

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE  
of  
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**31 July 2007**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3007182

Address: 1923 Fifth Avenue

Applicant: Steve Gestetner for Multi Capital Group

Board Members Present: Dana Behar  
Wilmot Gilland  
Mark Hinshaw (substitute)  
Kelly Mann

Board Members Absent: Jim Falconer (recused)  
Marta Falkowska

Staff Member Present: Bruce P. Rips

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**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant proposes to design and construct a 500 foot tower comprising nine floors of hotel, 30 floors of residential, ground floor commercial uses, amenity areas and eight below grade parking levels. Three low-rise, buildings (including the Icon Grill) occupy the site's three parcels extending along the west side of Fifth Avenue from Virginia Street.

The architect presented one concept design mirroring the image of the applicant's proposed Heron Tower which the Design Review Board considered at two early design guidance meetings on February 27, 2007 and June 12, 2007. Although the proposal showed a six story base varying somewhat from the Heron in order to achieve visual diversity at the street, the upper levels resembled the other proposal with its rounded balconies at the corner, sloped roof, and similar materials and coloring. The proposal for the Pagoda Tower's base illustrated shallow modulations on the five floors above street level indicative of the multiple uses within the proposed structure.

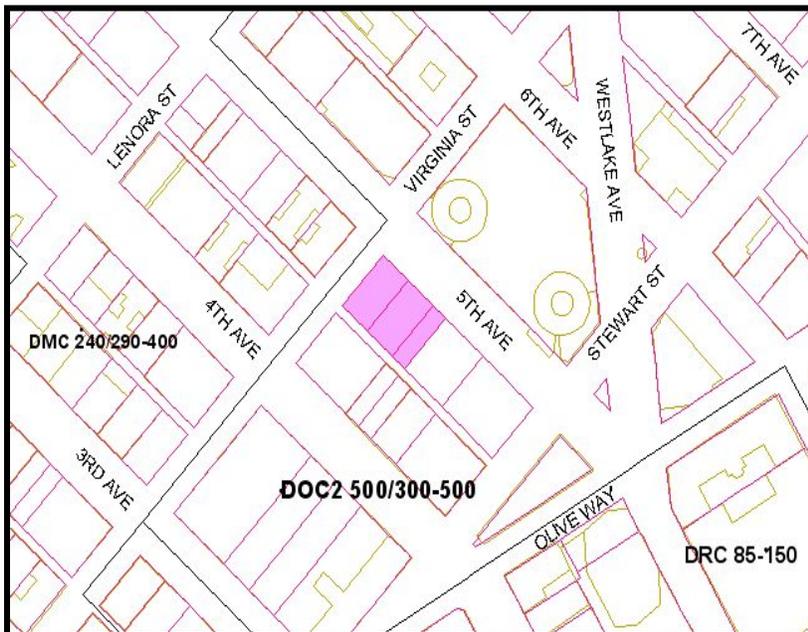
The Board reviewed three site plans options. Scheme #1 had restaurant and hotel uses facing Fifth Ave. and a curb cut leading to a hotel drop-off area deeply embedded in the structure. A

vehicular ramp accessed from the alley lead to a below grade garage. Scheme #2 shifted the curb cut to Fifth Ave. with the hotel drop-off area nestled between the adjacent Avis garage and the hotel lobby. Retail, restaurant / bar and lobbies faced Virginia St. and Fifth Ave. Scheme #3 transfers all vehicular access to the alley with the exception of a drop-off lane on Fifth Ave. Retail, hotel and restaurant uses front onto Virginia and Fifth.

The rooftop resembled the same design proposed for the Heron Tower---a sloping roof covering a solarium, amenity area, roof gardens, cistern and smokestack, micro-turbines, and supporting photovoltaic cells.

### Site and Vicinity Description

The development site, zoned Downtown Office Core 2 with a 300 to 500-foot height limit (DOC2 500/300-500), is located on the southwest corner of the Virginia Street and Fifth Avenue intersection. It lies on the eastern portion of the block bounded by Stewart and Virginia Streets, Fourth and Fifth Avenues. A public alley abuts the site. To the north across Virginia St., the zoning transitions to the lower height zone of Downtown Mixed Commercial with a maximum height of 400 feet (DMC 240/290-400).



The 16,200 square foot site extends approximately 120 feet on Virginia Street and approximately 150 feet on Fifth Avenue. A 16 foot wide alley currently separates the site from the Escala (under construction) at Fourth and Virginia streets. By the Escala's completion, the alley should increase to 18 feet. The site slopes upward approximately six feet from Fifth Ave. to the alley.

Comprising the same block face as the proposal are the Avis parking garage and surface parking lot at the corner of Stewart St. and Fifth Ave. (the site of the Heron Tower proposal). The two Westin towers lie directly across Fifth Ave. Behind the three subject parcels, the Escala condominium tower is currently under construction. Across Virginia St. lies the Hotel Andrea (1925), 2005 Fifth Ave. (office and retail, 1927), the Sheridan Apartments (1914) and the Westin garage (1981).

Several Seattle landmarks lie within blocks of the project site. These include the following: the monorail, McGraw Square, the Times Square Building, the Medical Dental Building, Nordstrom Downtown, and Macy's Downtown. The Centennial and Securities Buildings are grand

structures constructed in 1925 and 1913 respectively. Other significant structures in the vicinity include Westlake Mall, the Westin Hotel towers across Fifth Ave. A sense of eclecticism and lack of continuity pervade the immediate vicinity. With the terminus of the future trolley adjacent to McGraw Square as well as initial planning efforts to create another plaza in the Westlake right of way just north of the square, the city of Seattle seeks to imbue the district with a coherence currently missing.

Virginia St., a Class II pedestrian and minor arterial, runs one-way eastbound and Fifth Ave., also a Class I pedestrian street and major arterial, travels one way southbound. One-way eastbound Olive Way merges into Stewart St. at Fourth Ave. east of the Times Square Building. Fourth Ave. is one-way streets northbound. The convergence of Westlake Avenue and Fifth Avenue as well as that of Olive Way and Stewart St. forms a series of flatiron shaped parcels. The form of the Times Square Building most elegantly expresses the street pattern. McGraw Square forms a small public plaza amidst the Westin Hotel, a Bank of America branch, and the Times Square Building. The monorail travels in the Fifth Ave. right of way with two of its supporting columns across from the subject site. The alley will likely need to be widened by two feet. The Land Use Code proscribes a 12 foot wide sidewalk along Virginia St. and a 15 foot wide sidewalk on Fifth Ave.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Twelve people signed in at the Early Design Guidance meeting. The following comments were provided:

- Supports the applicant's intention to place retail on Virginia St.
- Create a shadow study to determine the impact of the two towers.
- View analysis from the site left out the future Heron building.
- The proposal and packet lack an analysis of the surrounding downtown neighborhoods. Is there a transition between neighborhoods? The proposal's response to its context is obscure.
- The proposal lacks an urban design analysis. There is no mention of adjacent buildings.
- The proposal does not recognize Escala's close proximity.
- Twin towers generally frame something significant between them. The project lacks this because the Avis garage separates them.
- The issue of the twin towers is important.
- This is not an edge site but a contained one.
- The applicant should prepare a plan for the alley.
- Keep in mind the local context. The north side is very different than the other sides of the property. The design should respond to the variety of activities and structures on Virginia St.
- The lack of curb cuts on Virginia St. and Fifth Ave. is positive.
- The alley has not been considered in the design.
- There is little analysis of the human scale impacts of two or three enormous towers. What are the impacts to the pedestrian quality of the street from the two towers?

- The base needs to have a human scale. The massiveness of the two towers dilutes the sense of human scale.
- The base needs refining. It shouldn't be a repetition of the Heron Tower.
- The round or curved motif of the Pagoda and the Heron dilutes the visual impact from the cylindrical Westin towers. Are the curves the best response?

## **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 Downtown Development*" of highest priority to this project. Selective Belltown Guidelines follow in italics.

### **A. Site Planning & Massing**

**A-1 Respond to the physical environment. Develop an architectural concept and compose the building's massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site. *a) Develop the architectural concept and arrange the building mass to enhance views. This includes views of the water and mountains, and noteworthy structures such as the Space Needle; b) The architecture and building mass should respond to sites having nonstandard shapes. There are several changes in the street grid alignment in Belltown, resulting in triangular sites and chamfered corners. Examples of this include: 1st, Western and Elliott between Battery and Lenora, and along Denny; c) the topography of the neighborhood lends to its unique character. Design buildings to take advantage of this condition as an opportunity, rather than a constraint. Along the streets, single entry, blank facades are discouraged. Consider providing multiple entries and windows at street level on sloping streets.***

Scheme #3's site plan, which directs vehicular access to the alley, places retail uses along Virginia St. and activates the hotel lobby with a bar and lounge, met the Board's expectations. The other two schemes which depicted curb cuts on Virginia St. and Fifth Ave. did not receive Board support and did not meet Land Use Code requirements.

The Board expressed its disappointment with several aspects of the proposal as it relates to the present and future physical environment. Both the packet and the presentation lacked a compelling analysis of the built environment---an analysis that would inform the design and convince the Board that the base relates to the intricacies of the three downtown neighborhoods it would appear to join. This analysis remains the foundation of the EDG process. The presentation and packet also treated the Pagoda in a singular way as if the Heron was non-existent. The drawings of the base, for example, should have shown both towers with the Avis building in between them. Additionally, representation of the Escala was minimal in the drawings and did not suggest the impact or influence upon both the pedestrian experience and

the design of the Pagoda Tower. How will the design of the Pagoda minimize unwanted impacts on tenants and pedestrians?

The presenter explained the design influence of older structures upon the proposal, yet the drawings did not convey it. The Board members were unconvinced that the design of the base, with the exception of the general site planning, would somehow enhance the existing texture of the neighborhood.

**A-2 Enhance the skyline. Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.**

The Board could not assume that twin towers were the most appropriate design response without evidence of much more analysis. There should be a series of studies or sketches depicting a variety of relationships between the towers. Early design analysis should show: varying heights, asymmetry, variations in potential materials and volumes or massing. The architect should then elaborate upon three or four distinct and viable versions to show their relationship on the skyline from all compass points, from the major streets, from major points of interest or view points. These versions should be placed in context with nearby towers (the Westin) and future towers (Escala) and others in the vicinity and represented in both drawings and model. The latter should be at a large scale and should include more city blocks than the model displayed at the EDG meeting. The various representations for the Pagoda and the Heron can be in chip board or styrofoam that they are easily built and manipulated.

Board members expressed their dismay that there no true alternatives massing schemes presented at the EDG meeting. Scheme #1 was missing from the packet. Scheme #2 was a modest variation of the preferred option.

**B. Architectural Expression**

**B-1 Respond to the neighborhood context. Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighborhood. a) Establish a harmonious transition between newer and older buildings. Compatible design should respect the scale, massing and materials of adjacent buildings and landscape. b) Complement the architectural character of an adjacent historic building or area; however, imitation of historical styles is discouraged. References to period architecture should be interpreted in a contemporary manner. c) Design visually attractive buildings that add richness and variety to Belltown, including creative contemporary architectural solutions. d) Employ design strategies and incorporate architectural elements that reinforce Belltown's unique qualities. In particular, the neighborhood's best buildings tend to support an active street life.**

The building's massing and the elaboration of the base's architectonic qualities should reflect the surrounding scale and texture of the exiting and future buildings. Above the base, the architect has a freedom to sculpt the building in response to various conditions or ideas including: the complexity of the street grid, distinct environmental conditions, the relationship with other tall

buildings, and architectural theory or history among other possibilities. The deformations should not merely refer to its sister tower, the Heron, but have a logic and consistency that represents thinking based on a multitude of built and environmental conditions in downtown that could inform the design. The various design alternatives should naturally grow out of this study and be a result of varying ideas and influences.

At the next EDG meeting, the Board expects the architects to show the relationship of the tower to the Escala (under construction), the Westin Hotel and any other proposals in the planning stages.

**B-2 Create a transition in bulk & scale. Compose the massing of the building to create a transition to the height, bulk, and scale of development in neighboring or nearby less-intensive zones. *New high-rise and half- to full-block developments are juxtaposed with older and smaller scale buildings throughout the neighborhood. Many methods to reduce the apparent scale of new developments through contextually responsive design are identified in other guidelines (e.g., B-1: Respond to the neighborhood context and B-3: Reinforce the positive urban form & architectural attributes of the immediate area). The objective of this guideline is to discourage overly massive, bulky or unmodulated structures that are unsympathetic to the surrounding context.***

The packet and the presentation lacked qualitative analysis of the impacts of three major towers upon the block and the neighborhood. Future efforts will need to show the analysis and present design alternatives that create a transition in bulk and scale from one to the other and from the two proposals with the Escala and the Westin. The Heron and the Pagoda would potentially create a canyon along Fifth Ave. The relationship of the Escala and the Pagoda would also significantly impact Virginia St. How do the designs of the Pagoda and the Heron towers reduce the significant impacts they will have upon the neighborhood?

The Board thought that the expression of the proposal's programmatic elements (hotel, residential) on the façade was a constructive first step. The Board did not endorse the specific design, however, as the members preferred to use the next meeting to understand how the Heron and the Pagoda proposals are seen together and how they respond to the lower scale buildings in the immediate vicinity.

The level of detail, particularly at the buildings' bases, should possess an intricacy which reduces the perceived mass of the three towers at the lower levels.

**B-3 Reinforce the positive urban form & architectural attributes of the immediate area. Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development. *a. Respond to the regulating lines and rhythms of adjacent buildings that also support a street-level environment; regulating lines and rhythms include vertical and horizontal patterns as expressed by cornice lines, belt lines, doors, windows, structural bays and modulation. b. Use regulating lines to promote contextual harmony, solidify the***

*relationship between new and old buildings, and lead the eye down the street. c. Pay attention to excellent fenestration patterns and detailing in the vicinity. The use of recessed windows that create shadow lines, and suggest solidity, is encouraged.*

As mentioned above, the Board expects to review a comprehensive analysis of the urban form and architectural attributes of the area and how they contribute to the design of the structure. Buildings under construction or that have received MUP approval should also be considered.

**B-4 Design a well-proportioned & unified building. Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.**

Scheme #3 depicted an outwardly focused rather than internally organized site plan which the Board favorably acknowledged. Members of the Board saw positive attributes in the architect's desire to express programmatic features on the structure's exterior. The applicant's concept for the two structures highlighted distinctive podia for the Heron and the Pagoda but similar shafts and roofs. The Board questioned the impulse to design identical structures above their separate bases. The possibilities that the towers may create a more dramatic presence on the skyline by use of contrasting silhouettes or complementary but not identical should be explored more by the architect. The Board expressed the need for the architect to step back in his thinking and study the proposal as an ensemble.

## **C. The Streetscape**

**C-1 Promote pedestrian interaction. Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming. a) reinforce existing retail concentrations; b) vary in size, width, and depth of commercial spaces, accommodating for smaller businesses, where feasible; c) incorporate the following elements in the adjacent public realm and in open spaces around the building: unique hardscape treatments; pedestrian-scale sidewalk lighting; accent paving (especially at corners, entries and passageways) - creative landscape treatments (planting, planters, trellises, arbors); - seating, gathering spaces; - water features, inclusion of art elements; d. Building/Site Corners: Building corners are places of convergence. The following considerations help reinforce site and building corners: provide meaningful setbacks/open space, if feasible; provide seating as gathering spaces; incorporate street/pedestrian amenities in these spaces; make these spaces safe (good visibility); iconic corner identifiers to create wayfinders that draw people to the site**

*Design for uses that are accessible to the general public, open during established shopping hours, generate walk-in pedestrian clientele, and contribute to a high level of pedestrian activity. Where appropriate, consider configuring retail space to attract tenants with products or services that will "spill-out" onto the sidewalk (up to six feet where sidewalk*

*is sufficiently wide).*

Although the proposed programming of the building at street level appears on the surface to be pedestrian friendly, the Board requested studies of potential different massing of the two buildings as well as the Escala to determine their impact on the pedestrian environment.

**C-2 Design facades of many scales. Design architectural features, fenestration patterns, and materials compositions that refer to the scale of human activities contained within. Building facades should be composed of elements scaled to promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation.**

The size of the nearly identical towers and their large sculptural gestures did not convey the sense that the designs referred to the scale of human activities within the structures. The Board pointed to the previous project reviewed that evening as an example of a design with facades composed of many scales. Variations in each face were preferred to a monolithic structure.

**C-3 Provide active—not blank—facades. Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.**

Consideration of the Escala's proximity and of the architect's treatment of the alley façade is critical to the Board's review.

**C-4 Reinforce building entries. To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce the building's entry.**

The Board will address building entries at a later meeting.

**C-5 Encourage overhead weather protection. Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit, overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes. *a) the overall architectural concept of the building (as described in Guideline B-4); b) uses occurring within the building (such as entries and retail spaces) or in the adjacent streetscape environment (such as bus stops and intersections); c) minimizing gaps in coverage; d) a drainage strategy that keeps rain water off the street-level facade and sidewalk; e) continuity with weather protection provided on nearby buildings; f) relationship to architectural features and elements on adjacent development, especially if abutting a building of historic or noteworthy character; g) the scale of the space defined by the height and depth of the weather protection; h) use of translucent or transparent covering material to maintain a pleasant sidewalk environment with plenty of natural light; and i) when opaque material is used, the illumination of light-colored undersides to increase security after dark.***

The Board will address building overhead weather protection at a later meeting.

**C-6 Develop the alley facade. To increase pedestrian safety, comfort, and interest, develop portions of the alley facade in response to the unique conditions of the site or**

**project.** *a) Services and utilities, while essential to urban development, should be screened or otherwise hidden from the view of the pedestrian. b. Exterior trash receptacles should be screened on three sides, with a gate on the fourth side that also screens the receptacles from view. Provide a niche to recess the receptacle. c. Screen loading docks and truck parking from public view using building massing, architectural elements and/or landscaping. d. Ensure that all utility equipment is located, sized, and designed to be as inconspicuous as possible. Consider ways to reduce the noise impacts of HVAC equipment on the alley environment. e. Pedestrian circulation is an integral part of the site layout. Where possible and feasible, provide elements, such as landscaping and special paving, that help define a pedestrian friendly environment in the alley. f. Create a comfortably scaled and thoughtfully detailed urban environment in the alley through the use of well-designed architectural forms and details, particularly at street level. Architectural concept g. In designing a well-proportioned and unified building, the alley façade should not be ignored. An alley façade should be treated with form, scale and materials similar to rest of the building to create a coherent architectural concept.*

Conveying an understanding of how the alley façade massing could mitigate the close proximity of the Pagoda and Escala is important. The Board requests drawings and diagrams showing functional relations between the structures and alternatives to the massing proposed at the EDG meeting. See C-3.

#### **D. Public Amenities**

**D-1 Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space.** **Design public open spaces to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents, and visitors. Views and solar access from the principle area of the open space should be especially emphasized. As a dense, urban neighborhood, Belltown views its streets as its front porches, and its parks and private plazas and spaces as its yards and gardens. The design and location of urban open spaces on a site or adjoining sidewalk is an important determinant in a successful environment, and the type and character of the open space should be influenced by the building's uses. Mixed-use developments are encouraged to provide useable open space adjacent to retail space, such as an outdoor cafe or restaurant seating, or a plaza with seating. Locate plazas intended for public use at/or near street grade to promote physical and visual connection to the street; on-site plazas may serve as a well-defined transition from the street. Take views and sun exposure into account as well. Define and contain outdoor spaces through a combination of building and landscape, and discourage oversized spaces that lack containment. The space should be well-buffered from moving cars so that users can best enjoy the space.**

*Open spaces can feature art work, street furniture, and landscaping that invite customers or enhance the building's setting. Examples of desirable features to include are: a. attractive pavers; b. pedestrian-scaled site lighting; c. retail spaces designed for uses that will comfortably "spill out" and enliven the open space; d. areas for vendors in commercial areas; e. landscaping that enhances the space and architecture; f. pedestrian-scaled signage that*

*identifies uses and shops; and g. site furniture, art work, or amenities such as fountains, seating, and kiosks.*

*Residential buildings should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space. In addition, the following should be considered: h. courtyards that organize architectural elements while providing a common garden; I. entry enhancements such as landscaping along a common pathway; j. decks, balconies and upper level terraces; k. play areas for children; l. individual gardens; and m. location of outdoor spaces to take advantage of sunlight and views.*

The applicant will need to prepare open space concepts for the next EDG meeting.

**D-2 Enhance the building with landscaping.** Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping—which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material. *Landscape enhancement of the site may include some of the approaches or features listed below, where appropriate: a. emphasize entries with special planting in conjunction with decorative paving and/or lighting; b. use landscaping to make plazas and courtyards comfortable for human activity and social interaction; c. distinctively landscape open areas created by building modulation, such as entry courtyards; d. provide year-round greenery — drought tolerant species are encouraged to promote water conservation and reduce maintenance concerns; and e. provide opportunities for installation of civic art in the landscape; designer/ artist collaborations are encouraged (e.g., Growing Vine Street).*

Concept landscape plans for the right of way will be required for the next EDG meeting including ideas for paving patterns, art, outdoor furniture, and landscaping.

**D-3 Provide elements that define the place.** Provide special elements on the facades, within public open spaces, or on the sidewalk to create a distinct, attractive, and memorable “sense of place” associated with the building. *Art and History are vital to reinforcing a sense of place. Consider incorporating the following into the siting and design: a. vestiges of Belltown Heritage, such as preserving existing stone sidewalks, curbs; b. art that relates to the established or emerging theme of that area (e.g., Western, 1st, 2nd, 3rd Avenue street specific character. See “Street furniture/ furnishings” under Guideline D-3, pgs. 25-27); and c. install plaques or other features on the building that pay tribute to Belltown history.*

With both the Heron and Pagoda towers, the architect has not demonstrated an analysis of historical resources that might inform the proposal’s architectural design or the elements that offer a sense of place and individuality.

**D-4 Provide Adequate Signage.** Design signage appropriate for the scale and character of the project and immediate neighborhood. All signs should be oriented to pedestrians and/or persons in vehicles on streets within the immediate neighborhood.

Response to this guideline will be addressed at future meetings.

**D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting.** To promote a sense of security for people downtown during nighttime hours, provide appropriate levels of lighting on the building facade, on the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, in landscaped areas, and on signage.

Preliminary lighting concepts should be available at the next EDG meeting.

## **E Vehicular Access and Parking**

**E-1 Minimize curb cut impacts.** Minimize adverse impacts of curb cuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.

The Board expressed its satisfaction with the no curb cut option on Scheme #3. DPD and SDOT will review whether two drop-off lanes makes sense on one city block.

**E-2 Integrate Parking Facilities.** Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments or suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by.

The Board applauded the effort to keep parking below grade.

## **DEPARTURES**

Departure requests were not discussed at the EDG meeting.

## **NEXT STEPS / STAFF COMMENTS**

Work with DPD staff to prepare concepts and presentation material for a 2<sup>nd</sup> EDG meeting. Much of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EDG meeting will be devoted to an analysis of urban design concepts and massing. The applicant will need to respond to the design guidance in the priorities section above and the following:

- A thorough context analysis.
- A focused statement of initial response to the guidelines which should be reflected in the drawings.
- Clear identification of materiality, color and detail in all concept representations.
- Further studies depicting the scale of the podia for the Pagoda and Heron and their relationship to one another, the Avis garage, the Westin and the larger context.
- Section drawings from both directions which continue across rights of ways and adjacent structures.
- Illustrate structural concepts and the impact on building form and the articulation of

exterior elevations.

- Provide elevations of all four facades with drawings of adjacent structures including the Escala, 2005 Fifth Ave. building and other structures etc.
- Show clearer indication of how the proposed building meets the sloping site along Virginia at streetscape.
- Perspectives from ground level of the whole building in context with existing buildings and the Escala and Heron Tower.
- Large scale drawings showing detailed sections and perspectives of the first few floor levels emphasizing the sidewalk experience and the detail of canopies and entrances.

BPR:

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