



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

Department of Planning & Development

D.M. Sugimura, Director

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**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE  
OF THE  
NORTHEAST SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3008906  
Address: 4554 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE  
Applicant: Jeff Bates of Shugart Bates Architects  
Date of Meeting: June 2, 2008  
Date of Report: June 10, 2008

Board Members Present: Craig Parsons, Chair  
Tom Nelson  
Tricia Reisenauer  
Sue Jensen  
Shawna Sherman

Board Members Absent: None

DPD Staff Present: Nora Gierloff, Land Use Planner

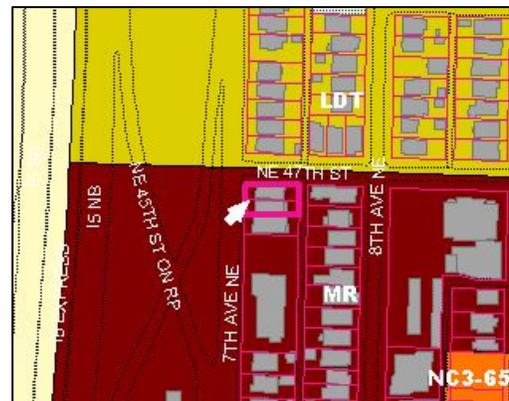
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**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant proposes a six-story apartment building with twenty-four (24) residential units and a 24 space, two story underground parking garage.

**VICINITY AND SITE**

The 6,420 sf site is located in the University District, at the southeast corner of 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE and NE 47<sup>th</sup> St. 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE is a minor arterial, and NE 47<sup>th</sup> St. is a nonarterial. There is an alley on the site's east side. The area includes curbs, sidewalks, planting strips and nearby transit stops on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NW. Parking is predominantly on-street, with limited parking located



**Figure 1.** Vicinity Zoning

off the alley or in small driveways from the street. The vicinity slopes gradually from north to south.

The site is zoned residential Midrise (MR, see Figure 1). Properties to the south of NE 47<sup>th</sup> St are also zoned MR. Land to the north of NE 47<sup>th</sup> St. is zoned residential Lowrise Duplex Triplex (LDT).

Development in the vicinity shows a gradual transition to multi-family structures from a residential neighborhood historically dominated by single family homes. To the south, residential towers built in recent decades reach or exceed the current zoning potential. Many nearby properties are relatively small and are occupied by their original homes, some of which have been converted to apartments, in varying states of repair. To the east of the site across the alley a 6-story structure containing 63 residential apartment units and parking for 95 vehicles is under construction. Directly to the south is a 3-story 9-unit apartment building (“Near U”, built in 1988) and a 10-story 96-unit apartment building administered by Seattle Housing Authority (built 1971). One block to the east are the 23-story University Plaza Condominiums, containing about 135 units. University Playfield is one block to the north.

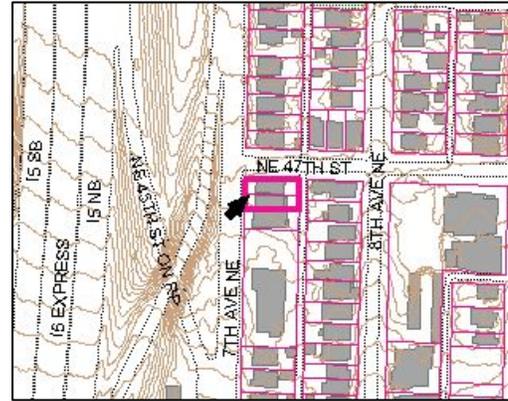
A predominant feature is Interstate 5 and its on-off ramps, located to the west of 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE. The interstate is about 15' below the average grade of this site and is therefore not immediately visible from the sidewalk. Traffic noise is quite evident, however. Metro Transit uses the west side of 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE for bus staging.

The site measures 107' by 60'. The site is generally level, and no portion of the site is designated as an Environmentally Critical Area on City maps. The site is currently occupied by two single family homes, located a few feet above sidewalk level. The remainder of the site is mostly landscaped, with mature cedar trees at the front and back of the southern house.

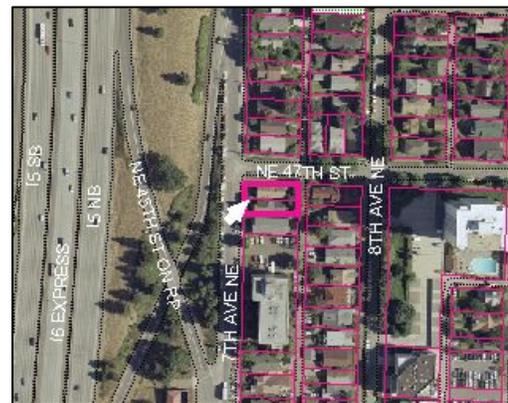
### APPLICANT’S PRESENTATION

Jeff Bates, project architect, described the site and vicinity, referring to much of the information presented above. He explained that on this tight site he wanted to create a responsive urban design that would be oriented to the views to the north and northeast and away from the freeway noise and solar gain to the west. The building massing and façade treatments would respond to these different environments.

The architect showed three alternative designs for the site.



**Figure 2.** Local topography



**Figure 3.** Aerial View

- Option 3 is the maximum building volume prescribed by the development standards of the Midrise zone.
- Option 2 shows a more creative approach to modulation with a series of three sawtooth angles along the north façade.
- Option 1, the applicant's preferred design, takes a different approach to modulation by breaking the building into a smaller rectangular western mass and a larger eastern mass that angles away from the northeast corner of the site, creating a planting area. With the street trees that would be required along 47<sup>th</sup> this would result in a double row of trees along about half of the façade. At the entry the building would be notched along the north and south facades to differentiate the rectangular section and provide a view through the building.

Options 1 and 2 show an 11.5' rear setback from the adjacent apartment building while Option 3 has the code minimum 10' setback. All options would have four units per floor and show the principal pedestrian entry on the north side, facing NE 47<sup>th</sup> St. All concepts also show vehicle access from the alley, and all have a subgrade parking structure that would occupy the entire site, lot line to lot line. Options 1 and 2 would require a departure from the modulation standards in the zoning code.

The applicant's preferred architectural expression would be modern with a loft aesthetic. At least the north facing facades are proposed to be predominantly glass. The western façade and portions of the southern façade str proposed to be more solid.

#### **CLARIFYING QUESTIONS BY THE BOARD**

*How would the pedestrian garage egress be treated at the alley/47<sup>th</sup> Street corner? A planter wall, berm and then security gate would screen the stairs.*

*Would the dumpsters be located at ground level behind the double doors? Yes, the units would also use the rear service corridor with a trash chute, compactor and dumpsters.*

*Are all of the units oriented to the north? Was there any exploration of a south orientation? Flipping the plan to have the stair and elevator core to the north would create a hard, blank edge on 47th. However 2 of the 4 units on each floor would have southern exposure though the first few floors would face the adjacent apartment building.*

*Is the client the same as the Duncan building to the east? Yes, and they would like some continuity though they intend to use different materials.*

*The bamboo proposed as a hedge along 7<sup>th</sup> and wrapping the corner to 47<sup>th</sup> may be too dense and prevent "eyes on the street".*

*How does this building compare in size to the Duncan Lofts? The Duncan site is 156'9" by 107' and has 63 units.*

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Three members of the public signed in at the Early Design Guidance meeting on June 2, 2008. The first speaker, Phillip Thiel, representing the University District neighborhood group had the following main comments:

- The developer has met twice with the neighborhood groups and listened to their concerns and suggestions.
- The alley is heavily used by pedestrians, both nearby residents and those passing through the area. Security and privacy for the residents along the alley is very important, and the low wall and landscaping shown will not be sufficient.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue is very busy due to the freeway access and use by Metro for bus layovers. Outdoor space on that frontage is unlikely to be used.
- The site is exposed to the west across the valley of the freeway to noise, wind and solar gain.
- While views to the south are attractive the strong southern sun leads people to block their windows. Views to the north are green and attractive and it makes sense to orient units to this view.
- Parking and service access off of the alley makes sense and is well handled.
- There was concern about the narrow area between the project and the apartments to the south.
- The group would support the modulation departure in order to allow the more creative approaches shown in Options 1 and 2.
- The transition in height and bulk between the LDT and MR zones along 47<sup>th</sup> is a real concern for the neighborhood. Given the size and architecture of the building setbacks on the upper floors would be almost impossible. They feel that the architects should concentrate on scale and form of the building.
- There are concerns that the small windows and unusual façade patterns shown on the design precedents page don't fit into the neighborhood context. Having significantly different façade treatments on different sides of the small building would look schizophrenic.

The manager of the Near U building clarified that it had 3 not 4 floors and was worried about the dark, narrow area between the two buildings. The architect stated that there would be approximately 16' feet between the buildings whereas the existing houses are almost on the property line.

A resident of the SHA building to the south expressed concern about the traffic generated by the proposed building being dangerous for the slow, elderly pedestrians that live there, especially when they travel along the alley. Staff said that that concern would be addressed in the SEPA review as part of the MUP process. The Chair clarified that traffic flow onto the site and the location of the garage entrance was an issue that the Board could address.

DPD also received two letters from the community, one expressing concern that one parking space per unit was inadequate and one in support of the project, architect and developer.

## **GUIDELINES**

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 of highest priority to this project, found in the City of Seattle's [Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings](#). In addition, Board members considered the project in relation to the [University Community Design Guidelines](#) (identified where appropriate).

*The applicant should address all priority guidelines and Board guidance below during the next stages of design review.*

### **A. Site Planning**

#### **A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics** (see also neighborhood guideline)

*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.*

#### **A-4 Human Activity** (see also neighborhood guideline)

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

#### **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.*

### **Guidance – Site Planning**

Given the constraints of the small site the Board did not request any changes to the preferred site plan (Option 1). They appreciated the slightly increased setback to the property to the south as allowing for better light and privacy between the residences. They agreed that alley access to the garage was the best location, however they wanted more information about grades, walls and sight triangles at the recommendation meeting.

Board members thought that the pedestrian entry and lobby would be an opportunity to activate the façade and put eyes on the street to provide for personal security of future tenants. They want the pedestrian entry to engage the sidewalk.

The Board was sensitive to the concerns expressed by the neighborhood group representative about the need for a privacy and security barrier to the alley. At the recommendation meeting they would like additional information about how the architect proposes to provide this in an attractive and durable manner.

**B. Height, Bulk & Scale**

**B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility** (see also neighborhood guideline)

*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.*

**Guidance – Height Bulk & Scale**

The Board recognized the issue of height transition from the residential lowrise zone to the residential midrise zone across NE 47<sup>th</sup> St. They also identified the challenges of designing an appropriately scaled building on a site that is relatively narrow in relation to the allowed 60' height. Board members indicated that the design's overall composition would likely play an important role in addressing concerns about height, bulk, and scale.

The Board's consensus was for the architect to stay away from eroding the building at the top because the building scale is too small for it to be effective. The angle shown on Option 1 would provide an "erosion" along the full height of the building along the most sensitive adjacency. The location of the building on a corner provides a built-in separation from the LDT zoning.

Overall the Board was most supportive of the "big move" in Option 1, but thought that some gesture to break up that angled north façade such as shown in Option 2 could be effective. They encouraged the use of articulation, recesses, protrusions, breaking the façade into vertical bays (as in Option 2) and other architectural devices to achieve an appropriate scale. There was concern about the nighttime appearance of a predominantly glass north façade and the suggestion that breaking it into segments or providing fins or vertical screens might reduce the amount that was visible from any one location. The Board was supportive of the architect's suggestion that a minor setback of the top floor on the north and east sides combined with a material change could be effective in reducing the scale.

**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 context.*

**C-4 Exterior Finish Materials** (see also neighborhood guideline)

*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.*

**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.*

### **Guidance – Architectural Elements and Materials**

Overall the Board appreciated the bold massing gestures proposed by the architects. They felt that Option 1 embodied a clear diagrammatic response to the constraints of the site. They emphasized that the other design decisions made by the architects must support that concept.

The Board thought that there was justification for different façade treatments based in an environmental response to the site conditions (noise, solar gain). However given the small scale of the building they were concerned that it could appear too eclectic and not present a unified appearance. They thought that while it will be a fine balance to strike it is important for the project to read as one building, possibly through material use and scale of the windows.

While Board members thought highly of the buildings that the architect selected as inspiration they were concerned that the context of the site did not support such an industrial aesthetic. They thought there could be an opportunity to use an environmental response as inspiration instead. Colors could be used to move away from that industrial expression.

The Board was excited about the lobby space providing a view through the building, emphasizing the break between the two parts of the structure.

## **D. Pedestrian Environment**

### **D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances** (see also neighborhood guideline)

*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-2 Blank Walls**

*Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.*

### **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.*

### **D-7 Personal Safety and Security**

*Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.*

#### **D-8 Treatment of Alleys**

*The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.*

#### **Guidance – Pedestrian Environment**

The Board wanted to see additional detail about the alley access and security at the recommendation meeting. They would like to see site sections in areas with grade changes, verification of the sight triangle at the garage entrance, and larger scale graphics.

The Board would like to see the architects develop an approach to providing ground level privacy and security without blank walls. One boardmember suggested use of attractive metal fencing with climbing plants to provide privacy without a hard edge.

The Board wanted the architects to explore using the residential lobby to activate the street front. While 24 residents wouldn't justify a large space it could be designed to create an active node in the building.

The Board expressed concern about how blank the southern wall might become if the units were all oriented to the north and east. They also wanted the more solid southern wall to appear as part of the same building as the extensively glazed northern façade.

#### **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.*

#### **Guidance – Landscaping**

Board members agreed that incorporating at-grade landscaping is important to the design's successful integration into the surrounding neighborhood. They directed that the next presentation should provide more detail about the retaining walls, planting areas and plants sized to the available depth of the planting areas over the parking garage. Required street trees along NE 47<sup>th</sup> St would be appropriately complemented with plantings along the site's north side.

#### **DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departure was requested:

- 1. MODULATION (SMC 23.45.054):** The applicant proposes a development standard departure to modify the façade modulation requirements of the MR zone.

The Board indicated that they would be inclined towards the departure request in order to allow the more creative building massing shown in Options 1 and 2. They were most supportive of the “big move” in Option 1, but thought that some gesture to break up that angled north façade such as shown in Option 2 could be effective. The Board will be very interested in the treatment of the north façade and how the design will be sensitive to the neighborhood to the north. However, the Board’s recommendation on the requested departure will be reserved until the final Board meeting and will be based upon the departure’s potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure.

**Supportive of departure as shown in Options 1 or 2**

**Summary of Requested Departure**

<b>STANDARD</b>	<b>REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>BOARD DIRECTION</b>
Midrise Modulation 23.45.054	Facades over 40’ long require an 8’ x 10’ inset	Applicant proposes an angled façade with a 12.5’ average setback	The Board was supportive of this design direction and wished to see it further developed at a recommendation meeting

**STAFF COMMENTS & NEXT STEPS:**

**MUP Application:**

1. Submit an application for Master Use Permit (MUP). Please call Nora Gierloff (at **206-684-8125**) when you have scheduled your MUP intake appointment with the Applicant Services Center.
2. Include a written response to the guidance provided in this EDG report and Attachment B to CAM 328. Include a discussion of how the proposed departure would help the project meet the design guideline priorities, information gained from subsequent meetings with community groups and coordination efforts with SDOT.
3. Plan on embedding 11x17 colored and shadowed elevations, landscape and right-of-way improvement plans into the front of the MUP plan set (4 per sheet). Label sheets “DR-1”, “DR-2”, etc.
4. Provide graphic illustrations, including 3-D colored graphics, drawings, or models, to demonstrate the design response to the priority guidelines and guidance.
5. Provide colored landscaping plans indicating size, species, and placement of all vegetation, as well as any special treatment (sidewalks or otherwise).

**Recommendation Meeting:**

6. Please submit a color and materials board
7. Submit a conceptual lighting plan.
8. The Board would like to review details of the vehicular and pedestrian entrance/exit to the garage.
9. Plan on working with the planner in developing a successful design response in a timely manner to allow review by the planner of a draft 11x17 design proposal, updating of the proposal packet and mailing of packets to the Board.
10. A Recommendation meeting will not be scheduled until an initial zoning review is completed.
11. Plan on sending in a digital PDF file of the final proposed packet per instructions on [www.seattle.gov/designreview](http://www.seattle.gov/designreview) .

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