



# Northwest District Association

August 20, 2015

**Portland Design Commission**

1900 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97201

**RE: EA 15-125425 DA – Block 290 - Slabtown Square**

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity for the NWDA Planning Committee to officially testify on the proposed Con-way square at NW 21st and Pettygrove Streets.

We have met with the developer and reviewed the most recent proposal that was presented at DAR #2 on June 11, 2015. We offer the following testimony.

The Master Plan envisioned the development on Block 290W be planned in concert with Block 291 to the north in order to achieve a more successful public square that closely matches the aspirations of the community. Without an integrated design, two key challenges, the height and FAR on the site, and the underground parking access are difficult to resolve. At an NWDA meeting in June, owners of Blocks 290W and 291 agreed to discuss the possibility of developing the parcels in concert with one another. Since NWDA has not received an updated plan reflecting the outcome of such discussions, its comments in this letter are offered in order to provide input on DAR #2, but with the hope that an alternate design that better meets the Conway Master Plan requirements and the community's needs is forthcoming.

Assuming that Blocks 290W and 291 are not developed in concert, we would nonetheless be supportive of some components of the current scheme, which is the culmination of six months of collaboration between the NWDA, Con-way and the development team. But the success of the Public Square is dependent on the resolution of several key elements.

**We are supportive of the following elements of the current proposal:**

1. **Enclosed square.** We support the enclosed square concept, with buildings surrounding the square to insulate it from the adjacent vehicular streets, and to create the necessary amount of private commercial frontages directly onto the square that are needed to provide the desired social animation required for a public square to be successful.
2. **Expansion of project site.** We recognize that to get a functional enclosed square while maintaining an adequate ground level area and minimum dimensions, the project site must be expanded beyond the 200' x 200' site. We support some expansion of the project site to the north and to the east to achieve an appropriate size, and to allow

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sunlight access as described in our previous testimony. On balance we support the trade-off of a reduced neighborhood park and Festival street for the enclosed square.

3. **Square size.** In support of the two points above, we endorse the proposed ~ 15,165 square foot square on the ground level, but the extent of upper level overhangs need to be examined closely for their impact on how big it actually feels inside the square, due to the reduced open area to the sky from the square. The overhangs should also be examined for what the perceived unsupported mass of the building feels like to be next to or under.

**We need further discussion on the following important unresolved elements of the current proposal:**

1. **Building Heights.** The height of the east, south and west buildings is not supported; the buildings need to be lowered to allow adequate sunlight and an appropriate scale of the enclosing facades;
2. **FAR.** The proposal places far more density around the square than was ever envisioned by the Master Plan, and results in buildings that are out of scale to the size of the square.
3. **Service Access.** Service access off of the Pettygrove Green Street is unacceptable. Service access off of Quimby is acceptable if managed properly, and compatible with the "market street" function as proposed;
4. **Parking Access.** Parking access off of the Pettygrove Green Street is acceptable only as a temporary condition. Parking access needs to be off of Raleigh, and coordinated with the development of not only the parking and circulation of all of Block 291, but with the entire development concept of all of Blocks 290 and 291;
5. **Master Plan Update.** The conceptual arrangement of the private and public uses for all of Blocks 290 and 291 need to be updated and refined before approving of any development scheme on Block 290W only;
6. **Architecture.** Further discussion of the architectural character is needed, and in particular the top floor setbacks, building articulation, materials and active ground floor uses.

We thank the development team for its commitment to working with the neighborhood and its stakeholders to create a successful project.

Best Regards,  
Northwest District Association Planning Committee

John Bradley  
*Chair, NWDA Planning Committee*