City of Seattle

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

SECOND RECOMMENDATION MEETING
OF
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Date of Meeting: April 14, 2009
Notes Approved: May 29, 2009

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number:	3008148 & 3009545
Address:	3031 Western Avenue
Applicant:	Brad Hinthorne, Ruffcorn Mott Hinthorne Stine Architects, for Martin Selig Real Estate
Board members present:	Dana Behar James Falconer Marta Falkowska, Acting Chair Jan Frankina 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 general comments regarding the project's response to the priority Design Guidelines identified by the Board as well as the guidance offered by the Board at the first Design Review Recommendation Meeting. It was explained that the form of the project was a simple profile created by the zoning envelope, except that it was set back 15 feet from the south property line to offer a greater separation from the edge of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) Olympic Sculpture Garden. Within the simple profile, the proposed structure was described as responding in each of its frontages differently. It was noted that the proposed residential structure would present four visible facades, a condition generally unusual, especially in a downtown setting, for other than public or institutional buildings.

Distinctively narrow facades would be presented to both Western and Elliott Avenues. A front door under a glass canopy, entering into a fully glazed two-story lobby, marked the Western Avenue street-level façade. Along Elliott Avenue the building would be set back to allow for a five-foot landscaping strip behind which would be a grill of channel glass planks. The central portion of the Bay Street exterior would be comprised of textured stone against which there would be a play of light and color emanating from a series of dichroic glass fins. Additionally, the amount of fenestration into the residential units along both the east and west edges of the Bay Street façade had been expanded from that previously shown at the first Recommendation meeting.

The Park facing façade was described as a three-dimensional "tapestry of glass." Large balconies faced with glass were hung off the façade and separated by a glass column assembly which composes the whole into a series of vertical bays. The design team proposed an additional layer in the Park-facing façade by allowing plant material to grow along the vertical surface of the glass columns.

In addition to the structure itself, the project would include an improved connection between Western Avenue and Elliott Avenue in the form of a community amenity, described as of a rare

and special scale, distinguished by significant landscaping in continuity with that already established within the sculpture park. As had been shown at the earlier Recommendation meeting, the 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 structure, including samples of proposed vision and spandrel glass, the dichroic glass fins intended for the north façade, the channel glass planks intended for the south façade, and the "Jerusalem" stone, in both the textured and smooth finish.

Public Comment:

Nine members of the public affixed their names to the sign-in sheet provided for the meeting. After asking a number of clarifying questions following the architect's presentation, the Board elicited comments from members of the public attending the meeting:

- 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 effects of shadows on their units.. 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 the park.
- A representative expressed the concerns of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) as follows:
    1. their preference would be no balconies at all on the south façade;
    2. they were concerned about shadows on the Serra "Wake" sculpture, particularly those depicted for 6:00 PM on June 21st;
    3. they would not like to see any billboards, i.e., advertisements of available units on the south façade.

Board's Deliberations:

The Board began by acknowledging the positive aspects of the connections and linkages being explored by the project's proponents. The Board affirmed again the rich potential of the site for residential development and the responsibility development on the site should assume 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 again acknowledged the effort the design team had continued to make to address those main issues the Board had raised for the site at the Early Design Guidance phase of the project, primarily the need to be a good neighbor to the Olympic Sculpture Park.

The Board's specific comments are probably best gathered under the headings of each of the four facades. Regarding the east façade, there was a strong suggestion that compositionally the east-

facing expression could benefit from a “thickening” of the canopy located above the residential entrance. This was recommended to the design team as an item for further exploration and study.

The focus of the Board’s comments on the west façade was on the lowest level where the building is set back to allow for sidewalk widening and to allow landscaping between the sidewalk and the building. At this lower level the proposed building houses a stairwell and two rooms containing building systems equipment, each faced with channel-glass planks. The Board thought it desirable that there be ambient lighting behind these glass planks that would enhance that area of the public sidewalk at nightfall and after. To this end they strongly recommended that the design team and development team should explore a system of interior lighting that would produce from within the structure a desirable glow to the glass planks.

Regarding the north façade, the Board commended the design team on their decision to inwardly extend the fenestration at both the east and west ends and the “light mural” treatment of the otherwise substantial portions of blank façade by the introduction of the pattern of integrated dichroic glass fins.

The south façade, providing the visual termination at the end of the Olympic Sculpture Park, received the most comment and discussion. Described by the design team as providing a backdrop or background to the sculpture park as a “three dimensional tapestry of glass,” the south facing façade elicited specific and spirited discussion regarding the proposed balconies and the recommendation of conditions regarding both landscaping and lighting within the fifteen foot setback area bordering the sculpture park.

There was some initial discussion about both the size (too large?) and the composition (visual and material) of the proposed balconies. There was additional discussion whether their use (as storage spaces) should be restricted by home-owner or tenant regulations. Regarding the later issue the majority of the Board was in agreement that urban living meant accepting some level of urban messiness on the balconies. Providing adequate accessory storage within the units or elsewhere in the building, and adequate and secure bicycle storage in the building would help to alleviate some potential for balcony blight as might some standard rules for balcony use.

Another potentially troublesome element related to the balconies, brought up in the public comment period and further discussed by members of the Board, was the fact that both from within the sculpture park and from around it prominent sight lines to the south façade from the various perspectives would include significant views of the undersides of the balconies. The Board, however, was content to remind the design and development team that regard for the balcony undercarriages was of utmost importance to the successful projection of that south façade and no place to be cheap or neglectful.

Since the vines and columnar evergreens along the south façade were said to mitigate the imposing bulk of the façade facing the sculpture park, the Board recommended as a Condition of their approval of the overall proposal that a plan for the maintenance (and replacement, if necessary) of plantings as set forth in the landscape plan be submitted as approved by DPD. Additionally, the Board recommended as a Condition of their approval of the project that a lighting plan for the site be reviewed and approved by the Land Use Planner for DPD. This lighting plan should include lighting for the stairwell/generator/transformer spaces at the lower level of the west façade and should document collaboration and agreement between the

development/design team and the Seattle Art Museum for lighting proposed within the fifteen-foot setback between the south façade and the Olympic Sculpture Park.

Four of the five Board members present agreed that the project should receive the Board's Recommendation of approval with the Conditions stated above.

Departures from Development Standards:

The preliminarily identified departure, from SMC 23.49.018: which requires overhead weather protection along the Elliott Avenue façade, is not required since the Code does not require the protection if a landscaped setback intervened between the sidewalk and the structure as is provided.