



December 11, 2015

The Honorable Ana Mari Cauce
University of Washington
Office of the President
301 Gerberding Hall
Box 351230
Seattle, WA 98195

Dear President Cauce,

I am writing to express my deep concern and opposition to the University of Washington's (UW) plan to minimize its contribution toward affordable housing and other public benefit requirements associated with the redevelopment of Rainier Square by taking advantage of the site's unusual platting.

Last week, the City of Seattle's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) published its decision to approve a master use permit (MUP) application that would allow for the redevelopment of a portion of the Rainier Square site. As you know, Rainier Square is part of the approximately 10-acre Metropolitan Tract UW owns in the heart of downtown Seattle and is bounded at street level by Union Street to the north, 5th Avenue to the east, University Street to the south, and 4th Avenue to the west. The MUP application calls for retaining the existing Rainier Tower and one small retail building near the intersection of 5th Avenue and University Street and redeveloping the remainder of the block with a 12 story, 160 room hotel; a 59 story building with 214 residential units and 780,000 square feet of office space; 91,000 square feet of ground-level retail; and 871 below-grade parking spaces.

A unique aspect of UW's ownership of the Metropolitan Tract is that it encompasses portions of the streets and alleys that extend through the area, including the sections of 5th Avenue and University Street that are adjacent to Rainier Square. In 2009, in response to a request by UW, DPD completed a Land Use Code interpretation that considered whether those segments of 5th Avenue and University Street could be counted as lot area for the purpose of applying the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) standard to calculate permitted floor area on the Rainier Square site. After reviewing relevant sections of the Land Use Code as well as related property records and case history, DPD ultimately concluded that they could, thereby increasing the base amount of floor area UW could build on the Rainier Square block before having to provide affordable housing, childcare, and other public benefits in exchange for additional FAR.

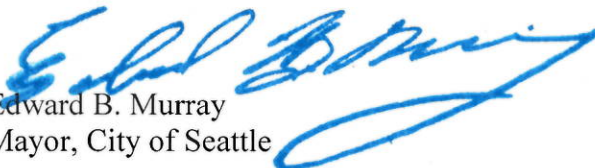
One year later, in 2010, the City executed a new street use agreement with UW that reaffirms UW's ownership of sections of 5th Avenue and University Street. This agreement, which has an initial term of 10 years, was negotiated by a prior administration and is not something I would have supported without also initiating a conversation about future UW contributions toward affordable housing production associated with development on the Metropolitan Tract.

DPD's recent MUP decision also treats portions of 5th Avenue and University Street as lot area within the Metropolitan Tract, effectively increasing the base amount of floor area UW can develop on the Rainier Square site. I believe it is inappropriate for UW – as one of the largest employers in Seattle and an important community partner – to take advantage of a narrow and limited legal technicality to reduce its payment toward affordable housing production to a level below what any other developer would have to provide for a similar project downtown. Recent estimates of how much less the Rainier Square project will have to contribute toward affordable housing and other public benefits as a result of UW's ability to include street area in its FAR calculations are in the millions of dollars.

As far as I am concerned, UW should contribute the same amount it would have paid had it not been able to count sections of 5th Avenue and University Street as lot area associated with the Rainier Square site.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate the positive, collaborative relationship the City shares with UW and believe together we can find a solution. I know that UW is as committed to creating an affordable and livable Seattle as the City is. I ask that your staff work with mine to reach an agreement that allows this project to progress while helping build an affordable Seattle for all.

Sincerely,


Edward B. Murray
Mayor, City of Seattle

Cc: Gregory K. Johnson, President, Wright Runstad & Company