



City of Seattle

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

**FINAL RECOMMENDATION
OF
THE WEST SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**
Meeting Date: April 23, 2009
Report Date: May 8, 2009

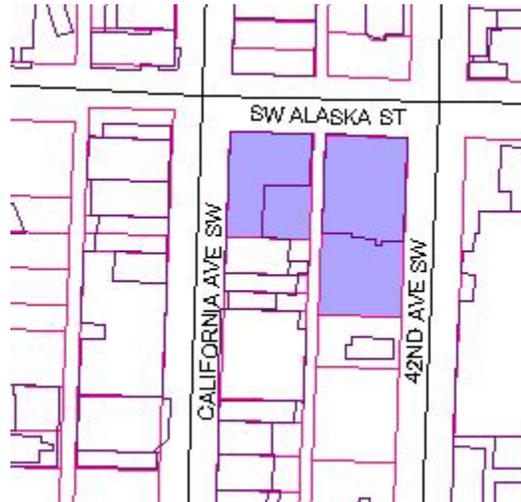
BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3007764 & 3007765
Address: 4706 California Ave SW & 4203 SW Alaska St
Applicant: Joseph Hines, Weber+Thompson Architects, for Conner Homes

VICINITY AND AREA DEVELOPMENT:

The development site consists of two parcels, one (16,675 square feet) at the corner of SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW, the other, larger (28,750 square feet) parcel at the corner of SW Alaska Street and 42nd Avenue SW. The two parcels are separated by a north/south running alley connecting SW Alaska Street and SW Edmunds Street. The applicant has applied for a partial alley vacation in order to provide a single, underground parking garage beneath two proposed above-ground structures.

The zoning for both sites is Neighborhood Commercial 3, with an 85-foot height limit (NC3-85). There is a pedestrian zoning overlay that affects the entire west parcel and which extends along the north forty-four feet of the east parcel. Currently there are structures on each parcel which are proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development.



The applicant proposes to develop two mixed-use buildings above a common underground parking structure. The west building, with a footprint of approximately 13,300 square feet, would contain six stories of residential units over one floor of retail at sidewalk level. The east building, with a footprint of approximately 25,800 square feet, would contain six floors of

residential units over a retail base. The entire development would contain 208 residential units. Parking for approximately 362 spaces would be provided below grade, with access to the parking garage proposed off 42nd Avenue SW.

Each of the above-grade structures would be held back from their respective south property lines in order to accommodate cross-block pedestrian corridors. The cross-block pedestrian corridor connecting the alley with 42nd Avenue SW would complement and expand the pedestrian corridor which is part of the Harbor Properties project under construction on the adjacent property to the south.

The proposed development lies within a swath of 85-foot allowable zoning height extending a block on either side of the commercial spine of California Avenue SW. Until recently actual development up to the allowed height limit has been minimal and sporadic (the nine-story Alaska House, just to the north on 42nd Avenue SW across SW Alaska Street, and which has stood there for 30 years, is an exception). More recently, several projects extending to the zoned height limit are under construction or proposed for construction in the general vicinity. Nevertheless, despite this activity, California Avenue SW still remains characterized by a ribbon of one and two story commercial buildings with relatively small footprints. This articulation, scale and massing, of urban form remains for many residents of the area emblematic of not only the traditional but the desired commercial main street appropriate for the West Seattle neighborhood.

Early Design Guidance meetings on this proposal were conducted on April 10, 2008 and again on May 29, 2008. Previous Recommendation Meetings were held on March 12 and April 2, 2009.

Recommendation Meeting, April 23, 2009

Board members present: Christie Coxley, Chair
 Joseph Hurley
 Robin Murphy
 Vlad Oustimovitch (for Brandon Nicholson, on leave)
 Norma Tompkins

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION

The presentation by the development team began with brief comments from the developer, Charlie Connor of Connor Homes, followed by remarks and a visual presentation by James Westcott of Weber+Thompson Architects. Mr. Westcott began by reminding the Board (and, in effect, briefing the two new Board members) that at the April 2nd meeting the design team had addressed concerns and issues regarding details of the street-level retail environment and had received recommendation for approval, by a vote of 3 to 2 of the Board members then present, for a requested departure from development standards to allow for vehicular access to the underground parking area for both buildings from 42nd Avenue SW. He also recalled that the Board had recommended retaining the residential entries on 42nd Avenue SW and California

Avenue SW, noting that the plans called for wrapping the retail storefronts around the corner at the California Avenue entry recess so that the entry would not distract unduly from the pedestrian experience along California. The Board had also recommended as a condition of approval that the selection of street tree species and locations for planting along SW Alaska Street across from the proposed new park would be coordinated with Bill Ames of the Seattle Department of Transportation. Another recommended condition at the previous meeting had been a requirement for retail entries to be located within the building recesses of each of the buildings at the two street-intersection corners. The Board had also asked the design team to remove the bollards proposed and shown for these two corners.

Mr. Westcott then recalled that the Board had requested that the applicant return as quickly as convenient for another meeting that would entail a “focused” review of unresolved issues regarding the massing and treatment of the structure to be located at the corner of SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW, the so-called “west building.” In particular, the design team had been asked to re-examine the one-story retail brick façade of the south half of the west building facing onto California Avenue and to review the modulation and treatment of the recessed, gray upper portion of the building.

There was a brief presentation of twelve massing studies that had been studied by the design team which was quickly followed by the presentation of four detailed studies (Schemes A through D), which focused primarily on the upper massing of the west building. Scheme A offered a top floor of the building that was differentiated from the other residential floors by incorporating more glass and less peripheral wall.

Scheme B showed a simple two-foot pull out of the wall for five stories above the one-story light brick retail façade. This would mean a 14-foot setback rather than a 16-foot setback of this portion of the upper façade in order to provide modulation. In this scheme the upper floor remained of a piece with the rest of the upper box.

Scheme C was described as a “seismic shift” and showed two vertical panels along the west façade pulled away, perhaps a foot, from the box. In this scheme the vertical pull-outs ran up 6 stories, to the top of the box, but otherwise the top floor displayed more penetration and glass as had been the case with scheme A.

Finally, Scheme D showed the more open top floor with more deeply modulated push-outs that only reached to the base of that floor and enwrapped the southwest, northwest and northeast corners of the upper box.

Public Comment

After asking a few clarifying questions of the design team, the Board opened the meeting to public comment. As part of the solicitation of public input, the Board Chair had asked that members of the public should express their preferences for one of the lettered schemes.

One commenter thought the west building remained out of scale and regretted that there was no intention to go back to the east building since, regrettably, the corner of that building at 452nd Avenue SW appeared much too heavy. A preference was expressed for “Scheme D.” Another found scheme “D” a “fairly acceptable building,” Scheme D appeared to be preferred by the

majority of those who commented. One member of the public was in favor of something even more asymmetrical than had been shown.

It was noted that only one of the 12 massing studies had shown a 2-story height along the sidewalk edge façade on the south half of California Avenue SW and more than one member of the public indicated a preference for this extended element that imparted a stronger sense of proportionality and overall strength to the California Avenue façade.

Another member of the public lamented the lack of any attempt to establish historical continuity with the existing built environment through incorporation of historical elements or fine detailing, especially in the brick work, a comment that had been a refrain at earlier Design Review Board meetings on this project.

Board Deliberations

Following the development team's presentation and after hearing public comments, members of the Board identified the following unresolved issues with the design presented:

- the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street was in need of further development and alterations; it was "too plain"; the corner was "weak"; the corner was "too timid"; the canting of the corner created an "uncomfortable feeling; in sum, the corner needed design changes in order to "strengthen it."
- compositionally, the design needed a two story base flush to the street south of the residential entry on California Avenue SW; a second story "frame" extension above the first retail floor was not the proper solution; the two-story façade needed integrally to include the second-floor residential units behind the façade.
- The north elevation of the west building was "static"; Why was the northeast corner (at the alley) the same as the northwest corner at California Avenue SW? The north façade would benefit by the introduction of asymmetrical elements and detailing.
- The top floor needs additional differentiation; the building still needs to be lighter at the top.

In making these observations, members of the Board acknowledged that the design had responded positively to several concerns voiced previously by both the Board and the community. One Board member specifically expressed gratitude to the design team for presenting four options, rather than the usual three, in response to the Board's request..

A colors and materials selection was on display, as had been the case at the two earlier recommendation meetings. These included colored flat and modulated cementitious panels, bricks in various colors, and metal trim and were referred to by the design team in response to specific questions regarding their use raised by the Board.

The Board agreed, however, that this "focused" Design Review Board Recommendation Meeting, while not totaling resolving all the outstanding issues the Board had with the design, brought it close enough that they could recommend approval with specific conditions. These conditions would each involve the applicants working with the Land Use Planner and the Department to work out the details of the design in conformance with the specific guidance

expressed by the Board. “Successful” solutions would be those agreed to by DPD and would include thoughtful, careful, and comprehensive responses to the following Board conditions:

1. The top, residential floor of the west building needs additional differentiation from the other floors, including but not limited to the diminution in appearance of structural and cladding elements and expansion of visible penetrations. This might best be achieved by starting with the more generous openings shown in both Schemes A and D. Additionally, this same or similar fenestration scheme, transferred in some recognizable way to the “tower element” of the “brick building” (see condition 2, below), could help to integrate the upper mass more effectively with the “brick building.”
 2. At the tower element in the brick building, at the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Alaska Street, differentiate the window treatment from the rest of the building. This could be done with material and openness, and/or by moving the frames, possibly as bay windows. These could project into the right-of-way if not structural. Make a clear relationship between these tower windows and those on the upper floor of recessed upper “building.” To further strengthen the distinctiveness of this corner, do away with the symmetrical treatment of the corner that wraps the alley and treat the two corner bays at the alley the same as the non-corner bays on the north, east and west facades.
 3. Square the post at the corner of SW Alaska Street and California Avenue SW to align with the rectilinear building. Make it appear stronger by making it dimensionally larger in each direction. Look at a subtle change in the brick “mix” at the corner element to further distinguish it.
 4. Explore signage expressions that would announce the “Junction” boldly and forcibly attached to this beefed-up corner post. In addition to this “super-graphic,” produce samples of proposed variable signage types that would impart differentiation and character to the street-level retail spaces.
 5. Provide a two-story base south of the residential entry on California Avenue SW that integrates the first level of residential units above into the façade.
 6. In addition to doing away with a “second tower” treatment at the alley, explore clipping one side or the other of the extruded modulation bays on the fifth and sixth floors to further diminish the monotonous and static symmetry of the north-facing facade.
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