



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Department of Planning & Development
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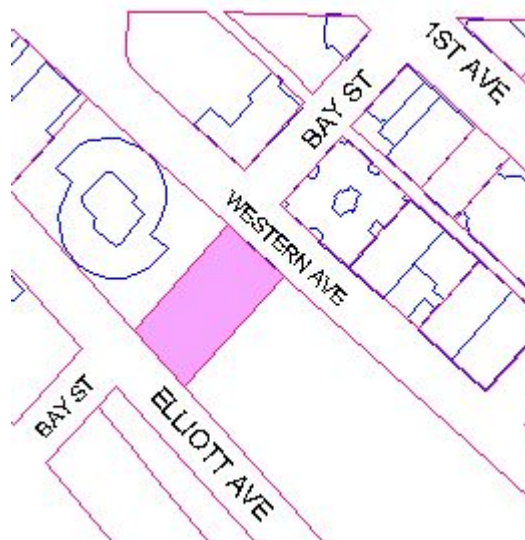
**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES
OF
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
January 8, 2008**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number:	3008148
Address:	3031 Western Avenue
Applicant:	Brad Hinthorne, Ruffcorn Mott Hinthorne Stine Architects, for Martin Selig Real Estate
Board members present:	Marta Falkowska , Acting Chair Matt Allert Dana Behar Kelly Mann
Board members absent:	William Gilland James Falconer
Land Use Planner present:	Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Downtown development site is bounded by Western Avenue on the east, Elliott Avenue on the west, by the Airborne Express building site to the north and the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park on the south. Included within the development site is the former Bay Street right-of-way which was vacated under Ordinance 1114450 of the City of Seattle. Actual development within the vacated right-of-way is restricted by a Property Use and Development Agreement (PUDA). The development site is trapezoidal in shape, with the Elliott Avenue property line flaring slightly outward as it runs from north to south. It measures approximately 100 feet in the north/south direction and 180-193 feet in the



east/west direction. The total area is approximately 18,700 square feet in extent. Currently there is a structure on the site, occupying most of the area south of the vacated Bay Street. Formerly a warehouse building, it is now used for parking and is proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development. The development site is zoned DMR/R125/65, with the area north of what was the centerline of Bay Street zoned DMC-65.

The proposed development is for a 14 story residential building, containing approximately 79 units with mostly below-grade parking for 79 vehicles. The parking garage would take access from the existing Airborne Express building's driveway and garage ramp off Western Avenue which bisects the eastern portion of the former Bay Street right-of-way. Additional access would be provided directly from Elliott Avenue. Project work would include landscape and pedestrian improvements along vacated Bay street, including a series of open stairs that would create a pathway with a more gradual pedestrian descent than at present running between Western and Elliott Avenues.

ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION

Three alternate massing models for the site were briefly presented to the Board. The first maximized the build-out of the site and angled the planes on both the north and south facades, sloping to a smaller envelope where the building reached its maximum height. It was noted that this scheme, while simple in form and perhaps presenting a more interesting architectural form when viewed from the sculpture park, was a technically complex form that made unit-planning difficult and reduced the glazing area on the lower portions of the south façade allowable per the International Building Code. Option 2 differed from the first option in being strictly rectangular in shape but with the eastern half of the massing slipping some thirty feet or so above the volume of the western half. The two halves were joined by an angular mechanical screen wall which followed the topographical decline of the site from east to west. In the description of the architectural team, this form was also "most consistent with roof lines of pavilions at Olympic Sculpture Park." The entire south façade was set back five feet from the property line and sported vertical bay windows which ran in strips the entire height of the structure. This scheme allowed for a large, usable recreational space on the lower roof and allowed for a higher percentage of glazing than had been possible with the first scheme. The simpler form allowed for easier unit planning and construction. In both schemes, presumably, vehicular access would be from Elliott Avenue as well as from the existing driveway providing access to underground parking beneath the Airborne Express building.

The preferred third option gave clear expression of two connected rectangular boxes, with the Western Avenue portion slipping some thirty feet or so above the top of the box that rose from Elliott Avenue. Like Option Two, this scheme allowed for a large, usable recreational space on the lower roof and allowed for a higher percentage of glazing than had been possible with the first scheme. The simpler form allowed for easier unit planning and construction. As in the two other schemes, vehicular access to the building would be from both street fronts, directly into the structure from Elliott Avenue.

The area north of the structure, including the entire the vacated portion of Bay Street, would be enhanced as part of the proposal. Project work would include landscape and pedestrian improvements, including a series of open stairs that would create a pathway, with a more gradual pedestrian descent than at present, running between Western and Elliott Avenues.

After asking a number of clarifying questions following the architect's presentation, the Board elicited comments from members of the public attending the meeting.

Public Comments:

Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- Several of those attending were residents from nearby apartment buildings to the east of the site where zoning did not allow, and actual development did not exceed, a height of 65 feet. They expressed concerns about view blockage and raised the broader issue of the "fit" of the height (at the allowed 125-foot zoning), bulk and scale of the proposed structure within the established "neighborhood character."
- Members of the public suggested: that the structure step back more generously from the property line with the Olympic Sculpture Park; that balconies did not provide a suitable backdrop or edge to the park; elements within the south-facing façade should not be allowed to compete with the park.
- The potential for a park-like development within the former Bay Street right-of-way was described by one member of the public as a fascinating opportunity for the neighborhood. Clear separation between vehicle and pedestrian pathways should be stressed; providing a meander to the vehicle driveway from Western Avenue, it was suggested, would add to the park-like character of the space.
- Several other concerns dealt with issues which as expressed were less clearly related to elements of design: i.e., the adequacy of the proposed parking, impacts on local parking and traffic, construction noise.

Board's Deliberations:

The Board began by noting both the fantastic potential of the site for residential development and the responsibility of development on the site for respecting the sculpture park to the south which has become in the short interval since its opening one of the City's great and cherished spaces. The Board identified three main issues that needed to be satisfactorily addressed by the development team as the project proceeded from this conceptual phase through full design development:

- How is this project a "neighbor" to the Sculpture Park"?
- How is this project a "neighbor" to the existing community around it?
- How does this project effectively meet the ground along each of its edges?

Within the discussion surrounding the first question, comments were elicited from a member of the landscape design team for the Olympic Sculpture park, and now advising the development team on this project, who stated that an overriding idea for the design of the park had been the notion that the park had to accept the city. The park was designed clearly anticipating that

development beyond the Park's control would take place at its edges. The landscape architect also noted that the trees on the slopes abutting to the east and north the "valley," where the Richard Serra sculpture entitled *Wake* had been installed, would grow to 30-35 feet within the next ten years.

Since the structure would not be allowed to move northward beyond the southern edge of the former Bay Street right-of-way, the impracticality of any generous setting back of the entire mass of the structure from the property boundary with the Sculpture Garden was noted by the Board. So too was the impracticality, but in some sense desirability, of relocating the circulation and service cores to the south façade where they might provide more effective backdrops to the sculpture park. Nevertheless, real concerns did remain regarding the desirability of open balconies on the south façade. At the very least, the Board agreed, the south-facing façade needed to be "quieted." The proposed structure, as the Board remarked, sits next to a world class sculptural park; for years to come it will be eminently visible from within the park; in this regard the challenge is for the design of the building to try to emulate the successful design of the park.

On the second question, about relating to the surrounding community, other than the Park, the Board requested that the development team at the next meeting provide the Board with a more thorough and detailed analysis of the neighborhood. To this end, the Board requested that the design team present some additional sectional views and perspective drawings of the proposed structure, studies that express the wider context and broader sense of the neighborhood.

On the third question, the Board noted that the proposed building appeared to present a blank wall to pedestrians traversing the Bay Street pathway. The Board would expect to see, at the next meeting, a great deal more of this courtyard area, with ample details of the façade adjacent to it, landscaping, materials, textures, pathway furnishings and artwork calculated to enhance the pedestrian experience.

Along the south façade, the development team should address issues regarding the questionable desirability of opening the lower units to a terrace, given the perceived vulnerability of these units. Apart from Western Avenue, the meeting of building and ground seemed awkward and unresolved. Most tenuous was the way the building met the ground along Elliott Avenue. The design of the building should improve, not diminish, the pedestrian experience along this edge. The improvements should include the addition of an interposing use between the sidewalk and the parking inside the structure and provide an adequate space for that use. Overhead weather protection should be a given along this facade.

As part of their presentation, the design team had identified five design guidelines as being "most pertinent to this project and site": B-2, B-3, D-1, D-2, and D-3. The Board agreed that guidelines B-3, D-1, and D-2 were highly pertinent to the project, but regarded the other two identified guidelines to be of lesser importance, while identifying several other guidelines, identified below, to be regarded of highest priority for a successful design.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, hearing public comment, and addressing their major concerns regarding the proposal, 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 Developments* and the *Design Guidelines for the Belltown Urban Center Village* of highest priority to this project.

A Site Planning

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.

The guideline above was chosen by the board to be of high priority. Human activity within the Bay Street corridor should be promoted by the interface of pathway with landscaping and building facade. Pedestrians should be engaged along Elliott Avenue; an existing bad condition is not justification for not improving the condition. The applicant should be prepared to demonstrate how the sidewalk level spaces within the Elliott Avenue façade provide for an enlivening of each of the street. In providing for some vehicular traffic leaving and entering the site from Elliott Avenue, the pedestrian realm is not to be ignored. Overhead weather protection along this façade seems appropriate. The design team should be prepared to demonstrate how both building and Bay Street corridor relate to the broader neighborhood context.

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.

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.

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.

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

There is an inherent potential conflict between any new development and the existing pattern of lower residential and commercial buildings. There is an established fabric in the area and this new development should continue to demonstrate sensitivity to that fabric.

The Board considers the activation of Elliott Avenue important to the success of the project. A big challenge will be to provide for the parking without introducing elements that run counter to the best urban design principles and that may adversely affect the desirable qualities of downtown urban life. The above-grade parking portion of the proposed structure at Elliott Avenue should be designed to convey an impression that a neighborhood priority (according to the Belltown Design Guidelines) is to create “vibrant pedestrian-friendly streetscape.”

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

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

Thoroughly explore inserting an intermediate use between the parking and sidewalk along Elliott Avenue. The façade along Elliott Avenue should be designed so as not to be without character or pedestrian amenity or interest. The north façade, facing the vacated Bay Street, should be designed to engage pedestrians who make use of the pathway between Western and Elliott Avenues.

- 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.***

In order to enhance the pedestrian experience, the project should provide overhead weather protection continuously along Elliott Avenue as well as Western Avenue.

The Board noted that the project should explore opportunities to achieve a good human scale, especially the way entrances address the two street fronts as well as the way the entire lower portion of the north façade interacts with the Bay Street courtyard area.

Architectural materials, scale and details should be integrated within a building whose concept is appropriate for the site and its surroundings as well as its programmatic uses. The Board was not prescriptive regarding materials, but would expect to see a choice of durable and sustainable materials and to be presented with samples of proposed colors and materials at the subsequent recommendation meeting.

D *Public Amenities*

D-1 *Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space*

Design public open space to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents and workers, Views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.

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.

D-6 *Design for Personal Safety and Security*

Design the building and site to enhance the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security in the immediate area.

Rethink the propriety of the lower terrace along the south façade which appears to compromise the security and safety of residents occupying these lower units. A sad comment on the failure of the design would be the need to provide a security fence between the project and the sculpture park next door. Expression should be given to clear path-finding details distinct from vehicular driveways and design of appropriate lighting and signage within the Bay Street corridor, achieving a distinctive sense of place.

The design team should provide studies of the proposed pedestrian environment both along the streets and along the through-block connecting courtyard. The applicant should be prepared to present details for a variety of streetscape and pedestrian pathway amenities, including lighting, overhead weather protection, signage and other elements calculated to generate a friendly and lively environment at the perimeter of the site and within the Bay Street courtyard.

Landscaping should be designed with the goal of realizing the prioritized guidelines, should soften the edge conditions where appropriate, and should contribute to an attractive and usable interior open space, courtyard area. The design should incorporate specific treatments to provide for attractiveness and an allure to the pedestrian through-site pathway and establish a genuine neighborhood amenity. The Board would expect to see a comprehensive Landscape Plan, one that treats not only the on-site open space but the streets' edges as well.

E *Vehicular Access and Parking*

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.

As noted above, under major issues, the base of the structure along Elliott Avenue remains an area of special concern. In order to provide safety and comfort and enliven the experience of

those walking by, the parking garage should not be nestled directly behind the sidewalk-level façade. Landscaping should be designed with the goal of realizing the prioritized guidelines, should soften the edge conditions where appropriate, and should contribute to an attractive and usable interior open space, courtyard area. The design should incorporate specific treatments to provide for attractiveness and an allure to any pedestrian through-site pathway. The Bay Street corridor should be regarded as a neighborhood amenity. The Board expects to see a comprehensive and detailed Landscape Plan, one that treats not only the roof-top garden and the on-site corridor but the streets' edges as well.

Departures from Development Standards:

The architects preliminarily identified the following departure from development standards that would be needed for the preferred option:

- SMC 23.49.018: which requires overhead weather protection along the entire street frontages; the proposal would not provide overhead weather along the Elliott Avenue façade.

The Board, as noted above, indicated a strong reluctance to recommend a departure from the requirement of overhead weather protection along the Elliott Avenue façade. The Board did indicate, however, that they might entertain the recommendation of granting other requested departure(s), provided such departure requests were integral to an overall satisfying design and providing design development responded adequately to the guidance regarding the desired relationship of the proposed building to the adjacent streets, pedestrian corridor, and sculpture park, as well as to the other provisions provided in the guidelines.

Staff Comments:

It is the expectation of the Design Review Board and DPD that the applicant proceed to further design development, which includes a demonstrable response to the guidelines and guidance noted above, and to a Master Use Permit application. Subsequent to a successful application, the proposal will be returned to the Design review Board for a Recommendation Meeting, at which time the adequacy of the design's response to the stated guidelines and Board's guidance should be demonstrated. In making their subsequent presentation to the Board, the development team should be prepared to show views of the proposal and its context from the water and to provide several sectional studies clearly showing the relationship of the proposal to the immediate neighborhood and the sculpture park.