



City of Seattle

Michael McGinn, Mayor
Department of Planning & Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**DESIGN REVIEW RECOMMENDATION
OF
THE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (AREA 7)
June 22, 2009
Notes available: July 13, 2010**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3009393
Address: 901 Stewart Street
Applicant: Kimberly McKittrick, SMR Architects, for Gethsemane Lutheran Church
Board members present: Brian Scott (Chair)
Jan Frankina
Gabe Grant
Sheri Olson
Board member absent: Pragnesh Parikh
Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Downtown development site is bounded by Stewart Street on the north, 9th Avenue on the west, by the multistoried Regence office Express building to the south and an alley on the east. Included within the development site and occupying the southernmost portion is the existing nave of Gethsemane Lutheran Church, constructed in 1954. An attached office and service wing, added in 1960, occupies the northern portion of the site.

The current nave is to be kept and renovated; the rest of the church complex is to be demolished. A new, seven-story structure with five floors of workforce housing over church offices and congregation spaces will be constructed on the northern portion of the site.



The site and surrounding area to the north, east and south is zoned for high-rise development (DMC 340) with even higher height limits allowable across 9th Avenue to the south (DOC2-500).

Most of the structures in the immediate vicinity, except for the Greyhound Bus Station to the south where a fifty-story hotel has been recently proposed, have been built in the past 20 years.

The residential portion of the new structure will contain consist of 50 studio, one bedroom and two bedroom units. No parking is required or proposed for the project.

Stewart Street is a class one pedestrian street. 9th Avenue is a designated Green Street with special street level requirements.

ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

Members of the development team had described, at the Early Design Guidance meeting, a project which was intended to reinvigorate an existing community of believers, members of the Gethsemane Lutheran Church, by creating 50 units of workforce housing above a new base of church office and service spaces, interconnected to an existing nave and basement homeless shelter that would be renovated in the process. The housing would be provided through an affiliation with LATCH, with the assistance of Office of Housing funding.

While SMR Architects would be designing the housing portion of the project, OSKA Architects would be commissioned with the design of the new church-related spaces at the first two levels, together with the renovation of the existing nave. At the Early Design Guidance meeting, Bob Jakubik of OSKA had briefly explained the plan for the church portion of the development, which would not be subject to the design review process: the existing nave would remain and be connected to new church facilities on two lower floors totaling approximately 12,000 square feet and basement space of some 6,700 square feet. The presentation at the Early Design Guidance meeting was given over to various options for the housing portion of the project, which would be comprised of five stories above the two-story church base.

Jim Olson of OSKA made the presentation on behalf of the design team at the Recommendation meeting which was held in the Boards and Commissions Room, City Hall, at 5:30 PM on Tuesday, June 22, 2010. The preferred scheme differed from that presented at the Early Design Guidance meeting in several particulars. The new structure northwest of the existing sanctuary was a simple rectangular box, devoid of the overhangs and appendages that had characterized the "preferred" scheme shown at the Early Design Guidance meeting. This box was said to respect the proportions of the existing sanctuary building. Likewise, the box's covering was comprised of a textile weave that picked up the colors of the existing sanctuary building, with a predominant cruciform pattern that united horizontal and vertical bands into the unified whole, variously conceived as tapestry, garment, or vestment.

The theme of the textile weave was re-enforced on the rooftop façade where plantings were integrated with open spaces provided for the residents of the building. As had been portrayed in the conceptual renderings shown at the Early Design Guidance meeting, two prominent features of the existing church would be relocated to the newer building. These were the Christus statue, now near the corner of 9th Avenue and Stewart Street, which would be relocated near the new Church entry on Stewart Street and the plain metal cross now partially above the campanile, scheduled for demolition, which would be relocated to a similar alignment on the stair tower facing onto Stewart Street.

Two other dominant themes informing the design were those of “beacon”—windows in the new corner chapel glow with light through reddish and yellow handcrafted glass—and “garden.” The chapel opens onto a garden that provides an entry from 9th Avenue. Gethsemane, the place of the olive press, was the olive grove or garden where Jesus went to pray with his disciples the night before his crucifixion.

Following the presentation, which also focused on the response to the principal directives that the Board had given at the earlier meeting, Kimberly McKittrick of SMR Architects presented and explained the departures from development standards that the design team was requesting. These were four in number: two involved the overhead weather protection (OWP), one requesting a break in the OWP to allow for space for the Kristus statue (SMC 23.49.018A)--referred to at the EDG meeting as the “give Jesus a break, Departure,” and one to allow a portion of the OWP to be higher than 15 feet above the sidewalk (SMC 23.49.018D). A third departure was requested to allow for some street-level façade glazing in colored glass that would not meet the requirements for “transparency” (SMC 23.49.056C). A fourth requested departure would be needed since the proposed structure would not be set back along 9th Avenue, a designated Green Street, as required by Code (SMC 23.49.058 F,2).

Following the design team’s presentation, the Board members asked a few clarifying questions prior to opening the meeting to public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Eight members of the public affixed their names to the sign-in sheet provided at the meeting. One member of the public, who at the Early Design Guidance meeting had questioned whether the “boxes” then presented were really the best solution to the challenge of maintaining a physical presence at that spot that was overwhelmed with and literally overshadowed by buildings of immense height, expressed a sentiment shared among other members of the public and the Board members: because of a series of fine design decisions, the “box” had become an “elegant box,” capable of holding its own at that location.

BOARD’S DELIBERATIONS

After engaging in a Q. and A. session regarding some of the programmatic considerations of the design, the Board began deliberations by voicing positive reactions to the design as presented. Each of the Board members present complimented the design team on the design and expressed appreciation for the steps taken to address concerns that had been earlier expressed regarding elements of the design. The Board members were agreed that these steps had produced a level of elegance and had elevated the status of the small building to the point where it could hold its own vis-à-vis the much larger structures in the neighborhood. At the Early Design Guidance meeting the Board had pointed to a lack of firm integration between the top and bottom of the new structure. The Board found a clear sense of integration between the bottom and the top as well as between the various facades in the current design.

That said, there were two areas where the Board urged the design team to exercise even greater refinement. The first concerned the cladding of the structure and the textured “weave” effect. More than one member of the Board strongly urged the design team to take an extra step and

explore changes in materials and joinery, suggesting a bas-relief, that might provide even greater perceptibility to the weave. A second area of concern was a desired refinement to the residential entry. One Board member suggested that the signage showed a “weakness in the design.” The Board urged the design team to work for a greater sense of welcoming and to take the entry “up another step” (figuratively, not literally).

Departures from Development Standards:

The Board also agreed that the four requested departures (see above) were in keeping with the Early Design Guidance and guideline priorities and would result in a building that would better meet the intent of those guidelines.