



City of Seattle

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

RECOMMENDATION MEETING OF THE CAPITOL HILL/FIRST HILL DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Date: May 7, 2008

Report Date : June 4, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3007324

Address: 505 Yale Av N

Applicant: Barry Aaronson, NBBJ Architects, for Yale Campus LLC.

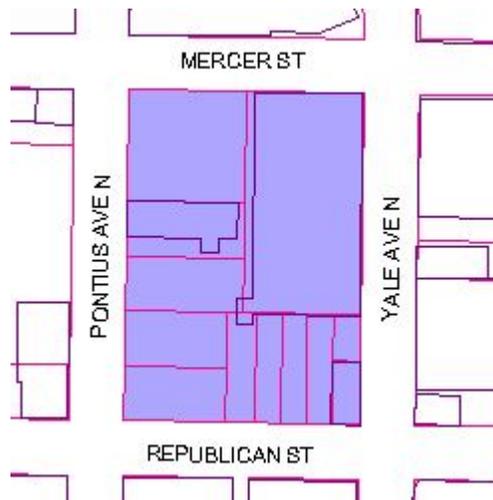
Board members present: Evan Bourquard
Brian Cavanaugh
Jason Morrow
Sharon Sutton
Rumi Takahashi, Chair

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The South Lake Union site comprises the entire block bounded by Mercer Street on the north, Republican Street on the south, Yale Avenue N. on the east and Pontius Avenue N. on the west. The site measures approximately 360 feet in the north/south direction and 255 feet in the east/west direction. The total area is approximately 43,200 square feet in extent. The block was platted without an alley intervening between Yale Avenue N. and Pontius Avenue N. Currently there are three structures on the site which are proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development.

The zoning is Seattle Mixed/Residential with a 55/75 height limit. The proposed full block development is for three four-story office building with ground floor retail-commercial space set above two floors of underground parking. The preferred design would



give an impression of three/four 4-story office buildings separated by a north/south private service alley and an east/west open plaza. The structure fronting onto Pontius Avenue N. would have a bridge at mid-block, connecting the second, third and fourth levels and set above the narrow, western portion of the central plaza which would be open to Pontius Avenue N. at the ground level. The three/four above-ground structures would be interconnected at the below-grade parking level.

ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION

The applicant's proposal for this site had been presented, at the Early Design Guidance Meeting, as the southern portion of a Yale Avenue campus, the northern portion of which was under consideration as a separate proposal, Master Use Permit 3007451. The development of the south campus was an extension, conceptually at least, of the development proposed by the same team directly to the north and across Mercer Street.

Three alternate massing models for the site had been presented at the Early Design guidance Meeting. It was the preferred third option that had undergone further design development and which was presented to the Board for their recommendation of approval. This scheme gave clear expression to three/four distinct buildings, each with three levels of office space above street-level retail space. A north/south running private alley bisected the site and was designated to provide all loading access to the buildings. A plaza, mid-block between Mercer and Republican Streets, would grant a clear separation between facades along Yale Avenue N. The plaza would narrow as it extended west to Pontius Avenue N. A pedestrian corridor would thus connect between the sidewalks on either north/south running streets. A portion of the long building that extended along Pontius Avenue N. would be recessed at its midpoint where a structural bridge would connect the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors. This would allow for a pedestrian passage at grade into the interior plaza which widened as one progressed to the east.

In making their presentation, the design team utilized computer generated materials, a three dimensional model, showing a wider context within which the development would take place, and 11" X 17" colored packets. Emphasis was on the design responses to the Guidelines identified as of highest priority for the project and the Board's guidance articulated at the Early Desig Guidance Meeting held on October 3, 2007. One major change since the Early Design Guidance Meeting was the location of access to the underground parking from Pontius Avenue N. at the northwest corner of the site.

Time was devoted to presentation of the plan to manage on-site drainage and run-off through a modified/continuation of the Seattle Public Utilities so-called "Swale on Yale" (actually on both Yale and Pontius) which will be operational for the two blocks directly to the south of the project. This will require modifications to the public right-of-way, to both sidewalk and planting strip, and must receive SDOT approval. Green roofs are proposed. The other landscaping component receiving substantial presentation was the configuration and treatment of the interior plaza/ pass-way. The status of the outdoor plaza, interior to the development, was clarified: it is intended to be open to the public as an open retail plaza. The project was described as seeking LEED Gold certification.

Public Comments:

Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- General affirmation of the proposal's design, applause for the introduction of the north/south "alley," and commendation for providing the mid-block plaza to break up the massing of the structures and to planning for public access to the retail along it.

Board's Deliberations:

The Board applauded the sustainable goals of the project and the development of the swales in alignment with those proposed to the south of the project. They affirmed their opinion that the proposed structures were largely appropriate to the neighborhood and the site. They favorably acknowledged the applicant's gesture of opening the plaza area as a true neighborhood amenity, something the Board had expressed a strong desire to see in their earlier guidance.

The Board agreed that the continuity between the north and south portions of the 'campus' was not forced or slavishly expressed, which had been their earlier guidance. It was reaffirmed that the cant and curve given to the Yale-facing façade of the north half of the eastern half block provided a desirable and subtle linking between the north and south campus.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting the Board had not expressed harmonious agreement regarding the aerial bridge connecting the two masses of the building along Pontius Avenue N. There was some discussion about the desirability of the bridge itself and the appropriate height of the bridge above grade and the impact that a relatively low first level of the bridge might have on the different experiences of one traversing the plaza/connector, either from east or the west. It was the applicant's contention that the bridge provided an appropriate wall to the outdoor room of the plaza when viewed from the east.

While recommending approval of the bridge, the Board did think that greater attention needed to be given the approach into the plaza from Pontius Avenue N. The Pontius side of the bridge, the Board stated, should "provide a bigger gesture to the public."

There was some concern expressed by members of the Board that the emphasis on the ribbon windows and other horizontal linear elements on the facades of the south structure on Yale Avenue N. and the structure extending along Pontius Avenue N. bestowed too much of a sub-urban "office park look" to the development. The Board stated that those portions of the facades could benefit greatly from introduction of some countervailing vertical architectural elements.

One Board member suggested that the intersection of "alley" and cross-block connection needed further architectural expression and treatment to become a "stop place," a "place to be" and not merely a point of passage.

Additionally, the Board expressed discomfort with the impression that the development appeared to "turn its back on Pontius Avenue N." While somewhat sympathetic to the argument that the east side of the development was not at present economically supportive of street-level retail uses, the Board thought the development team should take a longer-range view and make some

provision for the future capability of retail spaces activating the Pontius Avenue N. pedestrian realm.

The five Board members present recommended that the design should be approved with some accommodation to the Board's reservations and recommendations noted above to be worked out with DPD staff prior to issuing a MUP permit.

Departures from Development Standards

The five Board members also recommend approval of all the requested departures noted below. The specific Design Review guidelines that have been satisfied are noted in the departure matrix.

The following are the departures requested and recommended for approval at the May 7, 2008, Design review Board Recommendation meeting:

<i>Development Standard</i>	<i>Requirement</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Comment /Rationale by Applicant</i>	<i><u>Board Recommendation</u></i>
<i>1. SMC 23.48.018A Transparency Requirement</i>	<p><i>a. Class 1 & 2 pedestrian streets: A minimum of sixty percent of the width of the street-level façade must be transparent;</i></p> <p><i>b. All other streets: a minimum of thirty percent of the street-level façade must be transparent</i></p>	<i>The building whose long side faces on Pontius Avenue N. is only 12% transparent along Mercer St. and 51% along Republican St.</i>	<i>The frontages along Yale Av N. and the eastern half of Republican St. have ground floor retail resulting in a average of 89% transparency on Yale (the vital pedestrian-oriented pedestrian street) and average of 46% on Mercer (above the 30% requirement) The project achieves an average of 75% transparency on Republican.</i>	<p>▪ <i>Approve (Design Guidelines: A-2, A-4, C-3, D-1)</i></p> <p><i>Conditions: 1. No vitrines. 2. Provide transparency into bicycle storage area, integrated with landscaping to enhance views in and not obscure transparency.</i></p>

<p>2. SMC 23.48.018 B <i>Blank Façade Limits</i></p>	<p><i>Blank facades shall be limited to segments of 30 feet wide, except 15 feet wide on Republican, a Class 2 pedestrian street. Any blank façade shall be separated by transparent areas at least 2 feet wide. The total blank façade segments, including garage doors, shall not exceed 70% of the street façade.</i></p>	<p><i>Project proposes a blink façade length of 19'-31/2" for west building on Republican St., 95'-2" of same building along Mercer St and 150' along Pontius..</i></p>	<p><i>Due in part to topographic conditions at the site. Openness concentrated on Yale and eastern half of Mercer and Republican Streets. Extensive landscaping (including swales) proposed to enhance pedestrian experience.</i></p>	<p><i>Approve (Design Guidelines: A-1, A-2, C-2, C-3, D-2, & E-2).</i></p> <p><i>Conditions: 1. Provide vigorous Landscaping to soften starkness of blank walls and consider incorporating artwork with landscaping materials. 2. Provide additional door openings along Pontius.</i></p>
<p>3. Parking and Loading <i>Location, Access and Curb Cuts SMC</i> 23.48.034.C</p>	<p><i>Curb cut width and number of curb cuts shall satisfy the provisions of section 23.54.030, parking space standards, except as modified by the section. Required 25 feet maximum (For 2-way traffic, the minimum width of curb cuts is 22 feet and the maximum 25 feet, except that the maximum width may be increased to 30 feet when truck and auto access are combined.</i></p>	<p><i>Project proposes 3 two-way curb cuts, two at 20 feet to establish a private "alley" between Mercer and Republican streets, and one as entrance to and exit from underground parking.</i></p>	<p><i>Curb cuts are located so as to minimize intrusion into pedestrian realms. "Alley" eliminates need for service vehicles to back across sidewalks onto adjacent streets. Alley breaks up massing and adds further pedestrian connectivity through neighborhood.</i></p>	<p>▪ <i>Approve (Design Guidelines: A-2, A-4, B-1, C-3, C-4, D-4, D-5, & E-2)</i></p> <p><i>Conditions: See below under #4, Site Triangle.</i></p>
<p>4. Site Triangle <i>SMC</i> 23.54.030.G.2</p>	<p><i>For 2-way driveways or easements at least 22 feet wide, a sight triangle on the side of the driveway used as an exit shall be provided and shall be kept clear of any obstruction for a distance of 10 feet from the intersection of the driveway or easement with a driveway, easement, sidewalk or curb cut intersection if there is no sidewalk. The entrance and exit lanes shall be clearly identified.</i></p>	<p><i>Visual warning, [enunciator], or mirrors proposed in lieu of sight triangle.</i></p>	<p><i>Private Alleyway provides project and site amenity; The proposed design solution incorporates safety features as allowed in downtown zones.</i></p>	<p>▪ <i>Approved (Design Guidelines: A-8, D-1, D-7, D-8)</i></p> <p><i>Conditions: No audible enunciators, but seek a set of architectural solutions that will provide for maximum pedestrian safety and comfort.</i></p> <p><i>Staff Comments: Design for maximum pedestrian safety, probably by means of an integrated system of devices and strategies; will have to be clearly demonstrated before DPD grants approval.</i></p>

<p>5. Scale of development SMC 23.48.016 A2a,b, & d</p>	<p>a. Single purpose nonresidential development...is limited to a lot area of twenty-one thousand six hundred square feet or less; b. Development on lots greater than twenty-one thousand six hundred square feet must include residential use in an amount of gross floor area equal to sixty percent or more of the gross floor area in residential use.... d. Single purpose nonresidential structures on adjacent lots not separated by an alley...may not be internally connected.</p>	<p>Project proposes single purpose nonresidential development with lot area of 90,012 square feet. Development of commercial office space with retail base is comprised of 3 buildings above grade with below grade parking occupying the entire site and connected to each building. The building fronting on Pontius Av N. is articulated as two massed, conjoined by structural bridge with a pedestrian pass-through at grade.</p>	<p>Functionality and sustainability of buildings is enhanced while perceived mass is minimized by means of private intersecting alleyway and mid-block connector and provision for substantial open gathering space where the two are conjoined.</p>	<p>▪ Approved (Design Guidelines: A-8, B-1, C-3, & D-1. Conditions: 1. Reduce the impact of horizontal linear elements by introducing countervailing vertical architectural elements to mitigate the perception of substantial girth and to re-enforce the discreteness of above-grade individual building masses. 2. Widen the entry and enhance the experience of entering into the plaza area from Pontius Avenue N. and beneath the bridge.</p>
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As noted in the above matrix, the Board members conditioned their approval of various departures by requesting specific mitigation. It was their understanding that the conditions would find resolution within the MUP plans before they were issued and that the applicant would work with DPD staff to seek a solution that met the various concerns of the Board.

In recommending approval of the granting of a departure for providing less than the Code requirement for façade transparency, the Board was adamant that the inclusion of vitrines, or shallow glass display cases, was not an acceptable design solution for dealing with the lack of real transparency.

In response to the Board’s concerns regarding a departure from SMC 23.48.018A, transparency requirements, the applicant has proposed additional transparency into the bicycle storage area. The opportunity for pedestrian views into the interior will be integrated into a vigorous planting plan for the wall along Mercer Street.

The Board expressed concern regarding the lack of street-level retail use along Pontius Avenue N. and cautioned against not planning for retail use over the long-term life of the development.

In response to the Board’s concerns regarding the quantity of blank facades associated with the west building, possible neglect of the pedestrian experience, especially along Pontius Avenue N., and the possible future increase in interaction with pedestrians at the street level there, the applicant has proposed the introduction of two additional entry doors into the area now determined to be for office use.

In response to the Board's considerations regarding the third and fourth enumerated departures, those referencing curb cuts and sight triangles, the Board challenged the applicants to seek architectural solutions for providing pedestrian safety and comfort when vehicles were exiting the parking garage or exiting the "alley" (or central, at-grade driveway). In addition, the Board recommended prohibition of any audible enunciators.

The applicant has proposed utilization of mirrors which is allowed as an alternative in Downtown under the Land Use Code. DPD believes that guaranteeing the safety and comfort of pedestrians will probably involve an broader, integrated set of solutions and will continue to work with applicant to come up with the best solution for the circumstances of this site.

The fifth requested departure was a substantial departure from the provisions of SMC 23.48.016 A2, a, b, and c, which limits the scale of individual development. In recommending granting of this departure, the Board also recommended conditioning their approval of this departure: 1) to reduce the impact of horizontal linear elements on some of the facades to mitigate the perception of girth and to re-enforce the discreteness of individual buildings, and, 2.) to require an enhanced approach into the central plaza from Pontius Avenue N., one providing for a larger, more apparent and more inviting pathway from the west.

Subsequently, the design team has addressed the issue of providing for a more gracious entry by providing a wider entry and curving the building's façade at the north side of the passageway notch. An overhead canopy, running along the west façade south of the notched passageway has been added. This intersects with a soffit running along the south edge of the passageway which then connects with the bottom of the bridge. DPD believes these architectural gestures address the enhancement of the entryway requested by the Board, provided that: 1) the undersides of canopy, soffit and bridge receive treatment so as to be "of a piece" visually, so that the eye is drawn into the plaza; 2) lighting fixtures are provided either in canopy, soffit, along the side facades and walkway, or in a combination of each of these, to complement and enhance the other architectural elements, so as to draw the pedestrian, with comfort-- and with even a modicum of delight-- into the plaza area.

In order to address the concern of a feeling of "excessive horizontality" produced by the window and façade treatments on the structures located within the southeast quadrant and the western half of the site, the applicant has proposed 4-inch vertical fins, repetitive at the window mullions, along both the east and west external facades of each structure.