March 1, 2024

Ms. Theresa Neylon, Land Use Planner
Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
700 5th Ave, Suite 2000
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: WEDGWOOD CENTER DEVELOPMENT (SDCI PERMIT NO. 3040032-EG) EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE – 1 LETTER OF SUPPORT

Hello,

I am writing on behalf of the Wedgwood Community Council (WCC) in support of the proposed redevelopment of the Wedgwood Center, located at 8400 35th Ave NE on King County Parcel No. 0325049157 by Security Properties. The redevelopment plans referenced in this letter of support are limited to the three massing concepts presented in the Early Design Guidance – 1 plan set, dated January 17, 2024, and prepared by the Applicant Team comprised of Security Properties, SCB, and Communita Atelier. The proposed massing concepts are consistent with early coordination that Security Properties has had with the broader Wedgwood community over the past year, across six virtual and in-person community meetings. We have greatly appreciated Security Properties willingness to intentionally engage with our community early, beyond what is required, prior to the Early Design Review meeting. We also appreciate their commitment to continue to meaningfully engage with the community and neighbors as the design advances.

Within this letter of support, we will outline why we strongly support the Applicant Teams' preferred Concept C and the four requested departures, which we believe reflect the interest of the affected neighbors immediately adjacent to the property and the community's overall vision for its business district.

A Community Vision. *Wedgwood is and has been a community proactively anticipating and planning for change and creating a pedestrian environment within a thriving and inviting business district.*

Before outlining our support for the Applicant Team's preferred massing concept and requested departures, we believe it important that both the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection (SDCI) and the Northeast Design Review Board are provided some relevant background on the Wedgwood community's proactive planning for the 35th Ave NE business district.

- In 2009, the WCC received a grant from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) to complete a Vision Plan following community concern about the redevelopment of low-rise commercial development on 35th Ave NE. Following this Vision Plan, residents from Wedgwood, Bryant, View Ridge, and Hawthorne Hills initiated a neighborhood planning process to develop a clear, shared vision for the business district along 35th Ave NE, extending from NE 65th Street to NE 95th Street. Over a three-year process and another grant from the DON, with the support of the former Seattle Department of Planning and Development, the Future 35th Ave NE Plan was finalized in 2015. This Future 35th Ave NE Plan identifies:
    - Streetscape design toolkit – A toolkit of streetscape design measures to knit together four vibrant and walkable retail "nodes" at 65th, 75th, 85th, and 95th with treed "connectors" akin to a string of pearls. This toolkit, which we look forward to engaging with the Applicant Team on as the design advances, emphasizes safe and walkable corridors with opportunities for art, rest, and gathering scattered throughout.

- Supplemental design guidelines – Rather than presenting novel design guidelines, the design guidelines within Future 35th Ave NE Plan emphasize existing design guidelines approved by the City which are especially important to the community. Further, additional context and description are provided which are intended to communicate the shared importance of these guidelines.
- Recommendations to upzone – Finally, the Future 35th Ave NE plan was unique in that this community-led neighborhood plan called for upzone throughout its business district, much of which has been accomplished with the citywide upzone associated with the Mandatory Housing Affordability policy in 2019.

This Future 35th Ave NE Plan has been endorsed by both the WCC and Ravenna Bryant Community Association. While this Future 35th Ave NE Plan is not a formally codified neighborhood referenced within the City's Comprehensive Plan, it is the best representation of the community's overall ambition for 35th Ave NE.

- In 2014, as the community was frequently meeting to prepare the Future 35th Ave NE Plan, the City of Seattle held a survey as it was working on the development of new "Pedestrian Zones." Of the 902 participants that completed the City's survey citywide, 169 respondents (19% of total) voted on the Wedgwood-North (35th Ave NE and NE 85th Street node - 121 respondents) and the Wedgwood-South (35th Ave NE and NE 75th Street node – 48 respondents). In total, 70% of respondents were in support of the pedestrian zone for the Wedgwood-North node which includes the Wedgwood Center property. In fact, I wrote a blog post about our community's strong support for pedestrian zones in this June 25, 2014 post on the Future 35th Ave NE website. These pedestrian zones have now been adopted and are now referred to as "principal pedestrian streets."

Context Sensitive Massing. *Livable built environments must balance sometimes competing needs which require contextual site-specific responses rather than dogmatic application of policy.*

As we have laid out, the WCC and the community at large has emphasized over recent years our collective ambition to create a great pedestrian environment along 35th Ave NE. We appreciate the City has prioritized the pedestrian environment along 35th Ave NE through the pedestrian zone which is sensitive to scale and emphasizes the importance for pedestrian amenities at the ground plane.

It may appear to be a contradiction for the WCC to ***strongly*** support the Applicant Team's preferred Concept C which includes a) a curbcut off of 35th Ave NE at NE 84th Street [*Departure 3*] and b) surface parking off of 35th Ave NE [*Departure 2*] within the pedestrian zone. However, we present the following reasons why we believe Concept C, the preferred design, best reflects the community's and adjoining neighbor's interests much better than Concepts A and B.

- The existing Wedgwood Center property features 3 curbcuts on 35th Ave NE along its approximately 608 linear feet of frontage. (Note: Sheet 7 of the EDG-1 plan set does not show an existing curbcut onto 35th Ave NE north of the former grocery building.) These multiple curbcuts, setback commercial structures, and extensive surface parking which lack pedestrian facilities detract from the current walkability of 35th Ave NE. It's with this context, we believe, that Wedgwood respondents were strongly in support of the passage of the pedestrian zone policy which now prohibits curbcuts along principal pedestrian streets. However, the Wedgwood Center property extends from NE 85th Street to NE 82nd Street, making it approximately 2 times longer than all other commercial blocks within the NE 85th Street commercial node. Therefore, a single mid-block curbcut and corresponding break in the articulation of the building's massing will mitigate the potential mega-block feel of the massing to the pedestrian and better reflect the relative context of

other commercial blocks within the NE 85 Street commercial node, creating a more human-scale business district.

- Prohibiting a curbcut onto 35th Ave NE would result in the following adverse effects to neighbors and neighboring streets:
    - It would concentrate all vehicular movements for freight, garbage/recycling service, commercial, and residential users alike to NE 85th Street and NE 82nd Street and onto a relatively narrow, shared rear alley abutting residential properties located on NE 86th Street.
    - Significantly increase noise immediately behind residential properties along NE 86th Street resulting in far greater disturbance and adverse impacts to these neighbors.
    - Increase the opportunity and frequency of conflict between vehicular users of all kinds using the relatively narrow, shared alley.
    - Require a 70-foot-wide curbcut on NE 82nd Street - a non-arterial, neighborhood street which should be prioritized for pedestrians and does not currently support freight – necessary to accommodate the numerous concentrated vehicular users. The width of the curbcut would be required to accommodate expected freight turning movements. This 70-foot-wide curbcut would result in the loss of a 28-inch DBH Douglas fir tree considered a Significant Tree in addition to other mature trees.
- Allowing a curbcut along 35th Ave NE under the preferred Concept C would have the following benefits:
    - It would provide the opportunity for more organized and defined pedestrian crossing facilities and appropriate traffic control treatments on NE 84th Street, west of the site, to be determined for residents west of the redevelopment who are in walkable distance to the future retail and commercial uses provided by the redevelopment.
    - It would isolate commercial vehicular users to the proposed surface parking off 35th Ave NE and structured parking provided below grade. This would correspondingly allow for more organized, separated, and distributed vehicular activity on NE 85th Street for large freight and NE 82nd Street for residential users.
    - Greater distribution of vehicular activity would mitigate the expected increase in traffic on adjoining neighbors and neighboring streets while also reducing the risk for conflict between vehicular users.
    - Reducing vehicular movements along the back alley onto NE 82nd Street would create a more livable alley environment for the proposed townhouses to front and reduce the opportunity for vehicular and resident conflict.
- Allowing for limited surface parking off 35th Ave NE would result in the following benefits:
    - It would provide more accessible parking for disabled and mobility impaired patrons.
    - It could provide formalized spaces for car sharing providers and prioritized parking for food and/or grocery pick-up, which would likely occur informally along 35th Ave NE without curbcuts.

We strongly request the Northeast Design Review Board recommend and SDCI approve the Applicant Team's preferred Concept C massing and Departures No. 2 (Surface Parking abutting Principal Pedestrian Street) and Department No. 3 (Curbcut off of Principal Pedestrian Street).

Tradewell, Matthew's Red Apple, QFC. *Wedgwood has literally been built around a grocer at this location.*

While we understand that the Applicant's Team is of the opinion that the curbcut and surface parking are vital design elements desired by prospective grocers, it is important to note that our support of the single curbcut aligned with NE 84th Street and limited surface parking included under Concept C is not conditioned on a future grocer. Instead, we believe that the proposed massing and requested Departures No. 2 and 3 result in a site plan that better meets the needs of our community.

However, the WCC very much wants to maximize the potential for the Wedgwood Center redevelopment to include an anchor grocer. A grocer has been continuously serving the greater Wedgwood community at this site since 1959. Our neighborhood has literally been built around a grocery store at this location and has been the stage for informal gathering and social interactions that have helped knit our community together. The grocery store at this location has been and will be a commercial and retail use which drives pedestrian activity within the NE 85th Street node.

We strongly request that the Northeast Design Review Board recommend and SDCI approve Departure 4 (Small Commercial Uses) to allow for greater flexibility in the sizing of retail and commercial spaces within the Wedgwood Center redevelopment, located along a principal pedestrian street.

Trees + Density. *Wedgwood is all too familiar with significant trees being removed lately.*

Balancing the needs of a growing city while protecting our local mature tree canopy is admittedly challenging. However, where opportunities occur to protect our majestic, climate-change-fighting trees exist while still allowing for maximum housing unit production, they should be grasped with both hands.

In the Future 35th Ave NE Plan, our community embraced increased height throughout our business district, including the Wedgwood Center property. While the Future 35th Ave NE plan did not recommend the height requested by the Applicant Team within the preferred Concept C, the WCC believes the tall trees which watch over our neighborhood define the character of our community. Protecting these trees where possible is important.

We are willing to accept the greater height requested by the Applicant Team under Departure 1 (Additional 10 feet in Building Height) in exchange for the protection of the significant trees onsite, but have the following requests:

- We would ask that the Applicant Team to further consider Design Guideline CS2.D.5 (Respect for Adjacent Sites) and DC2.A.1 (Reduce Perceived Mass: Stepback the Façade), as described in the 2013 Citywide Design Guidelines and emphasized within the Future 35th Ave NE Plan, to maximize privacy of adjacent properties and reduce the perceived height of the massing along 35th Ave NE and NE 85th Street in particular where the massing would not be setback from the streetscape as it would be on NE 82nd Street.
- We would ask that the Applicant Team further coordinate with SDOT's arborist to minimize the removal of the Raywood Ash or Flame Ash street trees along 35th Ave NE and NE 85th Street which are in fair or good condition and creatively incorporate these trees into the proposed streetscape environment.

On behalf of our WCC board, we appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and thank you in advance for fully considering them. Please feel free to contact me at president@wedgwoodcc.org if you would like to discuss further.

Respectfully,

Per Johnson, Board President (He, Him)
Wedgwood Community Council