



City of Seattle

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

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE Of AREA 7, THE CAPITOL HILL DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Date: May 21, 2008
Report Date: May 29, 2008

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Number: 3008760
Address: 1623 Bellevue Avenue
Applicant: Roger Newell, Architect
Board Members Present: Rumi Takahashi, Chair
Jason Morrow
Evan Bourquard
Sharon Sutton
Board Member Absent: Brian Cavanaugh
DPD Project Planner: Art Pederson

PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The project proposes a six story structure with approximately 22 residential units, approximately 1,200 square feet of retail space and approximately 12 parking spaces within the structure at grade. Parking access would be from Bellevue Avenue.

The project site is approximately 5,250 square feet in area (50' x 105') and on west side of Bellevue Avenue between East Pine and East Olive Streets. The site sits above the parcels to the west and is divided from them by a short distance of elevation change that extends northward.



The site is zoned Neighborhood Commercial 3 with a sixty-five foot height limit (NC 3-65) as are all surrounding parcels. A Mid-Rise zone (MR) extends to the northeast beyond the alley

across the street. The surrounding parcels are a mix of ages and sizes of multi-family structures, some containing commercial uses, such as directly across Bellevue Avenue, and an occasional early 1900's single-family structure. The site directly to the south contains a 26 unit 1960's apartment structure but is currently undergoing DPD review to allow a six-story 103 unit residential structure with street level commercial space and parking for 123 vehicles (DPD #3007778).

ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

Roger Newell, project architect, described the project objectives and what the applicant team sees as the priority guidelines. The proposal aims to provide an upgraded investment property for the owner, while providing a quality infill project that is energy efficient, increases the site's density of units, adds commercial uses at street level and upgrades the sidewalk environment.

In addition to following the City Wide Design Guidelines the project will also respond to various Pike / Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines, such as: having a large and fully glazed store front at street level, recessed doorways at street level, street landscaping and street "greening", considering the sidewalk as part of the building's open space, visual relief of the building façade through the inclusion of decks, and including lighting for safety.

Four development schemes were presented. All schemes propose a full lot ground level base / plinth with five levels of residential units above set back from all plinth facades (except for Scheme 4), and the street facing façade containing the parking and residential entrances with the remainder of the façade with commercial space.

Scheme 1, "Code Driven" would have a 40' by 98' residential tower with four units on each level in four "quadrants". The remaining area on the plinth roof would be for residential amenity area (open space). Scheme 2, "Balcony Access", would orient each level's four units to the north and south with all unit access from balconies spanning most of the north façade. A series of modulating balconies could be provided on the street façade. The benefit of the scheme is increased units size because the external access balconies are not counted toward allowed FAR (Floor Area Ratio). However, two units on each level are buried between the front and rear facing units, and thus have reduced window exposure and no frontage on either the front or rear facades. Scheme 3, would place each level's four units in a four quadrants similar to Scheme 1, but with an approximately 10-foot off set between the front and rear facades of the north and south units. This scheme would modulate the building and increase the external exposure of two of the units from two exterior walls to include a short segment of third wall. Balconies on all units would be included. Scheme 4, the applicant's preferred scheme, would again arrange each level's four units in four quadrants but modulate all facades by stepping all residential levels twice between the front and rear facades and the sides. The north and south facades would then be at or close to the same plane as the building base below to make up for the reduced floor area in the stepped portions. Individual unit decks would be included in the first set-back between the closest façade walls to the front and rear. This scheme is preferred because it would maximize the visual access to and from the building, the modulation would provide greater façade articulation and the floor lay-out would allow more 2-bedroom units.

Details of and considerations for any scheme’s further design development were then discussed in response to Board questions.

- The upper level front set-back proposed in all schemes is in response to a needed 17-foot distance between the residential units at the second levels (28-feet above grade) and the existing electrical power lines. Placing the lines below grade would cost over \$100,000. However, it could be less and possibly affordable if done in conjunction with the proposed project to the south.
- The second level front setback would likely be rimmed by a concrete planter, with this or see-through railings on the remaining sides.
- The exterior finish material would be stucco on the residential levels with stucco over concrete on the plinth level.
- There is no intention to have a design relationship with the proposed new project to the south, only a physical proximity. That project will be “chopped” into boxes, while this project aims for a substantial residential and commercial expression.
- The residential entry would be combined in the same recess as the vehicle entry to create a more spacious area; otherwise it would be at the end of a 5-foot corridor if set-back from the façade. Consideration could be given to helping it stand out by changing awing / overhead weather protection over the residential entry.
- Sharing a driveway with the proposed project to the south has not been considered because of possible easement and legal difficulties with a condominium association anticipated for that development.
- Combining the residential and commercial entries was not considered as it is not preferred.
- Although no residential parking is required in this area, it is viewed as a necessary element for unit marketability and for lender’s standards.
- Internal open space, as opposed to the proposed plinth based perimeter open space, would be infeasible as it would exceed the industry standard of 15% or less of project residential space dedicated to common area versus rentable area.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

A request was made for one *Design Departure* from Code requirements as outlined below.

SUMMARY OF DEPARTURE REQUESTS

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed Amount of Departure	Rationale for Request	Board Guidance
Sight Triangle. Two-way driveways less than 22’ wide and less than 10’ from the property line may have a 5’ by 10’ unobstructed sight triangle on that side. SMC 23.54.030.G.	Allow the building’s northeast corner column extend into the 5’ leg parallel to the sidewalk.	The small site and demands of the proposed plinth construction require a column to intrude possibly 2’ into the sight triangle. The same safety goal can be achieved by the addition of mirrors and / or warning signals.	The Board will consider this if the proposed column location is the result of a better project design alternative and appropriate safety measures are possible.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Two members of the community attended the Early Design Guidance meeting and submitted the following comments and concerns:

- The proposed project will remove an adequate apartment building that provides affordable housing and replace it with more less affordable units.
- Do not use the Hawthorne Apartments directly across Bellevue Avenue for design direction; it does not have a welcoming street presence. The building is too massive / appears “formidable” and the street level retail is hidden beneath the sidewalk awning.
- The proposed plinth with the set back structures above is not a part of the surrounding urban context.
- The proposed recessed garage entry is a possible location for crime.
- Do not agree with the Board that there will be “confusion” between the garage entry and commercial entries as proposed.
- The balconies proposed as modulation “factors” will only serve as out of context “features”; these are not typical of the favorable surrounding light-industrial context.
- There is no reference to the favorable surrounding light-industrial context in the proposed design, but should be.
- Brick should be used as a façade material.
- Consider dividing the proposed large commercial space (approximately 1,200 SF) into two areas. This is more in keeping with the areas predominant small and popular commercial spaces.
- The design proposed would destroy the urban space qualities of the street.

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 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 and Commercial Buildings*” and “*Pike / Pine Urban Center Village Design Guidelines*” of highest priority to this project.

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 acknowledges that the relatively narrow site (50’) is a limiting site condition. However, the four schemes presented do not show any exploration of alternatives to a plinth with set back tower above. Although it is in response to the required first to second level set-back from existing Seattle City Light (SCL) power lines, it does not respond to the surrounding architectural context (see C-1 below). Further design development should strongly explore alternatives to this pronounced base and set-back when responding to the remaining design guidance given.

A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street. *Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.*

Responding to this guideline could be difficult with the proposed two bay plinth and combined and recessed residential and garage entries. Combining these two entries to avoid a single and narrow residential entry is understandable, however as proposed the residential entry could become lost in the larger bay. Moving away from the strongly expressed plinth as outlined in C-2 below could provide new design options for this area. The design should also consider bringing the residential entry further toward the property line and /or creating a closer visual association with the commercial entry area. Differentiation of the canopy / overhead weather protection (OHWP) for each entry can be explored, but not fully relied upon.

A-4 Human Activity. *New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.*

The proposed recessed commercial and residential entries beneath the frame of the proposed plinth seem to hide these elements and diminish their ability to support human activity.

The one large commercial space proposed isn't in keeping with the smaller commercial spaces in this area. Dividing this into two spaces with two entries may be a better economic choice while creating a better response to this guideline.

A-6 Transition between Residence and Street. *For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.*

The proposed 10-foot garage and residential door set-backs should not create areas where pedestrian and resident safety is compromised.

A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access. *Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties and pedestrian safety.*

A limitation of a narrow site is the amount of street frontage given over to vehicle access. The Board is supportive of the proposed 10-foot driveway but directs the design to create a visually pleasing and safe vehicle entry area with a high quality door finish / design and quality surrounding materials (soffit, walls, and lighting).

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 the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.*

The Board expressed concerns about the proposed building massing (see C-2 below).

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-1 Architectural Context. *New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a*

well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

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 context.*

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, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.*

The Pike Pine Design Guidelines provide many examples of prevalent contextual building forms and materials. The proposed extensive use of stucco and a pronounced plinth are not among them.

Again, the design should re-examine the use of the plinth with tower above. The Board notes that the proposed upper level frame expression does refer to the “moment frame” auto-row structures throughout the neighborhood. However, this expression is greatly diminished by its set-back from the plinth base and the recessed street level facade within the plinth.

If the underground re-location of the SCL power lines in conjunction with the neighboring project to the south is not possible, alternative to the tower set-back should be found. A possibility may be setting back the base to be in line with the upper levels.

An examination of the quality buildings in the neighborhood should be made to see what the prevalent material choices are; brick is one. If a concrete base is pursued, it should not be covered with stucco or similar. The choice of materials should reinforce the positive “moment frame” expression. Material transitions at the building corners should be visually appropriate. If a ground level set back is pursued careful attention must be given to the choice of soffit material to assure the set-back area is visually inviting.

C-5 Structured Parking Entrances. *The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.*

See guidance in A-3, 4, 6, and 8 above. Interior garage lighting should be shielded from sidewalk and street view.

D. Pedestrian Environment

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 architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.*

See guidance in A-3, 4, 6, 8, and C-5 above.

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. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical*

units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

The applicants discussed splitting the garbage and recycling storage areas within the structure and locating the garbage / dumpster equipment by the garage door since the proposed garage entry won't permit entry of large pick-up vehicles. Any location visible from the street must be fully and attractively screened.

D-7 Personal Safety and Security. *Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.*

See guidance in A-3, 4, and 6 above.

D-10 Commercial Lighting. *Appropriate levels of lighting should be provided in order to promote visual interest and a sense of security for people in commercial districts evening hours.*

Any street level façade setback, both pedestrian and vehicle, beneath a level above should provide adequate and attractive lighting. In respect to neighboring residential structures across Bellevue Avenue, light should not trespass off site.

E. Landscaping

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.*

Any street level setback, the planting strip (if it leaves adequate sidewalk width), and any upper level terrace areas are an opportunity for quality landscaping / Green Factor elements that will provide "greening" appropriate to this urban context.

Staff Comments

After integrating the above guidance into the project design, the applicant should proceed to submit an application for the full Master Use Permit. The applicant is welcome to submit preliminary pre-MUP responses to the planner for discussion.

With the MUP submittal, include colored and shadowed elevation drawings and site/landscaping plans with plans. Include material and color samples for planner review. Finally, please inform the assigned planner when the applicant has secured a MUP intake appointment.