2
Meeting Notes

July 9, 2014

Members Present:

Brendan Gamb
Cathy Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose

Staff Present

Mike Skutack
Steve Sheppard

Others Present

See Attendance Sheet

I. Opening of Meeting and Introductions:

The second meeting was opened by Steve Sheppard from City of Seattle, Major Institutions and Schools Program. Mr. Sheppard informed the audience that this is a working Committee meeting, but will have a thirty minute period for public comments. There will be no major presentations from the School District, however, the School District will make a very brief summary of the departure and will present some options as well as answer specific questions that was raised in the last meeting.

Mr. Sheppard introduced the School District to begin their presentation.

II. Presentation on Departures Being Requested:

Mike Skutack of the Seattle School District presented a truncated presentation of the departure, and the design process, including stakeholder comments that led to the design. Mahlum Architects,

A representative from Mahlum Architects provided a brief summary and walkthrough of the existing site plans with different alternatives; the proposed new Thornton Creek building will be a single story building that is in scale with the Decatur Building as well as with the neighborhood.

Regarding the circulation pattern, parent drop off and pick up will be on 80th and 77th street for small children that enter from the south. The parking lot will have 43 spaces, and 6 spaces designated for special education buses; general buses will be located on 40th Ave NE. The site plan is about keeping the building on scale of the neighborhood; a minimize transition space creates more open space and adequate sunlight to the building; there will be separate and different modes of circulation and there will be no conflicts for children coming in and out of the building.

The following is the list of the departure being requested for Thornton Creek.

- A. **Building Height** – The code for single family, low rise zone on an existing school site, the maximum height is 35 ft., plus 15 ft. for a pitch roof. The elementary school building height is 34.5 ft. at the gym, and everywhere else except for the penthouse is below the limit. The only part of the building that exceeds the 35 ft. limit is the mechanical penthouse. A departure request of 8 ft. above the minimum zoning limit of 35 ft. only for the mechanical penthouse of the two story classroom wing. The goal is to keep the overall bulk of the building low and keep the scale of the building low across the street.
- B. **Parking** – Parking calculations goes back to the code; take 4 assemblies, gym and north commons, area of the gymnasium divide the area by 80 sq. ft., and taking the sq. ft. by 80 giving 78 parking spaces for the gym, and 36 parking spaces for the commons. The child care facility requires providing 1 space for each 10 children or 1 space for each staff, whichever is greater; 1 space for each 10 children is bigger, thus requiring 5 parking spaces. An additional 1 loading and unloading for each 20 children is 3 parking spaces. The total required, 78, 36, 5, 3 is 122 spaces, carrying over, 119 parking spaces for the new Thornton Creek building. The total parking required 119 spaces for the existing Decatur Building, total parking required for off street will be 154 spaces, and total parking provided in the plan is 91 parking spaces on site. The departure request is 63 parking spaces less than the code required. It is 63 parking less to balance the open space and outdoor education playground.
- C. **Bus loading and unloading** – Request for offsite bus loading and unloading; 5 buses and 3 buses along the east side of 40th Ave NE, will not request departure for special education buses.

III. **Public Comments and Questions:**

Mr. Sheppard opened the discussion with comments from the public.

Comments Sharon May: Ms. May stated that she had questions concerning parking. She asked where the playground will be for the 250 students that is going to fill the old Decatur building. She stated that it appeared that the parking being proposed is intended to accommodate the 660 students in the new building, not the combination of both schools. In the last meeting, ~~She, she~~ asked about what would it would be required to have a zone parking permit for the neighbors.

Comment John Clarke: Mr. Clarke stated that while he does not live in the immediate area the development will impact him because he drives the area all the time and has been coaching youth soccer for 35 seasons. He stated that he believes that the neighborhood does not have enough outdoor sports venues and would like to see a re-design that would not impact the play fields.

Comment Chris Jackins: Mr. Jackins introduced himself as a coordinator for the Seattle Community Schools; he summarized five points regarding the need for this Committee to deny the departures being requested by the School District:

- 1) There was a questions raised concerning what would happen if the Committee rejected the Departures. The District implied that it would not go back to the school board. He disagreed and noted several examples illustrating similar situations where the issued did go back to the Board.
2. Previous superintendents were brought in to close and sell schools. They left.
3. The current superintendent came from California to give us mega-sized schools like Thornton Creek. Now he is leaving.
4. The field at Thornton Creek is a great asset to the neighborhood. Losing a quarter of the playfield is a major impact that will last through many superintendents.

5. The impacts of the proposal outweigh its benefits.

He urged denial of the Departures.

Comment Steve Smith: Mr. Smith stated that he was concerned about parking and traffic, parking for student care that requires 50 students; He mentioned that about 2.8 hours required parking to move the cars; He noted that the planned parking is for 660 students, but the school will have over 900 students; He stated that it is not adequate for today's needs, and he would like to ask for more funds to refurbish the building instead

Comment Robin Marshall: Ms. Marshall asked what the estimated parent drop off load might be. She asked why are there more than 8 buses and specifically whether buses for the two programs would be combined ~~and She~~ and She noted that field lighting might negatively impact the neighborhood and stated that this needed to be mitigated, how about delivery hours, garbage trucks and pick-ups, school events and school meetings, after hour meetings, and how will these be coordinated. She mentioned that the zone parking spaces would be nice for the neighborhood. She asked about how the water run-offs and parking on 80th will be mitigated and emphasized the need for cross walks, noted the need to address noise pollution related to the HVAC system. She asked if an environmental impact statement had been completed for this project; ~~Sheshe~~ would like to encourage safe routes, walking paths, parking paths, and cross walks.

Comment from an anonymous person: A comment was made about the desirability of having a calendar of events be published or notification to the community about possible school events this will be a tremendous help.

Comment from ~~Barbara Broderick~~ Barbara Broderick: Barbara stated that she ~~remains concerned~~ remains concerned about the traffic impacts on 40th between 77th and 80th. She noted that the projections show major traffic volume increases and that the ability of residents along this street both to access drives and traverse the street will be difficult. The buses that travel off the main street and buses coming in the courtyard; Metro buses that will be travelling north and south will increase traffic on 40th.

Comment from Per Johnson: Mr. Johnson stated that the design of the school building itself is great. He stated that his major issue concerns alternative for provide parking. The alternatives all keep the development to two stories which results in significant loss of play space. He questioned why three story alternatives had not been considered as this would preserve more space for both parking and outdoor space.

Comment from an unidentified person The commenter questioned the relationship of the Districts to the retention of two schools on the site. The commenter acknowledged the capacity problems at the north end; ~~but~~ but noted that locating two separate programs on this site has many problems. He asked for clarification concerning the projected uses for the retained Decatur building. Staff responded that it could be for a variety of future uses. The specific use is not yet determined, but it is clear that there will be a need for re-use of the building.

VI. Committee Deliberations:

Mr. Sheppard suggested addressing the departures in order of apparent controversy. He noted that the height departure appears to be somewhat less controversial. Members agreed to do so. He directed members to the criteria and asked that they carefully consider them. He also noted ~~that~~ that there were several issues raised both at the meetings and in correspondence that were not specifically about the such as the overall school design, broader neighborhood circulation and street improvement, District decisions concerning the retention of the old Decatur building that are not the subject of this meeting. He urged Members to consider whether these departures themselves are reasonable. These broader issues may inform Member's overall opinion but should not be the sole basis for any decision.

Mr. Sheppard also stated that bus loading can be subject to a departure only on the conditions that the off-site bus loading and unloading can be accommodated only when departure would contribute to reduced demolition of residential structures. He noted that this is a new issue that was raised in relationship to the Wilson Pacific Site. The City and District are evaluating this issue to determine if this restriction applies. District staff noted that they are not proposing any housing demolition. Holly Goddard noted that if denied the District would have to either look elsewhere or move the bus loading on site. There was considerable discussion of this issue. Steve Sheppard suggested that the committee proceed on the assumption that the City determines that Districts request to allow consideration of the departure for on-street bus loading and unloading is allowed and defer that decision to the City.

Leigh Stevens noted that Thornton Creek needs open space and requires outside activities thus the playfield is needed. This argues in favor of granting the departure.

Departure #1: Building Height

Mr. Sheppard then opened the floor to formal consideration of the Departures. The height departure was dealt with first.

Mr. Brendan Gamb made moved that;

That the Departure for height to accommodate the mechanical penthouse be approved without conditions.

Mr. Leigh Stevens seconded the motion.

Mr. Sheppard asked for discussion. No further discussion was forthcoming and the Question was called by show of hands.

The votes were as follows:

In-favor: 8

Oppose: 0

A quorum being present and the majority of those present having voted in the affirmative, the motion passed.

Departure #2: Parking and Bus loading (combined)

Mr. Sheppard began to open discussions on the remaining departure request on parking and bus loading. Mr. Sheppard asked if the committee wanted to deal with the departures as an inter-related issue or as two separate issues. The committee decided to deal with these as two issues.

Leigh Stevens asked for clarification concerning what conditions could be attached to a recommendation to grant a departure. Steve Sheppard responded that the committee could recommend conditions so long as they were related to the departures and gave a few examples. Members asked if the conditions were typically granted and how they were enforced. Holly Goddard noted that in most cases DPD is the enforcement agency. She also noted that conditions can be attached to the SEPA documents.

Louisa Rose noted that she did not feel that there is not enough information being presented to address the safety concerns. There is a need for more specificity on how this project address safety concerns such as kids biking to school, parent driving around looking for parking space, getting out of the driveway without a line of sight; all of these scenarios should be dealt with. She also noted difficulties for her and others on her block merging onto 40th Avenue NE.

Mr. Skutack responded that the District took great care in developing its plans and took student safety into concern. He noted that the District had its plans reviewed by its risk managers to address these issues. Changes were made to the design based upon this review. He noted that there were possible further improvements and suggested possible limits on parking on both sides of the street during bus loading and unloading times. Others suggested that the start times for programs in the new building and the old Decatur building be staggered in order to reduce congestion. There was brief discussion of traffic patterns to and from the school.

A question was raised if the bus departure is approved, can the location of where the bus queue be identified. It was noted that some busses queue on NE 75th Street and that this causes some problems. A response was made that the bus will be queuing on 75th. Mr. Sheppard responded that most of the Committees granting such departure identify the location for queuing.

A comment was made regarding traffic circulation patterns and who would go where? And asked if the School District will have crossing guards to enforce the traffic circulation. District staff responded that a Transportation Analysis for this proposal was created that includes the recommended mitigation. A transportation management plan was developed to communicate this mitigation to parents and to the school principal; and enforcement of these plans include desired access routes, increase in bus ridership and these measures will be tested overtime.

Members generally expressed dissatisfaction with the size of programs proposed for the site. One member noted national studies that indicated that as a school grows larger its connections with the neighborhood diminish. Others noted that there is the potential for conflict between competing needs of different programs at the Decatur building and the new school. Others noted that demolition of all or a part of the Decatur building might give more space for parking and suggested that the first candidate might be the Annex at the corner of 43rd Avenue NE and NE 77th Street. District staff noted ~~that~~ funds for demolition of the old Decatur building were not included in the bond issues.

Members then suggested that a list of possible conditions be identified and listed a series of possible conditions. Ms. Louisa Rose made a comment about her concerns regarding safety crosswalks and the presence of crossing guards and asked for more specificity on the District's plans to assure pedestrian safety. District staff stated that these issues would be addressed in a plan when the school was opened.

Mr. Stevens noted that there were references to a Transportation Management Plan but that the Committee has received no details on this. He reiterated that there were no communication or any answers were given to these questions at the last meeting. Holly Goddard noted that she could reference the mitigation contained in the Heffron Report as conditions on issuance of the building permit. She stated that the committee could add additional conditions. For instance she suggested that the condition might state that the safety committee which is currently working with the District, continue and that the committee could suggest issues that that committee formally address.

Mr. Sheppard stated that he had been taking notes from the conversation and that he thought that a starting point for these discussions might be those conditions already either stated outright or implied in the discussions. He summarized the conditions offered as follows: 1) removal of the Annex building either for additional children's play space or off-street parking; 2) that there be a limit of 250 students for the Decatur Building and that be made formal; 3) that the mitigations recommended by Heffron Transportation be filed and approved by DPD prior to the issuance of a building permit; 4) established parking limits on 77th during drop off times; 5) bus pick up and drop off occurs on 43rd; 6) staggered start and stop times be identified for both schools and filed with DPD. A member noted that there was a need to retain the significant tree on the southeast corner of the Annex site. After further discussion members generally agreed with the direction of the stated conditions.

Mr. Stevens asked if it might be possible to recommend that the District be constrained from placing portables on the site. He noted that this might increase the total student population above what is

currently envisioned. He noted that that might result in the student population being above the 660 +250 or 910 students envisioned in this plan. Mr. Sheppard suggested that this might be stated as follows: That the student capacity of the new Thornton Creek building be capped at 660 students and that no portable classrooms be added for the life of the building without a formal process. Holly Godard made a comment that this Committee can make a recommendation, but was not sure if this is a condition to the project.

Mr. Stevens noted that the committee discussion of limiting the capacity of the Decatur Building to 250 students might be meaningless without both formal limits on the size of the Thornton Creek building and limits on portables was included. The District can say that students in these portables are in the Thornton Creek building. He noted ~~th~~that if the portables were located on areas otherwise available for parking that this would be a major problem. Mr. Sheppard re-read the conditions previously offered. Mr. Stevens suggested that the possible condition be changed to a limit of 910 students on the site in the combined schools. Members agreed with this direction.

A comment was made regarding adding the retention of the trees as part of the condition.

Mr. Sheppard made a note that as part of the condition is the retention of the existing trees with a Land Use Code landscape buffer.

Following further discussion, Mr. Sheppard re-read the list of possible conditions as follows:

- 1) The annex building site be demolished to the sited used either for off-street parking or children's play space or open space.
- 2) The annex building site includes the retention of existing trees with any code required landscape buffer with a preference for 15 ft.
- 3) The mitigations recommended in the Hefron Transportation report be filed and approved by DPD prior to the issuance of any building permit and that the plan also include details concerning student safety.
- 4) The maximum student population of 250 be established for the existing Decatur building as a formal condition on any overall occupancy permit at Thornton Creek.
- 5) There will be no parking allowed at the north side of 77th Ave NE during student drop off or pick up periods.
- 6) There will be staggered start and stop times be established for each program for each school.
- 7) The capacity of all combined schools on greater Thornton Creek site be limited to 910 students and that no portables be added during the life of this program without a formal process.

Ms. Rose made a comment about adding a no parking condition but she has to ask her neighbors that will be affected regarding that condition. Mr. Sheppard responded to make it a tentative position subject until he hears from Ms. Rose and her neighbors. Members agreed to defer final action of these conditions to give members time to consider additional conditions. Members agreed and noted that these appeared to be related to both the parking and bus loading issue. He reiterated that any recommendation concerning the bus loading and unloading would be subject to a robust City discussion concerning the legality of the District requesting this departure.

Mr. Sheppard stated that he produce a preliminary list of conditions to be discussed at the next meeting. That list would be in more technical language.

That list was provided to members prior the third meeting and was as follows:

1. That the Old Decatur Annex, located at the northeast corner of NE 77th Street and 43rd Avenue NE, be demolished and its site re-used either for added parking, children's play space or general open space.
2. That in any re-purposing of the Old Decatur Annex site the existing mature trees shall remain and that additional major plantings remain within any code-required landscaped buffer. Note: the Committee prefers that there be a 15 foot landscaped buffer if feasible.
3. That the Transportation mitigation measures contained in the Transportation Technical Report for the New Thornton Creek Elementary School prepared by Heffron Transportation Inc., dated March 11, 2014, as outlined on pages 37 and 38 of that report, be filed with, and made conditions of the issuance of any building permit and remain in effect for the life of the new school.
4. That the total student capacity for all schools or programs on the combined Thornton Creek/Old Decatur site be limited to a maximum of 910 students as follows: 1) 250 students maximum within the Old Decatur Building, and 2) 660 students in the new Thornton creek building and that this limit remain for the life of the new school.
5. Than no portable classrooms be allowed on the combined Thornton Creek/Old Decatur site for the life of the new school.
6. That in order to assure sufficient capacity for thru traffic along 40th Avenue NE no parking be allowed on the west side of 40th Avenue NE between NE 77th and 80th Streets during the AM and PM bus loading and unloading periods.
7. That, if both the new Thorntown Creek and Old Decatur Buildings remain and are in use, staggered start and stop times be established for each and that no changes to those times that would eliminate the staggering be allowed without notification of the broader neighborhood, such notification to include at least one public meeting to receive neighborhood comment.

VII. Adjournment:

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

**Thornton Creek Elementary
School Design Departure
Committee**

Members

Beverly Ikeda
Brendan Gamb
Catherine Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose
Nichole Rose

Ex-Officio Members

Steve Sheppard – DON
DON Holly Godard – DPD

**Thornton Creek Development Standards Departure
Advisory Committee
Meeting #3
Meeting Notes
July 23, 2014**

Members Present:

Brendan Gamb
Cathy Lierman
Cathy Cosca
Edward Schwartz
Joel Domingo
Leigh Stevens
Louisa Rose

Staff Present

Mike Skutack
Steve Sheppard

Others Present

See Attendance Sheet

I. Opening of Meeting and Introductions:

The third meeting was opened by Steve Sheppard from City of Seattle, Major Institutions and Schools Program. Mr. Sheppard informed the audience that this is a working Committee meeting and will be speaking mainly to the Committee members.

He declared that a quorum is present, and that the official meeting may proceed. At the last meeting, the Committee approved the height departure and developed a series of possible conditions for bus loading and parking. The School District provided its suggested changes to those conditions. In addition members had requested that SDOT be present to respond to some issues. This proved impossible so SDOT provided a rather lengthy response. Mr. Sheppard noted that both of the above were provided to the Committee prior to this meeting.

Mr. Sheppard then further discussed the ambiguity concerning the code provisions related to application for a departure for on-street bus loading and unloading. He noted that different parts of the code appear to possibly conflict and that it is not clear that the District may request this departure. That issue will be determined by DPD not this Committee. Therefore the Committee can proceed to identify possible conditions to be applied in the event that the bus loading and unloading departure is determined to be allowable. However, he cautioned that in the event that DPD determines that that departure request is not allowable, that the District would have to re-do plans to accommodate bus loading on-site, or possibly expand the site. He noted that the latter appears very unlikely.

The School District will have brief presentation, and there will be a brief 20-30 minute break for public comments.

II. District Presentation

Mike Skutack stated that the District saw two issues: 1) future use of the old Decatur building and 2) SDOT issues

Mr. Richard Best was introduced to discuss the future of the Decatur building. He stated that when the District contemplated BEX four, neither demolition of improvement to the Decatur building was contemplated. This was because the district is unsure of future capacity needs. There are no funds available for demolition of the building. In addition there are revenue issues related to state grants that might result in loss of about \$1,000,000 in state funds related to possible modernization of the building, if the building is demolished. He briefly went over the details of that process. He stated that the District opposes demolition of the Decatur building and considers the Annex as an opportunity to locate independent smaller programs. He further noted that demolition might result in major delays related to the likely need to seek approval from Historic Preservation. There was some follow on discussion of this possible modernization grant.

He noted that there is no identified use for the Decatur building and that when the Thornton Creek project was presented to the School Board they were informed that prior to either future renovation, re-use of demolition, the project would have to be brought before the School Board for approval. Members generally expressed continued support for demolition of the Annex.

Mr. Leigh Stevens made a comment about the parking space issue and he mentioned that 18 parking slots could fit in the space in the space; the NE corner has 20 parking slots with the same width as the width of the annex building and about $\frac{3}{4}$ length of the annex building; it is difficult to accept the statistic of 18 parking slots where the space is 1.5 times the currently accommodates 20 parking slots. He also noted that in prior plans the District had offered alternative lay-outs that accommodated both parking and bus loading and unloading on site. The District stated that those designs were run past the various groups and determined to be undesirable for educational program reasons.

Mr. Skutack presented to the Committee the transportation issue responses from SDOT regarding their questions from the last meeting. There was a discussion of traffic and congestion along 40th Avenue. District representatives responded that SDOT too is concerned with the safety of the intersection of NE 77th Street and 40th Avenue NE. Mr. Rose reiterated that exiting onto the street is already difficult. District staff responded that SDOT has responded to possible restriction of parking on the west side of 40th Avenue NE and that this is possible. In addition they have suggested paving establishing no parking near the curb-cuts.

Leigh Stevens asked why the District was not considering bus loading and unloading extending into the yard area along the east side of 40th Avenue NE, thus retaining greater street width for traffic.

III. Public Comments and Questions:

Mr. Sheppard opened the discussion for public comments and questions.

Comment from Chris Jackins: Mr. Jackins stated that he is the coordinator of the Seattle Committee to Save Schools. He stated that he opposes the departures for the following reasons:

1. The District is arguing that not granting the departures for parking and bus loading will spoil the project and spoil the site. This is an indication that something is wrong with the project - it is too big and should not be here.

2 Pushing the impacts out into the neighborhood will spoil the neighborhood. The proposals are not balanced.

3. The bus loading departure, according to the plain reading of the City Code, is not allowed, it is only allowed if the District is proposing to otherwise demolish residential home, which it is not.

He further noted that the District is saying that the Committee is just making a recommendation; it doesn't matter and that it is not the Committee's job to consider what the law says. He responded that

the Committee's recommendation does matter and that a poor recommendation will be used to justify a poor proposal. It is our job to look at what the law says.

Comment from John Clark: Mr. Clark spoke at the last meeting and reiterated to maintain the footprint of the field and that the space is not enough venues for the kids. He urged retention of the open spaces.

Comments from Ginny Shulman - Ms. Shulman noted that the analysis appears to indicate that the new school would create a demand for only 18 more parking spaces for 660 additional students and asked for clarification on this issue.

District Staff responded that the existing school generated a need for parking in the neighborhood. This new school design will add a considerable number of new on-site parking spaces but still result in an increased demand for over-flow parking in the neighborhood 18 cars.

Comments of Scott Tennican - Mr. Tennican stated that the neighborhood need more open space. He urged accommodation of both parking and bus-loading and unloading on site.

Comment Polly Aird - Ms. Aird commented about her conflicting feelings about this project. She stated that the granting or denial of the departures did not appear to be a major issue, but that traffic is a major issue. She noted that as with Louisa Rose she finds it almost impossible to exit onto the street from her home. She is unclear about what the solution is; and that safety is a very critical issue and having the current plan is having an accident waiting to happen; it generates too much traffic, school buses, metro buses, students and parents crossing the streets.

Comment Jim Moran: Mr. Moran commented about the questions about plenty of deliberations, the elimination of the majority of the play field and no parking on the south side of 80th. He stated opposition to granting the departures.

Comment Robin Marshall: Ms. Marshall lives on 43rd and opposes granting the departures. She noted that parent loading and unloading is a problem and asked why it might be the role of the Committee to find solutions. Instead the Committee should request that the district provide the neighborhood with adequate solutions.

Comment of Beverly Ikede: She stated opposition to the departures and urged denial of the departures.

Comments of Gary Lverage - Mr. Lverage stated that he favored granting the departures in order to retain both open space and allow a better school design. He stated that he would rather see a few additional cars parked in the neighborhood rather than a poorly designed school

Comments from an unidentified person. The commenter stated that the project might be simply too large to be accommodated in the neighborhood. He urged denial of the Departures made a comment about his expertise is on investments and could not find any solutions or signs of investments be made if the departures are not granted and that this neighborhood can sustain not having these departures.

VI. Committee Deliberations on remaining Departures:

Mr. Sheppard opened the discussions to Committee deliberations on the remaining departures. Mr. Sheppard noted that he had provided members the list of conditions identified at the last meeting. He recommended that the led in Sentence on that sheet should recognize the ambiguity concerning bus loading and unloading and should therefore read:

The departures for less than required on-site parking and continued on-street bus loading and unloading (if determined to be allowable under the Code) should be approved with the following conditions:

Mr. Sheppard asked the Committee to introduce a motion to move forward the seven conditions for the remaining departures as discussed in the previous meeting.

Mr. Stevens noted that several members might just want to deny the departures outright and to finish the Committee deliberation and do a vote to recommend or deny the remaining departures. Members asked if the process could be delayed further. Mr. Sheppard responded that is possible, but urged the Committee to attempt to come to a conclusion. Mr. Sheppard informed the Committee that members who voted against the departures may proceed to write a minority report summarizing their objections to the departures.

A committee member asked for a show of hand on possible denial of the departures. The vote was five in favor possible granting of the departures and three opposed to granting the departure at this point.

Ms. Rose stated that she voted to deny the departures because she has not been supplied with enough information that the present plan being presented is safe. She was disappointed that there was no representative from SDOT at this meeting to discuss the safety issues.

Mr. Skutack informed the Committee that a representative from SDOT was present in the SEPA meeting, but due to schedule conflict, was not able to attend tonight's meeting. Mr. Skutack mentioned that SDOT did provide a comprehensive response to the questions the Committee have regarding safety issues. There was brief discussion concerning a possible loop arrangement for parent drop off access to the parking lot off of 40th Avenue NE. Mr. Skutack responded that there were reasons why that was not considered.

Leigh Stevens noted that the District response to the initial Committee conditions eliminated the prohibition of locating portables on the site. District staff responded ~~that~~ in the event that the old Decatur building was demolished then the possibility of addition of portables so long as the total number of students on site remained below 910 students.

Mr. Sheppard commented that there seems to be a high level of concern regarding safety and the effect of on street bus loading and more discussion on how much on-site parking and a bit less concern about the number of parking spaces on-site. Ms. Rose responded that it is difficult to separate the 40th Ave NE parking and buses that contributes to the traffic and safety problems. Ms. Rose would like to know how much traffic and parking will be improved and can this Committee speak to this issue; there are too many unknown regarding space and capacity.

Mr. Sheppard noted that the Committee's decision is not a capacity issue if the Committee decided to deny these departures. If departures are granted, the District can go back and re-design the proposal to use more off the site for bus loading and unloading and on-site parking. They might have to compromise their educational program somewhat. He cautioned the Committee to not automatically assume that if the departures are denied that action would force the School District to reconsider its decisions to retain the Decatur building.

Leigh Stevens asked in denying the departures and moving the busses and parking on site would result in more than allowed lot coverage. Ms. Goddard noted that these uses would not be considered in lot coverage.

Ms. Lierman stated that her concerns are the buses on 40th. She would like to written document about the safety hazard and the plan to make it safe. Members noted that there would be a need to carefully design how the busses load and unload on that site. There was a consensus that the buses be pulled back at least one bus length from the intersection of NE 77th Street and 40th Avenue NE. District staff stated that this was possible and that they would do this if at all possible. The Committee agreed to add this issue as a condition. Mr. Skutack noted that the District hopes to complete a traffic and transportation plan this fall and that there would be a committee to advice on this. He asked members to consider volunteering for that committee. There was follow on discussion of this issue. Ms. Rose repeated her concern that responding to safety concerns are being deferred to later dates and remains opposed to making a decisions at this point without this information.

Mr. Sheppard stated that the role of the Committee is really to recommend the underlying development (zoning) standards - heights, lot coverages, parking quantity etc. He observed that the many of the issues related to broader transportation issues and auto and pedestrian safety may not be enforceable on the District and might be more properly directed to the City, or contained within the general SEPA document. He noted that traditionally conditions recommended by the Committee should be reasonably related to the impact of the District's Design, within the purview of the District to address and reasonably enforceable on the District. Stated that at this point the Committee has three options - approve the departures, approve the departures with conditions or deny the departures. It is important that any conditions are reasonable and can be controlled by the School District. This Committee can say annex the building, extend the curbs, but that will be at the School District's purview.

Mr. Stevens stated that there has been the implication that since the District loads and unloads busses on-street at most other schools that this is no be deal. However there were reasons that the code required loading on site. He observed that it is certainly safer to load on-site. For that reason he stated that he was inclined to vote for the departure for less than required on-site parking, but against the departure for on-street bus loading and unloading made a comment to have the Committee do separate vote on parking and bus loading. Mr. Stevens observed that there might be many minor re-designs that might allow the busses to be located on-site.

Mr. Sheppard would like the Committee to determine whether to combine bus loading and parking as two separate issues or combining them into one.

Ms. Leigh stated hat in the event that the bus loading and unloading is located along NE 40th Street that the District should provide she and her neighbors with convex mirrors to make backing onto the street more. Mr. Sheppard that this could be a new conditions. Other members objected to this as a condition.

Mr. Sheppard Stated that the possible conditions 1, 2 3 4 6 and 7 established at the previous meeting appeared to still be on the table. Members reviewed those conditions and added additional conditions and changes as noted below:

1. That the Old Decatur Annex, located at the northeast corner of NE 77th Street and 43rd Avenue NE, be demolished and its site re-used either for added parking, children's play space or general open space.
2. That any re-purposing of the Old Decatur Annex site the existing mature trees shall remain and that additional major plantings remain within any code-required landscaped buffer. Note: the Committee prefers that there be a 15 foot landscaped buffer if feasible.
3. That the Transportation mitigation measures contained in the Transportation Technical Report for the New Thornton Creek Elementary School prepared by Heffron Transportation Inc., dated March 11, 2014, as outlined on pages 37 and 38 of that report, be filed sand approved by DPD prior to the issuance of any permit, and made conditions of the issuance of any building permit and remain in effect for the life of the new school and that the plan include details concerning student safety
4. That the total student capacity for all schools or programs on the combined Thornton Creek/Old Decatur site be limited to a maximum of 910 students. ~~as follows: 1) 250 students' maximum within the Old Decatur Building, and 2) 660 students in the new Thornton creek building and that this limit remain for the life of the new school.~~
5. No portable classrooms be allowed on the combined Thornton Creek/Decatur site so long as the old Decatur building remains.

6. That in order to assure sufficient capacity for thru traffic along 40th Avenue NE no parking be allowed on the west side of 40th Avenue NE between NE 77th and 80th Streets during the AM and PM bus loading and unloading periods.
7. That, if both the new Thorntown Creek and Old Decatur Buildings remain and are in use, staggered start and stop times be established for each and that no changes to those times that would eliminate the staggering be allowed without notification of the broader neighborhood, such notification to include at least one public meeting to receive neighborhood comment.
8. That the area along the eastside of 40th Ave NE where bus loading is prohibited be extended into additional 40 feet north by either extended proposed curb bulb or by striping.
9. That a Transportation Management Plan (TMP) be developed for the school with the participation of neighbors and that a resident of each perimeter street be included in discussions concerning the development of the TMP.

It was moved and seconded that

The departures for less than required on-site parking and continued on-street bus loading and unloading (if determined to be allowable under the Code) should be approved with the following conditions:

1. *That the Old Decatur Annex, located at the northeast corner of NE 77th Street and 43rd Avenue NE, be demolished and its site re-used either for added parking, children's play space or general open space.*
2. *That any re-purposing of the Old Decatur Annex site the existing mature trees shall remain and that additional major plantings remain within any code-required landscaped buffer. Note: the Committee prefers that there be a 15 foot landscaped buffer if feasible.*
3. *That the Transportation mitigation measures contained in the Transportation Technical Report for the New Thornton Creek Elementary School prepared by Heffron Transportation Inc., dated March 11, 2014, as outlined on pages 37 and 38 of that report, be filed and approved by DPD prior to the issuance of any permit, and made conditions of the issuance of any building permit and remain in effect for the life of the new school and that the plan include details concerning student safety*
4. *That the total student capacity for all schools or programs on the combined Thornton Creek/Old Decatur site be limited to a maximum of 910 students.*
5. *No portable classrooms be allowed on the combined Thornton Creek/Decatur site so long as the old Decatur building remains.*
6. *That in order to assure sufficient capacity for thru traffic along 40th Avenue NE no parking be allowed on the west side of 40th Avenue NE between NE 77th and 80th Streets during the AM and PM bus loading and unloading periods.*
7. *That, if both the new Thorntown Creek and Old Decatur Buildings remain and are in use, staggered start and stop times be established for each and that no changes to those times that would eliminate the staggering be allowed without notification of the broader neighborhood, such notification to include at least one public meeting to receive neighborhood comment.*
8. *That the area along the eastside of 40th Ave NE where bus loading is prohibited be extended into additional 40 feet north by either extended proposed curb bulb or by striping.*

9. *That a Transportation Management Plan (TMP) be developed for the school with the participation of neighbors and that a resident of each perimeter street be included in discussions concerning the development of the TMP.*

No further discussion being put forward the questions was called by showoff hands.

The vote was as follows:

In-favor	6
Oppose	2
Abstaining	0

A quorum being present and a majority of those present having voted in the affirmative, the motion passed.

Mr. Sheppard reminded the Committee that he will go ahead and write a draft report with the minutes attached along with the minority report summarizing the objections to the departure requested and expect to receive it in a few weeks. The Committee will then have the opportunity to review, make comments and edits to the draft report via email.

VII. Adjournment:

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

Appendix 3 Minority Report of Mr. Leigh Stevens

The Department of Neighborhood’s Operation procedures allow that any member or group of members who voted in the minority of any of the Committee recommendations may write a minority report on their objection to the conclusions of the Committee. Mr. Leigh Stevens exercised that prerogative as follows:

Please find enclosed a table containing the points I would like shared with whoever is to make the decision about the departures.

I do not believe that the School district presented reasonable alternatives to capitulation by the city regarding the construction regulations. I consider the presentations made by the School district to have been equivalent to threats. The alternatives presented by the school district were so obnoxious that I can take it no other way. I believe that some of the other members of the committee felt that the alternatives presented were really what the School district would do and so they voted for the departures. The impact on the neighborhood will be just too big and the safety of the families tied to the school will be compromised unless the design is changed. I will continue to attempt to get the design changed.

Minority report	
Departure	Objections to departures
Parking	1 The project has understated the parking needs after occupying the building. The methodologies used to estimate the number of parking spaces needed each day ignored the fact that neither building will host a neighborhood school program. Neighborhood schools draw many of their volunteers from within walking distance of the school. These school buildings will draw volunteers from most of North Seattle. The percentage of volunteers driving to the site will remain much larger than at a neighborhood school. The Thornton Creek Program consistently has a larger percent of families with adult volunteers working at the building than the normal neighborhood school. The number of parking spaces actually used will be larger than estimated by the school district.
	2 The estimation of available parking spaces overstates the on street parking available in the neighborhood. The demolition of a large amount of parking is ignored in estimating the impact on the neighborhood.
	3 The layout of the property is not well done. Significant area is left unused due to failure to properly overlap boundary areas of useful space.

	4	The School District has told us that only the original building is needed to host an elementary program of 250 students. The need for departures would be deminished <u>diminished</u> if the other two existing buildings, which are high in maintenance cost, were demolished.
	5	The New Building covers more ground than is required. The choice to build a portion of the new building in a one story fashion increased the space required by the building itself. A decision to host grades 3,4 & 5 class rooms on the second floor and grades K,1 & 2 classrooms on the first floor would have diminished the need for the requested departures.
	6	The use of the West Side of 40th Ave N.E. for Teacher Parking will significantly increase the visibility problems for neighbors that live on that block when they are trying to back out onto the street from their driveways.
bus load/unload	1	Cars pulling out of the new parking lot will have difficulty seeing down the street when pulling out into the street between the sets of buses parked on 40th Ave. N.E.
	2	Cars either turning at, or crossing the intersection from NE 77th Street at 40th Ave. N.E. will have reduced visibility down the street from the current situation due to the buses parked there.
	3	The municipal regulation seems to disallow granting a departure in this situation.
	4	The Choice to use NE 40th Street for load/unload eliminates a number of potential on street parking spaces.
	5	There is no guarantee that METRO will agree to move the two existing bus stops on the east side of 40th Ave N.E. between NE77th Street and N.E. 80th Street.
	6	The use of the West Side of 40th Ave N.E. for Teacher Parking will significantly increase the visibility problems for neighbors that live on that block when they are trying to back out onto the street from their driveways.

Appendix 4 Minority Report of Ms. Louisa Rose,

CONTEXT FOR MY “NO” VOTE ON PARKING AND BUS DEPARTURES:

I have been a community member of the School Design Advisory Team for the new elementary school at Thornton Creek and also a community member of the Departure Committee for TC. In both positions, I have felt that School District officialdom has a real disregard for the safety and livability of our community. Even though the District “engages” community members and places them on committees, as a developer it pays little heed to the community that will bear the burden of its decisions.

I have argued -- as have parents, teachers, and other community members -- that the land available for the project is not big enough to accommodate the uses that the District contends it must have. As designed, the project puts a serious burden on the neighborhood and creates potentially unsafe conditions for all users of the roads and the schools. Why two schools? There is no stated use for the Decatur School. But its presence makes it imperative to spend time and considerable resources to try to counteract a basically unsafe situation.

While the School District states that it is continuing to work with SDOT on safety improvements for the site, the Departure Committee has heard only about possibilities and ideas without any idea of their feasibility or likelihood of being adopted. A more rational process would be to present the Departure Committee with a set of proposals that could definitely be implemented and then ask for departures. Here are the reasons I voted no.

1. The Departure Committee was not allowed to consider the traffic/parking impact of the new school plus the old Decatur School. My focus at this point is on traffic and pedestrian safety. We have been told that the campus has the capacity for 910 students: 660 in the new school and 250 in the Decatur building. Yet, astonishingly, the Departure Committee learned that we were not supposed to consider the impact of the plan as a whole, even though it was referenced throughout the SEPA document and the Heffron Traffic Report. Some combination of School District and DPD rules has created an impossible situation in which we are prevented from considering the reality of the whole project.

2. We were threatened with condemnation of our homes. For community members, the threat of condemnation contaminated the decision-making process. Committee members listened to warnings at the second and third meetings that, should the School District find it necessary, it could move to condemn property. We questioned School District officials who felt that this would not be the case, but who were not able to rule it out definitively. If condemnation was not an issue, why raise it except to intimidate community members on the committee?

3. We were not told what resources we could expect SDOT to devote to mitigating traffic and parking hazards. In order to discuss specific concerns and to share our experience with known hazards at this site, we requested that an expert from SDOT talk to us about what realistically could be done to improve the situation. SDOT sent an email assuring us that they were making efforts to deal with safety questions but refused to come to a meeting. Right now there are all sorts of ideas floating around but no coherent plan. How can I assent to Departures without any real idea of what the School District or the city will spend money on to mitigate traffic and parking hazards?

4. We couldn't consider the safety of school neighbors. After a vigorous discussion of difficulties with sight lines for drivers entering traffic on 40th Ave NE, the School District offered to remove one of the school buses from the line-up at the corner of 77th Street. The Heffron Traffic Report identifies difficulties for drivers entering traffic on 40th Ave NE from the parking lot on school property. But, when I spoke about the hazards created when residents on 40th Ave NE attempt to emerge from driveways without any ability to see oncoming traffic, the response of officials at the meeting was dismissive -- essentially "other people in Seattle have difficulties so that's the way it is."

There was a proposal to create "no parking" at bell times for the west side of 40th Ave NE, but without the ability to discuss this possibility with SDOT, I have no idea if they would agree. The committee was instructed that they could write conditions only for those issues that the School District could remedy. My concerns for safety mostly fall under the jurisdiction of SDOT. This is a perfect example of how bureaucratic rules and institutional indifference muzzle a discussion of the realities of an unsafe situation.

5. We were told that future portables could not be ruled out. Throughout my experience with both Advisory Committees, Mike Skutack and Robert Evans have made sincere efforts to be helpful and clear, but I have no reason to place any faith in the School District's top decision makers. In the run-up to the Levy, voters who attended community meetings were told that an important purpose of BEX IV would be to eliminate portables. Why then did the School District refuse the Departure Committee's request to commit to a policy of no portables once the new school was built? Is it not enough to triple traffic here, place two schools on the site without enough land to truly accommodate them, and take away a large chunk of the limited useable open space in Wedgwood?

CONCLUSION

Basically, my "no" to bus and traffic departures reflects my unease with the paucity of information this committee received. I believe it is premature to vote on the requested departures and to write conditions for those departures without far more specific information about what can actually be done to make this site safe for everyone.