



The City of Seattle

# International Special Review District

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ISRD 97/08

## MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF TUESDAY, April 8, 2008

Time: 4:30pm  
Place: Bush Asia Center  
409 Maynard Avenue S.  
Basement meeting room

### Board Members Present

Jerry Chihara  
Misun Chung Gerrick  
Robert Ha  
Hoa Tang  
Weng Chan

### Staff

Rebecca Frestedt  
Melinda Bloom  
Karen Gordon

### Absent

Amalia Gonzalez-Kahn  
Joshua Osborn-Klein

Vice Chair Robert Ha called the meeting to order at 4:35 PM

### **040808.1 APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

February 26, 2008

MM/SC/JC/HT 4:0:1 Mr. Chan abstained. Minutes approved.

March 11, 2008

MM/SC/JC/HT 4:0:1 Mr. Chan abstained. Minutes approved with changes.

### **040808.2 CERTIFICATES OF APPROVAL**

040808.21 A Piece of Cake Bakery  
514 S. King Street

**Summary of proposed changes:** Proposal for retroactive installation of neon window signs.

**Staff Report:** Ms. Frestedt provided the staff report. She said that the street frontage is approximately 50 linear feet. She said the business is allowed 67.2 sq. ft. of signage, taking into account that the Chinese character signs amount to less than 40% of the total message area. She explained that the total proposed signage is approximately 77 sq. ft., which exceeds the allowance per SMC 23.36.338 Table 338D. She stated that photos in the project file suggest

**Administered by The Historic Preservation Program  
The Seattle Department of Neighborhoods**

"Printed on Recycled Paper"

that the signs were installed over 10 years ago without Board approval. She said that she became aware of the fact that the signs had not received approval while following up on a complaint from a community member about a non-compliant blade sign (that has since been removed by the business owner). Ms. Frestedt said that she encouraged the new owner to submit an application for a Certificate of Approval to bring the signs into compliance.

Ms. Frestedt said that the applicant requests that the Board consider making an exception to the allowance for the amount of signage. She said her staff recommendation is in support of the request on the basis that the signage contributes to the character of the District and adds interest and lighting to the street. She said the previous owner received a Certificate of Approval to add two bands of neon lighting to the face of the marquee in June 2001.

**Applicant Comment:**

Attorney Bennett Tse, from Tse and Associates, spoke on behalf of the business owner, Andy Meng who has limited English proficiency. Mr. Tse made a correction and commented that the signs were installed almost 20 years ago by the previous owner who he thought might not have been attuned to the ISRD rules and regulations. He said signs have been up and have never received any complaints. He reiterated that this issue was brought to the Board because the wooden sign on the west side (the aforementioned blade sign) was somewhat dangerous and has subsequently been removed. He stated they have also turned off one of the flashing signs at the City's request. He said they are requesting retroactive approval existing signs that have been up for well over 20 years.

**Board Questions:**

Mr. Chihara asked for clarification about how the signs were measured, since the neon does not cover the whole sign and the backing is transparent.

Ms. Frestedt said for the sake of obtaining measurements that the plastic backing for the sign frame is typically used. She said that the actual square dimensions may skew the overall calculations as a result of the transparency. She said there could be a slight adjustment to measure from the top of the neon letter to the bottom and from side to side as opposed to using the entire frame. She said that is something the board can take into account.

Mr. Tse agreed and said the measurement was based on using a straightforward rectangular measurement rather than complicated calculations that would eliminate the transparent backing.

Ms. Frestedt said she has the calculation if anyone wants to look at it in greater detail.

Ms Chung Gerrick said this is the type of signage that is encouraged in the neighborhood with the Asian characters; the graphics are animated and she said she appreciates that. She said even with the solid background and the neon light there is still a lot of transparency.

Mr. Tse confirmed the background is a clear color.

Mr. Ha said he likes that idea that it brightens up the street because it is otherwise pretty dark. He said it really helps and especially with the Gate there, it can brighten up the whole street.

Ms. Chung Gerrick asked if applicant maintains the planters in front.

Mr. Tse translated for Mr. Meng who said the planters belong to the property.

Ms. Frestedt said the property owner is the Union Gospel Mission.

Mr. Chihara said he is supportive of the exception to the allowance for the reasons stated by Ms. Frestedt and also for the transparency issues. He reiterated comments by Ms. Chung Gerrick that the signs really enliven the street and exhibit the type of graphics that are encouraged given it is not a flashing type and is fully lit. There are mitigating circumstances; it is not a paper sign obscuring the store front. He is supportive of the exception if the rest of the Board decides the same.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**Action:**

I move that the International Special Review District Board approve a Certificate of Approval for signage, as proposed. **This action is based on the following:**

**SMC 23.66.336 – Exterior building finishes  
B. Asian Design Character District**

**SMC 23.66.338 – Business identification signs**

**D. Permitted Sign Area**

**E. Illumination. Neon signs are encouraged to create an exciting and enhanced visual image in the retail core.**

**1. No sign or light shall move, flash or make noise.**

**MM/SC/JC/MCG**

**5:0:0 Motion approved.**

040808.22

Fire Station #10  
105 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue S.

**Summary of proposed changes:** Proposal to install a series of 10”x8” etched stainless steel art identification plaques.

**Staff Report:** Ms. Frestedt read from the staff report. She said the applicant requests to install three 10” x 8” etched stainless steel art identification plaques. She said each sign will be installed with four blind mount studs. She distributed materials to the Board. She said the applicants received a Certificate of Approval for a revision to the final design (mechanical screening) in March 2008. She said the Certificate of Approval for use and final design was issued in December 2005.

**Applicant Comment:** Ms. Frestedt introduced Justine Kim, from SOJ, and Ruri Yamplosky from the City’s Office of Arts and Culture. Ms. Kim said there are three major art components to this project: “Call and Response” which is proposed for 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue; “Sentinels” are proposed along Washington Street; and, “Bamboo Luminous” at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue entrance. She provided the verbiage for each plaque. She said they propose to put the plaque for the “Sentinels” on the brick wall along Washington and showed the Board the location on the plans. She said the whole area is open to pedestrian access so they can come in read sign and touch the sculpture.

Ms. Kim said the “Bamboo Luminous” on the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue side is proposed for the landscape planter and the plaque is proposed to be installed on the brick wall; it will be readable from the concrete pad next to the entry. She said the plaque for “Call and Response” is proposed to be installed on the ledge of the concrete planter wall that is on the east side of the plaza. She said the material for the plaques will be similar to look of sample provided to Board with stainless steel background and black etched letters.

**Board Questions:**

Ms. Chung Gerrick asked if the size of the sample is what is proposed.

Ms. Kim said it was.

Ms. Frestedt advised the applicant that the installation should be into the mortar joints instead of in the masonry.

Ms. Kim concurred and said they will work with the sign installer to make sure that happens.

Ms. Frestedt said there has been discussion to install a series of signs around “The Sentinels” that would be translated into different languages and asked the status of that effort.

Ms. Kim said it hasn’t moved much. She said they are trying to get the main signage done first and then move to translation. She said this is the proposed disbursement of the signage along the brick wall; the translations would march up the wall with “The Sentinels”. She said the graphic provided shows where each of those signs will be placed.

Mr. Ha asked if spotlights would be used at night.

Ms. Kim replied yes, they have already been installed and the artist has been out aiming them at the art pieces.

Mr. Chan asked if the “Bamboo Luminous” would be lighted from inside.

Ms. Kim responded they would be lit from underneath.

Mr. Ha recommended enough light so the street people won’t hang around there at night.

Ms. Kim said there is no cover so that may not an issue.

Mr. Chihara said he liked the signs as they are nice and understated.

Ms. Chung Gerrick stated she likes the translated text as one walks down the steps.

Mr. Ha said the art is nice and it is very interesting.

Mr. Chan concurred and said it will be nice for the passersby, especially the “Bamboo Luminous”.

Ms. Yamplosky said she has information about the artwork if the Board is interested; she has pages about the artists’ the inspiration behind the work.

Ms. Frestedt stated it would be a nice addition to the project file.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**Board Discussion:** The Board determined they had enough information to make a decision.

**Action:**

I move that the International Special Review District Board approve a Certificate of Approval for signage, as proposed. **This action is based on the following:**

**SMC 23.66.336 – Exterior building finishes**

**C. Exterior building design outside the Asian Design Character District**

**SMC 23.66.338 – Business identification signs**

**MM/SC/MCG/HT**

**5:0:0**

**Motion approved.**

Ms. Kim invited the Board to a public ceremony to celebrate the project on May 17 from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm with a presentation from the Mayor and tours of the facility. She said event will be open to the public.

**040808.3 APPLICATION FOR SPECIAL TAX VALUATION**

040808.31

Alps Hotel

615-625 S. King Street

Ms. Frestedt distributed a copy of the staff report to the Board. She explained that the applicant, Mr. James Koh, is seeking Special Tax Valuation for the Alps Hotel for rehabilitations made between March 17, 2006 and March 17, 2008. She said the work was performed in conformance with Certificate of Approval issued by the International Special Review District Board. She explained that there is also an Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit for National Register listed properties within the Historic District. She said it is a Federal program that property owners may also take advantage of. She said she thinks the Kohs may have taken advantage of that program as well.

Ms. Gordon provided background on the Special Tax Valuation program which is a special tax valuation for historic properties. Property owners who own designated City landmarks and contributing properties in Historic Districts, which the Alps Hotel is, can apply. She said this is a ten year special valuation on what you pay taxes: this is not what the Assessor assesses or values a property to be, it is just what taxes are paid. She said for the amount of money that is approved as rehabilitation costs, no taxes are paid on that amount. She said this is recognition that a property is an historic building and the owner has taken the extra steps to make sure it is renovated in accordance with the Guidelines of the District or as a Landmark. She said taxes will not be collected on the value of the rehab.

Ms. Gordon said that the building will continue to be appraised over the ten year period; in the 11<sup>th</sup> year it goes back on the rolls as new construction and the property owner will again start to pay taxes. She said on a project such as the Alps Hotel that it is quite possible that even with reassessment they could zero out or pay very little property tax the first couple years.

Ms. Gordon said the City has defined eligible properties as City Landmarks or contributing buildings in Historic Districts. There have not been a lot of Special Tax Valuation projects in the ID recently; she hopes that will change. She explained the process: the Board looks at the application and will then certify through a motion that the work that was done was done in accordance with the Certificate of Approval; the Landmarks Preservation Board is the local review board for this Ordinance. She evaluates the financial information and makes sure that all the expenses are within the time period and that at least 25% of the assessed value of the improvement is spent over the two year period. She said The Alps Hotel is in compliance and asked that the Board entertain a motion to pass it.

Mr. Chihara said the circumstances are that none of the current members was on the Board when the project first came through for approval.

Ms. Gordon concurred and said the reality is there is a pretty good description of rehabilitation; she usually goes back to the Certificate of Approval that was issued to make sure that it matches.

Mr. Chihara asked if The Alps was fully occupied.

Ms. Frestedt said the ground level retail is occupied and there are tenants above; she couldn't say what the occupancy is beyond that.

Mr. Chihara said it is nice to see that whole corner and now the Mar Building potentially open for business soon.

Ms. Gordon said programs such as this are a positive reinforcement for property owners.

Ms. Frestedt this project had come to the Board as a package with the Alps and the Mar.

Ms. Gordon clarified that this Special Tax Valuation is just for The Alps and said she imagines they will come in again when they are completed with the Mar and those costs will likely be eligible as well. She said they look forward to more property owners in the District taking advantage of this program so the Board can "spread the word".

Ms. Frestedt said it is a valuable message for Board members to send to the District.

Ms. Gordon said that since Mr. Koh owns a number of properties in the neighborhood, hopefully positive word will spread to other property owners in the neighborhood.

Ms. Chung Gerrick asked if the project passed through the Board and is built to compliance is the property owner eligible.

Ms. Gordon said that was correct and if the project is long term it can be phased; the owner could stagger the costs by applying multiple times. She said there have been 175 – 200 projects over the 20 years the program has been in existence; she calculated about six years ago it was about \$350 million of private investment and that doesn't count acquisition costs.

Mr. Chihara said he saw this when on the Landmarks Board he didn't realize that when it was in an Historic District it came to the individual District Board first; he said that is a nice thing to happen so that people are aware what the benefits are.

Ms. Gordon said it goes to each of the boards and it is helpful to see in order to help spread the word; it is a tangible example of the benefits of this program.

**Action:** I move that the International Special Review District Board recommend to the Landmarks Preservation Board to approve the following property for Special Tax Certification: Alps Hotel, 621 South King Street. This action is based upon the criteria set forth in Title 84 RCW Chapter 449; and based on the review and approval of the building exterior renovation by the International Special Review District Board; that the property is a contributing building located in the International Special Review District, and has not been altered in any way that adversely affects those features that identify its significance or contribution to the International Special Review District; that the property has been issued Certificates of Approval as required in the International Special Review District Board; and has substantially improved in the 24-month period prior to application, and that the recommendation is conditioned upon the execution of an agreement between the Local Review Board as required by Title 84 RCW, Chapter 449.

**MM/SC/HT/JC                      5:0:0    Motion carried.**

Ms. Gordon said the Landmarks Preservation Board will see this same Staff Report along with the ISRD Board recommendation and then there will be an agreement between the Chairman of the Landmarks Board and Mr. Koh, essentially that he agrees to maintain the property for at least ten years in that form and if he doesn't there are penalties etc. Once signed and notarized the agreement is sent to the Assessor who puts it on the rolls for 2009 and Mr. Koh will see his new taxes in 2010.

Mr. Ha asked for clarification on "maintain".

Ms. Gordon said he has to maintain the condition; he can't let it deteriorate and must keep it up for ten years or the agreement is revoked and a penalty is issued.

Mr. Ha asked what would happen if the owner sold the building.

Ms. Gordon said if the new property owner wants to take the Special Tax Valuation they have to agree to the same terms. There is an agreement that has to be executed.

Mr. Chihara asked if it was part of the title.

Ms. Gordon said it was but the new owner has to proactively sign an agreement.

Ms. Frestedt said it is a win-win, a great benefit to the property owner and the District.

Ms. Gordon said this program provides an extra layer of protection; if anything would happen with any current or future property owner, if they didn't get a Certificate of Approval to do their work this could be revoked.

#### **040808.4**

#### **GUIDELINE REVISION WORK SESSION**

Board discussion regarding Design Guideline revisions.

Ms. Frestedt provided materials for the Guidelines Revision work session and said she wanted to have a focused discussion on revision to the existing Guidelines. She said additions and

revisions could be made to the existing Guidelines in addition to the creation of new Construction Guidelines. She passed out copies of the existing Guidelines, the Ordinance and copies of Guidelines used by the Pioneer Square Preservation Board (PSPB) and the Ballard Avenue Landmark District Board (BALDB). She asked the Board for any comments about the existing ISRD Guidelines.

Ms. Chung Gerrick said they seem very light in comparison to the PSPB.

Ms. Frestedt stated she is providing them as an example of how other Boards have addressed certain elements within their districts. She said that each Historic District has an Ordinance similar to ISRD which goes into detail about what kinds of changes are allowed, prohibited; some districts allow Use review and some do not. The ISRD is unique as the District is not strictly historic but is also a cultural district.

Ms. Frestedt said the design Guidelines for the ISRD are limited to signage, canopies and awnings, with some detail about storefront and building designs. She said there is some additional detail about displays and vendor carts and reminded the Board about the recent presentation by Gary Johnson, DPD regarding possible revisions to land use code for displays. In contrast, she pointed out that the BALDB Guidelines include Codes, a section on the history, introduction and policy about how the guidelines are used and what is the context for how they fit into the District as a whole. She recommended adding a section on board meetings and the process of submitting an application for Certificate of Approval. She said BALDB guidelines also include a statement of goals and values and said much of this is included within the Land Use Code itself; she asked what Board members thought about calling out specific goals and highlighting goals or values in the ISRD Guidelines.

Mr. Chihara said it would be helpful to have some kind of overarching philosophy behind how decisions are made so they are not at the whim at any one Board member or perceived at being at the whim of any one Board member.

Ms. Frestedt said having that clearly stated guidelines would help strengthen the Board's decisions. She reminded the Board that it is a good idea when discussing an application, if there are parts of the application that is thought to be non-compliant, the Board should reference specific applicable sections of the Code or Ordinance Guidelines.

Ms. Chung Gerrick said she like the idea of adding the purpose and goals of the ISRD because looking at the current Guidelines it looks like the major focus is on awnings and canopies when really these should be later in the Guidelines. She said the Board should focus more on preserving the culture, historic buildings and encouraging the Asian characters and these items should be noted at the beginning of the Guidelines.

Ms. Chihara said the current guidelines seem like a stand-alone document separate from what is in the Land Use Code. He said he doesn't understand what the thinking was when the Design Guidelines were produced; he agrees with Ms. Chung Gerrick about the hierarchy of how things are reviewed.

Ms. Frestedt explained that the Design Guidelines were developed in response to provisions of the Land Use Code 23.66.025. Ms. Frestedt asked Ms. Gordon to comment on the origin of the guidelines.

Ms. Gordon said a lot has changed over time with regard to changing building technologies, signage changes, methods of attachment, different types of materials, so the Guidelines have really evolved over the years. She said that each of the Boards and Commissions with the exception of the Landmarks Board (because the Landmarks Board uses the Secretary of the Interior standards exclusively) all the Districts revisit their guidelines every couple years. She said much the changes come about when there are appeals to their decisions and the appeals have gone to the Hearings Examiner who has ruled perhaps against the Board or Commission. She said the ISRD Board does not have a lot of appeals; however, she said it is advisable to update the guidelines in response to trends in uses, building materials, or elements that are not clearly addressed in the existing guidelines.

Ms. Frestedt said there have been some examples where the Guidelines or the Ordinance didn't really anticipate a particular type of application, such as street furniture, lighting, or artistic expression of common building elements like the new Wing Luke Asian Museum canopy.

Ms. Gordon said one example is the issue of security gates. Twenty years ago people kept installing them, so since the gates were not preferable the Board developed standards and guidelines to oversee them. She said also the issue with street use vendors on Jackson prompted street use guidelines.

Ms. Gordon said PSPB is a good guide because they have divided their guidelines into areas that are analogous to the Chinatown/ID. She said they are working on revisions to the guidelines that affect the North Lot because it is important to give the architects and developers up front what the expectations regarding compatibility with historic buildings.

There was a discussion about recent briefings on proposed new construction projects and the absence of guidelines that regulate or guide those types of projects.

Ms. Gordon suggested that the Board consider having guidelines for different areas of the District. She said for example, there is a different character east of I-5 than there is west of I-5 or in the core versus the periphery. She recommended the Board look at the PSPB guidelines because they talk about the core area and a buffer area and the north lot is a separate area. She said the way PSPB guidelines are set up might be applicable to the ID in terms of defining guidelines; you might want more density on the periphery and be more protective of the core of the District where there are more historic buildings.

Mr. Chihara asked who provides oversight of the guidelines.

Ms. Gordon said it is with the Board.

Mr. Chihara said the Ordinance has to be done at the Council level.

Ms. Gordon explained that the Ordinance allows each Board to write its own guidelines. She said a certain effort is made provide the Board with some flexibility to change them as circumstances warrant. She said if there is a conflict, it would be an Ordinance change, for example the sign calculations. She said PSPB has language that talks about signage being compatible with the scale of the building rather than something that is a proscriptive as the ISRD guideline. She said in Pioneer Square if the South Downtown zoning passes it will have to change its maps (was will the ID) in terms of what the height standards are. She said if there are things items in the Ordinance that the Board wants to update, this is the time to talk about it.

She said it is worth reading the Ordinance and if there is something that is lacking clarity, this is the time to correct it.

Ms. Frestedt said they would include that as part of their discussion. She said the ISRD Board should consider whether or not there are areas in the Code that should be reinforced in the guidelines. She suggested approaching the revisions in more bite size pieces and asked the Board for input on how they want to move forward. She said starting with the existing guidelines seemed to make the most sense, along with seeing what is being done in other districts and determining how best to move forward.

Ms. Frestedt said that the Board may want to add a section dedicated to lighting or treatment of historic neon signs or decorative elements that are on existing buildings that are being neglected. She mentioned “ghost signs”, old historic signs and murals that exist on buildings. There needs to be a way to build into the language to encourage rehabilitation of some of those historical elements.

Ms. Chung Gerrick asked if the Board should identify specific elements that it would like to see preserved.

Ms. Frestedt said that should be part of the discussion and perhaps this can be one discussion on what other cities have done; they have guidelines that have photographs and drawings of some of the buildings and the historical fabric of the District. She said photographs and graphics would be particularly helpful for limited English speakers.

Ms. Frestedt asked Board members to itemize things they want to include in the guidelines, for example parking and load zones.

Mr. Chihara asked if there was a way to look at the guidelines in smaller segments for example looking at PSPB or BALDG, using their subheadings and looking at one or two of those subheadings and then discussing as a group what works well that might apply in the ID. He recommended that one of the subheadings be “purpose and goals” and that one meeting be dedicated to parking and storefronts and another meeting to signage and lighting.

Ms. Frestedt agreed it was a reasonable way to do it and said she would create an outline of the subheading and assign dates for the Board to dedicate time to discuss.

The Board agreed with that approach to the revision of the Guidelines.

Ms. Frestedt asked the Board’s preference on scheduling time to work on the guidelines.

Mr. Chihara asked if Board members could email their thoughts to Ms. Frestedt for her to compile and then have the Board discuss the finer points as a group which would limit the Board time.

Ms. Chung Gerrick said the discussion started a few months ago and then had a long break; she said more consistency is needed.

Ms. Frestedt said that is the importance of having an established work session schedule. She added that there will have to be a public meeting once there is a draft ready.

There was discussion about whether or not some of the work or information sharing could be done via email. Ms. Frestedt said she would accept comments via email and add them to the record if Board members were agreeable. The Board agreed to this approach.

Ms. Chung Gerrick said she likes the PSPB guidelines because one can read that without having to read the Land Use Codes which are not user friendly. She said if the Guidelines were more complete and would refer back to the Code it could be a more stand alone document.

Mr. Chihara said the Guideline format is more user friendly because you don't have to read the entire thing; you can go to the sub-group that is specific to what you are looking for.

Ms. Frestedt said that the ISRD Guidelines had not been updated since 1993.

Ms. Chung Gerrick thanked Ms. Frestedt for driving this process.

Ms. Frestedt said once there is a revised set of Guidelines it will be much easier to update. She said she wants this to be a product of the Board and appreciates all the feedback she has received at this meeting. She suggested the Board start with the Goals and Purpose section.

The Board agreed.

#### **040808.5 BOARD BUSINESS**

Ms. Frestedt said she had distributed copies of the statement for Financial Interest for Boards and Commissions which is required by law from City staff, public officials and members of boards who are taking action on projects. She asked that completed forms be turned in to her.

**ADJOURN**                      The meeting was adjourned at 6:06 PM.

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