



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

D. M. Sugimura, Director

**CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Application Number: 3007490
Applicant Name: Seattle Public School District
Address of Proposal: 8815 Seward Park Avenue South

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

Land Use Application to install a 7 ft. by 7.5 ft. double-faced, electronic, changing-image sign (Rainier Beach High School) on an existing monopole. The sign will be facing east and west on South Henderson Street. Existing 7 ft. by 9 ft. readerboard sign to be removed.*

*Note: The project description has been revised from the original notice of application to reflect additional information regarding the existing sign's dimensions.

The following approvals are required:

Development Standard Departure – To approve or condition the following departures (SMC 23.79):

1. To allow a changing-image sign in a multi-family zone – SMC 23.55.022.B
2. To allow an electric double-faced sign for a public secondary school to exceed thirty 30 square feet (sq. ft.) in a multi-family zone. – SMC 23.55.002.D.9 (Allowed 30 sq. ft., Proposed 52.5 sq. ft.)

SEPA DETERMINATION: Exempt DNS MDNS EIS

DNS with conditions

DNS involving non exempt grading or demolition or involving another agency with jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Site and Vicinity Description

The existing Rainier Beach High School Campus encompasses approximately 21.58 acres located in Southeast Seattle. This triangular-shaped site is a split zone property located within both the Single Family 5000 (SF 5000), Lowrise 1 (L-1) and Lowrise 3 (L-3) zones. This Campus is bounded on the west by residential and commercial uses; on the north by Cloverdale Place South; on the northeast by single family residences and 53rd Avenue South; on the east by Seward Park Avenue South; and on the south by South Henderson Street. The school site consists of a main two-story educational building comprising of a performing arts auditorium, library, commons areas, gymnasiums, classrooms and offices; several athletic fields; detached accessory buildings; and surface parking areas.

The Campus abuts four (4) streets: Cloverdale Place South, 53rd Avenue South, Seward Park Avenue South and South Henderson Street. 53rd Avenue South is considered a non-arterial street. Both Seward Park Avenue South and South Henderson Street are considered Secondary Arterials; and Cloverdale Place South is considered a Collector Arterial, all pursuant to SMC Chapter 23.53.

Surrounding properties east and north of the subject property are also zoned SF 5000 and L-3. Both L-3 and Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3-40) zones are south of the subject site. Neighborhood Commercial 2 Pedestrian (NC2P-40) and Neighborhood Commercial 2 (NC2-40) are the zoning designations west of the proposal. Existing developments in vicinity of the subject site are as follows: single family residences and a City-owned Park (Beer Sheva Park) to the north and east; apartments, retail, car wash facility and other commercial uses to the west; a multi-retail/grocery store complex (Saars Market Place, Rite Aide, etc.), King County facility (pump station) and apartments (Lake Washington Apartments) to the south.

Proposal

The Seattle School District ("District") proposes to install a 7' by 7.5' (52.5 square foot (sq. ft.)) double-faced, electronic, changing-image sign with LED monochrome display on an existing monopole along the South Henderson Street frontage of the Rainier Beach High School property. The proposed internally illuminated east-west facing sign, with an overall height of 20.75' to the base of the existing pole, would be designed to accommodate a changeable and movable image and three (3) lines of messaging. The internal illumination is proposed to be on a timer that would shut off between 10 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. It would replace an existing slightly larger (7' by 9') double-faced readerboard sign. The existing sign and proposed sign is situated on that portion of the property that is zoned L-3.

Public Comments

The required public comment period ended on November 11, 2008. DPD received one written comment regarding this proposal. The constituent requested a fourteen (14) day extension of the comment period and stated this proposal may have potentially detrimental impacts to neighborhoods and traffic safety. This same constituent also explained if this proposal is granted, a condition should be included to not allow the following sign displays: commercial advertisements, references to private businesses, or logos.

Development Standard Departure Committee Meeting

One public meeting of the Development Standard Departure Advisory Committee (“Advisory Committee”) was held on June 26, 2008 to consider development standard departures for the school proposal. The Department of Neighborhoods prepared and submitted a report to document public testimony and make recommendations to DPD for modifications to land use code development standards. The report contains a majority report, committee minutes and public comments. Public comments at the meeting focused on questions regarding the future sign’s specifications and maintenance plan, sign message content and message relay methods (blinking, streaming, etc.). For further detail, this report is available at DPD in the Master Use Permit file for this project.

ANALYSIS – Development Standard Departure

The Development Standard Departure process is being conducted pursuant to the provisions of Seattle Municipal Code sections 23.79.002-.012. Pursuant to these provisions an Advisory Committee was convened, public comment was received, and a written recommendation to the Director of DPD was made. This analysis and decision is made pursuant to the requirements of SMC section 23.79.010 that the Director determine the amount of departure to be allowed as well as mitigation measures to be imposed. The Director’s decision shall be based on an evaluation of the factors set forth in Section 23.79.008, the majority recommendations and minority reports of the Advisory Committee, comments at the public meeting(s) and other comments from the public. If the Director of DPD modifies the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the reasons for the modification shall be put forth in writing.

In reviewing the departure request, Section 23.79.008 directs the Advisory Committee to “gather and evaluate public comment”, and to “recommend maximum departures which may be allowed for each development standard from which a departure has been requested”. It states, “Departures shall be evaluated for consistency with the objectives and intent of the City’s Land Use Code....., to ensure that the proposed facility is compatible with the character and use of its surroundings”. The Advisory Committee is directed to consider and balance the interrelationships among the following factors:

- A. **Relationship to Surrounding Areas:** *The advisory committee shall evaluate the acceptable or necessary level of departure according to:*
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.*

More flexibility in the development standards may be allowed if the impacts on the surrounding community are anticipated to be negligible or are reduced by mitigation; whereas, a minimal amount or no departure from development standards may be allowed if the anticipated impacts are significant and cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.

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 departures may be allowed for special facilities, such as a gymnasium, which are unique and/or 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.*

Departure Request and Advisory Committee Recommendation

In January 2008, the Seattle School District requested the Director to initiate the departure process for Rainier Beach High School. One departure was requested-that departure being from a combined required sign type and sign size. One double-faced 63 sq. ft. readerboard pole sign currently exists at the subject site. After the completed modernization of the Rainier Beach sign, the proposed changing-image sign will be decreased to 52.5 sq. ft. and installed on top of the existing sign pole. This type of sign and sign size is not allowed outright on multi-family zoned property. Therefore, a departure to allow for a 52.5 sq. ft. changing-image sign is necessary. Table A describes the proposed departure request based on plans submitted to DPD.

Table A		
Development Standard	Required/Allowed	Proposed
Sign Type 23.55.022.B	No flashing, changing-image or message board signs shall be permitted in multi-family zones.	A changing-image sign.
Sign Size 23.55.022.D.9	One (1) electric double-faced identifying sign, not to exceed 30 sq. ft. of area for public secondary schools.	An electric double-faced 52.5 sq. ft. sign

The Advisory Committee met on June 26, 2008. At the meeting, the Advisory Committee determined that the requested departure was MINOR in nature. During this same meeting the Advisory Committee listened to public comment and recommended APPROVAL of the above mentioned departure. Details of the recommendation were captured in an August 2008 report prepared by the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) and forwarded to DPD.

Director’s Analysis

A. *Relationship to Surrounding Areas:*

1. Appropriateness in relation to the character and scale of the surrounding area;

The school itself is similar in scale and character with the surrounding neighborhood. The school campus is large. Surrounding private development-retail stores, multi-retail/grocery store complex and apartments-as well as another Seattle Public School campus consisting of two schools (Southlake High School and South Shore Elementary/middle School) and a Seattle Parks and Recreation Department (SPAR) community center (Rainier Beach) located near the Rainer Beach High School are similar in scale to the subject property.

In reviewing the school departure for sign size, DPD concurs with the Advisory Committee that this request is appropriate. The proposed 52.5 sq. ft. sign will replace an existing sign which is comparatively larger in size (63 sq. ft.). Additionally, many pole signs associated with surrounding development exist within close proximity of the subject site. Therefore, the proposed sign's size is in scale with the school itself and surrounding development.

In turn, a potential negative impact arises from the combination of the illumination and changeable image abilities of the proposed sign—specifically in terms of light and glare impacts. However, considering that the proposed signage will be facing an easterly and westerly direction away from the residential property south of the school, light and glare impacts to the residents aren't expected to occur.

2. *Presence of edges (significant setbacks, major arterials, topographic breaks, and similar features) which provide a transition in scale;*

The impact of the proposed sign is minimal because it replaces an existing larger sign and is proposed to be affixed to the existing sign pole in the same location. Additionally, this sign will be located on the north side of South Henderson Street which is a moderately used arterial with several transit stops.

3. *Location and design of structures to reduce the appearance of bulk;*

The proposed sign is smaller in size and scale to the existing sign; and will be affixed on top of the existing sign's pole. Therefore this criterion is adequately mitigated.

4. *Impacts on traffic, noise, circulation and parking in the area; and*

Installation of the proposed double-faced electronic changing-image sign on an existing monopole situated on South Henderson Street isn't expected to result in an increase to noise, circulation and parking in the area. However, further discussion concerning impacts to traffic as it relates to vehicle safety is warranted.

Signs with movement can cause driver distraction which could possibly lead to accidents involving pedestrians, motorists and cyclists. Questions and concerns were raised regarding the effects of light, glare and changeable imaging as they relate to vehicle safety at the departure meeting. Some Advisory Committee members feared that motorists might become distracted by rapidly blinking changing messages, moving images or light glare. Ultimately, there was a general consensus that the sign imaging should not include rapidly moving graphics, quick changing messages and glaring light. The Committee was further reassured this would not occur because the District representative (Mike Skutack) stated a shut-off period (between 10 p.m. to 6:45 a.m.) would be implemented automatically by a timer and the sign operations would be under the control of the principal's office staff. It is for these reasons that the Committee chose not to impose any conditions.

DPD agrees with the Advisory Committee's concerns and concurs that the proposed shut-off period via an automatic timer is appropriate to assist in mitigating the effects of light and glare to oncoming motorists. Yet, more specific guidance is necessary to mitigate potential future impacts associated with sign movement. Therefore, as a condition of approval, only static messaging will be allowed.

5. *Impacts on housing and open space.*

The proposed sign departures aren't expected to have any impacts on existing open space. Additionally, no impacts to housing are expected because the proposed sign will be situated perpendicular from the closest residential property which is across the street and south of the proposed sign. Thus, potential impacts associated with light and glare on adjacent residences is expected to be minimal.

- 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 departures may be allowed for special facilities, such as a gymnasium, which are unique and/or 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.*

The Seattle School District identifies the need to efficiently communicate Rainier Beach school events to parents and the community at-large. It is the District's experience that effective outreach to the parents and surrounding community tends to create more positive involvement and support for the school activities and organizations. Currently, school messages are communicated via one (1) existing 63 sq. ft. double-faced readerboard pole sign. The Rainier Beach Staff and PTSA have voiced that the existing pole sign is outdated; doesn't have adequate space to allow for multiple messages; and necessitates sign lettering be manually updated on a daily basis. In order to correct these inefficiencies, the District requests to install a 52.5 sq. ft. double-faced electronic changing-image sign on the existing monopole in order to modernize the existing Rainier Beach High School pole sign.

The Seattle Public School Board Policies and Procedures manual includes detailed language regarding specific limitations on District and school based advertising. Section E02.01.B.3 of this document cites, "Advertising will not be permitted on scoreboards, reader-boards, building facades, walls or floors, or in Memorial Stadium or District athletic fields." This same manual (E02.01.E.1) also defines advertisement as "...an oral, written or graphic statement made by the producer, manufacturer, or seller of products, equipment, or services which call for the public's attention, or services. This includes the visible promotion of product logos for other than identification purposes." Also, new signage must meet several code standards, including current development standards in the Land Use Code. Per SMC 23.55.022.B and 23.55.022.D.9, an electronic changing-image sign larger than 30 sq. ft. is not allowed for a public high school located within a multi-family zoned area. In order to meet the educational and social requirements adopted by the District, two (2) departures from the Land Use Code was required.

The Advisory Committee recommended a departure to allow the 52.5 sq. ft. changing-image sign with no conditions.

DPD finds the recommendation of the Department of Neighborhoods appropriate and approves the recommended departures from development standards with recommended conditions.

DECISION-DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURE

The development standard departure to allow a changing-image sign in a multi-family is **CONDITIONALLY GRANTED.**

The development standard departure to allow an electric double-faced sign for a public secondary school to exceed thirty 30 sq. ft. in a multi-family zone (Allowed 30 sq. ft., Proposed 52.5 sq. ft.) is **CONDITIONALLY GRANTED.**

CONDITIONS-DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURE

For the Life of the Project

1. The changing image sign shall only project static text messages. No flashing, streaming or scrolling text is allowed. Additionally, imagery consist consisting of pictures, graphics or video displays is not allowed.

Signature: _____ (signature on file)
Tamara Garrett, Land Use Planner
Department of Planning and Development

Date: November 17, 2008