



**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE
OF
AREA 4, THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

Meeting Date May 8, 2007

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Project Number:** 3006245
- Address:** 5201 Rainier Avenue South
- Applicants:** High Schaeffer, Driscoll Architects, for Murray Kahn of 5201 Rainier LLC
- Board Members Present:** Ann Beeman, Chair and Local Residential Representative
Steve Sindiong, Community Representative
John Woodworth, Development Community Representative
Michelle Wang, Design Profession Representative
Robert Mohn, Local Business Representative

Staff Member Present: Art Pederson

PROJECT, SITE, AND VICINITY DESCRIPTIONS

The project proposes to construct a four-story mixed-use development with approximately 2,000 sf of retail, three two-story live-work units, approximately 60 residential units above, and, in a separate building, four townhouses. Parking for approximately 59 vehicles would be provided beneath both buildings.

The triangular shaped 24,406sf site has 282 feet of frontage on Rainier Avenue South (Rainier Avenue) to the east, and 224 feet of frontage on 39th Avenue South (39th Avenue) to the west. The north “point” of the site faces southbound Rainier Avenue and is approximately 23 feet wide. The south property boundary is approximately 195 feet. There is an elevation gain of approximately 10 feet from north to south along 39th Avenue and 8 feet along Rainier Avenue. There are four existing street trees in the Rainier Avenue right of way (ROW) that must be retained. The site is zoned Neighborhood Commercial 2 with a 40-foot height limit (NC2-40).



The NC2-40 zoning extends along both sides of Rainier Avenue from 39th Avenue to the southeast. From 39th Avenue to the northwest the zoning changes to a combination of Commercial 2 with a 65 foot height limit (C2-65) and NC3-40. These zones contain a mix of mainly commercial and multi-family structures. Across 39th Avenue to the west, and the parcel abutting the project site to the south, the parcels are zoned Lowrise 2 (L2). This zone contains a mix of multi-family and single-family residences of various ages and sizes. Beyond this to the south the zoning diminishes to Single-Family 5000 (SF 5000) with mainly single-family structures but also containing Hitt’s Hill Park.

ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

The project architect described the neighborhood context, as outlined in *Project and Site Description* above and described the project goals, the site's opportunities and challenges and presented three possible development alternatives.

The development objective is to create "workforce" housing, that is housing affordable to those earning between 80 and 120 percent of this area's median income. This housing type is apparently in short supply in the Columbia City neighborhood. This site is optimal for this purpose as it is on a main arterial with good transit service and within a walkable distance to the Columbia City commercial core. The site also has a favorable orientation on Rainier Avenue, looking north to Columbia City and views of the downtown Seattle skyline.

The project's preliminary design approach is to have a "bold" shape that will respond to the "bold" or unusual site shape. The building design would stay away from a traditional approach of flat walls with bay windows". The exterior siding and finish materials would be a mixture of "contemporary and interesting".

The development program is to provide a small retail space (approximately 2,000 sf) in the northern end of the site and three live-work units along the Rainier Avenue frontage. The developer feels that retail spaces beyond the 2,000 sf proposed would not be viable due to the site's location outside of the Columbia City commercial core and the nearby underutilized existing commercial spaces. Because more extensive retail is not considered viable and residential uses are limited to 20 percent of the frontage along an arterial, live-work units are proposed along Rainier Avenue.

Alternative "A" proposed a structure with continuous frontage on all sides and a void in the center in response to FAR (floor area ratio) limits and the need for residential amenity area. Although this creates a strong street edge along Rainier Avenue it does not respond well to the adjacent L2 zoning and limits solar access to the central courtyard "void".

Alternative "B" maintains the continuous building frontages along 39th Avenue and the south property boundary but shifts the "void" area toward Rainier Avenue for better solar exposure. However, it was not pursued due to the consequent breaking-up of the Rainier Avenue façade and continued lack of responsiveness to the adjacent L2 zone. It would require two *design departures*.

Alternative "C", the applicant's preferred alternative, proposes two separate structures both above the structured parking. One structure on the site's southwest corner would contain four townhouse style structures with frontage and raised entries on 39th Avenue. The apartment type units would be above the north corner retail and Rainier Avenue facing live-work units in one structure extending around the site's north corner from 39th Avenue and around the full length of the Rainier Avenue frontage. Both structures would be separated by an internal courtyard for the residential amenity area that would have direct access from 39th Avenue and also be open along the site's south property boundary. The parking garage entry would be on 39th Avenue and set back between five and eight feet from the property line.

A preliminary building design was presented. The northern end and Rainier Avenue frontages propose a "serrated" façade that would recess the unit's wall planes instead of presenting a more traditional singular wall plane parallel to the street. The recessed wall planes, roughly parallel to the adjacent rights of way, would create intersecting walls that would be roughly perpendicular to the street. These recesses would result in balconies for the units and allow the roughly perpendicular walls to have extensive glazing for

views to the north and Downtown. The serrated and recessed frontage would extend to grade and include the live-work units resulting in low-gated exterior entry areas for these units. The rise in grade along Rainier Avenue would place the “street” and work levels of the live-work units progressively lower than the street grade. The northern end retail space would be set-back further from the serrated façade to allow for a larger sidewalk frontage and to create an extended area with overhead weather protection (OHWP).

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

Two *Design Departures* were requested for Alternative “C”, the applicant’s preferred scheme.

SUMMARY OF THE DEPARTURE REQUESTS

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed	Rationale for Request	Board Comments
Depth of Commercial Space. Non-residential uses must extend an average of at least 30-feet and a minimum of 15-feet in depth from the street-level street facing façade (SMC 23.47A.008.B.3).	At this time, an undetermined reduction in the average and minimum depths of the Rainier Avenue S facing live-work unit commercial spaces. Final amount will not reduce the long-term functionality of the proposed spaces.	The triangular lot shape restricts the options for configuration of the live-work spaces and placement of the structured parking behind. An internal “saw-tooth” design that staggers the depth of individual spaces would be a better design response.	The Board will carefully entertain a project design with reduced depths to the live-work ground level spaces provided this departure responds to the design guidance given.
Width of Driveway Entrance. The minimum width of for 2-way traffic shall be 22-feet (SMC 23.47A.030.D.2).	A reduction in width to 18-feet for two-way traffic.	A reduction in width to 18 feet would create a more attractive streetscape. This is feasible for the number of garage spaces to be provided.	The Board will continue to entertain a project design with a reduced driveway width provided this departure responds to the design guidance given.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ten members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting. Comments offered were as follows:

- The project should be designed and built under “Built Green” standards,
- Project should include units for families: the described unit sizes are for singles or people without children,
- If the commercial spaces are to be successful there must be parking,
- The presented design ideas show a design that doesn’t fit with the neighborhood’s historical character. The context isn’t all negative or abandoned buildings. This architectural firm should not impose an ill-fitting aesthetic on the neighborhood,
- The proposed vehicle access and location on 39th is good,
- The Rainier Avenue commercial spaces need to have the required depth to be bona fide “work” spaces, otherwise they could become at grade apartments. Instead narrow frontages, such as in the Columbia City commercial core, would work better.
- The “work” areas along Rainier Avenue should be at or above street level, not partially below as proposed. No fences separating them from the street, instead recessed entries could be provided.
- A fine level of detail for the live-work frontages is important for success, such as storefront glazing systems with transom windows above and kick plates beneath,

- The existing bus stop should be integrated into the façade design.
- The northern point of the building, the “prow”, should be emphasized. The corner location is highly visible looking from the west on Dawson Street. A notable design for the corner will provide a visual terminus and could be a landmark for the area.

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 siting and design guidance described below 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.

Prior to identification of the priority guidance, the Board discussed the three alternatives presented. The Board agreed that the two building arrangement and site plan of Alternative 3 is preferred. For example, the transitional nature of the townhouses to the abutting Lowrise zone is context sensitive. However, they had extensive discussion about the larger building’s relationship to the street and response to the Columbia City architectural context, as reflected in the guidelines below.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics. *The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.*

The overall approach to the triangular site, itself, is fine. However across the street there is triangular mini-park area the preliminary design does not acknowledge. Also, the proposed north facing view balconies, an important part of the building design, could likely be blocked by mature street trees.

- The developing design should respond to these conditions.

Additionally, the preliminary design for the building’s northern corner does not sufficiently respond to a prominent corner as viewed from both southbound Rainier Avenue and eastbound South Dawson Street. See A-10 below.

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility. *The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.*

A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street. *Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.*

Because this site is just outside of the core of Columbia City, the existing desirable spatial ROW characteristics of buildings close to the sidewalk that define the street wall is not immediate. However, that should be continued since the site and surrounding zoning plan for its continuation. Toward that end, the building design should:

- Create a well defined and detailed commercial frontage, with the upper residential levels continuing this but with a differentiated residential expression.
- The live-work entries should be more pronounced and the proposed recessed and gated entry set-backs (both horizontally away from the sidewalk and vertically below sidewalk grade) should be removed. The context of Columbia City shows much lesser entry and front façade set-backs, with typically only the entry door being recessed.

A-4 Human Activity. *New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.*

- The proposed townhouse relationship to the street is responsive to this guideline. The townhouse design should also develop the front entry stairs to act as semi-public transitional stoops.
- Follow the guidance in A-3 above for the live-work entries. For the MUP submittal and Recommendation meeting bring details / sections showing how the live-work units will relate the street and thereby support street level human activity.
- Assure adequate transparency for the live-work units. A suggestion was design for after hours privacy by the use of blinds but assure day-time visibility.
- Contact King County / Metro to discuss ways to integrate the bus stop and/or shelter into the building design.

A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street. *For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.*

The project proposes townhouses fronting 39th Avenue and requiring townhouse residents to travel along this street to the parking garage entrance. To make this enjoyable for residents and encourage resident lingering in support of street level human activity the project should:

- Continue to develop gracious entry stoops that will act like front yards.

A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access. *Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties and pedestrian safety.*

The project proposes a *design departure* from the driveway width standards in order to reduce the appearance of the garage entry. The Board is generally supportive of this provided it achieves that end. An elevation study of the proposed smaller opening should be included with the MUP plans.

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 from corners.*

- The site's prominent north corner should be enunciated by a stronger corner design. The proposed decks in this area work against this goal and should be removed. The corner design should respond and connect to the triangular open space area to the north, possibly with the use of substantial glazing.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-1 Architectural Context. *New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.*

The proposed design mirrors the Columbia City architectural context by placing multiple levels of residential units above a commercial ground floor. However, the preliminary design goes too far beyond the established pattern of facades "squared-off" to the street by the extensive serration / modulation.

- The proposed "angularity" should be lessened by removing it from the ground level and portions of the upper levels. Some of this concept could create interest and uniqueness; too much will

clash with the context.

- When lessening this angular geometry the project should become more responsive to the City Light building and seating area to the northwest.

C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency. *Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its façade walls.*

The project design approach is to respond to a bold site with a bold shape. However, the extensive angularity and ignoring of the historical Columbia City context instead imposes an unusual geometry on an unusual site. This angularity seems to make it difficult to impose a discernable order to the design and relate to the 100 year old Columbia City context. Also, the repetitive angularity across all uses (retail, live-work, and residential) will have difficulty relating a sense of the internal unit division and their function.

- If a modified “saw-tooth” expression is pursued it is appropriate for the residential uses, but shouldn’t extend into the live-work or retail areas.

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.*

In keeping with the proposed building’s bold form, a material palette of Hardi-Plank siding, aluminum, and glass is also proposed. The Board and community commented that the extensive use of this in conjunction with the proposed angular building form will not respond to the desirable community context. However:

- These materials can be used to good effect if responsive to the architectural context of the Columbia City commercial core.

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 project requests a *design departure* to reduce the Code required two-way driveway entry width of 22 feet to 18 feet to lessen the visual impact of the garage opening and the often stark interior of a structured concrete parking garage. The developer’s experience with a project of this size has shown that an 18 foot width works and gives more opportunity to lengthen the area for positive street-front landscaping or building façade treatments.

The Board is generally supportive of this request provided the reduced size is not only functional for traffic movement and provides the required site-triangles but also results in a more visually attractive street frontage in this area.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances. *Convenient and attractive access to the building’s entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather.*

The Board did not agree that the departure from the commercial minimum and average depth standards,

as proposed, would result in a better project. It was observed that the request appears to be driven by an accommodation to the internal parking layout. Also, in combination with the serrated and set-back live-work frontages, the minimized live-work spaces would not be used for work and likely result in secluded residential spaces along a busy street frontage.

In response to these observations the project should:

- Provide adequate and functional work area for the live-work units,
- Assure transparency to the interior,
- Create visible entries that signal the expected live-work commercial uses within.

Overhead weather protection is important for the retail frontage. However, OHWP only over the live-work entries, not their entire frontage, is appropriate.

Assure bicycle parking is evident and easy to use.

D-2 Blank Walls. *Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.*

See C-5 above relating to the garage entry. The proposal to raise the townhouses above street level should not result in blank garage foundation walls.

D-11 Commercial Transparency. *Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.*

See extensive guidance above relating to the live-work unit frontages and relationship to the street.

D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions. *For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and be visually interesting street for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops, and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.*

This general guidance should be applied to the raised townhouse street frontages.

Staff Comments

After integrating the above guidance into the MUP project design, the applicant should proceed to submit an application for a Master Use Permit. Include colored and shadowed elevation drawings and site / landscaping plans with the MUP submittal. Be prepared to submit material and color samples for planner review. Finally, please notify the project planner of the MUP intake appointment date at least one week before the appointment in order to be informed of any fees owing and for delivery of the project file to the intake staff.