

Angela Ruggeri

From: Dan Ryan <dan.ryan@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 09, 2015 9:56 PM
To: Planning Commissioners
Cc: Eric Shields; Angela Ruggeri; Paul Stewart
Subject: MRM CAR

I write in support (once again!) of the request for additional height and residential use at the MRM site in CBD 5. The proposed development at MRM offers high-quality retail, improved public spaces and pedestrian experiences, and homes for hundreds of new Kirkland residents. It'll bring a large enough retail space to host an anchor tenant that can support its neighbors. It's an enormous upgrade to the neighborhood. The city will be better for this development, and will hurt if the Commission persists in 'land-banking' this space.

Height

Obviously, this is a matter of personal preference as well is a policy question. But I would welcome an appropriately sized building at this location, and eight stories are appropriate. Eight would be lower than the adjacent Park Place. It would be lower than the Emerald building (yes, fewer floors, but below the top of their building). It would be far lower than the buildings set on the bluffs across Kirkland Way.

Five stories would be much lower than any nearby building on that side of Kirkland Way other than the Performance Center. With the generous upper floor setbacks and intervening roadway, it hardly impacts this building. And since that building doesn't have windows to the side, I'm not clear why we'd even care if it were adjacent to a much larger building. What is the interest that is served by surrounding the Performance Center with small buildings?

On the other side of Kirkland Ave, you have two smaller buildings opposite the corners of the MRM site. Each are separated by the wide street and adjacent only to the lower parts of the proposed MRM buildings. Between the setbacks, the width of the street, and their locations away from the corners of the MRM lot, I don't see what their objections would be. (If indeed, they have objected. Have they?).

The businesses at The Boulevard have always struggled, and could certainly benefit from some foot traffic. The former Sorella Spa space is still vacant six months after they moved to a livelier location on Lake Street, with no suggestion of a new tenant. Is there any retail space in downtown that has been vacant as long?

I hope we wouldn't suggest that we can never build a mid-rise building near a low-rise one? That seems a certain recipe for locking outdated development patterns in place forever.

Park Place is not sui generis. It's a fairly modest mid-rise development that most cities would welcome more of. I heard the arguments last year that the Park Place 2008 zoning decision was somehow a once-off not to be repeated. This is obviously unfair to the MRM applicant who got carved out of the legacy CBD 5 zone, and whose interests were not carefully examined.

Downtown Kirkland is our successful urban center. If we want it to work, we can not say 'once and never again' to urban development.

Residential Uses

A strict parity argument vis-à-vis the Park Place precedent would suggest a 30% residential use for MRM. I think it's broadly understood that this mix is probably not feasible. There are very few office clients in this region that are interested in sharing a building with residential units (I have only ever seen this mix work with much larger buildings, and it's not common even in large cities). So the practical question before us is whether to permit 100% residential on the upper floors, or not at all.

Park Place intends to have 600,000 sq. ft. of office, and is zoned to allow quite a bit more. As I understand their zoning, they could still get close to the 1.2M sq. ft. of office that Touchstone once planned for if they had any prospect of finding tenants. And yet nobody is confident that they will even get close to the 600K in their current plans for many years. What then is the purpose of 'land-banking' the MRM site?

And in what sense is 'land-banking' a good development strategy anyway? This is a city, not an office park. The sort of office tenants who might look to Kirkland are looking for locations with amenities that appeal to employees. They are specifically not looking for vacant lots next door. Permitting residential development here doesn't interfere at all with the ability of the Kirkland office market to serve reasonably foreseeable demand.

A conspicuous vacancy, or under-development, makes Kirkland less appealing, not more. The office developers setting up shop in smaller centers like Fremont and Ballard aren't looking for land-banks. They are looking for an environment where people want to work and firms can attract talent.

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Public Amenities

I live downtown; a few minutes' walk from the MRM site. I look forward to public improvements here. Because your memo dwells again on what sort of public benefits might be extracted from MRM, I'd like to take a few moments to comment on what I'd like to see.

I want to see it developed. I want to see the ugly and unsafe parking lot gone. I want to see successful retail including the larger retail space that MRM proposes. I could care less if we get 'public art' or a plaza, unless it's part of a well-used public space (which is to say, adjacent to buildings that see enough foot traffic).

However, I do want generous sidewalks, and connections through MRM to Park Place and to the park. I'd suggest that sidewalks be required on both sides of the street leading to Park Place (that may be implicit in MRM's suggestion of access improvements for the Performance Center, but let's make it explicit). And I do want the building to be designed so that it relates well to the street. This means bringing it up to Kirkland Way, and making Kirkland Way a more pedestrian-friendly place. A quality urban building here can mitigate the effects of the parking lots ringing the Emerald Building and others to the east of there.

The proposed design guidelines in Appendix 7 of your 3/13/14 packet promise a really great building. Let's get those written into the DRB directions.

<http://www.kirklandwa.gov/Assets/Planning/Planning+PDFs/Planning+Commission/MRM+PAR+PC+03132014.pdf>

Thank you for your time.

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