



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Department of Planning and Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**RECOMMENDATION MEETING
OF
AREA 4, THE SOUTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**
Meeting Date September 25, 2007

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Number: 3006245
Address: 5201 Rainier Avenue South
Applicants: Matt Driscoll, 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
Board Members Absent: Robert Mohn, Local Business Representative
DPD Planner: 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 - RECOMMENDATION MEETING

The project architect described design development of the EDG preferred Alternative "C" in response to the Early Design Guidance. The traditional elements of the Columbia City commercial core have been included in the design, such as large commercial storefront windows, bay windows, and extensive brick cladding. The project continues to focus the traditional retail street level uses at the corner. The proposed approximately 1,750 square foot commercial space will have a prominent entry at the corner and secondary entries along Rainier Avenue. Continuous overhead weather protection around this space will emphasize the corner. The main residential entry, with identifying signage and a canopy, will separate the retail area from the four live-work units extending the remainder of Rainier Avenue. The live-work areas have recessed entries, with individual flat glass canopies and extensive street front glazing.

The project landscape architect, Tom Rengstorf, described the sidewalk and courtyard landscape plans. The sidewalk plaza at the corner will have planting strip plantings to serve as a buffer from the adjacent traffic but be arranged to create a natural orientation to the Seattle City Light substation pocket park across the street. A sitting bench will be located at the plaza. The courtyard design creates a "wandering path" between the "townhouse" and larger structures. The "townhouse" units will have patios fronting on the courtyard along with some apartment units at the first residential level. General tenant access will be available directly from the mixed-use structure and from two outside entries from 39th Avenue South.

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.

DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES, EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 25, 2007.

The Early Design Guidance meeting was held September 25, 2007. After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, the Design Review Board members identified by letter and number the following 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:

- A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics
- A-2 Streetscape Compatibility
- A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street
- A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street
- A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access
- A-10 Corner Lots
- C-1 Architectural Context
- C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency
- C-4 Exterior Finish Materials

- C-5 Structured Parking Entrances
- D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances
- D-2 Blank Walls
- D-11 Commercial Transparency
- D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions

The detailed EDG Guidance is included below in *Italics* along with the Board's Recommendations on the presented Master Use Permit design response.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

Four Design Departures have been requested as part of the MUP proposal. (At the time of the EDG meeting two Design Departures were requested.) See *Design Departure* matrix at the end of this document for details.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Five members of the community attended the Recommendation meeting and submitted these comments and concerns:

- The MUP design is a much fit for the Columbia City business district that the EDG proposal.
- The commercial area at the corner should not be recessed behind the support columns, but instead should come out to the outside plane of the columns.
- The garage entry lintel should be extended into the abutting brick walls to give the appearance that it is holding something up, and not just a decorative piece.
- Support for the construction of "work-force" housing.
- Any rooftop HVAC equipment should not generate noise head at the new "townhouses" or on surrounding uphill properties, which having living areas at approximately the same elevation as the roof.
- The west wall (courtyard wall) of the mixed-use building needs more color, detail, and modulation.
- Landscaping should be added to soften the blank wall at the larger structure's southern façade where it meets Rainier Avenue.
- The color choice is too "typical" - it is seen all over the City, such as Ballard and Greenwood. A more original color palette should be chosen.
- The north corner plaza is nice and will help with visibility for vehicles going to Rainier Avenue South.
- The proposed courtyard access ramp at the south side of the "townhouses" could be unsafe due to a lack of visibility from the development.
- The parking should be reduced to increase the size of the live-work units.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the September 25, 2007 *Recommendation* meeting the Design Review Board reviewed the design submitted in response to the EDG and further developed in conjunction with the project planner and discussed the six requested *Design Departures*. Following clarifying questions and deliberation the Board provided the following additional guidance and recommendations. The Board's comments and recommendations follow EDG Guidance that is in *Italics*.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design responds to the guidance given.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design differentiates the residential from commercial spaces. The live-work entries now reflect the desirable commercial entry configurations of Columbia City. However, the Board feels the proposed reduced depth (see *Design Departure Matrix* at the end of this document), "saw tooth" back wall, and interior layout of these spaces will not result in viable "work" spaces, but instead to be predominately or entirely "live" areas. On a commercial street such as Rainier Avenue this will result in coverings over the windows for privacy and a loss of vital street level transparency (C-10).

The Board noted that the design factors causing this are:

- The location of the required parking on the same level and behind the live-work areas (resulting in the "saw-tooth" back wall and resulting in awkward "appendages" of space [live work Units B and C]), and
- The location of kitchens too close to work areas and stairways protruding into the work areas.

The Board recommends that the revised MUP plans alter the parking / storage / mechanical room configuration and live-work kitchen and stair locations to address these issues. Subject to

planner approval of these changes, the Board **Recommends** approval of this *Design Departure* request.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed townhouse / street relationship and accommodation of the Metro bus stop meet this guidance. The success of the proposed live-work entries and transparency to this guidance will depend on the design respond to the recommendations in A-2 and A-3 above.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed townhouse entry steps (page 21 of DRB packet) responds to this guideline

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the reduced garage door opening with the full brick cladding in the garage opening recess responds to this guidance. Details of the garage door material and color were not presented but are directed to be attractive materials and design. Because of the relationship of the sidewalk to garage-opening the proposed reduced sight triangle should not impair pedestrian safety. The Board consequently **Recommends** approval of the *Design Departures* requested.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design largely responds to this guidance. However, they **Recommend** that at least the first bay of the corner storefront façade fully come out to the proposed brick columns and clearly present the commercial entry door at the apex of the corner.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design reflective of the Columbia City context meets the guidance given.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed mixed-use building design responds to the guidance given. However, the townhouse street facing façade appears like the interior / courtyard façade of the larger building. The modulated and appropriately sized cornice and

stoop configurations are strong points, but the fenestration and deck arrangements fail to provide interest and differentiation of the four units within. The Board recommends that the design vary the fenestration and create façade interest by the addition of window bays, and other elements, if appropriate.

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.*

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels proposed design meets the guidance given.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design meets the guidance given and **Recommends** approval of the *Design Departure* requested, as discussed in A-8 above.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the proposed design meets the guidance given provided adequate response to the recommendations for the live-work units above is made.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The design proposes a *Design Departure* to not include a permitted street level use between the interior parking and the street level street facing façade along the approximately 48 foot distance between the garage entry and the townhouse units. Instead the parking will be separated by the concrete foundation wall. The reason for this request is the weak street-front commercial potential in this section of “south” Columbia City. This potential is even weaker along 39th Avenue South and reinforced by the L-2 zoning directly across 39th Avenue. Instead this area will be landscaped on the ground and have a green-screen on the wall. The Board feels the proposed landscaping and green screen wall treatment responds to this guidance and creates a transition between the commercial frontage and garage entry to the north and the townhouses to the south and **Recommends** approval of the *Design Departure* requested.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the success of the proposed live-work transparency will depend on the design respond to the recommendations in A-2 and A-3 above. Subject to planner approval of these changes, the Board **Recommends** approval of the live-work *Design Departure* request.

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.

Recommendation Meeting: The Board feels the open space plan as presented (and described in *Architect’s Presentation*) meets the guidance given.

SUMMARY OF THE DEPARTURE REQUESTS

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed	Rationale for Request	Board Recommendation
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. A-3, A-4, C-10, D-1, D-11	The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.
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. A-8	The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.
Street Level Uses Street level parking must be separated from the street-level, street-facing façade by another permitted use. SMC 23.47A.005.C	Provide screening and landscaping.	No use is viable here, while a landscaped and screened façade creates a natural transition between the commercial area and townhouses and L-2 zone uphill. A-8, D-2	The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.
Set-Back At the intersection of a side or front lot line of a residentially zoned lot a 15’ x 15’ triangular setback must be provided. SMC 23.47A.014	A 5-foot 2-inch set back parallel to the property line.	The entire project site is zoned NC 2-40 and abuts an L-2 zone. Instead of the required set-back, the proposed townhouses create a natural transition between zones by their character and 5’2” setback. A-5	The Board recommends approval of this request based on the submitted MUP design.

BOARD RECOMMENDATION

The Board finds that the project design successfully responds to the design guidance given, with the recommendations outlined in this document. The applicant and architect shall make the recommended design changes and submit the required drawings to the project planner for review and approval.

The Board **Recommends** the approval of the **four** *Design Departure* requests.

Staff Comments

The applicant should first submit the design response to the **Recommendations** in pdf or paper format to the project planner for review and approval. Then approved changes must be made to the MUP plan sets before MUP permit issuance.