



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: March 18, 2009
Report Date: April 9, 2009**

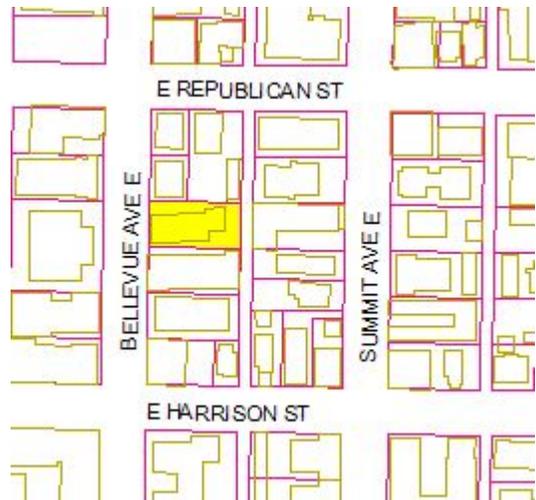
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Number: 3009804
Address: 418 Bellevue Avenue East
Applicant: Neal Thompson, Architect with the firm Roger Newell, Architect
Board Members Present: Rumi Takahashi, Chair
Jason Morrow
Evan Bourquard
Sharon Sutton
Brian Cavanaugh
DPD Land Use Planner: Art Pederson

PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The project proposes a six and one-half story structure with approximately 42 residential units and below grade structured parking for 39 vehicles. Parking access is proposed through a *Design Departure* to be from Bellevue Avenue.

The project site is approximately 7,189 square feet in area (60' x 119') and on east side of Bellevue Avenue East between East Harrison and East Republican Streets. The site is at the Bellevue Avenue street grade but approximately 16 feet below the alley surface grade.



The site is zoned Midrise (MR), which has a 60 foot base height limit. The surrounding parcels and neighborhood are also zoned MR. The surrounding uses are almost exclusively multi-story

multi-family structures of a variety of ages. The site is within the Capitol Hill Urban Center Village Overlay, but not within the Capitol Hill Station Area Overlay District.

A previously approved development proposal for the site (eight townhouses with 14 parking spaces) has been cancelled by the developer (Master Use Permit [MUP] 3003324 approved through Administrative Design Review May 2006).

ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

Neal Thompson, project architect, described the site context and character, what the applicant team sees as constraints on designing a project compatible with the surrounding existing development and the site characteristics because of some Midrise Zone development standards (see *Design Departure* discussion below), and presented five design schemes.

The architect described the surrounding context as a largely multi-family area (very little remaining single family structures), with most of the structures at about 4 stories. There is very little on-site parking for the existing multi-family structures. The site has little opportunity for significant solar access due to the four story structure to the south and limited views to downtown, Seattle Center and Olympics due to the six-story structure across Bellevue Avenue to the west. The site's main challenge is the approximately 16 foot elevation change between the lot now and the alley due to its impact on vehicle access and the ability to include units in the rear but at the first and second levels relative to Bellevue Avenue. Another challenge is the maximum building width and depth restriction and minimum set-back requirements that together limit lot coverage. The lot coverage limit, in the applicant's view, restricts the ability to create a building massing that is compatible with the surrounding building forms and adversely affects the development economics.

Scheme Five, the applicant's preferred scheme, was presented first. It would require six Design Departures (see table below), which include "major" modulation in lieu of the required modulation, would continue the Design Departure for street vehicle access previously granted under the previous MUP and reduce the average side set-back to 3.5 feet (Planner Note: post meeting review revealed 8 Design Departures would be necessary). Street access would however push the floors up one-half level plus and still result in no street facing street level units but provide street facing units at the buildings first level approximately 6-feet above the sidewalk grade. The resulting ground level blank wall could be concealed by a landscaped berm, however. The pedestrian entry would be on the building's north side above where the driveway is fully below grade. The pedestrian walkway would extend along the north property boundary and be parallel to the driveway. Building materials being considered would include rain screen panels, metal panels, and green screens. This scheme is sought because the ability to achieve a more compatible design through the requested Design Departures.

Scheme One, the Code complying scheme (not requiring any Design Departures) showed a proposed building massing in relation to the surrounding context. According to the architect, the draw-backs of this scheme are the narrow and long building mass with overly large side set-backs, a driveway ramp between the alley and proposed below grade parking that would be extremely steep due to the elevation change, and, as a consequence of the driveway ramp, prevent the inclusion of any street facing street level units on the first level.

Scheme Two is similar to Scheme One in its form, but proposes vehicle access from the street. The driveway proposed would be 10-feet in width in order to reduce impacts on the pedestrian environment. Street access here would also push the floors up one-half level plus and still result in no street facing street level units but provide street facing units at the buildings first level approximately 6-feet above the sidewalk grade. Design Departures would be required for vehicle street access, reduced sight triangle, and a portion of the building in the side set-back (the driveway ramp).

“Scheme Three” was the plan permitted under the previous MUP and was presented to show how street vehicle access could result in a better site design.

Scheme Four was similar to Scheme Five but included alley access. It was presented to show the extent of ramping required with alley access, the preferred building massing, and that only one street facing unit could be provided at the first level (which is also 6-feet above the sidewalk grade).

The following details were also presented in response to Board questions:

- The pedestrian access close to the vehicle access is because the building’s north side set-back is greater than on the south side. A bigger entry area is possible this way, in contrast to placing it in the middle of the site / building. This also allows for the largest amount of landscaping by the entry.
- The materials would mimic Capitol Hill’s predominate color of brick, but brick is not proposed at this time.
- The applicant’s assume the public might prefer alley vehicle access, but this would make the project difficult to work for the anticipated program.
- The parking proposed is less than the standard Code requirement because parking for a “ZIP” car would be provided.
- Alley access would require approximately 120 lineal feet of driveway ramp.
- The increased lot coverage does result in an increased number of units.
- The Design Departure requests for increased lot coverage, reduced side setbacks, and increased building depth are so the project can match the width and scale of neighboring buildings.
- To respond to the neighborhood materials and colors, in lieu of using brick, “earth tone” colors would be used, such as reds. The spacing between the rain screen panels would emulate the reveals of brick masonry.
- The expected direction for the design and choice of materials is not an attempt to match the neighborhood aesthetic, but it does not seek to create too much contrast.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

A request was made for six *Design Departures* from Code requirements as outlined below. Following additional review, two additional *Design Departures* would be required for the proposal.

SUMMARY OF DEPARTURE REQUESTS

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed Amount of Departure	Rationale for Request	Board Guidance
<p>Lot Coverage (Exceptions to Maximum Depth Requirements). Total lot coverage cannot be greater than allowed with maximum width, depth and minimum setbacks. (SMC 23.45.052.B.2.a)</p>	<p>Increase maximum allowed of 42% (3,037 S.F.) to 62% (4,451 S.F.).</p>	<p>This would also allow a more flexible building footprint, the creation of a landscaped open space area by the main pedestrian entry and to provide an open space area at the rear of the building.</p>	<p>The Board feels the increase is excessive in light of the design proposed.</p>
<p>Structure Depth. May exceed 65% of lot depth (77.87') if total lot coverage is not greater than with standard building width, depth and setbacks. (SMC 23.45.52.B.2.a)</p>	<p>Allow a 109.75' building depth.</p>	<p>This would also allow a more flexible building footprint and creation of a landscaped open space area by the main pedestrian entry and to provide an open space area at the rear of the building.</p>	<p>The Board feels the increase is excessive in light of the design proposed.</p>
<p>Modulation. Front: Minimum 6' depth w/ 60 S.F. decks. Sides: Based on amount of structure length > 65% lot depth. (SMC 23.45.054)</p>	<p>Front: Provide only 4' depth with < 60 S.F. decks. Sides: Increase from 40' maximum to 65' 10".</p>	<p>This would allow for flexibility in the unit floor plans.</p>	<p>Applicant has not demonstrated how it would make design better respond to the design guidelines and must do so with design guidance given.</p>
<p>Side Setback. Based on structure depth and height. Here: 16' average, 9' minimum. (SMC 23.45.056)</p>	<p>Provide 9.8' average, 5' minimum for building above garage base.</p>	<p>This would allow for flexibility in the unit floor plans.</p>	<p>Applicant has not demonstrated how it would make design better respond to the design guidelines and must do so with design guidance given.</p>

Land Use Code Standard	Proposed Amount of Departure	Rationale for Request	Board Guidance
Side Setback. Based on structure depth and height. Here: 16' average, 9' minimum (SMC 23.45.056)	Portions of the base (parking garage) above grade.	This would allow flexibility in providing underground parking with the site's topographic constraints.	Applicant has not demonstrated how it would make design better respond to the design guidelines and must do so with design guidance given.
Open Space. When structure depth > than 65' and lot area > 7,000 S.F. open space increases from 25% to 30%. (SMC 23.45.52.B.2.b)	20% proposed at EDG meeting.	(Planner Note: Not presented as a departure at meeting; but necessary for design proposed.)	No Board guidance.
Vehicle Access. From improved alley when abutting property. (SMC 23.45.060.B.1)	Vehicle access from Bellevue Avenue.	Alley access would result in a worst project design due to the site's topographic constraints.	The Board commented that the constraints of the proposed unit count and arrangement seems to drive this request. This can only be considered after provision of the thorough analysis requested in this document.
Sight Triangle. 10' x 10' triangular area on each side of driveway. 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.	Amount of reduction to be determined based on project design, but anticipated due to narrow site and goal of minimizing visual driveway width / impact on pedestrian environment.	A reduction will minimize the visible impact of a driveway on the pedestrian environment and result in a more compatible design.	The Board will consider this if street access is the best design alternative.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

- It appears the request for street access is only to increase the number of possible units.
- The proposed building height in conjunction with the reduced side setbacks will block views and light from some units of the apartment building to the north. Although the

upper levels shown appear set-back from the side lot lines, the ground level appears to come directly to the property line.

- Street access creates noise and safety issues for the pedestrian environment.
- This street /sidewalk is well traveled by pedestrians.
- There appears to be no positive (public) design benefits from having street vehicle access.
- The architect has done a tremendous job “cramming” the maximum number of units onto this site; there is room for unit reduction to ease the pressure to need these design departures.
- The building needs to fit into the surrounding context and wider neighborhood better by being a “background” building. There are too many materials and colors proposed. Consequently the design and choice of materials need to change. A strict requirement to use red brick (the predominant neighborhood building material) is not necessary, but materials with permanence are necessary.
- The “V” notches on the balconies are not appropriate.
- The large horizontal cornice does not fit contextually.
- The apartment building to the south has patios along its north center façade and in the rear. These will be shaded and overwhelmed by the proposed garage base and closeness of side setbacks. Also, there is too much material variety.
- This is a nice design for Alki, but not the “West Slope” of Capitol Hill.
- The reduced north-side side setback will likely result in the apartments to the north looking at bath vents and into unit windows.
- The proposed building will be twice the height of the adjacent buildings – and most of the other buildings in the area. The West Slope context is typified by 3-4 story buildings and has a smaller scale.
- The proposed street facing berm is to hide the garage protruding above the ground and will be pedestrian unfriendly.
- Alley driveway shown will result in a large retaining wall facing the southern property.
- The proposed ground level units facing the alley will be in a hole facing a 10’ retaining wall.
- Some priority guidelines are A-1 (respect topography, step building), A-5, B-1, and C-1.
- The unit number increase from the previously approved project is 500% and only possible from the large number of requested departures. (Planner Note: 8 townhouses approved by Administrative Design Review.)
- The shadowing of surrounding properties open spaces (particularly the large open space to the north) and obscuring of views and other buildings will create a surrounding “waste land”.
- The design should be simplified to better fit into the context; get rid of the “frou-frou”.
- As a developer I like the modulation. Not sure people understand the problems that will be caused by an alley ramp, such as a big retaining wall.
- The proposed pedestrian access open space will be a nice addition. But the pedestrian access and vehicle access should be separated with the pedestrian access on the north and driveway on the south.
- The project will be aesthetically better with the proposed landscaped open space on both the north and south street sides.

- The design is good, but maybe different materials would be more responsive to the neighborhood context. It doesn't hurt to have a new architectural form as long as it fits the surrounding context.

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 "*Capitol Hill Neighborhood Design Guidelines*" of highest priority to this project. Additional guidelines and guidance may be identified at a second Early Design Guidance meeting.

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 site's predominate characteristic is the grade change from the alley to the street, an approximate 16 foot drop. The applicant's preferred Scheme Five does not respond well to this challenge by proposing "ground" level alley facing units and their open space that would be approximately 12 feet below the likely top of an alley retaining wall. This scheme also results in a proposed first level of street facing units approximately 6 feet above the sidewalk level and separated by a berm. These features should not be pursued in further design development.

The alley and street offer different "datum" points for the project design. As proposed, the building does not line up to either. The site is a part of the surrounding western down slope, hence not just with a 16 foot elevation change between the alley that is partially the result of the now excavated site. Although challenging, these datum points must be acknowledged in order to better respond to the site and surrounding development.

Also, see *B-1* and *C-1* below.

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

The main entrance should face the street, preferably in the center of the site. Optimally, it should include a feature, such as to a stoop, to allow a transition area between the private building interior and the public sidewalk realm. If, after the building design responds to the guidance throughout this document, vehicle street access is found to result in the best design option, the pedestrian entry should be separate from the driveway.

A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites. *Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.*

The building siting and design must acknowledge the differing characters of the buildings to the

north and south. To the north there are units beginning at grade and close to the property boundary. Behind this building is an undeveloped / open space area with trees. The proposed building's north facing entry and associated walkway and stairs will result in a retaining wall and noise generating activity area close to these units. See A-3, A-6 and D-1 for solutions to this.

No acknowledgement was made of the open space area to the north in the presentation or proposed design. The building design should seek strategies to preserve sunlight to this area, reduce visual intrusion onto other private / semi-private space, and take advantage of views toward this greenery. Although the building to the south presents some areas of retaining wall to the project site, there are fenced patios and extensive unit glazing that should be factored into any design development.

Alley façade massing and design studies in relation to the structures to the east across the alley should be included in the next DRB presentation.

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 raised first floor and possible landscape berm to screen this condition do not meet this guideline and would not respond to the high pedestrian usage of the street and neighborhood. See A-3 guidance above for this area.

A-7 Residential Open Space. *Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.*

The proposed “ground” level alley facing units and their open space would be approximately 12 feet below the likely top of an alley retaining wall. This would not create usable or attractive open space and should not be pursued.

The proposed structure's solar and visual height impacts on the adjacent open space to the north should be considered and minimized.

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. (Also a Capitol Hill Neighborhood supplemental design guideline.)*

The Board felt that the need for street vehicle access is at least somewhat driven by the proposed unit count. Because Bellevue Avenue is used by pedestrians of the many surrounding multi-family buildings, a proposed driveway must be a last resort. A *Design Departure* for street access can only be entertained if it is clearly shown that alley access will cause real detriment to the street façade design and ability to respond to other street, pedestrian and building entry design guidance is this document.

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. (Also a Capitol Hill Neighborhood supplemental design guideline.)

Although four new design schemes were presented (a fifth was of the previously approved proposal that is no longer being pursued) there was an insufficient examination and presentation of the siting and massing of surrounding buildings and the preferred scheme's relationship to this context.

Because of this, the Board feels it is necessary to have a second Early Design Guidance meeting so substantive early design guidance can be given in response to the needed contextual information. For the next presentation additional options that further explore the issues in this document must be presented.

With what was shown, the Board acknowledges the constraints of the Midrise Code on the building floor area (foot print) while the context calls for possible constraints on building height. In this regard, an increase in the building width through Design Departures could be appropriate. These should assist in reducing the building height along the property boundaries where the transition to lower scale buildings or open space should occur (See A-7 above). However as proposed, the Design Departures that serve to increase the building size have not demonstrated how they will contribute to a better design.

For the next meeting studies of proposed building massing in relation to street and alley facing adjacent buildings must be provided to communicate the expected height and scale relationships.

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.*

The Board (and public) noted that the project context is typical of the West Slope Neighborhood as described in the Capitol Hill Neighborhood Design Guidelines. This immediate context is one of "background" buildings: buildings that blend into the favorable siting patterns, building massing and consistent palette of materials and colors. The Board noted that while the design proposed has positive elements that could be compatible in another neighborhood context, it is not appropriate here. (Also, see B-1 above.) Because of this strong architectural context, any design should begin with this context, then deviate from this based on site opportunities or constraints and better architectural ideas.

Similar to B-1 above, for the next meeting studies of proposed building massing in relation to street and alley facing adjacent buildings must be provided to communicate the expected height, scale and siting relationships.

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. (Also a Capitol Hill Neighborhood supplemental design guideline.)*

In keeping with the guidance in C-1 above, the proposed architectural concept should have a

background quality. That is, it should blend in with the context, while still being individual and appropriate to the current time.

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. (Also a Capitol Hill Neighborhood supplemental design guideline.)*

The proposed selection of materials and colors are not appropriate for the neighborhood context. Material choice should better reflect the predominant use of brick masonry and colors associated with this material. If alternative materials and colors are pursued, a study for neighborhood compatibility should be done and presented to the Board for the next meeting.

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. (Also a Capitol Hill Neighborhood supplemental design guideline.)*

Although the main entry is proposed on the building's north-side in order to integrate it with a landscaped area it is unlikely to create a lively space and is at odds with the guidance in A-3 and A-6. The entrance should be relocated on the front of the building. If a *Design Departure* is later recommended for street vehicle access the pedestrian walkway and entrance should be separated from the driveway.

D-8 Treatment of Alleys. *The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.*

The Board gave design guidance about the relationship of alley facing residential units. See comments in A-1 above and (Land Use Planner) addition of A-7, *Residential Open Space*.

Staff Comments

In order to provide the more in-depth site and context analysis needed by the DRB, a second Early Design Guidance meeting will be held. The applicant should develop a design "packet" that focus' on viable and guidance responsive options to two alternatives – one with alley vehicle access (preferred) and one with street vehicle access (alternative).