



# City of Seattle

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

**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES  
OF  
THE QUEEN ANNE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**  
Meeting Date: April 30, 2008  
Report Date: May 6, 2008

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3008741

Address: 1701 Dexter Avenue N  
Applicant: Robert Miranda, for Unico Properties

Board members present: Matt Roewe, Chair  
Mark Garrell  
Bill Vandeventer

Board members absent: John Rose, Jr.  
David Nemens

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

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**VICINITY AND AREA DEVELOPMENT:**

The site lies on the west side of Dexter Avenue N., directly opposite the intersection of Dexter Avenue N. and Hayes Street. It is rectangular in shape and bounded on the west by a 20-foot north-south alley intervening between Aurora Avenue N. and Dexter Avenue N. The site consists of 2 lots and measures approximately 150 feet in the north/south direction and 108 feet in the east/west direction. The total area is approximately 16,231 square feet in extent. The site slopes downwards approximately 25 feet between the alley and the east property line and is mapped as a steep-slope environmentally critical area. Currently there is a single structure on the north half of the site which is proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development. The site is zoned Neighborhood Commercial 3 with a 40-foot height limit.



The proposed development is for a terraced four-story commercial/residential building with the ground floor occupied by live/work units. Approximately 62 residential units are proposed for the upper floors. Parking for 12 vehicles will be under the proposed structure at alley grade with parking for an additional 56 vehicles located subterranean and accessed from Dexter Avenue N.

It is the intent of the development team to construct on site a concrete plinth containing a parking garage and live/work units facings onto Dexter Avenue N. The upper, residential floors would be comprised of wood-frame factory-built modules that would be delivered and assembled in a multi-level configuration above the site-built concrete plinth.

### **ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION**

The presentation by the development team began with brief comments from Robert Miranda of Unico Properties, the project's developer, indicating the intention to develop a project that would provide attractive modern, "green," market-rate housing that would cause less disruption for the neighborhood since the duration of on-site construction disturbance would be substantially reduced. The project was described as the first larger-scale residential and mixed-use building in Seattle utilizing pre-fabricated modules.

The design team, made up of HyBrid/Seattle and Mithun architectural firms, was represented by Rob Humble of HyBrid who made the substantive presentation to the Board. The presentation began with an analysis of the immediate vicinity and development site. Three alternate massing models or schemes for the site were then briefly presented to the Board. The first option established two terraced bars of residential units from the alley which stepped down to two distinct masses at the street front which were separated by a centered green space that divided them. While this scheme maximized the density of the site, it was described as providing no real community space for the residents, lacking in view corridors and saddled with dark interior corridors between the units. A series of live/work units at street level punctuated the east-facing façade.

The second option differed from the first primarily by providing residential units running parallel to Dexter Avenue N. in three long bars, with live/work units again at the sidewalk level. A narrow green strip of landscaping separated the front bar of units from the uphill units. While this configuration allowed for increased standardization of modules, it presented an imposing, monolithic face to the street and lacked a centripetal interior green space for the residents.

The preferred third option showed a central entry and central courtyard that provided a continuous visual opening through the site that aligned with the opening of Hayes Street across Dexter Avenue N. A six-foot deep recess storefront galley provided a transition between the sidewalk and the live/work units and allowed for an at-grade, accessible approach to the units from the higher grade of the sidewalk at the north end of the site.

### **Public Comments:**

- There was limited public comment regarding the proposal, other than acknowledgement that the development embraced a set of laudable goals. One member of the public, owner and developer of the property immediately to the north, expressed concern regarding the proximity of the proposed garage entry to his project. He noted that his own development took all parking access from the alley. He requested that access to the proposed development, were it to take access from Dexter Avenue N. rather than from the alley, should be from a location further to the south, away from his own project.

### **Board's Deliberations:**

Having asked their own qualifying questions regarding details of the proposal and having heard public comments, the three members of the Board began their deliberations, commenting on those guidelines that were of highest importance for the project. The Board complimented the development team on its thoughtful presentation. The Board noted that they agreed that the applicant's preferred proposal was generally appropriate for the neighborhood and the site.

Among the major issues singled out by the Board were the following:

- The driveway in and out of the subterranean garage did appear to crowd the neighbor to the north; invariably it would disrupt pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk; it posed a potential safety hazard for southbound bicyclists descending Dexter Avenue N. , if not for vehicular traffic. Since access from the street would require the Board's recommendation of granting a Design Departure, the Board wanted to see the applicant address more fully issues of appropriateness, functionality and safety. One area of investigation should be studies showing how a single lane in-and-out driveway might better serve the parking garage should a departure be recommended for allowing parking access off Dexter Avenue N.
- An issue related to the garage access was that of dealing with, trash, garbage and recycling materials; servicing the pick-up of these byproducts of residential living would appear to work better from the alley than from the Dexter Avenue N.
- The live/work units need to be of sufficient size and any diminution of the size of these units through a request for design departures would not be regarded favorably. This caution was equally applicable to both the height and the depth of the provided units. In general the design should emphasize the "work" rather than the "live" nature of these street-front units.
- Since much had been made of promoting alternative modes of transportation for the residents within these units, the design development of the Dexter Avenue N. façade and adjoining streetscape should look for ways to incorporate the bus stop into the architecture.

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 Multifamily & Commercial Buildings* of highest priority to this project.

## **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

### **A Site Planning**

#### **A-1 Responding to Site Characteristic**

*The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as...unusual topography...views and other natural features.*

#### **A-2 Streetscape Compatibility**

*The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.*

#### **A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street**

*Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.*

#### **A-4 Human Activity**

*New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street*

#### **A-7 Residential Open Space**

*Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open spaces..*

The guidelines above were all chosen by the Board to be of high priority. The units appropriately stepped up the hillside to accommodate significant changes in site elevation. Human activity on the street should be promoted by the interface of sidewalk and the live/work units. Providing for vehicles entering and leaving the site should not interfere or diminish in any way the desired goal of enlivening the street. Guideline A-7 was cited to re-enforce the Board's acknowledgement that the proposed inner courtyard with lush landscaping should continue to be developed as an attractive and vital space for the residents of the project.

### **B Height, Bulk and Scale**

*Projects should be compatible...and provide for transitions*

The Board acknowledged that the overall massing of the project as shown in the preferred option seemed right for the setting and context. The interface of the live/work units and their access pathway with the residential entry and the public sidewalk should be finer tuned and should demonstrate a proper scale for clear interaction with the fronting sidewalk and public realm.

### **C Architectural Elements and Materials**

#### **C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency**

*Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept.*

#### **C-3 Human Scale**

*The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale*

The Board noted that the project should explore opportunities to achieve a good human scale, especially as it informs the specific ways the live/work units address and provide for a transition to the sidewalk.

#### ***C-4 Exterior Finish Materials***

***Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, patterns, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.***

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 both proposed colors and materials at the subsequent recommendation meeting. The modular development, the first of its kind and size, will be setting the precedent and establishing the desirable characteristics for other developments to follow.

#### ***D Pedestrian Environment***

##### ***D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances***

***Convenient and attractive access to the building's entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.***

##### ***D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities and Service Areas***

***Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible.***

##### ***D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions***

***For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and provide for a visually interesting street front for the pedestrian. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements....***

The Board thought the opening into the building aligned opposite the Hayes Street intersection was a desirable feature of the proposal as was the courtyard located at a higher level at the heart of the project. Service functions they thought should be relegated to the alley. Serious attention should be given so as not to provide too much physical or psychological separation of the live/work units from the sidewalk. Such would be detrimental to the commercial functioning of these spaces. Expression should be given to clear path-finding details and to appropriate lighting and, in particular, signage.

The design team should provide studies of the proposed pedestrian environment along the street. The applicant should be prepared to present details for a variety of streetscape and pedestrian pathway amenities, including appropriate lighting, overhead weather protection, signage and other elements calculated to generate a friendly and lively environment.

## ***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 neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.***

***E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site***  
***Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project. should reinforce the character of neighborhood properties and abutting streetscape.***

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. The design should incorporate specific treatments to provide for an attractive transition between the sidewalk and the live/work units. The Board would expect to see a comprehensive Landscape Plan, one that treats not only any on-site open space but the street's edge as well.

### **Departures from Development Standards:**

The design team noted that it had identified three departures from design standards:

- Access to parking from Dexter Avenue N. as well as from the alley (SMC 23.47A.032—would require access from the alley only);
- Live/work units less than 30 feet in depth (SMC 23.47A.008 B3a—non-residential uses at street level must extend at least an average of 30 feet and a minimum of 15 feet in depth from the street-level street-facing façade);
- Height of the live/work units less than 13 feet floor-to-floor height (SMC 23.47A. 008 B3b—requires 13 feet).

In identifying these departures from design standards, the design team noted that further design development might allow them to drop the requests for the latter two departures since these might no longer be needed for the preferred option. The Board noted that they would not be favorably disposed to granting these departures since in their view the diminution of the live/work areas would adversely affect their intended functioning. A slight lowering of the floor-to-floor height of the northernmost of the live/work units to provide for accessibility access, however, might be acceptable. The Board noted that they would be willing to entertain the granting of the request for the first departure, provided the project proceeded along the promising direction indicated at this schematic stage of design and provided the design responded to the guidelines as set forth as being of highest priority for the success of the project as well as to the other provisions provided in their guidance. In particular the

applicant must modify the garage entry to stand further to the south of the north property line, investigate narrowing the driveway, even to becoming a single aisle, and demonstrate to the Board that the routine functioning of the driveway and parking entrance would not severely adversely impact pedestrian comfort or negatively impact bicycle or vehicular safety along Dexter Avenue N.

**Staff Comments:**

It should be noted that additional design departures may be needed to construct the structure as presented as the preferred option at the Early Design Guidance meeting. These would include:

- A departure from the requirement that 60 percent of the street-level, street-facing façade be transparent between 2 and 8 feet above the sidewalk (SMC 23.47A.008 B2 a), and
- A departure from sight triangle requirements (SMC 23.54.030G).

It should also be noted that a need for additional design departures may be discovered during zoning review which will occur after MUP submittal.

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, and with design departure requests clearly identified, the proposal will be returned to the Design review Board for a Recommendation of Approval meeting.