



**FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE  
CAPITOL/FIRST HILL/CENTRAL AREA DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

**Project Number:** 3005914

**Address:** 304 East Thomas Street

**Meeting date:** March 19, 2008  
**Report date:** March 20, 2008

**Applicant:** Brian Palidar, Group Architects

**Board members present:** Jason Morrow  
Sharon Sutton  
Rumi Takahashi  
James Walker, Chair

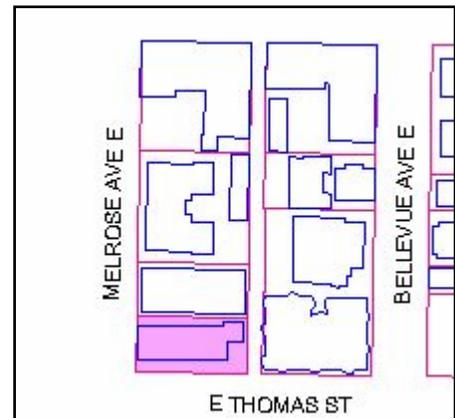
**Board members absent:** None

**DPD staff present:** Lisa Rutzick, Land Use Planner

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**SITE & VICINITY**

The subject site, located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, is approximately 7,200 square feet and is situated on the corner of the east side of Melrose Avenue East and on the north side of East Thomas Street. The site is currently developed with a three-story apartment building, which would be demolished. There is alley access to the site along the east side. The right-of-way on the west and south sides of the site currently has a steep rockery retaining wall. The subject property is zoned Midrise (MR) with a 60-foot height limit. The same zoning designation continues on all sides of the site. Well served by transit, the area comprises of mostly multi-family residential structures. Interstate 5 runs parallel and lies just to the west of Melrose Avenue.



## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The proposal includes demolition of the existing multi-family residential building and the construction of a new 30 unit multifamily structure. Access to the site is proposed from Melrose Avenue East and parking for 32 vehicles would be below-grade.

### **EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: MAY 30, 2007**

## **DESIGN PRESENTATION**

Three schemes were presented at the Early Design Guidance meeting. All options show a residential entry off of Thomas Street. Option A is a code-complying scheme with a modulated building form for approximately 20-22 units. Parking is both on the alley and from the street. Option B opens up the building envelope to include more decks, 32-36 units and parking on the alley as well as garage access from the street. Option C, the applicant's preferred scheme, shows an angled façade rotating the rectangular core away from Thomas Street. This option accommodates approximately the same number of units as Option B. In this alternative, all of the parking is accessed from the street. Both schemes B and C would require departures from setbacks, modulation, structure width and depth.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Approximately four members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting. The following comments were offered:

- The steps at the corner have a plaque with the name of the doctor who used to live on the site. This historic memento should be preserved.
- All of the garbage should be enclosed and secured.
- Clarify of the proposed materials. [metal siding and concrete]
- The building uphill and across the alley from the subject site is five stories tall and will be losing substantial views due to the proposed development.
- Supports proposed below grade garage and centered driveway.
- Likes the design of the top of the building.
- Wants to see something beautiful designed here. Including an angled elevation is not necessary for creating a contemporary building.
- Given that the parking is so expensive and inefficient, it is encouraged that a smaller building be considered.
- The existing landscaping is very nice and should be preserved.
- Clarification of the construction schedule [start next summer and last for approx 9-12 months] and permitting process.
- The views from neighboring units should not be diminished by reduced setbacks.
- Desire for good quality, durable and attractive materials.

## RECOMMENDATION MEETING: MARCH 19, 2008

### DESIGN PRESENTATION

The design presented at the Recommendation meeting was a further refined version of scheme B shown at the earlier meeting. The vehicular access is from Melrose and the residential entrance is off Thomas Street. The design aesthetic of the building is modern both in form and materials. Multiple departures were requested and efforts to minimize the intrusions into the setbacks included deck projections that are more transparent with mesh railings allowing views through the projections. The design includes a heavily landscaped and terraced right of way on both street fronts. The building has a series of common and private open spaces.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately four members of the public attended the Recommendation meeting. The following comments were offered:

- Prefer for the planting strip to be planted with vegetation, rather than paved.
- Concerned that the proposed concrete retaining walls will be targets of graffiti; larger, denser planting should be included to discourage this from occurring.
- The proposed yellow color appears in some of the renderings to be reminiscent of materials that are affixed to buildings under construction.
- Object to the overall aesthetic as starkly modern in contrast with the more historic, traditional context. The proposed design and color are too trendy and jarring for this location.
- Disagree that the proposed departures will result in a better building; instead it is just a bigger building.
- The color showed on the elevation mounted on the presentation board is a nice shade of yellow.
- Clarify that there is an existing multi-family structure on the property that will be demolished.
- Would like the Board to deliberate over each departure request.

### DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provided the following siting and design guidance and identified by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings* of highest priority to this project. The Board's response from the Recommendation meeting follows in bold text.

#### **A. Site Planning**

- A-1 **Responding to Site Characteristics. The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities.**

- A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites. Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.**
- A-7 Residential Open Space. Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.**
- A-10 Corner Lots. Buildings on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and public street fronts. Parking and automobile access should be located away the corners.**

The Board noted that the site topography and rockery are elements that can help minimize the presence of the driveway from the street. The Board encouraged efforts to preserve the existing landscaping on the site.

The Board was concerned that the requested departures are excessive and will unduly block views to the west from neighboring buildings. The design should be sensitive to the existing views and privacy of the neighbors. While the Board appreciated the unusual massing shown in the Option C, they were concerned that such massing works against the challenges of the site by obstructing more views. The Board agreed that Option B would better suit the site constraints, and the building mass should be pushed further to the south and west, but not beyond the plane of the building to the east.

The Board looks forward to reviewing a high-quality well programmed and well landscaped open space design. The rooftop decks (Option A) will be visible from nearby buildings and should be thoughtfully designed to elicit enjoyment by the residents, but also be visually pleasant as viewed by neighbors. (See also E-1 and E-2).

The Board supported the concept of locating the residential entrance off of East Thomas Street.

**At the Recommendation meeting, the Board felt that the residential entrance off of Thomas was well-located, but should be further emphasized by raising the overhead canopy. By locating the canopy at a higher level, the entry becomes more pronounced and alleviates the short appearance of the base.**

***Board Recommended Condition:***

- 1. The canopy over the residential entrance should be raised and draw more attention to the entry area.***

**The Board agreed that the proposed deck projections at the roof top were excessive intrusions into the required setbacks and should be eliminated. The Board agreed that if less intrusive sunscreens are proposed, that would be acceptable.**

***Board Recommended Condition:***

- 2. Eliminate the proposed deck projections at the roof top level.***

## **B. Height, Bulk, and Scale**

**B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility. Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to nearby, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between the anticipated development potential on the adjacent zones.**

See A1 and A-5.

## **C. Architectural Elements**

**C-4 Exterior Finish Materials. Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.**

**C-5 Structured Parking Entrances. The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.**

The Board encouraged use of solid, durable building materials that will help minimize noise from the freeway. Specifically, the use of well detailed brick, stone and architectural concrete are recommended. The Board stated that an all metal building will be out of character with the neighborhood. The Board looks forward to reviewing a more detailed, high quality material and color palette.

The Board encouraged the driveway design (paving, garage door, etc) to minimize intrusion to the sidewalk and be well-integrated into and contribute to the proposed building's aesthetics. A garage door system should be selected that is quiet and will not disrupt residents and neighbors as it opens and closes.

The Board wants all blank walls to be treated with architectural detailing to provide visual interest.

**At the Recommendation meeting, the modern building design had material palette that included grey aluminum windows, a zincalume finish for the flashing, red accent canopy over the entry and at the rooftop pavilion, open mesh garage door, architectural concrete at the building base, decks with metal mesh railings (for visual permeability), a red brick variety along the east façade, a dark grey colored cementitious panel on the ground floor with a bright yellow color on the upper floors. The recessed portions of the building were shown as a taupe cementitious panel.**

The Board agreed that the proposed yellow tone should be more subdued and respectful of the hues typically found in the surrounding older buildings. The proposed color contrasts too sharply with the context and should be more of an warm, earth tone

*Board Recommended Condition:*

*3. The proposed yellow tone of the cementitious panel should be more subdued in a warmer, earth tone.*

The Board discussed at length the materiality of the deck projections and unanimously agreed that the decks should be either metal (steel or aluminum) or concrete and not wood. The soffits of these decks also need to be considered carefully since they will be highly visible from below.

*Board Recommended Conditions:*

4. *The projecting decks should be either metal (steel or aluminum) or concrete.*
5. *The soffit design of these decks should be considered and detailed to be visually compatible with the building design.*

The Board also discussed the design of the east façade and suggested that the stair tower design be more pronounced to pull the height of that elevation lower where possible. The Board also suggested a slight reconfiguration of the southeastern units so that a vertical slot of windows is included where the building notch occurs.

<b>D. Pedestrian Environment</b>
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- D-3 **Retaining Walls.** Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce the impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscape.
- D-6 **Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks, and mechanical equipment away from the street where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units, and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

The Board reiterated that the relationship between the rockery and the building should be seamless and well-considered, especially where the building meets grade. The Board wants to see details for the residential entrance area and other points of access.

See also E-3.

The Board specified that the service areas be enclosed and secured. Access to these areas should be minimized and well-integrated into the development to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Board would like to review how the various garbage collection containers will be stored.

**At the Recommendation meeting, the Board reviewed the proposed service area off the alley and recommended that the service area be covered with at least some sort of metal mesh to screen views of the garbage and recycling area from views above the site.**

*Board Recommended Condition:*

6. *Include at least a mesh screen over the garbage area off the alley.*

## **E. Landscaping**

- E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites. Landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.**
- E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site. Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture, and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.**
- E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as existing significant trees.**

The Board requested to see an innovative and well-programmed residential open space design. The Board looks forward to detailed graphics showing the design of this courtyard and how it is accessed from the entry way with a distinctive, landscaped, functional entry pathway. Whether or not a roof deck is proposed, the Board asked for a well-designed rooftop with screening of the mechanical equipment and other considerations responding to the views of the roof from neighboring residences. The design should minimize the size of the rooftop equipment.

The Board discussed at length the treatment of the wider than normal right of way which is primarily a rockery retaining wall and stressed that this area be well-landscaped and designed. The rockery and site topography should work to soften the base of the proposed development.

The Board strongly encouraged the preservation and re-use of the historical plaque currently on the site.

**At the Recommendation meeting, a series of open spaces were provided in the proposed design including private decks, a common open space at the entry and on the north side of the building, private ground level open space and a common roof deck with an enclosed pavilion room. The ground level open space at the entryway has been designed to include rain activated water feature on the south side as part of the terraced landscape plan. The entryway is stained concrete and the sidewalk is standard scored concrete. The common open space on the north side of the building includes a water feature and landscaping. The proposed street trees on Thomas are Japanese Hornbeam and on Melrose, they are Serviceberry.**

**The Board was pleased with the extensive landscaping proposed for the wide right-of-way. They Board liked the terracing of the right-of-way along Thomas Street and suggested switching the locations of the water element with the landscaped portion.**

**The Board agreed that the terracing on the Melrose side was too architectural and created too many blank concrete walls. The Board recommended that the right-of-way design be softened with one raised bed at seating wall height that is heavily planted and bermed up towards the building plinth. The Board recommended trees, green screen and other vertical vegetation that will cover the expanse of the retaining wall and deter graffiti. The Board also noted that if a green screen is proposed on the north façade, there should be area provided to accommodate plantings.**

**Board Recommended Condition:**

- 7. *The right-of-way along Melrose should be revised to include one raised planter at seating wall height and heavily landscaped and bermed upwards. Special attention should be given to the screening the visible retaining walls (along both street fronts) with vegetation.*
- 8. *The area at the base of the proposed green screen on the north façade should be provided to accommodate plantings.*

**DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

At the EDG meeting, the following departure requests were considered by the Board:

- 1) **Setbacks (SMC 23.45.056):** The preferred design concept included several departures from the setback standards. The Board members warned that they will not be favorably inclined towards departure requests that result in a design that blocks views beyond what is allowed outright by the Land Use Code. The Board was specifically concerned with the north and south setbacks. The Board will not recommend approval of a reduction of the north setback. The Board indicated that they might entertain a setback reduction on the south side of the site only if the building does not project beyond the plane established by the adjacent building to the east (across the alley). The Board did note that reductions to the alley setback might be better received, provided that views are not blocked.
- 2) **Modulation (SMC 23.45.054):** The preferred design proposes to reduce and/or completely eliminate modulation along the front and side facades. The Board reserves opinion of such a departure provided development of an interesting and architecturally compatible building with high quality materials.
- 3) **Structure Width and Depth (SMC 23.45052):** The preferred design would require a departure from the structure depth standards. The structure depth is allowed to be 65% of the lot depth (39') and the proposed design would extend the structure depth to 42'-54'. The Board is concerned with how the overall massing is configured and designed and that the view obstruction from surrounding properties is minimized.

Eight departures from the development standards were proposed at the Recommendation meeting.

**Departure Summary Table**

<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<b>STRUCTURE DEPTH SMC 23.45.052</b>	65% of lot = 39'	67% = 40'	Additional depth allows for greater modulation while maintaining full setback on north side and allow for solar shade balconies. Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (A-5)
<b>MODULATION SMC 23.45.054</b>	Minimum depth of modulation = 8'	2' depth on all facades for a length of 10'	The required modulation would create awkward building form and design. Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (A-10)

<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<b>PROJECTIONS INTO SETBACKS SMC 23.45.056</b>	Minimum 3' setback to the front and side lot lines above 8'	Balcony projections into front setback by, leaving a setback of 8"	Board agreed that deck projections too obstructive and should be set back to the required setback. Board voted 4-0 to <u>deny</u> departure request. If this results in smaller than required deck open space, the Board is unanimously in favor of such a departure. (A-5)
<b>SETBACKS SMC 23.45.056</b>	Minimum 8' side setback	4'10" on alley side setback and 1'4" for stair tower egress at alley.	Consistent with the guidance given at the EDG, that reducing this setback would have the least impact on the neighboring views. Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (A-5)
<b>PARKING DISTANCE SMC 23.54.030</b>	Minimum of 5' from centerline of stall to nearest structural element.	4' to nearest structural element	The ADA stalls are the most deserving of extra clearance. Board voted 4-0 to <u>deny</u> departure request. (A-1)
<b>AVERAGED FRONT SETBACK SMC 23.45.056.A</b>	7.5'	5'	As long as the decks are shifted back to the line established by the bay windows projections of the structure to the east (2.5' from the property line) per the projections into the setback departure request above, the Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (A-5, A-10)
<b>VEHICULAR ACCESS SMC 23.45.060</b>	Access from the alley is required.	Access from the street (Melrose).	Given the extreme topographical change of the site and resulting infeasibility of taking access from the alley grade, along with extensive landscaping at and around the driveway, the Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (C-5, E-2, E-3)
<b>OPEN SPACE DIMENSIONS SMC 23.45.058</b>	No horizontal dimensions for ground level open space shall be less than 10'.	6'—7'-9"	Creative, varied, and interesting landscape design that includes water features with high visibility and improvement to the public realm are dominant features of the project design. Board voted 4-0 in favor of departure request. (E-2, E-3)