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ARCHITECTURE, PROGRAMMING, ACCESSIBLE DESIGN, INTERIOR DESIGN

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To: Ryan Harriman  
City of Mercer Island  
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**RE:** Revised Study Session Comments – DSR24-010

**Project Name:** 2900 78<sup>th</sup> Ave SE

**Project Address:** 2900 78<sup>th</sup> Ave SE

**Building Permit Number:** DSR24-010

Dear Ryan,

Please see the following itemized responses to the Design Commission's comments and recommendations to the study session conducted on 10/4/2023.

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### **Design Recommendations**

1. The Applicant shall address the Building Division comments either through design alteration or engaging the Building Division in conversations that address the items raised in the comment letter so long as there is no impact on the design.  
**Response:** The proposed building has been revised to accommodate the 15' ingress/egress easement along the south property line. Please see response letter for Building Study Session response dated 2/20/2025. This document is submitted with DSR24-010 Request for Information.
2. Due to the unique site and that the development is terminus to 29<sup>th</sup> Street, the **site design** associated with the proposed development **should serve as a focal point and be focused on pedestrian orientation and experience**. The public open space is small and design features are minimal. It needs to be more inviting to the public at a pedestrian level. The Applicant should do something more impactful, and amenities should be more cohesive.  
**Response:** The west façade and plaza was redesigned to serve as a focal point for 29<sup>th</sup> street while focusing on the pedestrian experience at the ground level. The entry to the plaza is increased to be more inviting to the public. The driveway is now combined with the previous loading zone and moved to the south property line, thus opening up more space for the public. The previous driveway area at the center of the site is now just a larger water feature and landscaped area. In addition, more storefront was added to the west façade to increase transparency into the building. The redesigned and enlarged plaza and open space creates a more cohesive and impactful space along the street frontage. Please see the revised Design Review package.



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**Design recommendations include:**

**a. Artwork:**

- i. Combine the design and lighting with artwork.  
**Response: The proposed lighting has been incorporated in the design of the public open space to highlight key features of the space including the artistic green wall along the north property line and a green wall/water feature underneath the cantilever. The sculptural benches will also be incorporated with lighting to enhance the overall space. Please see revised Design Review package.**

- ii. Install a remarkable bike rack, sculpture, or public art.  
**Response: The sculptural and public art aspects of this space are integrated into the public open space artistic green wall, the water feature, special paving, sculptural seating and planting.**

**The remarkable bike rack is no longer proposed as part of the required minor site features, but may still be requested by the City Engineer as part of the Right-of-Way improvements.**

- iii. Provide the fenestration calculation and explain why you can't reach the requirement. Since the calculation is likely not achievable, create a feature, especially at the high visibility element utilizing lighting across a textured concrete feature or some way of creating a feature element, an artistic element at the pedestrian level.  
**Response: The proposed length of the west façade is 36 linear feet. The length of the storefront has been increased to 19 linear feet providing 53% storefront. The central driveway has been removed and a seating lobby has been added in its place. On the north side of this seating lobby an additional 14' storefront has been added, helping to achieve the design intent of providing transparency at the ground level to enhance the pedestrian experience. Please see the updated Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025 for these design revisions.**

- iv. More details are needed on the artistic clock and what that would potentially look like.  
**Response: The artistic clock has been removed from the project scope.**

**b. Building Materials:**

- i. Ensure that the materials that are selected are sympathetic to the intent of the building, but also need to be held to the standard of textured quality materials.  
**Response: The proposal will use of quality textured materials to provide a language of simple, clean lines, warmth, and durability to create visual intrigue and tie the entire project together.**

- ii. All materials need to be textured and high quality. The materials and color need to last and hold up its appearance.



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**Response: The revised project proposal uses integrated color cement panels from Equitone, non-combustible wood textured siding from Nichiha, and powder coated metal panels. Each of these proposed materials provide a long-term quality and durability solution for a multi-family structure.**

- iii. Horizontal perforations in the roll up door, vertical perforations in the fence - use common language.

**Response: Both the coiling door and fence have been removed from the revised design. The original proposed driveway door has been replaced with storefront glazing and water feature wall.**

- iv. Embrace the horizontal in the coiling door, there may be an opportunity to do a horizontal in the fencing, creating or carrying that feature around as a band, so it becomes a bit more of an element that's creating some consistency from item to item.

**Response: Both the coiling door and fence have been removed from the revised design.**

- v. Consider the materials used in the garage gate and the fence that goes around the south side of the subject property. Consider reducing that palette down again because we don't want to see the trash, but there's potentially options to consider utilizing some of the major material pieces that have been identified there and continue them down at pedestrian level for a little more harmonious experience.

**Response: Both the garage gate and fence have been removed from the project. In the revised proposal the trash room is now fully enclosed and hidden from public view. The overall street facing ground level has been revised with an updated water feature, landscaping, specialized paving, and storefront glazing and plaza so to create a more harmonious pedestrian and occupant experience.**

- vi. Protect the columns, possibly a protective curve or something around them.

**Response: In the revised proposal the columns are now protected by a raised curb, while the driveway between columns have been removed.**

- vii. Consider fewer material choices; there is too much going on.

**Response: In the revised proposal the material selections have been reduced to create a more consistent and harmonious experience. Please see the revised elevations and perspectives in the Design Review packet.**

- viii. The cantilever portion comes out and then there are portions that sit back at the entry. Create a balance of the colors or the contrasting materials to work between the setback piece at the entry and the cantilever piece that comes out.

**Response: The proposed materials on the cantilever have been selected to simplify the massing as well as exemplify the small modulation of the recessed decks and façade setback at the public plaza. These recessed**

areas have been clad with a wood like siding to provide a touch of warmth. These material choices help pull the different masses of the street facing façade together.

- ix. Create a more homogeneous cantilever. That portion could potentially be all one material.  
**Response: The cantilever material pallet is simplified and the material is the same with the exception of the recessed decks that feature wood textured siding for a touch of warmth for the occupants.**
- x. The concrete walls need to be architecturally treated. The intention would be to create a fantastic feature wall and not just a smooth cast in place concrete wall.  
**Response: The proposal has been updated to now show horizontal board form concrete along the street facing façade. This treatment of the concrete creates directionality into the material and helps integrate it into the overall design of the public plaza design.**
- xi. There's a considerable amount of modulation that falls within the code. The palette is very clean and there's an opportunity to potentially add a little bit more language, but maybe that's less in variety, but more in the way that the material changes or has a higher level of interest, quality, and texture.  
**Response: Due to the ingress/egress easement revision the modulation of the south façade is less pronounced. Modulation around the building is maintained and the material pallet is simplified. The building provides variety, but in a more cohesive way. To provide that additional level of interest, quality, and texture, the revised project has expanded the use of a wood like siding to help provide that small scale element and warmth.**
- xii. Additional studies and refinements of the material expression would be beneficial.  
**Response: Refinements of materials and modulation were explored and the updated material palette provides a natural solution with a touch of warmth.**
- xiii. Exposed concrete is a concern. Consider turning the exposed concrete into a feature element that can improve the material presentation.  
**Response: The revised proposal has drastically reduced the amount of exposed concrete along the west street facing façade. The locations where exposed concrete is still present, it will be finished with a horizontal board form texture to help tie it into the overall design of the street facing public plaza and provided the concrete with some directionality while still providing great durability.**
- xiv. Considering the materials and then elevating them to create something that's a bit more engaging. Perhaps using iridescence and some bronze, but potentially instead of gray, white, and black. Add some warmth depending on the material used, using high quality and texture materials.

**Response: The overall material palette has generally remained the same but the addition of the wood like texture siding helps to creates warmth. This is located at all recessed decks as well as other selective areas to help push a more engaging overall design. The main white and gray panel materials have also been revised to a warm white instead of a cool white.**

- xv. There is concern about the use of fiber cement panel, especially the long-term durability of fiber cement.

**Response: The revised proposal has removed the Hardie fiber cement panels and replaced them with integrated color cement panels from Equitone, non-combustible wood textured siding from Nichiha, and powder coated metal panels. Each of these proposed materials provide a long-term quality and durability solution for a multi-family structure.**

**c. Lighting:**

- i. Create a design experience associated with lighting. The pedestrian experience should be enhanced by this project and lighting is a key part of that.
- ii. Lighting must be utilized very carefully.
- iii. The public right of way should be considered as part of the lighting
- iv. Consider creating feature texture, concealed lighting, color temperature, and the way that it's screened so that there is a definite level of intent.
- v. There needs to be a philosophy around lighting primarily from a pedestrian point of view.

**Response: The proposed lighting around the public open space helps to create an experience for users and passersby that highlight featured elements and varying textures. All lights are downward facing with a consistent warm white color temperature across the space.**

- **Pathway lights highlight the transition between the staggered edges paving and low profiles shrubs.**
- **Overhead lights above the green walls spill soft lighting through the leaves to help show texture and depth at night.**
- **Recessed lighting under the benches make the open slats and floating design of the bench more pronounced.**
- **Larger recessed lighting strips are used on the underside of the cantilever to illuminate the driveway as well as show the warm soffit strips that bridge the language of the public open space across the driveway.**

**d. Vegetation:**

- i. Remove some vegetation to allow the site to be more visible to pedestrians  
**Response: The vegetation has been revised to have a maximum height of 20" to provide better site visibility.**
- ii. Flank the north and south sides of the public open space with vegetation.

**Response: The landscaping has been revised to provide vegetation on both the north and south sides of the public plaza. This landscaping has been integrated into the overall plaza design to help blend vegetation and hardscape elements. Please see the revised Design Review package dated 2/20/2025.**

- iii. Ensure the species planted don't compromise the visual connection between the walkway and the open public space.

**Response: The revised planting plan is designed to not compromise the visual connection between the walkway and the open public space. Please see the revised Design Review package dated 2/20/2025.**

**e. Green Roof:**

- i. Show the irrigation system details and how it is integrated into the design.

**Response: Irrigation details have been added to the Design Review packet. Irrigation will be added at appropriate intervals to insure the survival of any plants.**

- ii. needs irrigation and there needs to be a maintenance plan provided that ensures survivability of the vegetation and a plan to replace the vegetation that doesn't survive.

**Response: A maintenance plan will be provided to ensure the survivability of the overall the sedum trays system.**

**f. Green Wall:**

- i. The green wall can be a sculptural item

**Response: In the revised proposal there are two green walls. Both of these green walls are proposed to be a sculptural element that are integrated into the overall design of the public open space. Please see revised Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025.**

- ii. The green wall should be illuminated in the evening.

**Response: The proposed lighting plan includes fixtures to illuminate both green walls.**

**g. Water Feature:**

- i. Integrate a water feature into the site feature area and then leave the public spaces more seating.

**Response: A water feature has been integrated into the landscaping at the southern end of the public plaza along 78<sup>th</sup> Ave SE. Having the water feature at this location now leaves more room for Seating at the northern end of the plaza.**

- ii. The area to the south of the driveway is designated as a site feature on the plan set  
**Response: In the revised proposal, the driveway has been shifted to the south property line. To help integrate this driveway area into the street frontage design, the first 40' of the driveway will contain a similar paving design of the public plaza. The use of similar paving patterns will help couple the two spaces together, the spaces will further linked together by use of accent lighting. Please see the revised Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025**
- iii. Consider incorporating the water feature amenity into that area  
**Response: A water feature has been incorporated into the open public space. See updated Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025.**
- iv. The water feature can be a sculpture item.  
**Response: The revised proposal contains a water feature that is designed to be sculptural in shape and composition, mimicking the hardscape design within the plaza. The water will cascades down a vertically textured rock wall with a composition of plants that blend into the plaza at ground level. Please see the revised Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025.**
- v. Tie everything together with the water feature to show purpose.  
**Response: The water feature provides design elements that help create a focal point to the end of 29<sup>th</sup> St and ties the plaza and ground level materials together with purpose.**

**h. Visibility/Visual Impacts:**

- i. Amenities and the assets being provided in the public domain, in this highly visible location, need to be very carefully considered. Ponder the long-term vista and the approach of that amenity, or series of amenities in the site design.  
**Response: The revised public open space thoughtfully integrates the proposed elements into a welcoming design that stretches the along the entire property frontage. From a distance, the artistic green walls, vegetation and water feature can be seen. As pedestrians get closer, they begin to notice the benches protruding from the walking surface, the staggered design of the stamped concrete that pushes and pulls from the vegetation, and the shallow creek running away from the building.**
- ii. Increase the visual impact and scale of the amenities so that they are perceived from a distance as well as being up close.  
**Response: In comparison to the adjacent properties, the visual impact and scale of the amenities provides a strong contrast and design interest with the proposed project. The overall composition can be perceived from a distance, through the large setback at the public plaza, which highlights**

the open space as well as the main entrance. Up close a more pedestrian scale comes into view, such as the detailing of the hardscape, landscaping, benches, and façade.

**i. Seating:**

- i. Ensure the walkway has a wide opening by opening by altering the location of the benches.

**Response: The revised proposal has the benches located at the north side of the public plaza leaving enough space to allow for a wide and welcoming pedestrian experience.**

- ii. Focus on seating in the public open space.

**Response: The public plaza contains two benches to allow the public to sit, relax, and enjoy the space. These benches have been integrated into the overall design of the space to create a coherent design.**

- iii. Utilize seating in the public open space to make it more attractive to the public and to activate the public space.

**Response: To make the public plaza a more attractive and activated space the benches have become a sculptural element, designed to stand out as unique features while still being functional.**

- iv. The benches could be a sculptural item.

**Response: The proposed benches have been design to be a sculptural element for the public plaza, please see the bench design in the updated Design Review Package dated 2/20/2025.**

**Follow-Up Requests/Recommendations:**

- a. **Area South of the Driveway** - The area to the south of the driveway is designated as a site feature on the plan set. There's an opportunity in this area for landscaping that isn't part of the public open space, green roof, or green wall. It could be a place where art could be installed, a place where a water feature could be installed, or a place where more landscaping could be installed. Explore options on how to design the area to integrate it into the pedestrian experience. The property is highly visible and the access to the property should be featured prominently.

**Response: The revised proposal has shifted the driveway to the south property line thus reducing the opportunities to extend landscaping or artwork to this area. However, to help integrate this visible driveway area into the street frontage design and overall pedestrian experience we have proposed the use of stamped concrete similar to that what is proposed within the public plaza at the northwest corner of the site. The use of similar paving patterns help couple the two spaces together, the spaces will further linked together by use of accent lighting. This allows for the driveway to become more than just a service entrance to the building.**

- b. Work with the City Engineer and the City's parking experts to determine if **the parking plan** is sufficient for the proposed development. A memo from the City Engineer to the Design Commission that the parking plan is acceptable is needed at application.  
**Response: After discussing with the City Engineer, it was determined that the parking ratio of compact stalls cannot exceed 50%. The parking plan has been revised to provide a total of (10) parking spaces 5 of which are compact stalls.**
- c. **Additional study** associated with the exposed concrete material is needed.  
**Response: The revised proposal has drastically reduced the amount of exposed concrete along the west street facing façade. The locations where exposed concrete is still present, it will be finished with a horizontal board form texture to help tie it into the overall design of the street facing public plaza and provided the concrete with some directionality while still providing great durability. In leu of the concrete that has been removed we have proposed more store front glazing as well as green walls and water features.**
- d. The Design Commission is concerned about the use of fiber cement panel, especially the long-term durability of fiber cement and want an additional study associated with the material.  
**Response: The revised proposal has removed the Hardie fiber cement panels and replaced them with integrated color cement panels from Equitone, non-combustible wood textured siding from Nichiha, and powder coated metal panels. Each of these proposed materials provide a long-term quality and durability solution for a multi-family structure.**
- e. Challenge the designer to **work on a few more iterations**, not so much from a building options or massing standpoint, but from the articulation of the materiality and the color selections. What is the building wanting to be? Is it a background building, a foreground building, a piece of the overall streetscape, whatever that is, that's what's missing. It's not quite clear what it wants to be.  
**Response: This is a foreground building that is designed to stand apart from the adjacent properties, but at the same time fit within the existing and future context. The design intent is to provide a focal point at the end of 29<sup>th</sup> street, using a prominent cantilever as a beacon, and then through the recessed façade draw pedestrians into the public plaza and into the building entrance. The design is focused along 78<sup>th</sup> Ave SE as the primary façades are the south & west sides. The remaining façades are simplified as these are marked as zero lot lines and may be blocked by future construction.**
- f. You don't really see the **elevation of the public open space** at the entry. It will be seen from a distance and approached from a distance. How does it meet the front door and some of these other site amenities. Take that into consideration and look at it from that vantage point to bolster your invitation of how that might be framed.  
**Response: The design review feedback was considered in the design and multiple vantage points were studied during the revision of the public open space. To express the entry and site amenities from a distance, the proposed project uses a drastic push-pull modulation in the street facing façade. The cantilever is pushed out into 78<sup>th</sup>**



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**Ave SE becoming a beacon, while directly adjacent the façade steps way back from the street, allowing for pedestrian to be drawn into the public plaza and the entry door. This of course is clearly defined by the landscaping and artistic benches and water feature. With this the design team deems that the public open space and entrance is clearly framed and visible from the public right of way.**

- g. **Street facing facade element:** Is there a binding element that holds all these elements together from a design and a presentation point of view, not only in the street facade, but in the overall massing associated with the building? Are these elements all bound together in one cohesive design in a small building?

**Response: The building must be viewed as a whole composition. The simple material pallet, building geometry, and response on the ground level is considered one cohesive building by the design team.**

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We trust that these responses adequately address your comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

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