BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Site Description

The development site combines seven parcels of land to establish a total land area of approximately 59,700 square feet, near the northeast edge of Downtown Seattle. The site is zoned Downtown Mixed Use Commercial with a height limited 240/2490 – 400 feet (DMC 240/290-400) and occupies an entire city block; with street frontage on Minor Avenue to the west, Denny Way to the north, Yale Avenue to the east, and Stewart Street to the south. The block is irregular in shape due to a shift in the street grid system. The subject site is also located within the Denny Triangle Urban Center Village, and Downtown Design Guideline area. The site is not located in a designated Environmentally Critical Area (ECA).

The site is developed with three commercial buildings, surrounded by hard surface parking lot, and a vacant land at the corner of Denny and Yale Avenue. The combined development site is
essentially a flat lot with a slight downward slope to the west. The abutting streets are fully developed rights-of-way with asphalt roadway; curbs, sidewalks and gutters. Denny Way (principal arterial) and Stewart Street (principal transit street) convey heavy traffic volumes past the site. An improved alley, running perpendicular to Stewart, bisects the development site. The applicants are seeking to vacate the alley to unify the development site.

Area Development

The site is located just south of the less intensive Seattle Mixed zone across Denny way and west of Interstate Five (I-5) at the northeastern edge of Downtown. The site is within the Denny Triangle Urban Center Village (UCV) in the Denny Triangle neighborhood of Downtown. Some surrounding buildings of note include; REI’s signature building within three blocks of the subject site, a one-story Greyhound bus garage built in 1940 immediately to the north across Denny, and across Stewart to the south are the two metal-cladded Metropolitan Park commercial buildings. The area is in transition as more lands are being considered for development, or are under construction. Surface parking lots and modest sized buildings are currently typical in this area.

Zoning in the area includes Seattle Mixed with a height limit of 125 feet (SM 125) to the north, Multifamily Midrise zone with a height limit of 60 feet (MR) east of I-5, and Downtown Mixed Commercial (DMC) zone with varying heights. This area contains a mix of commercial uses that include surface parking lots, office, retail, and lodging uses. Of the residential uses in the area, apartments/condominiums dominate the uses within the upper levels of the existing structures.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The owner seeks to construct two 36-story towers above a 5-story base containing both residential and commercial uses. The proposed uses include retail, physical fitness center, childcare center, office, 300-plus room hotel, and approximately 340 residential units. Parking for 940 vehicles will be provided below grade. An alley vacation is being requested to allow a more integrated design proposal.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE:

A total of five Early Design Guidance (EDG) meetings were held previously. This report is based on notes and Board identified adopted Guidelines deemed to be of highest priority taken during the previous EDG Meetings:

A-1 Respond to the physical environment
A-2 Enhance the Skyline
B-1 Respond to the Neighborhood Context
B-2 Create a Transition in Bulk and Scale
B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form and Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area
B-4 Design a Well-Proportioned & Unified Building
C-1 Promote Pedestrian Interaction

1 The first EDG Meeting was held on September 25, 2007; the second meeting, December 4, 2007; the third meeting, May 13, 2008; the fourth meeting, November 25, 2008; and the fifth EDG meeting was held on April 28, 2009.
Public Comments:

During the Early Design Guidance Meetings the public expressed general support of the site’s redevelopment but was keenly interested in understanding how the podium level would function with an internal arrival court, and types of proposed uses at street level. During the earlier meetings comments focused on building mass and compatibility to the surrounding area, traffic impacts, zoning height transitions, sustainable design considerations, and pedestrian oriented street presence with shops and landscaping flourishes. By the time of the fifth EDG meeting the public did not have any comments to share with the Board or developer. Throughout the process the Board took into consideration public comments to inform their analysis and design guidance.

Board Guidance:

The Board acknowledged that ensuring a well proportioned and scaled development is a critical factor to successfully integrate the project into the Denny Triangle’s neighborhood fabric which is in transition. The design composition should be sensitive to the surrounding zoning height limits, yet find an expression reflecting it unique edge location. The Board wants the design to engage the streetscape wherever possible and scale the design to integrate itself into an area in the Denny Triangle neighborhood with four street frontages; Denny Way, Yale Avenue, Stewart Street, and Minor Avenue. The internal arrival area needed further refinement to visually activate the street level environment; the applicant was encouraged to increase the amount of store presence in and round the internal arrival area at street level. The area should be welcoming to residents, guests, and the public. This area should draw the public in. Additionally, the applicant was directed to provide studies of height, bulk and scale impacts on Capitol Hill and other surrounding areas. The design should create visual interest with lightening in the evening and in internal arrival area. Overall, the Board supported the direction of the design proposal. Downtown Development Guidelines should be followed to activate the streetscapes.

The previously stated 18 design guidelines were all chosen by the Board to be high priority. The Board wants the developer to engage the streetscape wherever possible and scale the design to integrate itself into area.

(For complete copy of the EDG document refer to the MUP file or DR Web page; http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Project_Reviews/Reports/default.asp)
RECOMMENDATION MEETING:

The applicant applied for Master Use Permit on June 2, 2009. The Board reconvened on February 23, 2010, in Room L280, at City Hall in order to review the applicant’s response to the previous priority guidelines and guidance and to make recommendations to DPD regarding the design of the project and the requested design departures. Four of the five Board Members were present.

Design Review Response:

Since the Early Design Guidance Meeting held on April 28, 2009, there have been a number of refinements that have affected the size and configuration of the proposed development.

Jack McCullough, of McCullough Hill, P.S., opened the presentation with an administrative update on the project. Since the last EDG public meeting, the owners have hired another architecture firm, Tiscareno Associates, to better address design concerns of the Design Review Board and specific requirements of the property developers. Mr. McCullough next provided updates on significant events since the previous meeting in April 28, 2009. The Design Commission conditionally approved the alley vacation public benefit package as presented, with final approval dependent on completing the Design Review process.

Bob Tiscareno, Architect, opened with an overview of the project’s history and then proceeded to address site context analysis and design objectives specific to previously stated design guidance. Where possible, an emphasis would be placed on increasing opportunities to provide an engaging pedestrian experience along each street frontage which would include quality green elements and architectural detailing to provide a sense of place on a block with a significant presence in the neighborhood. The reinvigorated design attempts to build the community through design by creating a sense of place set within an existing neighborhood context that is responsive to the needs of tenants, users of the building, and neighbors. A number of changes have been made in response to comments from the Board and public, including reshaping the pedestrian realm to strengthen the focus on the pedestrian and to connect the parcel to the adjacent properties. In response to Board concerns during EDG, Mr. Tiscareno walked through the building’s sustainability program that included pursuing a LEED NC 2.2 Silver rating with a possibility to increase to Gold. A no-hotel option was also presented to inform the Board and public of a future potential based on financing in a declining economic climate. The design team used computer generated presentation materials and 11 x 17 colored packets to describe the design response.

Updated Design Presentation:

**Internal Arrival Area:** In response to Board guidelines, the applicants deemphasized the vehicle presence in the arrival area by increasing both tactile clues and the area dedicated to pedestrian related activities. As viewed externally, the surface patterns and color of the sidewalk will provide visual clues to separate pedestrians from vehicles. An integrated curb and bollards will provide a safeguard between pedestrians and vehicles within the site. Access through the internal arrival area will be one-way, entering from Minor and exiting onto Stewart Street. Approximately only 12 feet of the 50 foot opening will be devoted to vehicle use. Storefront
windows will be placed along one side of the pedestrian walk near both the Minor and Stewart entry and exit to further engage pedestrians, drawing them into the development site. A shimmering mosaic tile wall (the back wall of the retail area at the corner of Minor and Stewart) eliminates a previously-blank wall in the internal arrival area and provides light and color. The entry to the lobby facing Denny Way is proposed to be a glass wall which will also increase the amount of transparency and light in the area. A sculptural ceiling “light cloud” will be employed as a centerpiece within the internal arrival area to make the experience bright and colorful; the lighting of the area is intended to be very bright. The ceiling height is proposed to be approximately 22 feet above the ground surface to allow natural light and air to circulate within.

**Pedestrian Experience:** Careful attention has been directed to creating a unique and attractive experience for visitors to the development site along each street frontage. The preferred scheme introduced during the final EDG meeting depicted a monolithic mass that felt chunky and unrefined. The revised plan establishes a more sophisticated street level experience with the sculpting of concrete forms and spandrel glazing, placement of operable windows at the podium level, and distribution of street furniture (i.e., bus lean bars, bike racks, decorative metal railings, etc.), landscaping, and large curb bulbs. Each street frontage employs distinctive fenestration patterns upon the building’s facade. These nuanced details combine to effectively scale down the building’s street level visual impact along each street frontage rendering a desirable pedestrian-level experience. At street level, the building façade is setback at various distances from the right-of-way to increase outdoor space for pedestrian engagement around the site’s perimeter. In keeping with the future Denny Way right-of-way improvements, the design scheme decreases the building’s mass at street level by putting greater emphasis on the pedestrian experience. Sidewalks have been widened on all sides, but in particular on Denny Way, to enhance the pedestrian experience and to increase the feeling of safety from vehicles. Vehicle loading and parking have all been pushed underground to make the street experience more enjoyable. The loading was previously provided for at the corner of Denny and Minor. The loading area was pushed below grade, and this area is now a pedestrian-friendly retail space. Although the code does not required retail along any of the street frontages, much of the street frontages include retail. The Denny and Stewart facades in particular include a large amount of transparency, provided either through retail or lobby spaces, adding to the pedestrian-friendly experience. Signage and lighting plans were also presented to the Board.

**Outdoor Courtyard:** In response to Board guidelines, the podium level’s roof top was visually enhanced with the added detail that included a green roof, a possible outdoor swimming pool and spa, plaza, and deck with views to the Seattle Center and beyond, and lawn area. The presentation included descriptions of how the outdoor areas would function, using materials, furniture and plants to create usable spaces on the roof level. The outdoor childcare center’s play ground was included in this presentation. Landscaping would be prominently featured throughout to help showcase the “outdoor recreation areas” on the building. The amount of trees and shrubbery has been depicted to provide greater coherence to the overall design scheme, establishing a frame to areas of pedestrian activity.

**Design Departures:**

The applicant is currently requesting five departures from Land Use Code development standards – Overhead Canopies SMC 23.49.018.A, Façade Setback Limits SMC 23.49.056.B.2.d, Façade
Board Comments and Questions:

The Board was troubled and inquired about the design and layout of the internal arrival area. Of particular interest was the design intent of the internal arrival area. Why the need for a mosaic tiled wall set behind the corner commercial space? The applicant stated that they intend this space to be the rear or back of house area for a proposed retail or restaurant use. The Board expressed their concern that the design team squandered an opportunity to activate the internal arrival area by stimulating visual interest with the installation of a transparent wall. A series of questions followed directing the design team to address concerns surrounding use and function of the internal arrival area. The design team informed the Board that the internal arrival area would provide drop-off and pick-up for the proposed hotel use; the height would rise approximately 22 feet above its surface; contrary to insinuations regarding the photo examples in the packets, the intent is to fully illuminate the internal arrival area to be bright and airy. The pedestrian walkway would provide store front windows, as well as office windows looking down upon the internal arrival area, to spatially open up the area, and to provide a pedestrian-friendly experience.

The Board followed up this line of inquiry with questions surrounding residential lobbies at street level. In the opinion of the Board, area dedicated to the residential lobbies set at the base of each tower seemed excessive and a rationalization was warranted. The applicant stated the residential lobbies would be a well-appointed living room with artwork to encourage usage by residents and visitors. The concept has been successful in activating the lobby level in other locations. The residential lobby area will be broken into two segments associated with each tower above. An area equivalent to 1,400 square feet (40’ X 35’) under each tower will be dedicated to the residential lobby area. This area will be flexible to allow conversion for portions to commercial use when the economy dictates reconsideration of highest value and best use. The lobby will also be fully transparent, allowing for an interaction between pedestrians outside and users within.

The Board next directed their attention to upper level balconies and windows. One Board member stated that balconies were unusable. The applicant explained that their recent experience with Escala proved that more gracious outdoor balcony space encourage usage, even on sides of the building which typically are abandoned because of shadows and breezes. The Escala has included very large decks and some have outdoor fireplaces which has encouraged use. The plan is to follow the success of previous projects and build on lessons learned. The Board then directed questions to upper level operable windows. The Board was concerned with the lack of operable windows for residential units. The applicant responded that there would be sliding glass doors to the decks.

One Board member asked whether the proposed building’s street level frontage along Denny seemed to compress the sidewalk width in front of the main entry. The applicant confirmed the minimum width would be maintained, it was just that the setbacks are more gracious on either side of the main entry that gave the appearance of a constricted area. The Board wanted to know
if any studies were developed illustrating proposed roof top amenity areas. The Board believed that the roof top plans may have lacked the level of detail as found on the podium level roof top. The applicant clarified the confusion by stating that the root top outdoor residential areas were primarily design for observation because of the potential strong winds. Furniture and potted plants would be flexible to accommodate activity and weather, but no permanent landscaping would be provided on the roof as it would likely fail. Lastly, the Board wanted to know what, if any, considerations for a design change when the hotel use would be removed from the development proposal. The applicant replied that any material change away from hotel would be a financial decision, but would not impact the exterior design of the building. Overall, the Board felt that the project would be a nice addition to the neighborhood with few lapses.

Public Comment:

A public member acknowledged appreciation for the design review packet’s availability on-line and proceeded to express opinions on the proposal. The gentleman stated that it appeared that no consideration had been directed towards impacts associated of height, bulk and scale on adjacent zones. Furthermore, in his view, the impact of a 400-foot tall structure on adjacent zones with 125-foot limits had not been reconciled as currently designed. It was his opinion that this type of proposal only creates unwanted urban canyons, with no consideration for ground level open space. In addition, the commenter believed the internal arrival area should be conditioned to provide a certain level of lighting to make it a welcoming destination. Lastly, the public member shared a guideline within Belltown that encourages twin towers to be dissimilar which should be applied to this area.

Board Discussion and Recommendations:

Board members appreciated the design response to build a well-crafted and well-designed structure incorporating an internal arrival area access from Minor and spilling out onto Stewart. The Board liked the design team’s response to the final guideline priorities set on April 28, 2009. Discussion ensued among the Board, including support of requested departures, vehicle access, exterior cladding, landscaping, and resolution of the internal arrival area. The revised building mass along the street frontage spatially has opened up the sidewalk experience, with vertical and horizontal modulations to make the street experience for pedestrians more engaging. Street level operable windows in the form of roll-up doors increase opportunities to open up the pedestrian realm to proposed uses is a strong added element the Board enthusiastically supported. Given the juxtaposition of the zoning height relationship with adjacent properties and width of rights-of-way the Board felt the height transition to adjacent properties was well-executed with the massing as presented. The twin tower design will make a strong statement, marking the edge of Downtown and anchoring the end of Denny. The proposed pedestrian entries, near the central portion of the building along Denny and at the internal arrival areas are a marked improvement from the last time the project went before the Board.

The Board focused its attention on the internal arrival area, more enriched streetscape activity along the Denny Way frontage, though vastly improved the corners of Minor and Denny and Denny and Yale need additional focused attention, and readability of the podium level along

2 No such policy could be found within the Design Guidelines for the Belltown Urban Center Village
Stewart Street. Two sticking points surrounded the internal arrival area. Execution is everything; potentially this area could become too dark to activate the space. Every effort must be exerted to avoid this potential outcome. One way would be to replace the mosaic tile wall and open the commercial space with a glass curtain wall; not only would this increase a sense of openness but would provide additional activities to attract attention into interior spaces. The illumination of internal arrival area must be set at a level to make this a bright space even during day hours.

The street frontage along Denny appears to lack enough commercial activity to engage pedestrians within the right-of-way. Visual clues between the commercial and residential uses are not well defined. Though the existing pedestrian experience along Denny is underwhelming an effort is underway lead by the City to transform the right-of-way and deemphasize vehicle activity. This project could be a catalyst for more thoughtful design geared towards the pedestrian. To this end the Denny frontage should explore strategies to enrich the pedestrian realm. The Stewart Street frontage affords opportunities to increase the presence of bicycle racks and resolve the fenestration above the main entry. To encourage alternative modes of travel the number of bicycle racks should be increased not only along Stewart but along street fronts where practical. The fenestration pattern above the main entry along Stewart needs a more graceful design approach to signal its prominence. Consideration should be made to the upper level fenestration. The Board urges the applicant to further study the practicality of installing operable windows in the residential units. The advantage would be in allowing fresh air to circulate within the units and give the exterior additional character.

The applicant has created dynamic and lively edge treatments at the corners of Minor and Denny and Denny and Yale with few lapses in the execution of location of rain gardens. The concern is the street level program for the landscaped groundcover. One concern is the practicality of introducing rain gardens in confined areas were pedestrians congregate. These areas are prone to be trampled upon if it is deemed an easier path for pedestrians. At the Yale and Denny Island, the bus stop suggests a hard edge or frame to the development site across the street. Some type of architectural and landscaping refinement is required to soften this space. The applicant shall contact the appropriate agencies including the community groups responsible for the current design of the bus stop art installation prior to embarking on the redesign. The little path of green at the blub corners should be removed altogether. The introduction of rain gardens should be reconsidered, especially if it will not provide a measure of performance to handle surface run-off. The architect should work with DPD on the details for improvements to the proposal as identified above.

In response to the possibility of the hotel use being removed from the development site's program due in part to the financial climate. If the hotel is removed from the project, the Board expects to see substantial revisions to the base to reflect the revised program elements. It was the Board’s understanding that the floor plans at the podium level including the internal arrival area were dependent on the hotel use requiring a grand entry and floor areas with high ceilings dedicated to lobbies, ballrooms, sport courts, etc. Overall, the applicant has created a dynamic addition to the neighborhood as proposed; the removal of the hotel use could alter the impact of the project both internally and upon adjacent properties.
The four Board members present recommended that the design should be approved with the next design response to the Board’s recommendations to be worked out with DPD, prior to issuing a MUP permit. The four Board members also recommended approval of all the requested departures noting specific Design Review guidelines that have been satisfied as noted in the departure matrix.

The following departures were requested and recommended for approval at the February 23, 2010 Recommendation meeting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Standard</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
<th>Comment/Rationale By Architect</th>
<th>Board Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overhead weather protection and lighting. SMC 23.49.018.A</td>
<td>Continuous overhead weather protection shall be required for new development along the entire street frontage.</td>
<td>Interruptions.</td>
<td>Interruptions to lend greater scale and articulation to street-level experience.</td>
<td>* Approved by 4 of 4 members present (Design Guidelines: A-1, B-1, B-4, C-1, C-4, C-5, &amp; D-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Façade Setback Limits SMC 23.49.056.B.2.d</td>
<td>In downtown zones, a maximum setback of the façade from the street property lines at intersections shall be 10 feet. The minimum distance the façade must conform to this limit shall be twenty feet along each street.</td>
<td>15 feet provided at Yale &amp; Stewart. 12 feet provided at Yale &amp; Denny</td>
<td>In order to achieved the desired massing relationship to surrounding properties the east tower has been sculpted to provide in such a manner that has resulted in increase.</td>
<td>* Approved by 4 of 4 members present (Design Guidelines: A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, B-3, &amp; B-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Façade Modulation (Upper Level Standards) SMC 23.49.058.B.3</td>
<td>Any portion of a façade exceeding the maximum length of façade prescribed on Table 23.49.058A shall be set back a minimum of 15 feet from the street property line for a minimum distance of 60 feet before any other portion may be within 15 feet of the street property line.</td>
<td>Irregular modulation provided.</td>
<td>To achieve a better design form and integration, modulation has been governed by relationship of the tower to podium level.</td>
<td>* Approved by 4 of 4 members present (Design Guidelines: A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, B-3, &amp; B-4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Curb Cuts for nonresidential uses. 23.54.030.F.2.a.3</td>
<td>In downtown zones, a maximum of two curb cuts for one-way traffic at least 40 feet apart, or one curb cut for two-way traffic is permitted.</td>
<td>One two-way curb cut and one one-way curb cut on Minor Street.</td>
<td>Irregularly-shaped site; Minimizing total number of vehicle access to the entire development site; have already greatly reduced number of curb cuts.</td>
<td>* Approved by 4 of 4 members present (Design Guidelines: B-1, C-1, C-4, E-1, E-2, &amp; E-3)</td>
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</table>
Summary of Board Recommendations:

The Board acknowledged appreciation of the design response to a development site that will have a significant impact in the redevelopment of the immediate area. The following were recommended by the four Board members present as conditions of the approval:

- A more rigorous design solution is needed to visually open up and make the internal arrival area attractive to pedestrian related activity. The mosaic tile walls adjacent to the vehicle lane should be replaced with a transparent curtain wall to allow commercial activity behind the glass wall to spill out into the space. Additionally, the lighting illumination must be set at a level to make this a bright space even during day time hours.

- The applicant is strongly encouraged to provide operable windows on the upper residential floors, if feasible. The planner will accept further studies to resolve the upper level façade design composition.

- Some type of architectural and landscaping refinement is required to soften the location where rain gardens are proposed. The applicant shall contact the appropriate agencies including community groups responsible for the current architectural design installation prior to embarking on the final redesign of the bus stop island at Yale and Denny. The little path of green proposed at the bulb corners should be removed altogether. The introduction of rain gardens should be reconsidered, especially if it will not provide a measure of performance to handle surface run-off.

- The fenestration pattern above the main entry along Stewart needs a more graceful design approach to signal its prominence.

- To encourage alternative modes of travel the number of bicycle racks should be increased not only along Stewart but along street fronts where practical.

- If the hotel is removed from the project, the Board expects to see substantial revisions to the base to reflect the revised program elements, the proponents are required, subject to the limits of the Land Use Code, to present before the Downtown Design Review Board a packet that illustrates substantial revisions to the base to reflect the revised program elements.

The architect should work with DPD on the details for improvements to the proposal as identified above.