



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

Department of Planning & Development

D.M. Sugimura, Director

**FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE
DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3008920

Address: 1900 8th Avenue

Applicant: Barry Aaronson and Kate Diamond, NBBJ
for Schnitzer West

Meeting date: September 23, 2008
Report date: December 23, 2008

Board members present: Matt Allert
Dana Behar
Marta Falkowska, Chair
Dan Foltz, Substitute
Kelly Mann

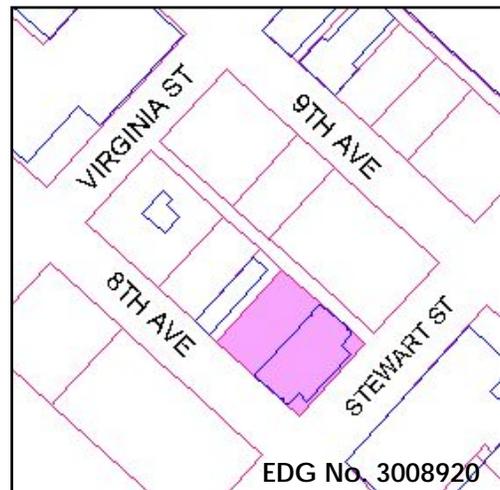
Board members absent: James Falconer
Wilmot Gilland

DPD staff present: Lisa Rutzick, Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY DESCRIPTION

The subject site, zoned Downtown Office Core 2 with a 500 foot height limit for non-residential use (DOC 2 – 500’/300’-500’), is a corner lot located on the southwest corner of the block. The site is bounded by Eighth Avenue on the west, the alley to the east, Stewart to the south and an ongoing project under construction (1918 Eighth, DPD Project # 3004017) to the north.

The DOC 2 zone continues to the south and east of the subject site. Across 9th Avenue to the east, the zone



EDG No. 3008920

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changes to Downtown Mixed Commercial (DNC 340'/290'-400') and to the north across Virginia, it changes to Downtown Mixed Commercial (DNC 240'/290'-400'). Development and use in the vicinity includes a variety of uses and structures, including high-rise structures for residences, office uses, a Federal Courthouse, institutions and other uses characteristic of those found in the Central Business District.

The site is marked by changes in elevation along both the surrounding rights of way and the alley. A four-foot drop in elevation occurs from east to west along Stewart Street with a similar grade change on the north of the site. A slightly greater grade change occurs south to north along the alley and along 8th Avenue.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposal includes demolition of an existing structure and the construction of a new building. The new structure would be a ten story office building with ground level retail uses, below grade parking for 220 stalls. The new building is proposed to be an expansion of the 1918 Eighth Ave building that is currently under construction (DPD Project # 3004017) and will be a 36-story office tower to the north with the floor plates connecting at corresponding levels. The existing five-story building is proposed to be demolished.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE: MAY 6, 2008

DESIGN PRESENTATION

Three schemes were presented – all of which included an office program and ground floor retail with almost 100% lot coverage. All of the schemes involved departures from the development standards.

1. Option 1 proposed an addition to the existing 1918 8th Avenue project currently under construction, which included an eleven (11) story square tower above a ground floor base with a traditional alley; a narrower gasket connecting the tower to the existing project. This scheme would share MEP systems and elevator core with the 1918 Eighth Project for energy efficiency purposes. Additionally, it would share the 1918 parking entrance/exit at Virginia to minimize curb cuts and will expand the existing parking floors.
2. Option 2, the preferred scheme, was also an addition to the existing 1918 Eighth Avenue project currently under construction and included an eleven (11) story rectangular tower above ground floor retail. The alley was pulled back and made wider to allow for a more pedestrian friendly plaza leading to a secondary building entrance off Stewart, as well as a drop off valet. This option would include a landscaped roof-top terrace. The scheme would share MEP systems and elevator core with the 1918 Eighth Project for energy efficiency purposes. Additionally it would share the 1918 parking entrance/exit at Virginia to minimize curb cuts and will expand the existing parking floors.
3. Option 3 proposed a fourteen (14) story, freestanding square tower with its own, independent MEP systems and elevator core as well as garage entry off the alley.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS: SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

DESIGN PRESENTATION

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board discussed at length the design of the alley along the east side of the subject site. Of particular interest is the relationship between pedestrian circulation and points of entry at the alley, the proposed development with the new building across the alley and the connection between the sidewalk and entry areas.

The architects expressed that a primary design goal of the project is to create an addition that relates to the development's adjacent buildings but express an individuality that is befitting of a prominent urban location. This is achieved by using systems, materials, and details that are either taken literally from, or inspired by, the adjacent buildings. These elements are assembled into a unique 'box' and 'lantern' composition set upon a common 'base' design.

The proposed overall massing shows further evolution from the preferred massing scheme shown at the EDG presentation. At the Recommendation meeting, additional information regarding the proposed open spaces, landscaping, façade treatment and lighting was presented.

The project is shown to relate to the surrounding neighborhood in function, scale, design, and materials. The design includes a site plan that shows the consistent relationship of the proposed streetscapes to the surrounding buildings, and the relationship to the courthouse plaza; the overall placement of street level retail, building entrances, and parking entrance on the block; the commons plan shows the important entry link through the addition to the commons (The commons provides tenant amenities and is the point of elevator access to the upper floors of the building); and the open space associated with the 1918 8th Avenue project that was previously located at the third level has been moved to the roof level of 1900 8th Avenue to accommodate the building addition.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately six members of the public attended the Final Recommendation meeting. No public comment was offered.

DESIGN GUIDELINE 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 following siting and design guidance and identified by letter and number found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development* of highest priority to this project.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Respond to the physical environment. Develop an architectural concept and compose the building's massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site.

The Board discussed that design of the proposed building should strive to appear as a free-standing building whose shorter height provides relief from the taller surrounding buildings of the block. The open space notch shown in Option 1 works well provided it does not compete with the main building entrances.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board discussed the overall building massing and architectural elements. The Board was very pleased with the character of the design that borrows and translates elements of the buildings to the north and east of the proposed development. The Board was very supportive of the elegant, glassy and light lantern element at the corner, as well as the setting back along the alley to create a more generous alley width and entry spaces. The Board applauded the restrained building architecture that incorporates lighter vertical spandrels that differs from the adjacent new buildings to the north and east, while still using architectural materials that are of a similar palette to these other two buildings. The vertical spandrels are delicate and of a different proportion than the vertical features of the adjacent buildings. The majority of the extruded curtain wall elements are either taken directly from, or closely related to, the details in the adjacent projects.

A-2 Enhance the skyline. Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.

The Board noted that the views of the rooftop design, mechanical equipment, penthouses and roof level landscaping will be highly visible from neighboring building and should be designed with this in mind.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board was pleased with the use of trees and landscaping defining and serving as the building top. The Board recommended that the extending plantings to the alley side (eastern portion) of the roof top to offer the same sense of definition along the east façade.

B. Height, Bulk, and Scale

B-1 Respond to the neighborhood context. Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighborhood.

The Board would like to better understand the open spaces and development that is occurring on the entire block.

B-3 Reinforce the positive urban form & architectural attributes of the immediate area. Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development.

The Board was particularly interested in the building form and how it will relate to the rest of the block and greater context.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board was supportive of the variety of open spaces located at the sidewalk, alley and rooftop. In addition, the developer has commitments to provide green street enhancements for two blocks along 9th Avenue, between Lenora Street and Stewart Street. The sidewalk open spaces were designed to build a relationship between the open space of the project and that of the Courthouse by including a wider sidewalk that creates a transition between the standard sidewalk and the larger space of the courthouse plaza. Also, the widened sidewalk along 8th Avenue provides relief the somewhat severe solid base of the Courthouse on 8th Avenue, while also enhancing the public realm.

Along 8th Avenue, the elevation shows the retail base that is carried over from the 1918 8th Avenue project to the north. On top of that base is the glassy ‘lantern’ element with column articulations that retain the scale of the adjacent building’s narrow vertical pre-cast elements. Topping the ‘lantern’ is an allee of trees on the roof, which acts as a capping element for the composition. The glassy character of the lantern is enhanced by raising the interior ceiling height at the perimeter to eleven feet, reducing the horizontal spandrel panels at each floor to a narrow two feet deep.

On Stewart Street, the elevation most directly shows the overall building composition of a ‘lantern’ adjacent to a more solid ‘box’. The double height retail space along this street is clearly expressed. The ‘box’ is a more opaque façade, with smaller glazed openings as necessitated by the energy code, to balance the more open composition of the lantern. The ‘box’ and ‘lantern’ elements are placed on the pedestrian-friendly base of a pre-cast colonnade and transparent retail frontage.

The alley elevation shows the relationship of the Stewart Street entry directly to the common interior space, as well as the valet parking area.

B-4 Design a well-proportioned & unified building. Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.

The Board was supportive of the “knuckle” concept between the proposed building and the 1918 Eighth Avenue building. They agreed that the glassy, open connection would be

an appropriate design concept to pursue. The Board discussed and felt strongly that this proposed building should not appear as an addition to the 1918 Eighth Avenue building, rather it should have a distinct character of its own.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board noted that the “knuckle” portion of the west elevation that abuts the building to the north was generally well-executed, but might benefit from further simplification of the base of the element to provide this link between the new building and the abutting building to the north.

C. Architectural Elements

- C-1 Promote pedestrian interaction. Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming, and open to the public.**

The Board specified that they will be very interested in a strong retail design at the ground level, especially at the corner. The corners of both the alley and the street should be specifically designed to ground the building and attract active retail uses.

The Board agreed that combining the proposed building with the 1918 Eighth Avenue building is advantageous in that the elevator provisions are accounted for in the other building, allowing the retail uses and spaces to be more flexible.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board felt that the corner lantern element that overhangs the sidewalk is a dramatic feature. The lighting design relates the project to the adjacent buildings by reincorporating the ‘crown’ lighting concept with façade mounted uplights and reusing the canopy mounted down-light details to create a consistent pedestrian experience along both edges of the block.

- C-4 Reinforce Building Entries. To promote pedestrian comfort, safety and orientation, reinforce the building entrance.**

The Board was particularly interested in how the entries off of the alley, as well as the alley space will be treated, to create a gracious, elegant space. The Board noted that both the alley entrance, as well as the street entrances should be treated equally as the front doors if the preferred scheme is pursued.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board liked that individual retail entries could be designed at the street level. The Board also agreed that the provision and connections between the retail, lobbies and interior spaces are a welcoming concept that promotes pedestrian interaction.

- C-5 Encourage overhead weather protection. Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit, overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes.**

C-6 Develop the alley facade. To increase pedestrian safety, comfort and interest, develop portions of the alley facade in response to the unique conditions of the site or project.

The Board looks forward to an alley design that is innovative and offers a unique element that contributes to the pedestrian environment.

The Board noted that this guideline is particularly important because the vehicle entry and drop off functions off the alley will make this an active, visible place that should be enhanced. See also C-4.

At the next meeting, the Board will be interested in the organization and functionality of the parking access and service areas. The Board agreed that vehicular access off of Virginia is desirable provided that studies of the traffic and parking show that the anticipated volume can be supported with this single access point.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board enthusiastically supports the garage entry design at the alley, which is setback from the sidewalk and hidden beyond the pedestrian entry points.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space. Design public open spaces to be visually pleasing, safe and active environment for residents, workers and pedestrians. Views or solar access to the principal are of the open space should be especially emphasized.

The Board agreed that the open space at ground level should relate to the retail uses. The Board agreed that some combination of the open space plans shown in Options 1 and 2 would be most appropriate to the site – creating both ground and roof level open spaces.

The Board also discussed the long, unrelenting wall of the courthouse across the street to the west. Given this monolithic structure on the west side of Stewart, it is even more critical that the building face along the east side, including the subject site, be broken and modulated to provide relief and visual interest. The Board did agree that the configuration of the courthouse plaza area should lend cues as to how the streetscape and ground level open space are designed and that the two sites should relate. The generous courthouse plaza creates an opportunity for the proposed building to draw pedestrians down the street with wide sidewalks, landscaping and strong retail.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board liked the relationship of the landscape design at the sidewalk level with the landscaped open space at the courthouse across 8th Avenue to the west. On 8th Avenue, the landscape site plan shows existing trees, planting beds, and benches along the sidewalk. The building along 8th Avenue has been setback an additional 3'-0" beyond the required sidewalk dedication. On Stewart Street, the sidewalk has existing trees and planting beds, and is activated

with outdoor café seating of a potential restaurant use. The building along Stewart Street has been set back an additional 9'-2" beyond the required sidewalk dedication. Along the alley, the plaza-like sidewalk finishes extend down the alley and the planting in this area creates a comfortable experience for the Stewart Street entry to the common interior space and valet parking area. The highly visible landscape roof plan includes a variety of occupied spaces available to tenants of the building. A key feature of the rooftop design is the allee of trees along the 'lantern' portion of the building. This gesture seeks to improve the roof garden experience, as well as act as a cornice of the 'lantern' seen from street level.

- D-2 Enhance the Building with Landscaping.** Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping, which includes special pavements, trellis, screen walls, planters and site furniture, as well as living plant material.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board recommended that the pedestrian entry at the alley be further emphasized to create a more welcoming and obvious entry. The Board was very pleased with the generous width given to the alley, but agreed that further emphasis of the entry area would improve the functionality and perception of this alley concept. The elevator lobby providing ADA access should be better signed and articulated to create a more gracious entry. The Board recommended that the lobby space become wider and include greater transparency to achieve this sense of entrance at the alley level. The Board also recommended that the high quality ground level materials shown on the street facing facades should wrap around to the alley and extend at least as deep as the far edge of the elevator lobby. These materials include the pre-cast granite base, etc.

- D-3 Provide elements that define the place.** Provide special elements on the facades, within public open spaces, or on the sidewalk to create a distinct, attractive, and memorable "sense of place" associated with the building.

The Board felt that the alley façade and program should include elements that define the space and create an identifiable character.

E. Landscaping

- E-3 Minimize the Presence of Service Areas.** Locate service areas for trash dumpsters, loading docks, mechanical equipment and the like away from the street where possible. Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.

The Board will be very interested in how the open space is distributed throughout the project site and encouraged the open space to be located at the sidewalk and plaza levels for the greatest pedestrian and community benefit.

The Board discussed that the alley will be in shadow from the proposed building and if the intent is to make a welcoming, active entrance off the alley, then consideration of the solar exposure is important. Maximizing light to the alley entrance area will be critical to the landscaping and comfort of the space.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board confirmed that the garage ventilation was screened from pedestrian views.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

At the time of the Recommendation meeting, the following departures were briefly discussed:

1. HEIGHT OF OVERHEAD PROTECTION (SMC 23.49.018.A and D):

Continuous overhead weather protection is required along the entire street frontage between a minimum of ten feet and a maximum of 15 feet above the sidewalk with a minimum horizontal extension of eight feet. The proposed design includes canopies that are higher than 15 feet above sidewalk on both street frontages. The change in canopy height is related to the change in sidewalk elevation to a maximum of four feet, six inches above sidewalk grade.

The Board agreed that this design responds appropriately to the existing topography and voted unanimously in favor of the proposed departure. (B-3, C-1)

2. FAÇADE SETBACK LIMITS (SMC 23.49.056.B):

The Code required that the facade be located within two feet of the property line, except that setbacks larger than two feet shall be limited to 40% of the façade for Type 1 pedestrian streets. The proposed design includes a greater setback area along both streets. On Stewart Street, the setback is nine feet, six inches for a total 62% setback of the façade. On Eighth Avenue, the façade is setback two feet, four inches for a 100% total façade setback.

The Board agreed that the proposed design creates a more generous, wider sidewalk and streetscape environment that responds to the context to the courthouse to the west and creates a more spacious and welcoming street presence for pedestrian circulation and voted unanimously in favor of the proposed departure. (B-4, D-1)