



City of Seattle

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

**RECOMMENDATION MEETING
OF
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
October 28, 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: James Falconer
Marta Falkowska
William Gilland, Chair

Board members absent: Dana Behar
Kelly Mann

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

The presentation of the design team began with a series of responses to questions that had been posed by the Board at the conclusion of the Early Design Guidance meeting held on January 8, 2008: "How is the project a *neighbor* to the Olympic Sculpture Park? How is the project a *neighbor* to the existing community elsewhere in the vicinity? And how does the project effectively meet the ground at each of its edges?"

The design team responded to the second question first, suggesting that the building would be clad in high quality, durable materials that would offer the surrounding "emerging neighborhood" improved value and an increased sense of place. In particular, the project would include an improved connection between Western Avenue and Elliott Avenue in the form of a community amenity of a rare and special scale, distinguished by significant landscaping in continuity with that already established within the sculpture park.

In response to the first question the design team emphasized that the design as developed since January made a positive addition to the neighborhood and established an appropriate and well-considered edge to what has become in its brief existence one of Seattle's most cherished spaces. The proposed design deferred to the park in several key aspects, including proximity, bulk and color among others. The design was intended to create a backdrop for the park. Establishing continuity with the sculpture park by means of on-site landscaping and the former Bay Street pedestrian connection was assured by the choice of landscape architect responsible for these elements. He was Charles Anderson, principal of Charles Anderson Landscape Architects, who had served as landscape architect for the Olympic Sculpture Park. Mr. Anderson spoke briefly of plans to establish and maintain continuity and consistency with the park in the design of the landscape and choice of landscaping materials.

Addressing the question of edges, the design team began with the park edge and illustrated how the proximity of the semi-public and private spaces was buffered by both the steep topography and the dense plantings of the park's northern edge. The southern face of the proposed

residential structure was, in turn, separated by a fifteen-foot setback and buffer from the south property line of the site, creating a clear distinction between private and public uses. On Western Avenue a two-foot setback enabled accommodating a twelve-foot wide sidewalk. An entry canopy would provide a clear sense of entry as well as weather protection along this facade. The northern edge of the proposed building would interface with a densely landscaped pedestrian space. Along Elliott Avenue the building would be set back four feet to allow widening of the sidewalk as well as to allow a planting buffer between the sidewalk and the building.

The overall massing of the proposed structure was an elaboration of what had been shown as the preferred third option at the Early Design Guidance meeting. There were 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, but a new, bolder use of a series of external frames along the south façade created a distinct expression of a series of distinctive steps down the hill between Western Avenue and Elliott Avenue. As earlier, the scheme allowed for a large, usable recreational space on the lower roof. As in the two other schemes, vehicular access to the building would be from both street fronts, directly into the structure from Elliott Avenue and via a driveway from Western Avenue into the former Bay Street right-of-way that sloped westward and became lidded before turning into either the Airborne Express building or the new structure.

With more detail than had been shown at the Early Design Guidance meeting, 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.

The design team's presentation concluded with a showing of materials intended for the proposed structure.

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:

Four members of the public affixed their names to the sign-in sheet provided for the meeting. Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- One resident from a 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 expressed concerns about the adequacy of the proposed parking, on view blockage, and about effects on the home values of those on the east side of Western Avenue. The comment echoed concerns that had been expressed at the Early Design Guidance meeting regarding the bulk and scale of the proposed structure and its "fit" within the established "neighborhood character."
- Another member of the public suggested that the structure did not step back enough at the south property line.

- Another found the design of the building generally aesthetically lacking, noting more broadly that the park had become “iconic” and that any structure in that location would detract from it.

Board’s Deliberations:

The Board began by acknowledging the positive aspects of the connections and linkages being explored by the project’s proponents. It affirmed again the rich 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 special spaces.

The Board acknowledged the effort of the design team to address the three main issues or questions the Board had raised at the Early Design Guidance phase of the project as being critical for a successful project, namely: 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? Focusing on the first question, the Board thought the proposed design, given its prominent setting at the north edge of the Olympic Sculpture Park, set itself more competitively than neighborly. Specifically, the protracted “fin” or “slash” that ran up the building and swooped like a ski-run at the upper portion of the structure was thought to need “quieting.” It was generally thought to be too disruptive, competitive as a backdrop to the park and was not perceived to be integrated into the design of the building itself. Likewise, the white frames showing on the south façade were thought to be “too brilliant” and “contrasty.” They were “too top heavy.” There needed to be less of a contrast between the frame and the other elements. The façade needed to be “quieted down.” It was thought “not to be there yet.”

Addressing the response to their initial third question, the Board noted that the proposed building’s north-facing façade remained overwhelmingly blank and oppressive in relationship to the Bay Street pedestrian way. As one of the Board members expressed it, the structure “exudes the feeling of waiting for another building to be set there against it.” The question was raised why, even given the back-of-house functions and sheer-wall requirements, some openings could not be provided to afford relief to the blankness. In general, the Board felt that the building wall, landscaping and pedestrian pathway still was in need of enhanced integration.

This related to the second issue of question, since the pedestrian passageway was a neighborhood passageway and would serve as a neighborhood amenity. The Board would expect to see, at the next meeting, more details of this courtyard area, of landscaping, materials, textures, pathway furnishings and artwork calculated to enhance the pedestrian experience, and with perspective images of these details and of the elements of the façade adjacent to it,.

Apart from Western Avenue, the meeting of building and ground still seemed somewhat awkward. The Board was not totally persuaded that the proposed relationship of structure and sidewalk along Elliott Avenue worked yet. Pedestrians should be engaged along Elliott Avenue; and the existing bad condition, while improved, did not seem remarkably improved.

As had been noted in their earlier guidance for the project, 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 which address their concerns about the heavy frame and the diagonal element portrayed in the design presented at the first Recommendation Meeting.

At the next Recommendation Meeting the design team should be prepared to provide studies of the proposed pedestrian environment both along the adjoining streets, along the through-block connecting courtyard, and from the sculpture garden as noted in the list below. The Board specifically requested that the development team should be prepared to demonstrate the following:

- A deeper analysis of the neighborhood context, including diagrams, images and text, including a statement of how this analysis of the neighborhood context is influencing the specific design;
- Plans, with north arrow and scale, showing all significantly different levels of the proposed structure, including parking levels and rooftops;
- Sections cut through the site in both the east-west and north-south directions which include at least the beginnings of adjacent structures (include vertical dimensions);
- Project elevations, incorporating design changes from previous renderings;
- A variety of perspective drawings as seen from the pedestrian level, and to include a view from the south at the site and level of the Richard Serra sculpture, with an attempt to examine the relationship of the proposed structure to the Olympic Sculpture Park as accurately as possible;
- Rendered perspectives from close up within the pedestrian realm, showing canopies, entrances, terraces, and the experience of a pedestrian moving through the courtyard along the north edge of the proposed structure;
- A comprehensive landscape plan and renderings at various appropriate levels of the courtyard and structure;
- Indications of the nighttime illumination of the project;
- A materials board and/or actual material samples;
- Clear responses to the priority guidelines and guidance given at the Early Design Guidance phase of the project, in both verbal and visual form;
- An exploration of the inclusion of artwork within the courtyard to tie it conceptually to the handsome small park across from the Airborne Express building and the Olympic Sculpture Park itself;
- A clear explanation and articulated justification for any requests for proposed departures from development standards;
- Sun/shadow diagrams for various times of the day and seasons of the year;
- A study model of the project, including substantial context.

Departures from Development Standards:

The architects noted that the departure preliminarily identified earlier, from SMC 23.49.018: which requires overhead weather protection along the Elliott Avenue façade, would not be required since the Code did not require the protection if a landscaped setback intervened between the sidewalk and the structure as was now being provided.

Staff Comments:

It is the expectation of the Design Review Board and DPD that the applicant proceed with further design development, which should include demonstrable responses to the guidance noted above. The proposal will be returned to the Design Review Board for another Recommendation Meeting, at which time the adequacy of the design's response to the stated guidelines and Board's guidance will again be evaluated.