

**BEFORE THE HEARING EXAMINER
City of Seattle**

In the Matter of the Appeal of)	Hearing Examiner File:
)	
Haris Hodzic)	MUP-22-010 (SE, SU)
)	
of a decision issued by the Director, Seattle)	Department reference:
Department of Construction and Inspections,)	Project 3038863-LU
regarding a Land Use Application for a Special)	
Exception.)	APPELLANT’S RESPONSE TO
_____)	APPLICANT’S MOTION TO DISMISS

Dear Hearing Examiner,

The appellant, Haris Hodzic, respectfully requests that the Hearing Examiner does not dismiss the appeal in the above-captioned matter.

Background and Argument

Applicant is correct when he states Appellant bought a house and had no problem with the home being built on the qualified lot. Appellant to this day has no problem with the home being built on the lot that qualifies under any of the SMC Section 23.44.010.B.1.d. In this case Appellant has learned from various City and County resources that the subject lot does not qualify and therefore appellant hopes the Hearing Examiner will allow this opportunity to explain why we believe that the SDCI decision in this matter should be overturned.

Applicant states that he has been a real estate broker for 37, so it came as a surprise to us that none of the facts about the Lot 1 were disclosed to Appellant during the purchase process. I understand that maybe in the real estate industry brokers only operate on a need to know basis, but we felt the code of ethics might have been violated by choosing to only disclose items that would benefit the seller but not the buyer. As the owner of the lot 1 likes to say, “he’s the seller and Appellant is the buyer”, meaning anything goes as long as profit is realized by the buyer. Appellant had no reason to distrust the Applicant in this instance and it was only later after learning about the true nature of how lot 1 came into question that it was decided we could not sit on the sidelines and watch public interest, and ultimately safety get jeopardized.

When putting the appeal together Appellant has admittedly used colorful language to depict the circumstances that had led us to this point. Using such language was Appellant's opinion and is open to anybody's interpretation and is not intended to insult anybody.

What Appellant meant by "skilled in navigating City's agencies" was that the Applicant achieved something that experienced developers like Daniel Duffus for example failed to do. Mr. Duffus fought the City through the courts in *Duffus vs. City of Seattle*¹. In the final decision court ruled the following:

We conclude DPD² and the hearing examiner did not err in concluding the public records before 1957 did not establish the west half of Lot 7 as a separate building site. The 1904 deed does not demonstrate the conveyance established a separate building site. The building permit issued in 1907 also does not establish the west half of Lot 7 as a separate building site.

Mr. Duffus failed in establishing their lot as a separate building site and they even had deeds and building permits prior to 1957 and that was not enough to "establish a separate building site". Applicant in our case does not have any of these. We argue that they do not even own two thirds of the lot that they managed to segregate. If that does not qualify as "skilled in navigating the City's agencies" I do not know what does.

In *Duffus v. City of Seattle* this was also stated:

We affirmed denial of a writ of mandamus because the deeds did not "*clearly* establish]" or "demonstrate whether either conveyance was made for the express purpose of establishing a 'separate building site.'" *R/L Assocs.*, 61 Wn.App. at 674. The court in *R/L Associates* "agree[d] with the City that the term 'building' must be presumed to have some meaning independent of the term 'site.'" *R/L Assocs.*, 61 Wn.App. at 674.

Simply stating that there is a site is not enough to establish a "separate building site". There must be solid proof in the records to show that the lot was intended for a separate building site, which all the records prior to 1957 show that for the subject lot, lot 1 in this case, it was not.

In a Clerk File #313652³, Department of Planning and Development Director's report: Proposed Amendments to single family minimum lot area exceptions...., Mr Andy McKim states the following under the "Recommended Code Changes" section under #8:

The Historic Lot Exception applies to certain lots established as separate building sites in City or County records prior to 1957. Ever since 1957, when minimum lot area requirements were codified, Seattle's codes have provided an exception from lot area requirements for some lots of record. The original intent was to preserve investment-backed expectations that predated the minimum lot-area requirement. Neighbors have complained that this exception is applied based on arcane records that are difficult to interpret and as a result they have no way of knowing which undersized parcels in their neighborhoods might qualify. Further, in some cases the records relied on do not necessarily reflect an historic expectation that a property could be separately developed.

¹ *Duffus v. City of Seattle*; Opinion 71294-2-I; 02-23-2015; DANIEL DUFFUS, Appellant, v. CITY OF SEATTLE by and through its Department of Planning and Development, Respondent.

² DPD is equivalent of what SDCI is today

³ Clerk file can be downloaded at: http://clerk.seattle.gov/~CFS/CF_313652.pdf

...The proposed ordinance also eliminates reliance on historic mortgages, as a mortgage for a portion of a lot, alone, may not provide sufficient evidence that the lot was held with the expectation that it would be separately developed. Finally, sales contracts would not be a basis for a lot-area exception as a contract alone does not determine that a property was historically a separately developable parcel.

It is clear that the department's long-standing practice, or "intent" as was mentioned here, has been to only allow this exception in order to "preserve investment-backed expectations", and honor the "historic expectation that a property could be separately developed".

There is no evidence that this small lot, which was reduced to only one third of its original size due to the establishment of the road, was ever intended to be separately developed. If the original owner of properties 1, 2, 3, Mr. William Schoenfeld, intended lot 1 to be separately developed he would not have signed the petition to have the road built⁴. There would be some record of him objecting to such a road being built or having two thirds of the lot dedicated for the county road. All the evidence of events surrounding road establishment taking place is provided in the original appeal document.

Applicant mentions signing of the No Protest Agreement as somehow being enough for accounting for the land that was taken from a legitimately established right of way for the street purposes. "No Protest Agreement" is not enforceable and once the house is built that agreement is worthless. Tax payers would have to cover the cost of potentially buying out the newly built house so it can be torn down so that the rightful 60 feet right of way can be re-established. From what we understand it is a duty of City officials to protect public interest and we hope that will be recognized with this appeal.

By requiring "no protest agreement" SDCI is inadvertently admitting that the project is encroaching into the right of way for the Arterial street. Why else would they ask for anything of sorts? If there is no question the project is not encroaching into a well established and recorded right of way, why even ask for this "no protest agreement"? How is this agreement enforceable if the house gets built eventually but the road must expand that direction? Does the owner suffer the consequences of buying a house on a questionable lot or do taxpayers have to pay for the demolition and paying fair value for that house? More appropriate action would be to ask for the proper deed to be recorded so there is never any question what this portion of the land was intended for.

Applicant states in his motion to dismiss that "Koll Hagen brought up that he was not sure that the Lot 1 was 30 feet wide". Then he goes on to question the blueprint's accuracy and calls it a "remodel sketch". He also claims this happened 40 years ago as if all of a sudden we should ignore history. My impression is that asking for an exception to build the house based on "historical lot exception" does not mean ignoring something because it happened 40 years ago. I would think it would be quite the opposite. Applicant goes on to say how we should pay attention to the legal description of this so-called "sketch" and pay attention to that cause there are no words "less county road" anywhere. He then asks us to ignore the lot size being 6860 as this was just a "sketch". Referring to blueprint as NOT being legal document contradicts the wording in the same "historical lot exception" that reads:

⁴ in the original appeal document EXHIBIT 3: PETITION FOR COUNTY ROAD

The historic lot exception may be applied to allow separate development of lots already in existence if the lot has an area of at least 2,500 square feet, and was established as a separate building site in the public records of the county or City prior to July 24, 1957, by deed, contract of sale, platting, or building permit.

In order to get a building permit Applicant would have to submit blueprints and get their permit approved. To state somehow that blueprints would be trivial and not something we should be paying attention to is another attempt to have us ignore history and facts altogether.

I am submitting here as evidence from “King County Department of Assessments - Real Property Record” that clearly shows accurate property size also reflected accurately on the blueprints submitted as 6860 SQ FT. Added here for emphasis, also full card attached with this document as Appendix A.

LAND DATA	
ZONE ACTUAL	SF7200
JURISDICTION	SEATTLE
LOT SIZE	6860 SQ FT
LOT WIDTH	70
LOT DEPTH	98
SEWER AVAILABLE	YES
UNDERGROUND UTILITIES	NO
WATER SYSTEM	YES

Applicant also makes a statement that the legal description on the blueprint does not show anywhere “less county road”. I would like to point out to the same Real Property Record in Appendix A that shows exactly that “less co rd” is part of the legal description. Much like all the assessor’s records provided in earlier document. Added here for emphasis.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION
LOT 1-2-3 BLOCK 2 IMPERIAL HEIGHTS ADD TO BALLARD LESS CO RD

To all these suggestions to obtain legal building site opinion letter, Applicant responded by saying, “the owner is about 90% on moving forward with the Legal Building Site Opinion Letter, but has brought up an issue that I want to run by you AND, based on your reply I am likely to go come down to the Seattle DPD and wait in line to see the right person to going forward with the Legal Building Site Opinion letter”.

Applicant ultimately never did get this legal letter which could have been a fraction of what they supposedly paid to get this project approved. We are expected to sympathize or somehow take into consideration how they spent money on this project and now we should just blindly agree to ignore all the facts presented in this case? They knew the risks with pursuing this matter especially because they were fully aware that at least 10 feet of the lot 1 did not belong to them.

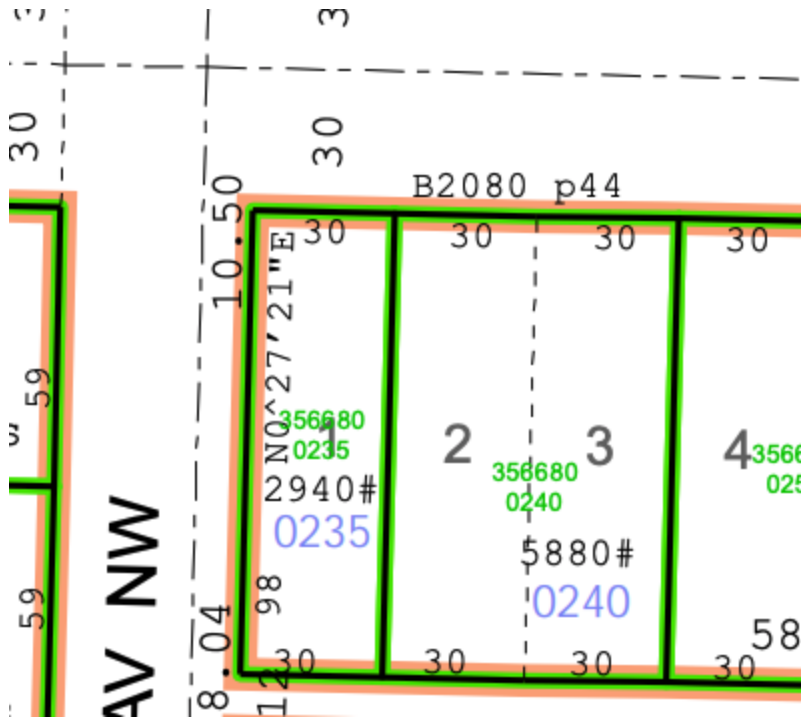
As a matter of fact and all the historical records it appears all these show it is actually more likely that 20 feet of the lot has never been legally Hagen’s possession. Even when the mistake occurred and legal description change enabled them to get this land there is no legal document like Deed or Court Order indicating that City or County ever conveyed this land to Hagens. This portion of 20 x 98 feet of the Lot 1 was free of taxes for the majority of the 20th century.

Applicants also mention our concerns are somehow “old news”. Old news to whom? Our understanding is that their “old news” would not be so old as a matter of the Hearing Examiner’s process. All this is completely “new” to the Hearing Examiner and to somehow present this as not important is puzzling.

It is true that we have been trying to exhaust all the possible avenues to get this resolved and we contacted many folks. Unfortunately to this day it does not appear anybody is willing to dig more into these issues as I must admit, it is hard. It is hard to fix years of bad record keeping or trying to piece things together where it is hard to dig out relevant documentation. It is fortunate however that, as imperfect as our system is, breadcrumbs of history are all over the place. We just have to take time and follow those breadcrumbs and maybe, just maybe we will arrive at the truth.

For example, when Andy McKim was first approached by the Applicant and looked over the quarter-section map he determined that the map “does not reflect that any portion of Lot 1 was lost through dedication for the street”. If he just looked closer to that map⁵ he would have spotted a number “B2080 p44” right next to the subject property. Added the portion of the current quarter-section map showing the number.

⁵ quarter-section map can be downloaded here:
https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/assessor/emap/InternetPDF/qs_SW352603.pdf



What we learned about this number through our communication with King Country, City Archives, Road Services from Renton, and SPU Engineering Records Vault department, is that this is a book of surveys where the street was recorded. We were able to obtain this page and it clearly shows that the right of way for 28th street was recorded to be 30 feet from the center line making the total right of way as recorded by that book to be 60 feet, in accordance with all the other historical records we were able to pull and present with this appeal. Part of that page added here for emphasis.

another. Sure, now they are trying to dance around this fact but the fact remains. They knew the lot was not buildable but they still pursued it and now they complain about losing money during the process. Not sure what to make of it.

Also worth mentioning is that the quarter-section map Andy McKim referenced has a big disclaimer. Says there that map is for assessment purposes and not guaranteed to show accurate measurements. In other words not to be used for official business.

The information included on this map has been compiled by King County staff from a variety of sources and is subject to change without notice. King County makes no representations or warranties, express or implied, as to accuracy, completeness, timeliness, or rights to the use of such information. King County shall not be liable for any general, special, indirect, incidental, or consequential damages including, but not limited to, lost revenues or lost profits resulting from the use or misuse of the information contained on this map. Any sale of this map or information on this map is prohibited except by written permission of King County. This map is for assessment purposes only. It is provided to assist in locating your property and is not guaranteed to show accurate measurements or to reflect salability or buildability of tax parcels. Do not use for survey purposes.

Applicant is complaining about the Appellant bringing about so much information and its aim is to confuse the truth. As somebody who is trying to convince the Hearing Examiner that the city made a mistake we have to provide all the possible information that could help us determine what really happened.

Somebody mentioned to me the other day the term “preponderance of evidence⁶”. As I heard the term before I never really looked it up, and came to find out what it really means is that Appellant has the burden of proving each essential element of this case/appeal by “preponderance of evidence”. Appellant has to “present the more convincing evidence”. “To prove an element by a preponderance of the evidence simply means to prove that something is more likely than not. In other words, in light of the evidence and the law, do you believe that each element of the [claim/counterclaim] is more likely true than not? It refers to the quality and persuasiveness of the evidence, not to the number of witnesses or documents.

We feel we have presented enough evidence to prove our points. Lot 1 could have never been recognized as a qualified lot under any of the exceptions under SMC 23.44.010, for all the reasons we have discussed in all of our communication so far.

If the Hearing Examiner feels he has enough evidence to overturn the decision made by the SDCI in this matter we would be welcoming their decision on special exception reversal/dismissal with their response to this letter.

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Conclusion

The appeal of Project No. 3038863-LU should NOT be dismissed as all the historical evidence points out to the subject lot being ineligible under the current Seattle Municipal Code. Applicant wants us to believe that only one historical event should be considered when granting “historical lot exception”. That one event, aka. platting, happened in 1907. Even though Applicant is looking into an exception that calls out on the department to look into not just one historical event, that benefits the Applicant, but to carefully consider all of the available historical documentation and events, and base their decision on not just one favorable event but everything else that happened before 1957 and potentially beyond.

All the historical events point out to the fact that when Hagnes purchased the property in 1957 they had acquired all three lots but size of the lot 1 that was acquired was only 980 sqft (10 by 98 feet) as evidenced by the assessors records indicating “less county road” against the lot 1.

Assessors property cards attached with this document prove that the size of the lot was exactly the same as it was on the blueprints that Applicant called out as just a sketch, not a legal document, etc. 6860 sqft were acquired by Hagens in 1957 and to this day there is no documentation even conveying the rest of the lot 1 to them. If such a document exists and Applicant has it we would like it to be submitted as an Exhibit. Fact that the Hagens never owned two thirds of the lot 1 makes sense because that portion, since 1919, has been City/County’s possession. Simple error in Assessor’s legal description that occurred in the early 90s enabled the owner to acquire land that, according to the historical records provided with appeal document and with this response, has never been theirs.

Entered this 23rd day of November 2022.

Haris Hodzic

Haris Hodzic, Appellant

cc. Mike Rayburn and Jim Rockwell, applicant
Michael Houston, SDCI

Appendix B: Tax Roll records from 1941

		IMPERIAL HIGHTS ADD TO BALLARD		COUNTY				
								30
1	3 1	JOHN A OLSEN			18	37	1	3 1
2	3 1	SETH JACKSON			18	38	1	
3	3 1	SETH JACKSON			18	39	1	
4	3 1	C.E. JACKSON			18	40	1	
5	3 1	C E JACKSON			18	41	1	
6	3 1	C E JACKSON		Less Co Rd	18	42	1	
7	3 1	W.C. SLEPICA		Less Co Rd	18	1	2	
8	3 1	W.C. SLEPICA			18	2	2	
9	3 1	WM SLEPICA			18	3	2	
10	3 1	WILHELMENA SCHOENFIELD			18	4	2	
11	3 1	WILHELMENA SCHOENFIELD			18	5	2	
12	3 1	CARL E KEYES			18	6	2	
13	3 1	CARL E KEYES			18	7	2	
14	3 1	H T PAPKE			18	8	2	
15	3 1	H T PAPKE			18			

Appendix C: Survey Book - B2080 P44

