

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

## **LOUISA BOREN STEM K-8 SCHOOL DESIGN DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Project #3039386-SD**

**July 25, 2022**

This report is produced pursuant to the City of Seattle Municipal Code (SMC; “the Code”) 23.44.006 F and 23.79. The intent and purpose of this report is to document public comment and make recommendations to the City regarding proposed modifications to development standards to replace an existing pole mounted sign and construct a new ground mounted sign with a double-sided, electronic, changing image message board at Louisa Boren STEM K-8 School located at 5950 Delridge Way SW, Seattle, WA 98106.



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

# **1. Background**

## **1.1 Project Description**

On April 19, 2022, Seattle Public Schools (SPS) submitted a request for a departure per SMC 23.79.002 for the Louisa Boren K-8 signage project. The departure request pertains to the prohibition on changing image message board signage in neighborhood residential zones, as set forth in SMC 23.55.020.B.

The project calls for the demolition of an existing pole mounted sign and construction of a new ground mounted sign with a double-sided, electronic, changing message board.

## **1.2 Building History**

Louisa Boren Junior High School opened in September 1963. On that day, the school welcomed 800 students in grades 6 through 9 and had 40 teaching stations. The mid-century modern building was designed by Seattle architecture firm Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johnson (now NBBJ) and The Museum of Flight.

The Boren building is spacious and light, with classrooms surrounding courtyards and Japanese Garden-style landscaping. Many of the original trees planted in the 1960's is still part of the landscape.

The building was used as interim location for schools whose premises were undergoing renovations. Boren has been a temporary home to many schools, including Arbor Heights Elementary, Madison Middle School, and West Seattle, Cleveland, and Chief Sealth High Schools.

The Boren building is no longer used as a temporary site and is now permanent home to Louisa Boren STEM K-8.

(Source: <https://borenstemk8.seattleschools.org/about/building-history/>)

## **1.3 Neighborhood Characteristics**

Delridge Way SW is a principal arterial with two driving lanes, on street parking, bus drop-off, and a protected bicycle lane. Longfellow Creek Green Space is on the opposite side of the street from the playfields and parking south of the school.



The existing pole mounted sign is located at the school's main entry. Multi-family housing is on the opposite side of the street from the school.



North of the school, zoning changes to NC2P-55(M). This zoning requires commercial uses at the street level and allows building heights up to 55'.





#### 1.4 Requests for Departures and Process

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

The purpose of the Committee is 1) to gather public comment and evaluate the proposed departures for consistency with the objectives and intent of the City’s land use policies to ensure that the proposed facility is compatible with the character and use of its surroundings; and 2) to develop a report and recommendation to the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) from DON (SMC 23.79.008).

In April 2020, City Council passed Ordinance 126072, which temporarily allowed certain land use applications to be handled administratively. These provisions (later extended by Ordinance 126188) were part of a larger City effort to expedite permits, respond to economic challenges, and address urgent development needs during the pandemic. Thus, the DON Director is temporarily authorized to submit this recommendation report to SDCI in lieu of a public advisory committee process. Absent further legislative action, the temporary provisions will expire 60 days after the Mayor lifts the COVID-19 Civil Emergency Order. The content of the report is informed by public comments solicited and reviewed by DON staff.

Following completion of DON’s recommendation report and its transmittal to SDCI, the Director of SDCI will issue a formal report and decision. The SDCI Director will consider the DON report’s recommendations and (1) determine the extent of departure from established development

standards that may be allowed, and (2) identify all mitigating measures which may be required. The SDCI Director's decision is appealable.

## 2. Departures

### 2.1 Specific District Requests

SPS proposes to install a double sided, electronic, changing image message board to replace the existing pole mounted electric sign.

The zoning code for neighborhood residential zones does not allow signs that have changing images. SPS is seeking a departure from the Code to install a sign that can display changing images due to the following:

1. Changing image signs make it easier to alert families and the community to events taking place at the school.
2. Messages can be displayed in multiple languages.
3. Changing image signs can be a more equitable way to communicate about school events since not all families have equal access to technology.

The proposed sign location along Delridge Way SW is near the school's main entry where it will replace an existing electric sign. Delridge Way SW is also a school's most active street frontage.



**Departure #1** – Changing image message board signage in neighborhood residential zones.

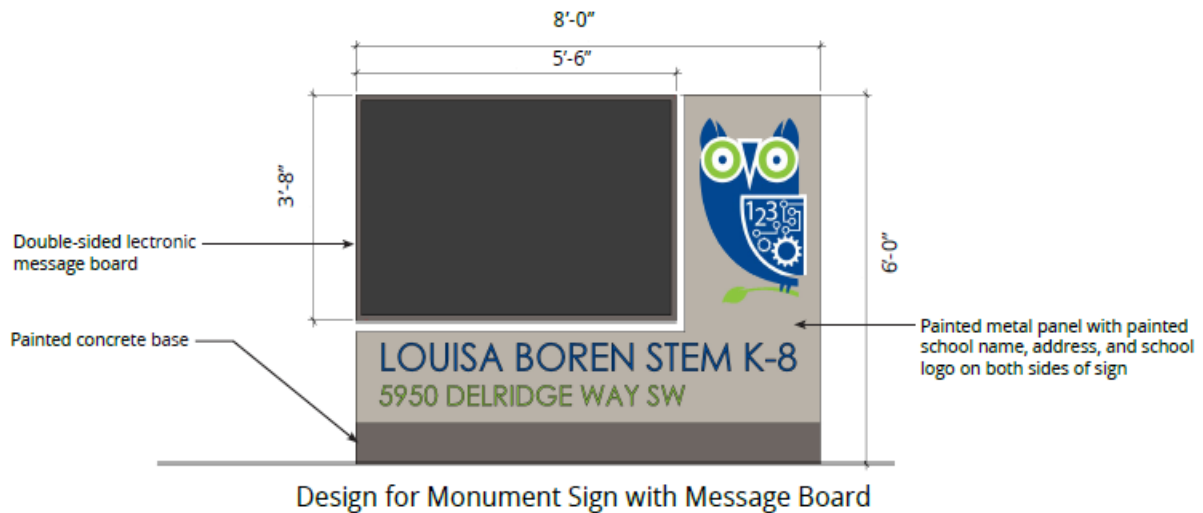
Existing Standard: SMC 23.55.020.B, D.7 Signs in Neighborhood residential zones

- B. No flashing, changing image or message board signs shall be permitted.
- D. The following signs are permitted in single-family zones:

7. For elementary or secondary schools, one electric or non-illuminated double-faced identifying sign, not to exceed 30 sq. ft. of area per sign face on each street frontage, provided that the signs shall be located and landscaped so that light and glare impacts on surrounding properties are reduced, and so that any illumination is controlled by a timer set to turn off by 10 pm.

SPS proposes the following limitations on the sign's operations:

1. Messages would only be displayed in one color.
2. Messages can change to show different content, but no messages would flash.
3. The sign would only display messages when school is in session, and would not be used on the weekends, holidays, or vacations.
4. The sign would only operate between 7:00 am and 7:00 pm.



Current pole-mounted electric sign that would be demolished



Proposed ground mounted sign with changing image message board

The proposed sign is lower to the ground than the previous pole mounted sign. This is more appropriate to the scale and character of the surrounding area.

The proposed sign is also oriented to face passing vehicles and pedestrians instead of facing neighboring properties. This mitigates its visibility from surrounding residential properties.

**Proposed Departure Requested:** Changing image message board signage in neighborhood residential zones.

## **2.2 DON Review and Recommendations**

### **2.2.1 Public Comment**

The public comment period began via a DON press release issued on May 19, 2022 and extended through June 24, 2022. DON sent the press release directly to media outlets and mailed postcards about the public comment period to addresses within approximately 600 feet of the school property. DON also created a webpage where the public could submit their comments. In addition, DON instructed SPS to post signs at the perimeter of the school property and publish a notice of public comment opportunity in the City's Land Use Information Bulletin (LUIB).

DON received a total of eight public comments via email submission. Nine comments were also submitted and posted to the [West Seattle Blog](#).

### **2.2.2 Review Criteria**

In lieu of an Advisory Committee process, Section 23.79 of the Code currently allows the DON Director to evaluate requested school departures for consistency with the general objectives and intent of the Code, and to balance the interrelationships among the following factors:

a. Relationship to Surrounding Areas:

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

b. Need for Departure: The physical requirements of the specific proposal and the project's relationship to educational needs shall be balanced with the level of impacts on the surrounding area. Greater departure may be allowed for special facilities, such as a gymnasium, which are unique and/or an integral and necessary part of the educational process; whereas a lesser or no departure may be granted for a facility which can be accommodated within the established development standards.

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

Code departures may be granted to accommodate the educational needs of public-school programs located in neighborhood residential zones. For Louisa Boren STEM K-8, SPS demonstrated it cannot equitably communicate about school events with the existing pole mounted sign and requires a development departure for an electronic message board.

#### Need for Departures

Six of the eight public comments DON received expressed support for the requested departure. Those in support described the design and location of the proposed message board as appropriate for the school and in the context of its surrounding area. The proposed sign's role in providing timely communication about school events and facilitating parental involvement in school activities were also cited.

DON also received two comments expressing concerns about the requested departure. One noted the sign's proximity to Delridge Way SW and the potential for digital reader boards to distract drivers and create unsafe conditions. The other comment stated the departure is not needed because the existing sign at Louisa Boren STEM K-8 is sufficient and relatively new.

DON shared these comments with SPS and SPS provided responses. Regarding the sign's relationship to Delridge Way SW, SPS stated they would operate the sign so that messages could change periodically but not flash. Additionally, the sign would only use one-color LED lights when displaying images. The sign itself would be neutral tone and match the color of the school building. These operational and design decisions are intended to help make the sign no more distracting than a fixed message sign.

Regarding the comment about the sufficiency of the school's current sign, SPS responded the existing pole mounted sign is not designed to display messages; it only displays the name of the school. The proposed sign fulfills a different purpose to communicate about events to the school community and the neighborhood.

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

#### DEPARTURE #1 – MESSAGE BOARD SIGN

- 1) **Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board sign having an impact on the character and scale of the surrounding area.
- 2) **Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on the presence of edges.
- 3) **Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on the location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk.



- 4) **Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on traffic, noise, circulation, and parking in the area.
- 5) **Impacts on housing and open space** was considered and DON did not have concerns about the message board having an impact on housing and open space.

DON recommends:

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

- 1) **The sign should be lit only when school is in session, and not used on weekends, holidays, or vacations.**
- 2) **The sign should only operate between 7:00 am and no later than 7:00 pm, except for special school events such as family nights and school programs, during which it can stay operational until 9:00 pm.**
- 3) **Sign illumination should be limited to one color with a dark background.**
- 4) **No flashing, scrolling, or moving images, but messages can change to show different contents.**

Nelson Pesigan,  
Department of Neighborhoods

**From:** [Adima Kareem](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** 3039386-SD - Louisa Boren STEM  
**Date:** Sunday, June 5, 2022 2:39:12 PM

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CAUTION: External Email

Hello Nelson,

Please take this email as an expression of support for the application to improve the sign for Louisa Boren stem k-8 school at 5950 Delrage Ave SW.

Thank you,  
Elmira Abdulayeva

Sent from my iPhone

>

**From:** [Angela Wallis](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** 3039386-SD - Louisa Boren STEM  
**Date:** Saturday, June 4, 2022 8:35:00 AM

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**CAUTION: External Email**

Hi Nelson,

I'm writing to express my support for the application to improve the sign for Louisa Boren stem K-8 at 5950 delrage Avenue SW.

Please register this comment as in support of the application.

Best,  
Angela Wallis

**From:** [Caitlin Huertas](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** STEM School sign  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 31, 2022 9:42:09 AM

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**CAUTION: External Email**

Hello,

I love the new design for the school. Thank you for your work!

Sincerely,  
Caitlin Huertas  
STEM K-8 PTA Communications

**From:** [dianefields41@aol.com](mailto:dianefields41@aol.com)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** Boren School Sign  
**Date:** Friday, May 20, 2022 11:37:34 AM

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**CAUTION: External Email**

I think this is a great idea. Many of the other schools have illuminated signs and so should Boren.

Diane Fields - School Neighbor

**From:** [John Reardon](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Louisa Boren sign change...  
**Date:** Monday, June 6, 2022 10:12:15 AM

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CAUTION: External Email

Sign change will not improve education quality.  
Sign change will result in higher maintenance costs both from mechanical maintenance and graffiti removal.  
No cost benefit to a sign change.

I do like the proposed artwork ("painted metal") of new sign. Nice!

Two sided electronic messaging is worthless and at best, annoying, no matter where it is or who posts or pays for it  
it.

The whole idea seems like a waste of money, which I would prefer go to educating the teachers so they could be  
even better teachers!

text (508) 617-3723  
Sincerely; John Reardon  
[johnstrongtree@yahoo.com](mailto:johnstrongtree@yahoo.com)

Humankind: A Hopeful History is a 2019 non-fiction book by historian Rutger Bregman  
The War on Normal People by Andrew Yang. The ability to put people out of work and the thoughts for a  
guaranteed minimum income.  
Any book by Becky Chambers. Future utopias, a positive artist & pleasure to read.  
The Color of Law: by Richard Rothstein. A scary history book, well documented, easy to read.  
The Man Who Planted Trees by Jean Giono. (an inspiring book)

**From:** [Margo Bergman](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** Louisa Boren STEM K-8 sign  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 31, 2022 11:58:35 AM

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CAUTION: External Email

I think this is a great idea. It will allow parents and the community to easy know what is happening and the school, allowing for greater involvement of parents who may not read email or Facebook.

Margo Bergman  
STEM parent

**From:** [Michelle Johnson](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** Louisa Boren STEM K-8 sign departure  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 31, 2022 3:20:03 PM

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CAUTION: External Email

I am in support of this change! I do not live directly across from school but as a frequent visitor it would be amazing to know when there are special events. This is also a very equitable way to communicate with many in the school community who may not have access to the same information online.

Sent from my iPhone



**From:** [Wendy Morgan](#)  
**To:** [Pesigan, Nelson](#)  
**Subject:** public comment for new sign at Louisa Boren STEM K-8 West Seattle  
**Date:** Sunday, May 29, 2022 2:33:02 PM

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**CAUTION: External Email**

Dear Mr. Nelson Pesigan,

I'm writing in response to project number 3039386-SD. I would like to have comments considered during this public feedback period regarding a new sign at Louisa Boren STEM K-8.

The following are a few of my concerns/questions regarding the installation of a new sign:

- I'm questioning why money will be spent on installing a new sign when the sign that is currently at the school is a brand new. It has been installed within the past three years. I've been a teacher at Louisa Boren STEM K-8 for five years and there is a LONG list of improvements that should be made both in and outside of the building. A new sign is not on that list of updates that would be considered essential.
- I don't think it's safe to install a digital reader board in a school zone on a busy street such as Delridge. Digital reader boards tend to distract drivers. Having distracted drivers in a school zone where there is a lot of traffic seems to put children at risk as well as other pedestrians and cyclists that use the street everyday.
- The design of the sign that has been proposed, will be blocked by school buses when families are driving kids to school. How will they be expected to read the sign when it can't be seen during the drop-off and pick up times when people would be most likely to read it?
- It has been stated that this will improve communication with families who don't have access to technology. A slight improvement might be to have a reader board on the building closest to the main entrance. Even so, I think the use of talking points, distribution of hot spots to families in need, and directly reaching out to families to ask them what is the easiest way for them to get information will be the most effective way to determine clear communication, not by installing an expensive digital reader board.
- It saddens me to see tax dollars wasted in this way. I think this might be a conversation worth having when the new sign that is currently on Delridge is old and needs to be replaced. There are so many improvements that our school deserves to have, I think that the top of the list should be increasing the security of our building.

Thank you for reading these responses. I'm happy to discuss this at greater length if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Wendy Morgan  
[mwendy500@aol.com](mailto:mwendy500@aol.com)



July 5, 2022

Nelson Pesigan  
City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods  
PO Box 94649

Re: Louisa Boren K-8 STEM School  
3039534-SD

Dear Mr. Pesigan,

It was heartening to see so many letters of support to allow the departure from the Seattle Municipal Code for the proposed double-sided electronic changing image message board at Louisa Boren K-8 STEM school.

There were letters from other writers who expressed concerns about the proposed project. The comments touched on several issues. This letter is intended to clarify the district's thinking on issues related to the requested departure from the Land Use Code.

One letter expressed concern about the sign's relationship to Delridge Way SW, stating that digital reader boards distract drivers which creates an unsafe condition. Per page 14 of the Departures document, the district proposes to operate the sign so that messages are able to be changed periodically, but the messages would not flash on the readerboard. Additionally, the district proposes to use only one color LED when displaying images. The sign itself is a neutral tone matching the color of the building. These limitations on use are intended to make the sign no more distracting than a fixed message sign.

Other design considerations were also made to favor safety in the sign's relationship to its context. The location of the sign is the same as the existing pole mounted sign. The proposed location of the sign at mid-block is far away from crosswalks and driveways so it does not obscure view angles. The orientation of the sign at ninety degrees to the street allows drivers to see the message from far away as they approach. A sign oriented parallel to the street would require drivers to turn their heads away from the road.

There was a comment that there is not a need for this departure because the existing sign is sufficient and relatively new. The existing pole mounted sign does not have an ability to display messages. It only displays the name of the school. The proposed sign fulfills a different purpose to communicate about events to the Louisa Boren school community and neighborhood.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to comments on the proposed design.

Sincerely,

Brian Love  
Principal

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