

March 11, 2014

Sarah Schafer  
Boise City Planning and Development Services  
150 N. Capitol Boulevard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Boise, Idaho 83702

**Re: Concept Design Review Application for City Center Plaza/Final Design Review Application for VRT Transit Facility Located at 799 W. Main Street**

Dear Ms. Schafer

KC Gardner Riverwoods, L.C. (the “**Applicant**”), is applying for final design review approval to facilitate the construction of an underground transit facility at the southeast corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street, at approximately 799 W. Main Street, and concept design review approval for two multistory commercial buildings to be constructed above the transit facility. KC Gardner Company, L.C., (“**Gardner Company**”) is the manager of KC Gardner Riverwoods, and the developer of the mixed-use project (“**City Centre Plaza**”).

Due to the sequencing of construction, the need for constructing the transit facility structure first, as well as the need to construct improvements underneath Main Street within the existing right of way, the applications for the project are being submitted as set forth herein. We request final design review approval of the transit facilities. We request concept approval of the remainder of City Centre Plaza. We will return for final approval of the remainder of the project at the point that all other vertical elements are at an 80% design stage. This is the process that Gardner Company previously followed in obtaining approval of 8<sup>th</sup> & Main and we believe it is the best approach for a project of this complexity.

This letter supplements the application and associated materials submitted in support of the design review application request and should be considered an integrated part of the total application submittal. Additionally, this letter is intended to address the elements and objectives of the Boise City Code set forth in Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d) establishing the design review standards applicable to all applications.

**A. Site And Project Description**

Before addressing the specific issues related to Design Review, it is important to first discuss the nature of the property to be developed and its history. The project is located on the existing surface parking lot adjoining US Bank Plaza at 101 S. Capitol

Boulevard (the “**Site**”). The Site also will include improvements that cantilever over the existing parking structure underneath the US Bank Plaza and the pedestrian walkway over the southern boundary of the Site.

City Centre Plaza will have four distinct elements: a renovated US Bank Plaza with additional retail space; the transit facility owned and operated by Valley Regional Transit (“**VRT**”); a nine story retail and office building (“**Clearwater Building**”); and an expansion of the Boise Centre with a new ballroom and meeting facility (“**Centre Building**”) owned by the Greater Boise Auditorium District (“**District**”). The Clearwater Building will be constructed above the transit facility on the portion of US Bank Plaza’s existing surface lot located at the southwest corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street. The Centre Building will be constructed above the transit facility on the southern portion of the US Bank Plaza between the arena and the existing US Bank Plaza.

## **B. Philosophy of Project**

Gardner Company is the managing member of the entities owning both 8<sup>th</sup> & Main and US Bank Plaza, Idaho’s two tallest and largest Class A office buildings. The existing surface parking lot is a long underutilized component of the redevelopment of downtown Boise. We believe that surface parking lots in the Central Business District are both an obstacle to development and an incredibly inefficient use of urban space. From and after the construction of the US Bank Plaza in the mid 1970’s there was always the intention that an additional building be constructed on the surface parking lot. In fact the surface parking lot was developed devoid of any significant utilities or other improvements anticipating such a development.

Our architect for this project, Darin Bell of Babcock Design Group, describes the integration of City Centre Plaza with the existing US Bank Plaza as follows:

The US Bank Plaza occupies a remarkable location as the Site includes all of the block between Capitol Boulevard, Main Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Street, as well as the vacated Grove Street. This has long been the city’s hub of activity. The existing US Bank tower has been sited to co-exist with future structures that could occupy the remainder of this block as evidenced by the orientation of the main facades and the open space left on the prime corner of 8<sup>th</sup> & Main.

As this location, 8<sup>th</sup> Street, the Grove Plaza, and Main Street have at various times over the past 40 years focused as the center of transit in the City. It is therefore fitting that we can integrate a subsurface state of the art transit facility as part of this project. A below-grade location under the new building will provide for eight bus stops, conditioned space for ticketing and waiting as well as a police sub-station. Pedestrians will access the transit station through glass doors opening from 8<sup>th</sup> & Main down escalators.

Designing above ground neighboring improvements compatible with the US Bank Plaza requires particular finesse of the open spaces left by the void between the old and the new. As such, we have proposed City Centre Plaza

as two arms that wrap around the west and south side of US Bank Plaza, connected by a glass link on upper levels that allow pedestrians to integrate the existing US Bank Plaza and Grove Plaza with the new Centre Building on the south and the Clearwater Building on the west.

Additionally, the existing pedestrian walkway over the southern portion of the US Bank Plaza property will be preserved and enhanced to improve the pedestrian link between the Grove Plaza and Capitol Blvd. Street lamps will be left in place to mark the familiar path that once ran between an empty wall and a parking lot. The walkway will be further enhanced through public art, architectural features, color and space defining lighting treatments.

The uses of the Centre Building on the south are integrated with the Clearwater Building. The convention uses will include pre-function and ballroom facilities to the south in the Centre Building bridging over and connecting to the Clearwater Building where meeting space is located. The ballroom pre-function area will have a large west facing "picture window" over the grove giving visitors to Boise a view of one of downtown's favorite gathering spaces and reinforcing the tie between the Greater Boise Auditorium District's existing and new facilities.

The main lobby of the Clearwater Building will share its energy with existing US Bank Plaza. Doors to each will open to a common plaza, creating a sort of outdoor living room where people can meet and enjoy the dynamic urban environment, which can be enhanced by pedestrian features and retail uses that are presently non-existent. A connecting canopy between the structures will create portal, bridging the space and defining the new retail and plaza area.

In addition to office space and meeting space, the Clearwater Building is designed to house educational facilities with a variety of offices, instruction and collaborative areas on the second and third floors of the building. Balconies and terraces throughout the Clearwater Plaza provides a variety of locations where its tenants, visitors, and guests can observe and interact with the Grove Plaza, 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and Main Street. Vibrant restaurant and retail spaces will fill the ground level spaces in both buildings to afford pedestrian interaction and outdoor dining along the Grove Plaza and 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

The form of both the Clearwater Building and the Centre Building are intended to be different, but complimentary with the existing US Bank Plaza as well as the modern 8<sup>th</sup> & Main immediately to the north and west of the Site. Where possible the Clearwater Building has been angled to lessen the impact of views from the US Bank Plaza while adding to the excitement of urban proximity. The proposed exterior finishes will introduce a broader range of values and textures than currently found on the Site, but simultaneously harmonize with the warm hues that have long existed at the Site.

Gardner Company believes that this project affords Boise a unique opportunity to do a type of mixed-use project that is rarely found in a city this size. There are several distinct elements to this project that we will now address.

## **1. Transit**

Historically, Boise Urban Stages utilized portions of the existing US Bank Plaza and the Grove Plaza for parking and transfers. Presently, VRT utilizes Main Street and Idaho Street as its transit mall with twelve bus stops located on those streets. As Gardner Company looked to the future of the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street, it became obvious, that if possible, retaining transit facilities at this location but in a subterranean configuration was desirable. While there are many in the community who will continue to utilize transit out of need, we are seeing more and more people who utilize transit as a transportation choice. As the owner of both 8<sup>th</sup> & Main and US Bank Plaza, we embrace transit as benefiting our tenants and their customers. We do not believe that a transit center on the periphery of downtown Boise will support ancillary services or effectively integrate as a part of a mixed-use development. Nor will it encourage growth in transit use.

Upon completion of the transit facility, eight (8) bus stops will be located wholly underground, the only elements visible at street level will be the surface entrance for transit customers and the exit ramp for buses on Main Street and the entrance ramp on Capitol Boulevard. Bus stops will be relocated from Idaho Street and the remaining surface transfer stops will be reconfigured along Main Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street in close proximity to the transit center.

## **2. Meeting**

To meet the requirements of the District and to permit the future redevelopment of the existing convention center, while integrating the transit facility into the Site, the new ballroom space in the Centre Building will be constructed on top of a structure consisting of a commercial kitchen and retail space at the ground level as well as two floors of parking above.

The floor of the ballroom space will be approximately forty five (45) feet above the ground elevation and its parapet will be approximately eighty six (86) feet above the ground elevation. The ballroom facilities require a clear ceiling span of twenty four (24) feet above the floor. Constructing such a span requires trusses spanning the entire width of the space resulting in the finished elevation of the ballroom facilities to be forty two (42) feet from its floor to the top of the parapet of the structure. The ballroom space including its required service area is approximately 21,500 square feet and cantilevers over both the pedestrian walkway adjacent to the arena that is being preserved and US Bank Plaza, which will have a direct connection to the parking facilities at its second floor.

Notwithstanding the requirements of the Boise City Code, which do not require the provision of parking that would necessitate a new parking facility as part of City Centre Plaza, Gardner Company has determined that providing adequate service access to the Centre Building as well as replacement customer parking for US Bank Plaza requires the

inclusion of structured parking as part of the Centre Building. There will be two levels of parking constructed within the limited footprint available between the US Bank building and the pedestrian easement accessible from Capitol Boulevard and through a sky bridge connecting to the building.

### **3. Technology**

The third element of City Centre Plaza is the Clearwater Building which will front on Main Street and be constructed above the transit facility. The Clearwater Building is intended to tie two of Boise's most iconic office buildings together as described above and provide a building where technology operations, education and training can all be integrated in one location. Clearwater Analytics will be the anchor tenant consolidating all of its operations in a single location. The District's meeting rooms will be in the Clearwater Building, connected to the ballroom facilities in the Centre Building. Additional educational services and meeting areas will be included elsewhere in the Clearwater Building.

### **4. Retail**

The final element of City Centre Plaza is the retail and pedestrian improvements integrated throughout the Site. 8<sup>th</sup> Street has become Boise's premier pedestrian draw with restaurants and retail uses lining both sides of the street from Front to Jefferson. These uses not only provide services required for the users of the Site throughout the day, but more importantly it activates the Site at night and on the weekends.

## **C. Application of Design Review Standards**

The applicable design review standards are set forth in Boise City Code Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d). We will address of these standards as follows:

**1. Site Design Requirements.** Pursuant to Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i) of the Boise City Code, the design review committee is required to make specific findings regarding site design. The specific site design requirements will be addressed as follows.

**(a) Traffic Impact.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i)(A) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating design, "traffic impact is minimized and the pedestrians and cyclists have been provided for through the use of sidewalks, pathways, landscaping, and safe parking lot design." As we evidenced in the supporting documents transmitted herewith, significant thought and investigation has gone into the design of the various vehicular components to ensure that pedestrians and vehicles, including transit buses, can safely interact.

On Main Street, the traffic impact of the transit facility is minimized through the retail and pedestrian enhancements that are planned. The existing above ground bus stops and parking lot entrance are being replaced with a proposed service and loading area and the exit ramp for the transit facility. On Capitol Boulevard, in consideration of the proposed improvements that ACHD and Boise City have been working on for several years to calm

traffic, the proposed southbound transit lane readily integrates with the plan for two north bound vehicular lanes and a protected bike lane.

At the existing pedestrian crossing, the proposed enhancements (i) clearly identify the pedestrian walkway connecting Capitol Boulevard and the Grove Plaza; (ii) clearly define the existing arena garage, lading dock an loading zone licensed by ACHD for the hotel and arena to the south; and (iii) define the entrances and protects the vehicles leaving the US Bank garage, the transit center, and the Centre Building Garage.

Improvements throughout the Site provide far more significant pedestrian interaction and flow than exist today with the surface parking lot that occupies the Site. Pedestrians will be encouraged and invited to move from Capitol Boulevard at both Main Street and Grove Street to the Grove Plaza as opposed to the current parking lot which discourages pedestrian interaction.

Deliveries to the Clearwater Building will occur at Main Street with all utility, trash and other services occurring jointly through the transit facility after hours. For the Centre Building, delivery and service areas will be integrated with the existing US Bank Plaza garage facilities and accessible therefrom.

**(b) Landscaping, Stabilization, and Screening.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i)(B) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating design “landscaping screens buffer adjacent uses, and screen or conceal unsightly areas.” This site is an urban site that is zoned and planned for a much higher intensity of use than presently exists. However, consistent with Boise City’s design guidelines, we have undertaken to ensure that such intense urban uses are appropriately designed to address this issue.

As set forth above, utility and service areas, including trash and grease receptacles have all been designed so that they are not visible from the outside of the project and will be integrated with the subterranean improvements. The proposed pedestrian enhancements greatly improve the existing surface parking lot use.

**(c) Grading and Drainage.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i)(C) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating design “on-site grading and drainage have been designed so as to minimize off-site impact.” The redevelopment of this site has no material grading or drainage issues. Drainage will be addressed in conjunction with ACHD consistent with past practices in the downtown Boise core. Additionally, the improvements are replacing an existing surface parking lot which will have minimal net impact on drainage and run off.

**(d) Signage.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i)(D) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating design signage should provide for business identification, minimize clutter, and comply with the sign regulations. At this point, because this is just a conceptual approval, we have not finalized the signage package for the project. It is intended, however, that there will be signage on the Centre Building on Capitol Boulevard identifying the Boise Centre’s facilities as well as on the Grove. Additionally, the anchor tenants for the Clearwater Building will have significant signage on Main Street and 8<sup>th</sup>

Street. All retail tenants in the project will require street level signage consistent with past approvals of signage in the vicinity. A complete sign program will be presented for review and evaluation will be part of a subsequent application.

**(e) Utilities.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(i)(E) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating design that the size and location of utility systems do not detract from the design of the buildings. As noted above, all utility and service requirements will be appropriately located and screened. Service and utility facilities for all the improvements will be located underground or internally to the extent possible. All exterior systems will be appropriately located and screened.

**2. Structure Design.** Pursuant to Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii) of the Boise City Code, the design review committee is required to make specific findings regarding the architectural design of the buildings. The specific structural design requirements will be addressed as follows.

**(a) Building Mass.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii)(A) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating the project architecture, "building mass should be consistent with development in the immediate area." As we discussed above, it is our intention in designing both the Centre Building and the Clearwater Building that they connect and relate to the existing improvements. This already is the most intensively developed location in downtown Boise. Most importantly, this location has been continuously occupied by commercial uses from and after the founding of Boise City.

The existing US Bank Plaza anchors the Site with the Clearwater Building and Centre Building wrapping around it. The US Bank Plaza was constructed in the mid 1970's and until this year was Idaho's tallest building. Immediately to the north and west is 8<sup>th</sup> & Main which was completed earlier this year. To the south is the existing CenturyLink Arena and Grove Hotel. The Clearwater Building on Main Street tie both the US Bank Plaza and 8<sup>th</sup> & Main together in size, style and scope. Similarly, the Centre Building has the same effect due to its location between the US Bank Plaza and the hotel and arena complex. The buildings have been designed to permit the convention facilities to function on a single level. By integrating them horizontally between the two buildings, we have been able to minimize the height and mass of the two buildings.

**(b) Building Façades.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii)(B) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating the project architecture, that the height to width relationship is compatible and consistent with architecture in the area. With respect to the façades of the buildings, there has been significant attempts undertaken to integrate all the improvements while relating to the adjoining buildings. As discussed above, the proposed improvements tie to the existing improvements throughout the area.

The Centre Building approximates the height of the arena and is significantly smaller than either the hotel or the US Bank Plaza. Great effort has been made to minimize its mass, which its proximity to the arena permits. The Clearwater Building similarly has fewer stories than either US Bank Plaza or 8<sup>th</sup> & Main. Its design is intended to integrate

with and relate to both structures. It is important to note that compatibility should not be measured in terms of sameness.

For far too long compatibility has been interpreted by some residents and decision-makers as sameness in Boise. We do not believe that compatibility and consistency should be interpreted in such a way. To do so has resulted in monochromatic and homogeneous periods of development in the past. We believe that compatibility is evaluated much broader than that and have attempted to do that here. The most vibrant and interesting cities have a variety of styles, materials, configurations, and elevations in their cores.

**(c) Openings in the Façades.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii)(C) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating the project architecture, façade openings “shall be consistent with the architecture in the area.” To the extent possible, we have attempted to ensure that the street elevation is of an appropriate mass and scale.

Due to the technical requirements of the uses proposed for the project, there are limitations on the ability to do that as we integrate the convention facilities, transit facilities, and structured parking within the existing and future project. To address the mass and the uses along Capitol Boulevard, we determined early in the process that the Centre Building would be required to cantilever over the existing pedestrian walkway and the entrances to the transit facility and the parking structure. This was done to enhance visibility, safety, and reduce the massing of the buildings along this elevation. We believe that this is an appropriate solution along Capitol Boulevard especially when viewed with the design and use of the improvements immediately to the South.

Along Main Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Street and the Grove Plaza, we have taken significant efforts to enhance the pedestrian and visitor experience. The integration of the entrances to the US Bank Plaza and the Clearwater Building provides an open area that is clearly defined as to its purpose and scope. Similarly, the uses and façades along 8<sup>th</sup> Street and the Grove Plaza are designed like the existing uses on the Grove Plaza and elsewhere on 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

**(d) Exterior Material.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii)(D) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating the project architecture, that the exterior materials should complement surrounding development in terms of color and relief. As discussed in the opening above, both the Clearwater Building and the Centre Building are intended to provide a transition in style and material between the existing US Bank Plaza and the adjoining improvements. The monochromatic design of and the small number of materials employed in the US Bank Plaza and the arena and hotel require a different exterior material treatment for this site. Through exterior material selection, color selection, and exterior treatments we can complement the existing improvements without replicating them. We have attempted to (i) integrate more relief and more variation than the existing improvements along Capitol Boulevard; (ii) employ elements that complement the façade type and uses on the Grove Plaza; and (iii) tie the various styles of architecture found along Main Street together.

**(e) Proximity to Residential Property.** Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(ii)(E) of the Boise City Code states that in evaluating the project architecture,

impacts should be minimized on adjoining residential uses, including those across a street or an alley. This is an urban setting, located within the C-5 zone. While there are residential apartments and condominiums in the immediate vicinity of the Site, we do not believe that the impact of the project on such residential units is material.

**3. Consistency with Adopted Plans and Design Guidelines.** Pursuant to Section 11-03-04.12.C(7)(d)(iii) of the Boise City Code, the design review committee is required to make specific findings regarding the consistency of the project with plans and design guidelines previously adopted by Boise City.

Many important plans and guidelines are found in the Comprehensive Plan adopted by Boise City. In our prior applications for conditional use permit and variance we have addressed the Comprehensive Plan in detail and we therefore incorporate that analysis herein by reference. Additionally, we have worked closely with Boise City Staff to ensure that the project complies with and adheres to the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines.

On the Capitol Boulevard frontage we recognize that there are challenges to integrate the existing improvements associated with the existing US Bank Plaza as well as the arena and hotel as discussed above. Due to the proposed entrances to the transit facility and the parking garage taking access off of Capitol Boulevard we are aware of the need to ensure that that elevation is inviting and safe. The design we have proposed addresses appropriate mitigation of these uses and is consistent with accepted traffic engineering principles.

While we will defer to Staff in its analysis of the applicability of and compliance with the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines, we have gone to great lengths to ensure that the project complies with the intent, standards, and guidelines of this document. It is important to acknowledge that the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines provide flexibility in design by identifying issues of concern and then providing alternative solutions to meet the spirit of the standards.

As we have addressed above, we believe that we have satisfied and complied with the intent, standards, and guidelines of Section 3.4.2 of the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines as they relate to the integration of pedestrian facilities and connections throughout the project.

Building elevations and designs are compatible with and follow the intent, standards and guidelines associated with the architectural character requirements of Section 4.1 of the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines

Additionally, through the configuration, alignment, and articulation that has been utilized in the design of both the Clearwater Building and the Centre Building, we have met the intent and requirements of Section 4.2 of the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines. The mass and configuration of these buildings is clearly consistent with the desired outcome for the central business district. They are also harmonious with the existing improvements that have been developed since this location became the

commercial hub of Boise first with the construction of the Overland Hotel and subsequently with the construction of the Eastman Building adjacent to the Site.

**D. Accompanying Materials**

In support of this application for a final design review approval of the transit facility and conceptual design review approval for City Centre Plaza, we are transmitting this analysis together with the following documents:

Site and Floor Plans

Landscaping Plan

Building elevations

Color Photographs of the Site

Perspective and Context Drawings

These materials will be supplemented upon our submittal for final design review approval for City Centre Plaza together with the materials board. No materials board is being submitted at this time because upon further discussion with Staff, since the only element that is receiving final design review approval is the subsurface element, the transit facility, the review and approval of that component does not lend its self to or require a material submission at this time.

Please schedule this matter for hearing before the Committee as soon as reasonably possible as the development of the transit facility is the most time sensitive component of this project. The transit facility cannot be developed within the time and financial constraints VRT faces, unless construction of the subsurface elements are commenced this spring.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey M. Wardle  
VP Development/General Counsel