City of Seattle
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

Department of Planning & Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

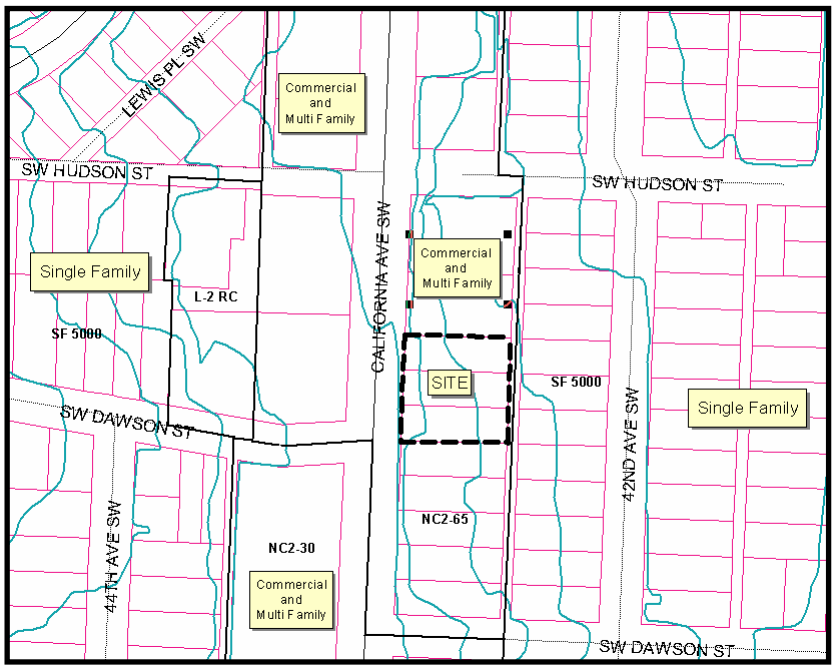
EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE PRIORITIES
OF THE
SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Date: January 10, 2008
Report Date: January 23, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number:	**3008044**
Address:	**5020 California Avenue SW**
Applicant:	**Eric Murphy of Hewitt Architects**
Board members present:	**Deb Barker (Chair)** **Catherine Benotto** **Christie Coxley** **David Foster**
Board members absent	**Jeff McCord**
DPD staff present:	**Mike Reid, Land Use Planner** **Colin Vasquez, Senior Land Use Planner**

SITE & VICINITY



The 22,125 square-foot site consists of three parcels and is located along the California Avenue SW neighborhood commercial corridor, immediately west of a single-family residential zone. The site currently contains three structures functioning most recently for multi-family, single family, and small-scale commercial uses. The site shares street frontage to the west with California Avenue SW and utilizes an existing and fully-improved alley to the east for vehicular access.

The site exhibits a grade change from east to west of approximately 24 feet, trending lower towards California Avenue SW from the

adjacent single-family zone residences to the east. There are no environmentally critical areas (ECAs) located on the site. An identified ECA steep slope exists north of the site; however, the subject properties are located further south than any potential buffer for this area.
The site is zoned Neighborhood Commercial 2 with a 65-foot height limit (NC2-65) and a floor area ratio (FAR) of 4.75 for structures that contain both residential and nonresidential uses. Similar zoning exists along the east and west sides of California Avenue SW between SW Edmunds Street to the north and SW Dawson Street to the south. An existing alley located approximately 150 feet east of California Avenue SW delineates a zoning transition from NC2-65 to Single Family 5,000 (SF5000). Areas along the east and west sides of California Avenue SW south of SW Dawson Street are zoned primarily NC2-30. Surrounding land uses include a mix of multi-family and single-family residential structures, with commercial uses located along both side of California Avenue SW.

The multi-family residential buildings in the vicinity of the site vary in terms of construction age, although most properties in the immediately vicinity were constructed between the 1960's and 1990's. Most of the single family homes to the east appear to be of early to mid-20th century construction.

California Avenue SW is fully improved with curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and landscape strips along both sides of the pavement. Limited on-street parking is available along both sides of this street, between SW Hudson Street and SW Dawson Street. Vegetation on the site consists primarily of grass and shrubs, with a few mature trees located on the northern-most parcel.

Bus stops are located on California Avenue SW, with a northbound stop immediately south of the site at Dawson Street SW and a southbound stop west of the site at SW Hudson Street.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed development includes the demolition of existing on-site structures and the construction of a mixed-use building featuring street-level commercial space along California Avenue SW with approximately 90-100 apartment units above. The proposal would utilize an existing alley immediately east of the site for vehicular access to an at-grade parking structure within the building.

DESIGN PRESENTATION

Three design alternatives were presented at the Early Design Guidance (EDG) meeting. All options included a mixed-use structure with street-level commercial space, apartment units on the upper floors, and at-grade parking contained within a parking garage accessible from the existing alley to the east.

The **first alternative** provided a mixed-use structure with commercial space facing California Avenue SW to the west and at-grade parking accessible from the alley to the east of the site. The parking structure is capped and creates a level platform with the street-facing commercial uses along California Avenue SW. Approximately 90-100 apartment units are proposed above the commercial and parking level platform, yielding a "U" shaped building with the open end facing California Avenue SW. This street-facing open space is designed to provide a residential courtyard which takes advantage of sun exposure and westward views of the sound. The units range from studios to two-bedroom units, with an overall average unit size of 670 square feet. Three pedestrian entrances along California Avenue SW provide access to the street-level commercial space. Contemplated materials were not provided during the presentation of this design option. The applicant provided a preliminary landscape plan and green factor assessment, featuring new small caliper-diameter trees along the north and south property lines and medium caliper-diameter trees along California Avenue SW to compliment the existing street trees. Shrubs of varying height will also trim the north and south

perimeters of the site, while four 50 square-foot clusters of shrubs will be planted intermittently along the alley-facing property line. This alternative features open space/landscaped buffers along the north, south, and east property lines.

The **second alternative** provides a mixed-use building with street-level commercial space along California Avenue SW and at-grade parking accessible from the alley to the east of the site. The parking structure is also capped and creates a level platform with the street-facing commercial uses along California Avenue SW. Approximately 90-100 apartment units are proposed above the commercial and parking level platform, providing a open courtyard on the platform at the southwest corner. The units range from studios to two-bedroom units, with an overall average unit size of 660 square feet. Contemplated materials were not provided during the presentation of this design option. The preliminary landscape plan and green factor analysis, as detailed in the description for the first alternative, also applies to this alternative. This alternative also features open space/landscaped buffers along the north, south, and east property lines.

The **third alternative ("preferred alternative")** proposes similar street-level commercial use and at-grade parking as detailed in the descriptions of the first two alternatives. The parking structure is again capped and creates a level platform with the street-facing commercial uses along California Avenue SW. Approximately 90-100 apartment units are proposed above the commercial and parking level platform, yielding a "U" shaped building with the open end facing south. This south-facing open space takes advantage of sun exposure and features a landscaped courtyard accessible to residents of the proposed building. This alternative also features open space/landscaped buffers along the north, south, and east property lines and additional building modulation along the north façade to increase the setback from the corresponding property line. Contemplated materials were not provided during the presentation of this design option. The preliminary landscape plan and green factor analysis, as detailed in the description for the previous alternatives, also applies to this alternative.

The applicant stated that the three alternatives were developed to advance the design guidelines identified by the applicant as highest priority. Multiple, recessed entries along California Avenue SW are proposed with each of the three alternatives and are intended to enhance the streetscape compatibility (A-1) between the proposal and established context surrounding the site. The applicant noted that setbacks proposed from the western property line, display windows, and plantings along the sidewalk are intended to enhance the transition from the street to the building. The alternatives feature a two-story base, five-story middle, and one-story top floor design which the applicant stated complies with the City's intent for height, bulk, and scale compatibility (B-1). Articulation, treatments, and signage are intended to be compatible with traditional development in the West Seattle Junction area and strive to advance the human scale (C-3) of the proposal. Impacts resulting from on-site parking (D-5) will not be visible from the street, as vehicular access to the site will be achieved by accessing an alley present to the east of the site. The applicant added that the three alternatives, as provided, will not require any identified design departures.

BOARD QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

The Board had the following questions and clarifying comments, with responses noted from the applicant:

- All three design alternatives appear to feature maximum height along the east/alley side of the site. Is there a design reason for this?
    - The grade of the site trends higher towards the east/alley side of the site, so the mass along the alley is as proposed to balance the site.
- Does the proposed design require the upper mezzanine to be located along the alley?
    - The design intent for the upper mezzanine includes loft space along the alley, which would allow larger windows and increased transparency along the upper level along the alley.
- Has the design team investigated taking access from California Avenue SW rather than the alley?
    - Access from California Avenue SW would not be supported by the City, which encourages alley access whenever possible.
- Does the applicant have any design alternatives which feature stepping-back from the alley, to improve the transition to the single-family zone?
    - In order to make the project financially feasible, the building envelope cannot be given away; however, the design will show sensitivity to this edge condition.
- How many units are proposed with each alternative?
    - Approximately 90 to 100 units are proposed among the three alternatives.
- It appears that fir trees are present on site, in addition to the street trees present along California Avenue SW. Do you intend to retain these trees and are they incorporated into your green factor equation?
    - The street trees will be retained, while the on-site firs will be removed. Green factor requirements will be upheld with this proposal.
- Can you specify the height of the building to the north?
    - The building to the north is 65 feet in height.
- Please clarify the required setback from the alley for the NC2-65 zone.
    - 15 feet is required for portions of a structure above 13 feet in height to a maximum of 40 feet. For each portion of a structure above 40 feet, additional setback should be at a rate of 2 feet of setback for every 10 feet in height.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 40 members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting. The following comments were offered:

- Resident of the building to the north commented that California Avenue SW and the small structures currently on the site allow substantial light to penetrate his building. He added that the proposed development should recognize this impact in the design.
- California Avenue SW is beginning to exhibit a canyon effect and the design should provide relief along this corridor.
- The design should utilize high quality materials, such as stone and brick.
- The proposed courtyard should be east-facing and the building should step down as it approaches the alley.
- Please show sensitivity to the immediately vicinity, particularly properties to the north and east.
- The design should entertain using California Avenue SW for vehicular access rather than the alley.
- Indicate whether balconies will be located along the north façade of the proposed building.

- The architect should consider splitting the mass into two buildings rising above a two-story platform.
- Open space should be east facing to minimize impact to adjacent single-family residents.
- Adequate guest parking should be provided on-site, given the number of proposed units and the lack of on-street parking available in the vicinity.
- The proposal seems too large for the established scale and context of the neighborhood.
- The design should provide an adequate loading/unloading zone for delivery trucks.
- Architect should investigate possibility of creating a single-purpose residential structure, and remove retail use from the proposal.
- Design should show greater sensitivity to the single-family zone to the east.
- Provide additional rendering at the next meeting which show an increased setback from the alley and rendering from the perspective of the single-family zone.
- The east facing façade should utilize vegetation and landscaping to enhance the proposal's green factor.
- The street trees along California Avenue SW should be removed as part of this project, since the City does not provide their adequate maintenance.
- The lack of off-site parking provides that those visiting this development will be challenged to find parking.
- California Avenue SW should be used to provide vehicular access to the site.
- Clarify the building setback along the alley; it appears the proposal is insufficient.
- The residential courtyard should not face California Avenue SW.
- Please indicate whether overhead weather protection will be provided along California Avenue SW frontage.
- Architect should consider removing the proposed courtyard and locate the required greenspace on the roof in order to reduce the size of the building.
- Proposal should embrace the principal objective provided in the West Seattle Junction Neighborhood Design Guidelines, which states the a proposal should feature better design and site planning to enhance the character of the City and ensure that the new development sensitively fits into the neighborhood.
- Outside of the West Seattle commercial core, many commercial spaces site vacant. To avoid this, the developer should consider removing commercial space from the proposal and reducing the height of the building.
- New development on this site must respect the character of the neighborhood and the single-family zone transition to the east.
- Architectural character of the development should reflect residential influences, such as implementing pitched roofs and incorporating craftsman home construction techniques.
- The design should not turn the back of the building towards the alley, since this perspective is highly visible for the residents of the single-family properties to the east.

DESIGN GUIDELINE 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 following siting and design guidance and identified by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings* and *West Seattle Junction Design Guidelines* of highest priority to this project.

The Board had the following general comments:

- The massing diagrams presented maximize height with insufficient attention to the single-family zoning transition to the east.

- The proposal should shift the mass and height from the alley towards California Avenue SW (reiterated by DPD during the pre-submittal meeting and subsequent communications).
- The applicant should investigate creative ways of utilizing provided open space to minimize impacts to the properties to the north and east and to preserve existing views.
- The design schemes presented lack significant exploration of the site opportunities and constraints. The applicant should recognize the challenges of the site and consider pursing a design requiring departures if it will yield a more accommodating design.
- California Avenue SW is principally a commercial street and the design should incorporate this characteristic. The design should pay strict attention to quality and detail to serve a context setter for future projects along this corridor.

The following items were repeatedly discussed by the Board and included among the most important for the design.

- **Height, bulk and scale relative to the zone transition to the east. (A-5, B-1)**
  The subject site exhibits a significant zoning transition to the east, from NC2-65 to single-family residential uses. Despite a slight grade change trending towards the single-family zone, particular attention should be focused on developing a design which eases this transition.
  - Techniques such as reduction in upper story massing, upper story setbacks, and emphasis of lower building elements through materials and architectural treatment at the east façade could be used to improve the effect of the proposed building on adjacent sites. The Board suggested that the applicant consider creative uses of green space and the residential courtyard orientation in order to minimize height, bulk, and scale impacts felt by the adjacent properties. The applicant should pay particular attention to the orientation of the building and it's approach to adjacent properties, perhaps by "cascading" the structure or, at minimum, stepping the structure back from the alley and the Broxton to the north. The Board and City staff noted that height, bulk, and scale impacts are also a significant component of the pending SEPA review.
  - The Board requests that the applicant provide three unique design schemes which more appropriately address the height, bulk, and scale impacts that would result from this development. These refined designs should all feature techniques and implementations which minimize the impacts to the less intensive zone, as well as the Broxton to the north.

The applicant should also address all priority guidelines and Board guidance below during the next stages of design review.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics. The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.

The Board felt that the proposed massings, displayed in the three alternatives presented during the initial EDG meeting, do not offer a satisfactory response to the site characteristics pertaining to the transition east of the site. Development on this site should, where possible, preserve the views and light currently available to the properties to the east (and the Broxton to the north).

In response to public comments, the Board wants the applicant to utilize the steep grade change to help minimize the impacts that the development may have on the single-family

residences to the east. The Board requested that the applicant prepare north/south and east/west (from the middle of the site) section elevations to show how the proposal will work with adjacent surrounding properties and with the existing site conditions. These sections shall also extend through to the adjacent properties, to illustrate potential impacts posed by this development.

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

The Board stressed the importance of siting the building effectively to maximize the special characteristics of the alley and California Avenue SW rights-of-way. Compatibility with the streetscape established in the vicinity provides that the proposal should carry the mass and height along the California Avenue SW façade and should ste
p back from the alley right-of-way to the east.

A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites. Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.

The Board felt that the proposed design should respond to the concerns of adjacent residents, particularly the single-family residents to the east of the site and the residents of the Broxton to the north.

The site is located on a zone edge as shown in the map provided on page one of this report. Special consideration should be given to the design of the east façade of the building in order to meet these guidelines. Items to consider include reducing structure height on upper levels, setting back upper levels to reduce scale, shadowing, window locations, landscaping, location of open space, materials, and architectural treatments.

The proposed development should create an acceptable transition between the project site and the existing residences to the east. The applicant must provide sufficient detail on how the proposed development will work with the existing zoning constraints of this site. The Board requests that the applicant prepare section elevations, as detailed in the guidance for A-1, to identify how the proposal will work with the existing site conditions and adjacent properties. The applicant shall also refine the provided shadow study to clarify potential impacts posed by this development. The applicant should develop and graphically document the design relationship with adjacent properties.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility. Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

As detailed in the *West Seattle Junction Design Guidelines*, current zoning along California Avenue SW has created abrupt edges between intensive mixed-use development and less-intensive residential development. In addition, the Code-complying building envelope of NC2-65 often results in development that exceeds the scale of the existing vicinity. Refined transitions in height, bulk, and scale must be considered within this guideline.

The Board noted that special consideration should be given to the east façade and massing to improve the transition from the NC2-65 zone to the less intensive SF 5000 zone to the east, by examining other items discussed in the Hot Button Issues and Items A-1, A-2, and A-5.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-3 Human Scale. The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale.

The applicant shall provide additional details regarding this item at the next stage of review. The design should pay strict attention to quality and detail to serve as a context setter for future projects along this corridor.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-2 Blank Walls. Buildings should avoid blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.

The applicant should guide the design to avoid potential blank walls, with particular focus on minimizing the aesthetic impacts from the perspective of the single-family zone. Guidance provided under A-1, A-2, and A-5 should be implemented to ensure the façades are adequately treated.

D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures. The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

The Board strongly agreed that the vehicular access to the site should be visually minimized. Comments reflect those found in A-1, A-2, A-5, and D-2.

D-8 Treatment of Alleys. The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrians' street front.

The Board strongly agreed that the east-facing façade should be treated with consideration for the single-family zoning transition. Comments reflect those found in A-1, A-2, A-5, and D-2.

E. Landscaping

E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites. Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighborhood properties and abutting streetscape.

The Board stressed that the proposal should include the creative utilization of green space and landscaping to soften the transitions towards the single-family zone and towards the Broxton to the north. The Board also urged that the courtyard design should respond to the great neighborhood amenity of the sensitive views from the properties to the east and should be oriented to provide a break in the massing along the alley.

DEPARTURES

No departures have been requested by the applicant at this time. A complete zoning analysis will be completed once the design is advanced adequately to identify all potential development proposals. The proposed development shall adhere to the NC2-65 development standards.

NEXT STEPS

The Board has recommended a 2nd EDG meeting in order to re-examine the applicant's design direction prior to initiating the Master Use Permit (MUP) process. It is anticipated that the 2nd EDG meeting may be able to yield a recommendation from the Board, provided that the guidance offered during the initial meeting was fully addressed by the applicant.

In addition to responding to the guidelines and providing plans and elevations, the applicant will need the following for the next Early Design Guidance meeting:

- Three distinct design alternatives which address the edge condition along the alley and the relationship with the Broxton to the north. Alternatives should illustrate the implementation of enhanced setbacks, height transitions, landscaping, modulation, and other selected design techniques to mitigate height, bulk, and scale impacts on adjacent properties.
- South, east, and west elevations which clearly define the perspective from the adjacent properties.
- Evidence of the designer's investigation of materials and their effect on building form.
- Elevations and study sections which include adjacent buildings.
- Large scale elevations from the pedestrian perspective. Add shadows and other means of projecting depth. Shadow studies should focus mostly on those times of the day and year when residents of adjacent properties to the east would be most inclined to utilize their rear-yards (i.e., afternoon in the spring, summer, and early fall).