
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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STAFF REPORT

DESIGN COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

Project No:	DSR25-003
Description:	A Study Session with the Design Commission to discuss a proposal to renovate the Encounter Church. The scope includes the demolition and renovation work in addition to the expansion of the Narthex.
Applicant/ Owner:	Brad Austin (Urbal Architecture) / Hyon Kim
Site Address:	3200 78 th Ave SE, Mercer Island WA 98040 Identified by King County Assessor tax parcel number: 5459000456 & 5459000460
Zoning District	Multiple Family (MF-2)
Staff Contact:	Grace Manahan, Code Compliance Planner
Exhibits:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Development Application2. Study Session Application3. Project Narrative4. Plan Set5. Criteria Compliance Narrative6. Building Study Session Comments

I. INTRODUCTION:

On February 4, 2025 the applicant applied for a study session with the Design Commission to review a proposal for the Encounter Church improvements project. The scope includes refinishing the existing brick veneer and wood siding, infill of existing window openings, replacement of the patio and play area surfaces and expansion of the Narthex which will include a larger roof, structural foundations and slabs, exterior curtain walls with entrance doors, installation of interior finishes, and associated mechanical, plumbing, and electrical work. Applicants for Design Commission Design Review are required to take part in a study session with the Design Commission prior to public hearing pursuant to MICC 19.15.220(C)(2)(a); this study session fulfills this requirement.

The subject property is located at 3200 78th Ave SE, in the Multiple Family (MF-2) zone. The neighboring properties to the south and east are also within Multiple Family (MF-2) zone. The neighboring property to the west is within the Public Institution (PI) zone. The neighboring properties to the north are within the Town Center (TC) zone.

The subject property is developed with the existing Encounter Church. Neighboring development include apartments to the east, offices to the south, Mercerdale Park to the west, and the United States Postal Office to the north.

The Applicant will need to submit a formal design review application for proposed development, which will require approval by the Design Commission prior to issuance of any construction permits. Following completion of this study session and receipt of an application for design review, an open record public hearing in front of the Design Commission will be scheduled pursuant to MICC 19.15.220(C)(2).

II. STAFF ANALYSIS AND CRITERIA FOR REVIEW

A. MICC 19.03.010 – Multiple-family.

Pursuant to MICC 19.03.010(A)(1), any development within the MF-2L or MF-2 zones shall comply with chapter 19.12 MICC, Design standards for zones outside Town Center.

Pursuant to MICC 19.03.010(B)(1), the existing use is an allowed use within the MF-2 zone.

MICC 19.03.010(E) contains height limits for buildings within the MF-2 zone. No building shall exceed 36 feet or three stories in height, whichever is less, except appurtenances may extend to a maximum of five feet above the height allowed for the main structure. The proposed development does not include any changes to the height of the existing building, which is five stories tall.

B. MICC 19.12.010 – General.

Design vision.

Non-Town Center areas are largely characterized by residential settings that are heavily vegetated, topographically diverse and enhanced with short and long-range views that are often territorial in nature. The design of new and remodeled structures should respond to this strong environmental context. Site design should maintain the natural character of the island and preserve vegetation concentrations, topography and the view opportunities that make Mercer Island special.

Development of new and remodeled structures should conserve Mercer Island's special environmental characteristics, such as steep slopes, watercourses, and large concentrations of mature trees. Buildings shall be designed to be architecturally compatible with other structures in the neighborhood with respect to human scale, form and massing, and relationship to natural site features. High quality and durable materials, complementary colors, texture, and architectural detail should be incorporated into the design. Use of materials such as natural wood and stone, and design elements such as large building overhangs and window exposure to natural light, are encouraged.

Landscaping should reflect the natural wooded character of Mercer Island and provide visual separation between different land uses. Amenities such as street trees, plantings, and other landscape design elements, including fountains or water features, and art features should be integrated into new and remodeled structures and their sites.

Design review process.

For full application of design requirements, all design requirements of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall apply, except as provided in MICC [19.01.050](#)(D)(3)(a), when there is new construction from bare ground, or intentional exterior alteration or enlargement of a structure over any three-year period that incurs construction costs in excess of 50 percent of the existing structure's current King County assessed value as of the time the initial application for such work is submitted; provided, application of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified.

For partial application of design requirements, the following design requirements shall apply when there is a minor exterior modification, as defined in MICC 19.16.010.

- MICC 19.12.030 pertaining to building design and visual interest;
- MICC 19.12.040(B)(5), (6), (7), (8), (9), and (11) pertaining to landscape design and outdoor spaces: entrance landscaping; planting types; screen types and widths by use and location; perimeter landscape screens; surface parking lot planting; and general planting, irrigation and maintenance standards;
- MICC 19.12.050 pertaining to vehicular and pedestrian circulation;
- MICC 19.12.060 pertaining to screening of service and mechanical areas;
- MICC 19.12.070 pertaining to lighting;
- MICC 19.12.080 pertaining to signs.

For purposes of determining when a project will be considered major new construction or minor exterior modification, and the threshold for application of design requirements as set forth in subsections (D)(1) and (2) of this section, if there is no current King County assessed value for a structure, a current appraisal of the structure, which shall be provided by the applicant and acceptable to the code official, shall be used as the value point of reference.

The applicant must demonstrate if the proposed development requires full or partial application of design requirements.

C. MICC 19.12.020 – Site features and context.

Should the proposed development require full application of design requirements, the application of these requirements shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified. The proposed development application does not include any work on the site pertaining to site features and landforms, sloped or hillside development, or the relationship of buildings to site.

D. MICC 19.12.030 – Building design and visual interest.

Compliance with MICC 19.12.030 is required for both full and partial application of design standards. The objectives of this section are to ensure high quality materials and finishes are used to bring a visually interesting experience to the streetscape; ensure the building design is based on a strong, unified, coherent, and aesthetically pleasing architectural concept; ensure buildings are detailed, provide visual interest, maintain human scale, and enhance the architectural character of the neighborhood; and to ensure high quality durable materials which will help to maintain and protect property values.

These objectives are accomplished by establishing standards for scale, form, and mass, building facades, building articulation, materials, and color, building entrances, and rooflines.

Scale, form and mass.

The proposed Narthex expansion is proportional to the adjacent buildings because the visual mass of the expansion appears cohesive with the existing Church structures on site. The height of the expansion does not surpass the adjacent Sanctuary, and the footprint of the expansion roof is aligned with the Sanctuary. The expansion does not encroach onto the street edge more than the existing Church structures so it does not appear as having unmodulated visual bulk from the public way or surrounding properties.

Building facades – Visual interest.

- a. *Facade modulation and modulation guidelines.* The proposed façade of the Narthex expansion that faces the public way is less than 50 feet in width so modulation is not required on the expansion itself. To provide modulation along the entire Church façade, the exterior wall of the expansion is set back approximately 5 feet from the exterior wall of the Sanctuary. The existing Church structure to the east of the expansion is further set back approximately 10 feet, so the entire north façade of the Church has three intervals of modulation.
- b. *Ground level facades.* The existing ground level facade at the back of the building that is visible from a public view was constructed using materials designed to create visual interest. The ground level façade of the Narthex expansion that faces the public way is almost entirely a glass curtain wall which provides visual interest for the nearby public and those entering the Church.
- c. *Fenestration.* The existing building includes fenestration that is integrated in the overall building design and provides variety in facade treatment. No changes to the locations of fenestration are proposed.
- d. *Horizontal variation and emphasis.* The proposed design includes painting the exterior building facades in a design that is visually interesting. No other changes are proposed to the building facades pertaining to horizontal variation and emphasis.
- e. *Signs.* The proposed development does not include the installation of signs.

Building articulation. The proposed design includes the use of variations of color, patterns, and arrangements of the balcony columns as facade elements to make the balconies more proportional to the scale of the building.

- a. *Tripartite articulation.* The proposed design subtly speaks to the building top, middle, and base using colors and materials that create human scale and visual interest. The applicant is responsible for demonstrating that the proposed design is equal or better than the standard for tripartite articulation, per MICC 19.12.010(E).
- b. *Fenestration.* The existing building includes fenestration that is integrated in the overall building design and provides variety in facade treatment. No changes to the locations of fenestration are proposed.
- c. *Architectural elements.* The building articulation for the narthex expansion is provided with the roofline and protruding roof structure since the facades of the expansion are primarily glass curtain walls. The roof expansion is a low-slope roof and has considerable overhangs of approximately 5 feet. Mass timber beams to support the overhangs and wood soffits underneath provide a variation of color and material compared to the glass curtain walls.
- d. *Upper story setback.* The proposed expansion of the Narthex will be set back 5 feet from the existing exterior wall of the sanctuary to reduce the apparent bulk and promote human scale.

Materials and color.

- a. *Durable building exteriors.* The applicant is responsible for demonstrating that the proposed design includes high quality and durable materials. The proposed materials are high quality, durable and will require minimal maintenance.
- b. *Consistency and continuity of design.* The proposed materials and colors included in the design are chosen to be cohesive with the existing Church structures that are proposed to be refinished as part of the renovation work.

- c. *Material and color variation.* The applicant is responsible for demonstrating that the proposed variations in materials and colors are generally limited to what is required for contrast or to accentuate architectural features.
- d. *Concrete walls.* The proposed design does not include concrete.
- e. *Bright colors.* The proposed design does not include bright or fluorescent colors.

Building entrances.

- a. *Architectural features and design.* The Narthex is the primary entrance. Special attention is given to the primary entrance by creating a modern architectural feature, with glass curtain walls and large roof overhangs, that provides an updated look and feel the Church. The simple form of the expansion is cohesive with the existing structures by not visually overpowering them.
- b. *Entrance connections.* The Narthex is the primary building entrance, and the expansion is proposed as part of the renovation work to make the entrance visually distinctive for current and new Church members.

Rooflines. The Narthex expansion is less than 70 feet in length so roofline modulation is not required, but it does provide visual interest and variation compared to the existing Church structures. The slow-slope roof has overhangs of approximately 5 feet to reduce the perceived building height and mass.

E. MICC 19.12.040 – Landscape design and outdoor spaces.

Pursuant to MICC 19.12.040, the design must ensure that the landscape design reinforces the natural and wooded character of Mercer Island. The applicant is responsible for demonstrating whether the proposed development requires full or partial design review. Should the proposed development require partial design review, compliance with only MICC 19.12.040(B)(5), (6), (7), (8), (9), and (11) is required, however, application of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified.

MICC 19.12.050 – Vehicular and pedestrian circulation. Per MICC 19.12.010(D), application of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified.

No changes to the existing vehicular and pedestrian circulation are proposed. These areas are not being worked on for the proposed development, therefore, they are not required to be altered or modified.

F. MICC 19.12.060 – Screening of service and mechanical areas. Per MICC 19.12.010(D), application of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified.

No changes to the existing screening of service and mechanical areas are proposed. These areas are not being worked on for the proposed development, therefore, they are not required to be altered or modified.

G. MICC 19.12.070 – Lighting. Per MICC 19.12.010(D), application of [chapter 19.12](#) MICC shall not be construed to require an existing structure to be demolished or relocated, or any portion of an existing structure that is otherwise not being worked on as part of the construction to be altered or modified.

No changes to the existing lighting are proposed. These areas are not being worked on for the proposed development, therefore, they are not required to be altered or modified.

H. MICC 19.12.080 – Signs. The proposed development does not include any new signs.

III. RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommended motion at this time, as this is a Design Commission study session.