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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

**PROJECT MEMO: Morrill's Crossing**

**TO:** Sarah Hopkins  
**FROM:** Pat Carroll  
**DATE:** January 25, 2006

**RE:** Landscape Peer Review

At your request, Carroll Associates has reviewed the proposed Morrill's Crossing project with respect to landscaping, buffering, screening, pedestrian circulation, and integration within the existing neighborhood. Reference materials included site visits, previous submission materials from the Applicant; discussions with the City Arborist and others in the horticultural industry, and specific review of the landscape plans for Morrill's Crossing (drawings C-9 and C-10 dated 6/30/05). The plans were reviewed for conformance with the City of Portland Land Use Standards (Chapter 14), B-2 and Contract Zone Requirements as well as Section VI- Arboricultural Specifications and Standards of Practice in the City of Portland Technical and Design Standards. Based on this analysis the following observations are made:

**OVERALL SITE PLAN CONCEPT**

The project consists of a mixed use development containing approximately 150,000 SF of non-residential space, 45 residential units on a parcel of land containing 20.2 acres of land. The site is located on the eastern side of Morrill's Corner in Portland abutting the Portland terminal rail lines along the south, Allen Avenue to the west, and an established residential neighborhood to the north. Primary access to the site will be from Allen Avenue across from Paul White Tile. The site is currently a mixture of vacant land and existing retail, warehouse, and office space which will for the most part be demolished for the proposed development.

An extensive landscape plan has been submitted which includes over 500 trees and 2774 shrub/groundcover plants, as well as preservation of a small amount of existing vegetation at the rear of the property

**PERIMETER BUFFER PLANTINGS**

The project directly abuts an established residential neighborhood to the north and proposes to buffer the project through a combination of landscape plantings and fencing. A 6-foot stockade fence is proposed to run along the north property line from Allen Avenue approximately 240 feet to the driveway connection with the Allen Avenue Apartments. It is unclear whether the fencing extends beyond this driveway but it is recommended that it be extended to the proposed Townhouses on the east side of Magnolia Street. A mixture of deciduous and evergreen plantings has been located on both sides of the fencing adjacent to the Allen Street Apartments in conformance with the technical guidelines. Along the middle portion of the site adjacent to Princeton Street a landscaped pedestrian esplanade is proposed. This landscaping, along with the placement of the townhouse buildings, seems to provide adequate buffering between the retail/ commercial uses and the residential neighborhood between Magnolia and Morrill Streets. A second section of stockade fencing is located on the northeast corner of the project adjacent to the residences on Morrill Street, extending approximately 280 feet along the west side of the Merrill Street right-of-way. Further east along the north property line minimal fencing is proposed. Supplemental buffer plantings here are rather sparse and not adequate to properly buffer the residential uses from the service area of the grocery, especially the residences that exist at Cornell and Cambridge Streets where lights from the recreation field parking lot will shine directly into the adjacent residence.

The site is highly visible from Forest and Allen Avenues, especially where the railroad crossings occur. At these locations views are predominantly at the rear of the proposed retail buildings adjacent to Bruno's and northeastward across the parking lot towards the Stop and Shop. A 6-foot chain link fence and minimal plantings are proposed continuously along the railroad line. In several locations some earth berming is proposed to help screen the parking lots. It is recommended that additional evergreen plantings be located along the south property line in the areas between Bruno's and the supermarket to more effectively screen the rear service and parking lots from view. The addition of stockade fencing and/or berming where feasible in this area will also aid in minimizing the impact of these areas from Forest and Allen Avenues.

Entrance plantings and landscaping along Allen Avenue seems attractive and will provide a welcoming arrival for visitors. Berming this landscape area between Allen Avenue and the development is recommended to significantly screen the parking lot and vehicles from view and allow the landscaping to become the foreground element in the streetscape.

### **INTERIOR BUFFER PLANTINGS**

Buffer plantings have been proposed within the project to buffer between the residential uses and the retail/ office uses. This planting consists primarily of evergreen trees located along the north and east sides of the supermarket, attempting to soften and screen the building mass and service areas. Landscape strips are also located between the townhouses/ retail parking lot and apartments/ Boxing Club uses on the east end of the project. This planting appears adequate as a buffer between differing uses with the exception of the supermarket service area, where additional evergreen trees, lower shrub masses, and fencing could be used to provide significantly more screening of this activity than proposed. It is also recommended that the applicant consider providing shrub understory massings where Austrian Pines are indicated, as these trees tend to lose lower branches and their effectiveness in screening will be greatly diminished as they mature.

Dumpster locations are indicated on the site plan and are proposed to be screened with a wood fence. The addition of some plant material around these structures would help soften their visual impact. More importantly, however, there is concern regarding the number and location of the dumpster pads. There are none indicated adjacent to the Mixed-Use building or for the townhouses, and the two located behind the proposed retail building seem awkward for a refuse truck to service. Trash haulers typically will place the dumpster where it can be easily lifted, and if the enclosures do not work properly the fear is that the dumpsters will be left outside the enclosure.

Parking lot islands are well landscaped with a mixture of shade trees, shrubs, and perennials/ ground covers and should provide an attractive element to the project. Technical Guidelines recommend that 10% of the parking area be landscaped and it is unclear whether this standard has been met with the proposed parking layout. Additional islands and plantings would help break up the mass of parking and provide shade, perhaps could be accommodated where light pole bases are located throughout, adding protection to the lights as well.

There is some concern regarding the extensive use of Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) within the parking lot islands and throughout the site. The landscape plan specifies a total of 361 of this species to be used on the site. While the plant has a good form and is salt tolerant, it may not be suited for the harsh environment of a parking lot, where heat, dry soil, snow loading and wind burn could damage plants and lead to unsightly and dead plants. The applicant should consider using this plant where relatively protected and select another species for the parking lot islands or where exposed to extreme growing conditions.

### **OTHER LANDSCAPE CONCERNS**

Tree plantings indicated within cutouts in the sidewalks at the mixed-use building and other retail buildings appear to be located within very small openings (3'x3') in the pavement. Based on our experience and discussions with the City Arborist, the minimum opening size should be 24 SF, or an area approximately 6'x4'. It is also recommended that the cutouts be raised to reduce the amount of road salt and other toxins from the parking lots from being deposited in the treewell. Given the width of sidewalk indicated on the plan, there is concern whether the cutouts will allow adequate pedestrian movement along the walkway. There is also concern regarding the proximity of the trees to the buildings, but the species indicated (Armstrong Maple) is narrow and upright and should be able to survive in such a planting condition.

There is no street tree planting or other landscaping proposed in front of the supermarket and it appears that there are locations where some level of planting could be installed. This would greatly soften the front façade of the building, provide shade and interest for the pedestrian, and break up the scale of the building and pavement.

It does not appear that curbing is proposed in the island areas between driveways at the townhouses. Plantings here will not be protected from plows, vehicle wheels, etc and will have a difficult time growing. It is recommended that curbing be provided in all locations where planting or lawn areas could be subject to vehicular traffic and abuse.

Snow storage areas identified on the plan are minimal. Given the extensive landscaping proposed for the project, it appears that a plan for snow storage/removal is critical. There is little room on islands or lawn areas to plow snow, and those plant materials adjacent to roadways, parking areas, and sidewalks need to be able to withstand plowing conditions.

Preservation of existing vegetation is not well defined on the drawings. Notes indicate that tree protection will occur at the edge of grading limits, but this does not seem to be indicated on the plan. Technical Standards as well as standard practice recommends that protection extend to the dripline of the trees to be protected. Drawings and notes should be revised to better indicate the areas and means of protection.

It appears that the detention basins will function as dry basins except for periods of inundation during storm events. It may be desirable to provide some plantings on the sideslopes to soften its appearance and blend into the natural environment which it abuts. A taller fence along the field side might also be considered to minimize balls from ending up in the pond area, and a gate somewhere would aid in retrieving those that do.

Irrigation of the landscape areas is not proposed. It is recommended that the applicant consider such a system, as there is a major investment in plant material. It is relatively inexpensive to install/maintain, and is proven to greatly benefit landscape plants, especially in such a harsh setting.

With the extensive landscaping proposed it is critical that a maintenance program be established that protects the Owner, City, and neighbors and insures that all landscaping is properly maintained, replaced, and protected throughout the life of the project.

### **OTHER SITE PLAN CONCERNS**

Pedestrian circulation is indicated throughout the project and in general seems to move pedestrians effectively. Several thoughts that would improve pedestrian circulation include:

1. Connect the sidewalk along the north side of the entrance roadway between Magnolia and Allen Avenue. This seems to be a natural connection and desired circulation route for pedestrians moving from the townhouses to Allen Avenue as well as neighborhood residents.
2. Connect the pedestrian sidewalk running east-west on the north side of the supermarket parking lot to Morrill's Street. This would allow neighborhood residents a more direct route to the supermarket as well as provide a connection to the apartments and recreation field in the rear.
3. Move the sidewalk along the supermarket service area to the east side of the landscape area, providing a greater buffer between the service area and pedestrian as well as making it more accessible for the apartment residents.
4. Provide additional berming and landscaping along the sidewalk between the driveway and railroad along the south side. This will be a pretty hostile environment for pedestrians and berming/ landscaping can add interest and better separation between the two.
5. Provide a sidewalk connection between the two apartment buildings in the rear and the recreation field/ parking lot. This route will definitely be used by residents and it makes sense to provide such a pathway.
6. Provide a pedestrian connection between the pathway that extends around the field/ detention pond and Cambridge Street.

Site Lighting is proposed to be a combination of 15' high pole lights in the large parking lot, 12' high pole lights adjacent to the residential and pedestrian oriented uses, and building mounted wall packs on the rear and sides of the retail and supermarket buildings. It appears that lighting fixtures will be sharp cut-off type and that minimal spill of light will be present at the property lines. Building mounted lights on the north side of the supermarket seem to provide excessive levels of light and do not seem warranted at the levels proposed. Lighting of the service area is high directly adjacent to the building but falls off quickly as one moves away from the loading area. It is unclear from the application whether lighting will remain on all night or only when operating, and the Board may wish to request clarification on this item.

It appears that the project will be constructed in phases. While the townhouses and apartments do provide buffer and screening of the retail center from the neighborhood, if their construction is delayed it will be critical that adequate buffer planting and/or screening be installed to protect the neighborhood residences. It is unclear how much of the buffer planting would be installed in the initial phase of the project.

Noise levels from vehicular traffic, service loading/ unloading, and HVAC equipment could be substantial at certain periods of the day depending on size, frequency and timing. It should be noted that plant materials by themselves are not adequate to block or suppress typical noise. To be effective, noise baffles need to be solid such that sound is reflected back or over the barrier, not dissimilar to what is found along the Interstate highways. It is unclear what methods, if any, the applicant is proposing to reduce or control noise levels on the project.

Overall the landscape plan seems appropriate and will greatly soften the impacts of such a large development, buffer the existing neighborhood, and provide an attractive retail shopping and living environment. With consideration of the recommendations in this memorandum this project we look forward to its successful completion.