

# UNIVERSITY PARK COMMUNITY CLUB (UPCC)

5215 19<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Seattle, 98105  
206-522-0203

TO: [PRC@Seattle.gov](mailto:PRC@Seattle.gov)

Planner in Charge: Abby Weber (206) 684-7188 - Floor SMT 19

RE: 3036964-EG – project at 5031 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Seattle, 98105

Dear Abby Weber:

Although University Park Neighborhood, which is represented by the UPCC, is a peripheral neighborhood within the University District, as well as a single-family neighborhood, our concerns for quality of life and a positive sense of community are not confined to our geographical borders. Thus, was the board most appreciative of the community outreach by the project's developers in the very early stages of design efforts, and we shared our general thoughts, concerns, and other feedback forthwith. In fact, the plan document even summarizes our reflections; for this we are most grateful. We have enclosed our prior communications as part of this formal comment letter, per your suggestion **(please see addendum to this letter below)**.

After reviewing the plan details located on Seattle Portal Website, thanks to your assistance, we would like to provide the following additional feedback:

## General observations:

Categories	Observations
Parking availability and garage entrances	We appreciate that parking is being provided but are not sure why it was reduced from 29 spaces to 18. We also appreciate the fact that the two entrances to the two levels of parking are located on the alley and not on the street, in response to our prior detailed concerns.
Overall parameters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Landscaping</li><li>• Entries</li><li>• Bulk/height/density</li></ul>	While acknowledging the need for greater density in the U District, in line with the recent Up-Zone, quality of life is also important, especially for residents in close proximity to each other. The present COVID19 pandemic has amplified such factors. Therefore, the project should include more efforts to decrease the bulk of the structure, regardless of the trends along 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave NE. This effort should include the choice of vegetation, a prominent, inviting entrance and lobby, appropriate setbacks to address privacy in relationship to adjacent buildings, and the softening of the impact caused by its box-like, LEGO appearance.

	Of most concern is the comment regarding “ <i>recessed entries</i> ” as a means of maintaining “ <i>human scale</i> ”. (page 12) This is completely in denial of the spirit of a City who want to promote a sense of belonging. We believe the entries should be bold, inviting, and prominent from the streetscape, while ensuring safety and security for the residents.
Setbacks	Per plan: “... <i>the requested setback departures are primarily on the south side.... This has the added impact of allowing the project to provide wider north setbacks, helping preserve the solar access of the northerly neighboring building.</i> : (page 12) This is an excellent concept that will acknowledge the surrounding buildings and mutual impacts.
Individual living units	Has there been any discussion about the various size apartments that will be available? The plan document states that the project will include efficient housing units. Does that mean there will only be studio apartments? It is not clear, since the units appear to vary a great deal in size. Will there be 1 and 2 and perhaps 3-bedroom apartments? How will the developer address the changing demands of renters, who must live, study, and work from home, etc., as described in detail in our last correspondence?
Sense of Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connectivity to streetscape and the larger neighborhood</li> <li>- Streetscape appearance</li> <li>- Privacy and safety balanced with connectivity</li> </ul>	Although privacy and security should be of top priority in the design, given the goals of Seattle to create neighborhoods with a true sense of community, new construction must avoid the pitfalls of many recent developments in the U District that have hidden entrances, tall, obstructive fencing, including vegetation. Inviting entrances to engage its residents with its surrounding neighborhood is also of utmost importance, in order to promote healthy, interactive, and respectful neighborhoods.
Architectural contributions to the neighborhood	Again, we respectfully request that the developer not create a clone box building. Think along a new trajectory and be innovative. Just like tract housing in the 1960s, no matter the quality of any design, rows and rows of identical square-like structures is monotonous and disrespectful of the historical uniqueness and the eclectic nature of the U District. Note the discussion in the plan of the future of this city block, which will likely “ <i>mature and grow through redevelopment</i> ”. (page 12)
Missing details - Is this just part of the entire early design review process?	The plans discuss fenestrations, such as “ <i>well-proportioned windows</i> ” (page 12), and yet the position of doors and windows do not appear in the drawings. Therefore, we are unable to comment on these design features.
Congruency between prose and plan drawings	Flowing descriptions that are not consistent with the drawings should be avoided. Just be honest in your goals, your descriptions, and your plan specifics. Let your ideals flow into reality through your actual designs and not just represent noble, but abstract concepts.
Architectural features and the impact on the residents	Decks and position of stairs/elevators seemed to have created unusually shaped apartments, especially those facing 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave NE. Has the developer addressed such issues as these: the noise from the stairs/elevators, the practical daily use of decks by its residents (some are quite odd in shape), the location of the bathrooms and bedrooms, etc.? Some of the apartments have fairly narrow and odd-shaped areas. Unfortunately, the scale is unknown.
Acknowledgment of the impact of adjacent buildings on design options	In the various options, the developers appear to consider the design features in relationship to the adjacent buildings. This is very appropriate and insightful, as it represents a larger acknowledgment of this building’s impact with respect to its neighbors.

### Specific observations:

Topics	OPTION A	OPTION B	OPTION C
Balconies	Per plan: top four floors northern end	Per plan: restrictive to all floors on the northeast corner of the building	Per plan: On every floor for units facing 11 <sup>th</sup> Ave NE
	Per plan: <i>“Balconies are provided both to add texture to the façade and to provide additional space for residents’ use.” (p. 12) “... street-facing balconies provide additional open spaces visually connected to the street below.” (page 12)</i>		
	Observations: The best of all options	Observations: restrictive to the north end leaving most apartments without this feature. The decks face north and abut against a large verticality, thus creating a shadow, given that the sun rises and sets in the south throughout the entire year.	Observations: Deck angulations appear to address only the aesthetic appeal to the street but not the practical use by its residents. Unusual in shape and location; impractical.
	What amenities will be retained for those units that have no balconies, such as window arrangements? Perhaps they can have faux balconies, in other words, sliding doors with ornate railings for safety, without an actual deck?		
Entrances	Per plan: <i>“Human scale is maintained by balconies and recessed entries.” (p. 12) “Each option highlights the building’s main entry in a variety of ways....” (p. 12)</i>		Per plan: <i>“This option places its double-height entry in the northeast corner in reaction to the northerly neighboring building.” (page 28)</i>
	Observations: Of the three options, this is the only one where the entry actually opens directly onto the street and sidewalk.	Observations: Since the entry is recessed around a corner and does not face the street, there should be extra efforts to make it inviting and safe for residents and guests, as well as welcoming to the streetscape.	Observations: This acknowledges the neighboring residents and their privacy, etc. But, since the entry is also recessed around a corner and does not face the street, similar efforts should be made as with option B.
Unit layouts As affected by the façade articulations and location of circulation	Per plan [ issues with vertical circulation: <i>“Vertical circulation in all options is located away from the street-facing façade, reducing its impact on the building’s perceived height.” (page 12)</i>		
	Observations: Location of stairs appears to compromise the layout of certain apartments, especially those facing 11th Ave NE. Additionally, where will the windows be placed in the unit on the second floor which lies within the vertical architectural feature on the southeast corner of the building?	Observations: Less impact on the units facing the street	Observations: Least amount of impact on the configuration of the individual apartment units.
	We believe that the locations of the vertical circulation should be influenced less by architectural style and design impacts and more by the creation of strategic exits for the safe and rapid evacuation of all residents in times of emergencies. Once again, practicality must rule over appearance.		

Access to storage/bikes	Per Plan: <i>“Pedestrian and bicyclist access are the primary functions at the street facade.” (page 12)</i>		
	Per plan: separated from the lobby; access only through the garage	Per plan: open access to the lobby	Per plan: open access to the lobby
	Observations: not very practical. Requires the residents to enter the garage and leave via the alley, even if they don’t have a car. It is inconsistent with the above statement	Observations: better, but now the storage/bike area is too open to the lobby area	Observations: preferred, as there is still a separation from the lobby for privacy, security and a sense of elegance to the entry.
Overarching architectural approach (Page 15)	<i>Per plan: “Option A takes a subtractive design approach. Beginning with a solid mass ..., selective erosion is used to mitigate the perceived mass of the building, create visual interest, echo existing datums, and provide for street-facing balconies. “Vertical circulation is separated from the street-facing façade to allow for fenestration and mitigate tower elements at the street. It is also located near the main entry for residents’ convenience.”</i>	<i>Per plan: “Option B celebrates verticality. By dividing the street-facing façade into a series of vertical stripes, it also mitigates its perceived mass and establishes a 2:1:2:1 rhythm along 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NE. The southerly vertical elements end two stories above grade, allowing a gracious entrance. “Vertical circulation is placed along the north façade in coordination with the northerly neighboring building.”</i>	<i>Per plan: “Option C utilizes horizontal banding and angled walls to create a lively composition. The bands establish a vertical rhythm and are occupied as balconies in some areas. Wrapping them around the corners of the building helps tied the front and side façades together. In addition to the visual interest they provide, the angled walls help mitigate the perceived mass of the building. “Vertical circulation for this option is similar to Option A.”</i>
	Observations: Vertical circulation setback cuts down on the bulk of the street-facing façade. But the LEGO shape of the entire building is still overwhelming. What is the purpose of the southeast corner other than to lose bulk, since it is not an integral part of the entry? Will it include any other architectural detail to soften its impact?	Observations: These concepts are not clear in the drawings: 1. Vertical stripes 2. The 2:1:2: 1 rhythm. The design does appear to respect the privacy of the northern neighbor.	Observations: This option appears to be a mosaic cliché of efforts to satisfy the concerns about a building that is out-of-proportion for its lot and the neighborhood. But there are many other issues which result from this, especially concerning the configuration of the individual units (including room layout and furniture placement) and the shapes of balcony, that are showy but may not be very practical, etc.
	<b>FYI:</b> The prose should match the schematic design drawings, or at least the drawings should be marked to explain the prose in more detail, such as is alluded to on page 34. This would help those of us who are not as knowledgeable about various architectural terminology and design jargon. Instead, it appears that the glowing phrases are merely used to soften the impact of the actual design features and not to actually describe them.		

**Our summary conclusion:** If we were to select our preference among the three options, we would lean toward option D, for the above reasons and the following factors:

1. No mention about any true appreciation for the historical uniqueness of the U District
2. Prose which is incongruent with schematic drawings and incomplete details regarding vague concepts, such as fenestrations
3. The belief that this design will become the new trend: *“We see this as a precedent for bringing higher density residential usage into a zone with latent redevelopment potential.”* (page 12)


Perhaps a combination of the various positive features in the three options, along with other suggested changes to this massive box-like configuration, could become the new “option D”, ultimately achieving a new trend which will indeed inspire future development.

**The developers and the city must heed the following suggestion, as borrowed from the carpenter’s idiom of “Measure twice and cut once”: Think first, then rethink ...**

1. Rethink outside of the “Box” instead of going with the trend of yet another LEGO-styled box.
2. Rethink beyond the present assumptions of population growth trends, given the “new normal”, as individuals and families discover the nomadic spirit in order to seek new opportunities.
3. Rethink with a creative spirit, but with practical applications; let the designs be more than “window dressings”.
4. Rethink about long-term goals and commitments to your tenants and their changing needs and priorities. This neighborhood is in real need of long-term residents; a truly interactive, mutually supportive, and cohesive community cannot thrive if its existence is based and dependent upon an ever-fluctuating population of transient tenants.
5. Rethink about Seattle’s commitment to livability as well as to security and safety.
6. Rethink about the unique history and character of the U District and how to respect and reflect its richness.

The University Park Community Club appreciates the opportunity to be part of the design process, one which we hope will change the trajectory of growth throughout the U District, making livability of greater importance than merely addressing various population growth statistics and expectations. We look forward to continuing the conversation, as the designs for this proposal become more refined in detail.

Respectfully submitted,



Aileen M. Langhans, UPCC board secretary  
206-522-0203; [ailenmargaret@yahoo.com](mailto:ailenmargaret@yahoo.com)

CC: Council Member Alex Pedersen, District 4

## **ADDENDUM**

# **University Park Community Club**

## **5031 11<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE NORTHEAST PROJECT**

### **Our reflections and feedback**

**October 19, 2020**

**We truly appreciate your proactive outreach to nearby neighborhoods for input and feedback so early within the design process for your project. Upon reflecting on your brief summary statement and your survey questionnaire, along with the plans of the adjacent development at 5039 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, the University Park Community Club (UPCC) would like to provide more detailed reflections. Our family neighborhood, which is located west of your project in the U District, is situated north of NE 50<sup>th</sup> Street, south of Ravenna Park, east of 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, and west of 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave NE. Yet our concerns expand beyond our borders, as we are concerned about the quality of life throughout the U District.**

**Here is a brief summary of those reflections for your consideration:**

1. Utilize setbacks not as strict limitations, but as an opportunity to soften the impact of your development, while still providing an increased density envisioned by the U District Up-Zone goals:
  - a. Upper floor setbacks per code and ground floor setbacks both should be used to soften the impact of the bulk from the streetscape.
  - b. Ground floor setbacks should also be used to decrease the impact of bulk, density and height on the neighborhood. Further design features could also create a more inviting appearance to the surrounding neighborhood.
  - c. Ground floor landscaping should not only be designed for the residents and the passersby, but for our non-human neighbors; roof gardens cannot be the only source of “green”, although they add productively to the overall Seattle canopy.
2. We appreciate the inclusion of garage parking spaces at a 1:1 ratio for the residents, but we would like to make the following observations:
  - a. Will there be adequate, safe, accessible, and secure bicycle storage spaces for the residents?
  - b. Will the garage entrance be situated on the alley, and not the main street, with the alley being preferred?
  - c. **Reasons why the garage entrance should not be situated on the main street:**
    1. It will create an unsafe situation for pedestrians in a city that wants to create pedestrian friendly communities.
    2. It will interrupt the connectivity of the residence and residents to the community.
    3. It will diminish the grand entrance as a welcoming space to the public.

4. It will cause issues along a busy thoroughfare of cars, larger vehicles, bicycles and public transportation, with the residents needing to accelerate in order to merge with the traffic. Furthermore, the traffic itself would be put at risk by such merging. This will also be an issue for those drivers who must abruptly exit the flow of traffic on the street and watch for pedestrians, as they approach the garage entrance. Note that long-term increases in traffic volume along 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NE must be taken into serious consideration, in anticipation of population build up throughout the University District – a major goal of the U District-wide Up-Zone.
  - d. **Reasons why an alley entrance to the garage is preferred and practical:** Having the garage on the alley will pose less problems, if there are also adequate setbacks for load/unload zones and garbage and recycling facilities within the property boundaries. In that case, the cars will not be abruptly exiting onto the alleyway, where there is far less traffic anyway.
3. Make sure there is adequate area on the alley for garbage, recycling, and load/unload zones on site (not within the narrow alleyway), to free the alley for emergency vehicles, garbage trucks, etc.
  4. Inviting streetscape, entrance, and lobby should be of high priority in the overall design:
    - a. Don't turn the building into a fortress of privacy with hidden entrances, which may also decrease the safety to its residents.
    - b. Connectivity with the community and the streetscape could be creatively expressed through setbacks, landscaping, and other design features in order to increase interaction with the surrounding neighborhood, while still providing safety, privacy, and security for the residents.
    - c. Make the entrance and lobby visible and inviting as it faces the sidewalk and streetscape.
    - d. Note these design standards of the U District as discussed in the plans for the pending student resident project on 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NE and NE 50<sup>th</sup>:

#### U DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES: OPEN SPACE CONCEPTS

Open space organization and site layout	Residential open space	Street-level open space
Design outdoor amenities, open space, and pedestrian pathways to be a focal point and organizing element within the development, break up large sites, and foster permeability	Provide a variety of types of outdoor private amenity space instead of only locating privacy amenity space on rooftops.	Design open space at street level to be welcoming. Semi-public spaces, such as forecourts should engage the street and act as a “front porch” for residents. Minimize the use of gates or visual and physical barriers, especially those adjacent to the street. Any necessary fences or gates should

		be set far back from the street to create a semi-public transitional space.
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<b>Connectivity</b>	<b>Street level interaction</b>	<b>Architectural concept</b>
<p>Networks and connections to community open space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include open space at grade that physically or visually engages the public realm. Options include plants, public courtyards, play areas, gardens, and ground level patios</li> <li>• Treat all alleyways as potential pedestrian routes, incorporate windows, entrees, art, lighting, and active uses of alley facing facades to activate and improve safety in alleys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design prominent, accommodating entries with vertical emphasis and intricate architectural interest at a variety of scales. Use high quality materials and detailing to an identifiable entrance and welcoming experience for visitors and users.</li> <li>• Courtyard areas should be physically and visually accessible from the street. Units facing the courtyard should have a porch, stoop, or deck associated with the dwelling unit to support community interaction. Any fences or gates should be set back from the sidewalk to incorporate semi-public transitional space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design building massing and form to express an intentional and original response to the context, streetscape, and all guidelines, not merely a reflection of the code-allowable building envelope.</li> <li>• Reduce the bulk and scale of large buildings. A large building should be legible as a series of discrete forms at multiple scales to reduce perceived bulk, create interest, and help users understand how the building is occupied.</li> <li>• Embrace contemporary design through distinctive, elegant forms that demonstrate a context-sensitive approach to massing and façade design.</li> </ul>

5. This is a golden opportunity to create living spaces that address the new “normal” activities of daily life:
  - a. The home has become the hub of life, with more people working and studying from home. Create study and workspaces within each unit that are secure, comfortable, and inviting – ones that address the present situations where residents try to multitask in the kitchen.
  - b. Realize that external options for entertainment have become more limited, so create a livable unit for 24/7 living, not merely a place to sleep and eat.

- c. Provide residences that are inviting to more permanent residents, rather than transient populations, such as students. Make them adaptable for a variety of family sizes and styles.
- 6. Use architectural features, such as windows, balconies, upper story setbacks, and siding to break up the massive appearance, to soften the impact of bulk and density, while still providing the desired density, and to reflect the eclectic nature of the U District. Take the time to look along the various city blocks in our neighborhood to realize that our homes are rich with individuality, not with conformity and cookie-cutter concepts. Use your research of nearby architectural features to truly guide your plans, not to mimic what is present, but to honor historically lasting designs. Make sure your prose is actually congruent with your designs and plans, not merely a justification for them.
- 7. Learn from the mistakes of some recent developments in the U District and from the wonderful positive architectural features of still other new developments. Avoid being yet another box apartment structure which seems to be built with LEGOs, which creates a feeling of tract housing, and which, if spreads, threatens to establish a massive monolithic presence along our streets. Don't let the adjacent project dictate your plans. Seek to establish a new trend toward livability, uniqueness, connectivity, and compatibility over mere efforts to address population growth and demands. Even people in apartments want to feel they are living in a 'home'. Through your design bring style and grace back into our neighborhood. **So, think outside the 'box', and reimagine a new future.**

In closing, we hope that you will consider our ideas and reflect on our concerns. Let's keep the conversation going as you proceed to develop more detailed plans and designs.

Sincerely,



Aileen M. Langhans, UPCC board Secretary

5215 19<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Seattle 98105; [aileenmargaret@yahoo.com](mailto:aileenmargaret@yahoo.com); 206-522-0203