City of Seattle

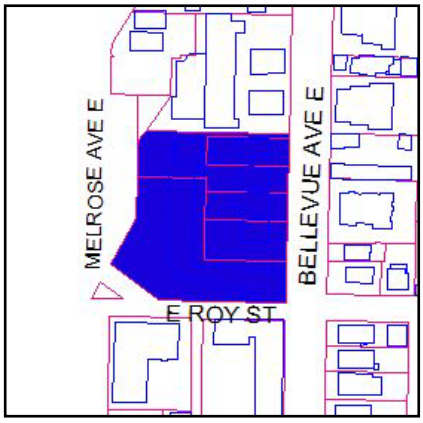
Department of Planning & Development
D.M. Sugimura, Director

DESIGN REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE
CAPITOL/FIRST HILL/CENTRAL AREA DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number:	**3010378**
Address:	**711 Bellevue Avenue East**
Meeting date:	**April 21, 2010**
Applicant:	**Lesley Bain, Weinstein AU Architects for Point 32**
Board members present:	**Dawn Bushnaq** **Lisa Picard** **Wolf Saar** **Sharon Sutton, Chair**
Board members absent:	**Evan Bourquard**
DPD staff present:	**Lisa Rutzick, Land Use Planner**

SITE & VICINITY



The site is located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood and lies within the Capitol Hill Urban Center Village at the northwest corner of Bellevue Avenue East and East Roy Street. The site is relatively flat along the 248 foot Bellevue Avenue East frontage. The topography drops on the west edge of the site, and a portion of the site is within an ECA. The 55,870 square foot site includes five existing houses and the BelRoy Apartments.

The site is zoned Lowrise 3 (L3). This same designation extends in all directions around the subject site. There is a Neighborhood Commercial 1-40 (NC1-40) zone on the north end of the block, and another NC1-

40 zone at the nearby intersection of Summit Avenue East and East Mercer Street. The area south of East Mercer Street is zoned Midrise (MR). The existing urban form of the vicinity is varied in terms of height and density. On the east side of Bellevue Avenue East, buildings range from three to eight story residential buildings and a few single family homes.

Well served by transit, the area comprises of mostly multi-family residential structures. Interstate 5 runs parallel and to the west of Melrose Avenue.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project includes demolition of the existing houses and new construction of approximately 60 residential units. The preferred option retains the existing BelRoy Apartments and would require a Contract Rezone from Lowrise 3 (L3) to Midrise (MR). Access to the garage with 70 stalls would be provided below grade and accessed via the existing garage entry to the BelRoy Apartments on East Roy Street.

The proposal intends to preserve the BelRoy Apartments and demolish the five single family structures. Appendix A material will be submitted on the existing buildings as part of the Master Use Permit process.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE: OCTOBER 7, 2009

DESIGN PRESENTATION

The applicants presented four options for developing the property. Option 1 illustrates a plan that meets the current L-3 zoning, and removes the existing BelRoy building. Units would be in three buildings, with surface level parking below the buildings and access off of Bellevue Avenue East. Units would be off of a double loaded corridor. This scenario meets existing code, but does not allow for the historic preservation of the BelRoy, sustainability based on natural ventilation and daylight, and the urban design goals for a more pedestrian-oriented Bellevue Avenue East.

Option 2 also meets the L-3 code, but retains the BelRoy. This scenario has two buildings along Bellevue Avenue East, and surface parking below and behind the units. While the project goal of retaining the BelRoy is met, the project results in 36 new units and uses surface area as parking rather than as open space. Vehicles enter and exit to Bellevue Avenue E.

Option 3 illustrates what is possible under the existing MR code, retaining the BelRoy and creating a single building along Bellevue Avenue East, with code compliant setbacks. In this scenario, 70 new units can be built in a single, double-loaded corridor building. This option illustrates the allowable envelope with a 60-foot high building. Taking full advantage of an MR zone would not reflect the varied massing that is characteristic of the neighborhood, and the double-loaded units do not meet the project's sustainability goal.

Option 4, the applicant's preferred direction for the project retains the BelRoy and creates narrower buildings that allow for natural ventilation and daylight, and on-site open space. Parking is below grade and enters off of Roy Street. This scenario uses the 60-foot height only for a 40-foot wide bar along the north. The rest of the construction matches the height of the existing BelRoy. The circulation for the units is a "point-block" strategy, with stacks of paired units entering from stairwells. This is the same strategy used in the BelRoy. The interior of the site would include a 12-unit building and would have landscaped areas and circulation. The applicant would need to request a contract rezone in order to allow a portion of the site to exceed the 30 foot height limit of the L-3 zone.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 34 members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting and seven letters were received. The following comments were offered:

- Supportive of project, but concerned that the four units located in the central courtyard should be eliminated to have a truly open courtyard. Also concerned about the height of the north building and feels that these 12 units should be distributed elsewhere on the site.
- Would like to see the proposed six story element lowered and suggests using the minimum floor to floor height. Believes that attention to the streetscape will be an improvement to the neighborhood. Feels this is a well studied proposal.
- Concerned that private views will be blocked and would like the building heights lowered. Supportive of the general project direction that is respectful of the neighborhood character and is pleased that the applicant has been responsive to the neighbors concerns.
- Concerned that the north tower is out of context of the surrounding environment. The taller buildings that are in the area were built before the current code was implemented. Feels that granting a rezone that allows greater height will set a poor precedent for the neighborhood.
- Supports project's current direction.
- Neighborhood planning group consensus that an open courtyard should be the central focus of this project and that support for additional height would be encouraged to achieve an open central courtyard. Note that the strongest opposition is from neighbor's who reside in the tallest building in the area (9 stories) that would no longer be permitted.
- Respect for the BelRoy is critical and that the proposed building should respond to the three story height of the BelRoy. Also notes that the five existing houses, that are proposed to be demolished, are an important part of the existing streetscape character.
- Concerned with the loss of the houses and the resulting loss of neighborhood flavor in exchange for modern, larger buildings. Clarified that the developer has not decided whether the units will be rental or condos. Also concerned with shading and view impacts from the proposed buildings.
- Supportive of the notion of designing through-units, which are a unique model and desirable from a green building standpoint. Feels the Board should support a departure that allows for skinnier buildings.
- Wondered whether thought of restoring the existing houses, rather than bull dozing them and recognizing the character they lend to the neighborhood. Against the increased height.

- A few exceptions that were allowed 30 years ago to allow taller buildings should not be considered a precedent for further buildings. The neighborhood design guidelines note that maximizing solar exposure is desirable; however allowing a taller building will preclude sun from other buildings across Bellevue.
- Three different alternatives have not been shown. The proposed development looks too blocky and the buildings should run east-west with courtyards on either end for safety. The proposed building is too tall for the context. Would like to see brick used.
- Support preservation of the existing single family structures, but if this development goes forward, it should be well-designed and support density. Opportunities for rental units are desired and parking is always a problem in this area.
- Support project proposal and feels the building can be mitigated with landscaping along the street. The pathway that runs along I5 should be cleaned up and attention given to security issues. Also suggested that relocation of the existing houses should be explored.
- Concerned with the impacts of construction. Supports keeping existing houses, especially the front yards associated with these houses.
- Corner spaces should provide access to the courtyard area.
- Like the slenderness of the building which will mitigate the increase height. Continuing the street wall is good and should include individual entries that encourage pedestrian activity.
- Concerned with the loss of the old growth cedar tree located in the property, increase in traffic congestion, preservation of the existing houses and corporate gain as the expense of affordable rental housing units.
- Prefer increased height for the north building to allow courtyard to remain open, quality materials that reflect the original apartment building and floor plans that are relatively small to keep innovative and affordable layouts similar to the BelRoy.
- Pleased with preservation of BelRoy. Added height for north building not too impactful as the north building is only approximately 30-40 feet wide. Concern about the precedent this will establish is a concern, however.
- Architectural history of the BelRoy includes narrow footprint, garden entry walk, paired apartment stacks “point blocks”, smaller units, and natural cross ventilation. Impressed with the plans to preserve and enhance the building and create a sensitive development surrounding the BelRoy.
- Supportive of the rezone request for added height and would support more height if courtyard remains open.
- Concerned with the loss of greenbelt and bird habitat and trees along the fence line. Would like to see these preserved.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATION: APRIL 21, 2010

DESIGN PRESENTATION

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, a further developed design was presented that included a reduced interior building, detailed landscaping plans, materials palette and revised fenestration plans.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 16 members of the public attended the Recommendation meeting. The following comments were offered:

- Oppose rezone of site to Midrise. Dubious about the viability of café space. Natural ventilation is problematic with freeway fumes. Object to the height of the north tower.
- Worried there is an inadequate supply of guest parking proposed. Concerned about steepness of Roy Street during icy conditions. Existing zone should be respected.
- Pleased with the design aesthetic and character.
- Support concept of taller tower to allow more space in the courtyard. Prefers the mix of building heights in the neighborhood. The entry to the commercial spaces should be from the sidewalk to the east and not to the north.
- Support garage entry off of Roy Street (rather than Bellevue).
- Support preservation of the BelRoy.
- Concerned that the proposed green space does not benefit the neighborhood, only the building residents.
- Feels this is a classy alternative to an otherwise boxy approach. Clarify café commercial use in the zone.
- Support for proposed massing and responsiveness to the BelRoy. Well-scaled courtyard.
- Strong street wall design. Community already has public open spaces available.
- More density is good.
- Clarifying proposed units will be condos. Concerned with the privacy and light for the interior units facing each other.

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 those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings* 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.

The Board expressed much interest and concern with the proposed site plan, specifically the design of the interior spaces. The interior courtyard should be of the highest quality in terms of design, landscaping, dimensions and usability. The preferred scheme shows 12 units located within the courtyard space; this freestanding structure within the courtyard area significantly affects the sense of openness and tradition typically associated with an internal open courtyard spaces. In order to be convinced of the merits of keeping these units in the central structure, the Board would need to see an exceptional development of the outdoor spaces and all façade

treatments. In an effort to describe what could be considered an exceptional space, the following elements should be explored:

a. Wider open spaces around the central building.
b. Character and development of the entries and ability for individual ownership of the open spaces outside of ground level units.
c. High quality materials.
d. Window treatments and design that responds to the BelRoy.
e. Well developed landscape plans that acknowledge the public-private quality of the spaces, while also being sensitive to the privacy of the individual units.
f. Relationship between the new and existing building both in section and three-dimensional renderings.
g. The landscape and site plan should include points of relief, as well as gathering space.

A-2 <u>Streetscape Compatibility</u>. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

The Board agreed that the building along Bellevue should be the same height as the BelRoy. And the eastern portion of the north building should drop down to this same datum line. See B-1.

A-3 <u>Entrances Visible from the Street</u>. Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

The Board agreed that the north entrance area should have a strong sense of arrival and be open to the air or have a sense of visual openness in the architecture, similar to the sense of the arrival and openness of the south entrance. The Board wanted further exploration of the community space that occurs at the north side of the north entry point.

A-5 <u>Respect for Adjacent Sites</u>. 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 Board will continue to be interested in the shadow impacts from the proposed massing on neighboring properties.

A-6 <u>Transition Between Residence & Street</u>. The space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.

The Board expressed keen interest in both the existing and proposed second entry area accessed from Bellevue, as well as the point block entries for those units that front onto Bellevue. These entries should be gracious and allow views into the courtyard open spaces,

while the entries to the unit groupings along Bellevue should be attractive while also expressing the privacy and security of the residences.

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

The Board is interested in seeing the next level of design of the open spaces created by the courtyard area, the transitional space between the residences and the street along Bellevue, the open space along the northern property edge and the existing spaces to the west of the BelRoy. The Board is also very supportive of cleaning up the vegetated slope area between the BelRoy and the pathway that runs parallel to I-5. See also A-6 and E-2.

B. Height, Bulk, and Scale

B-1 <u>Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility</u>. 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 nearby, 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 on the adjacent zones.

The Board agreed that the preferred option is heading in the right direction and appears to be creating a positive precedent for the neighborhood. The Board discussed at length the relocation of the 12 units in the courtyard to elsewhere on site and possibly the north building. See A-1.

The Board also noted that the east end of the north building should be the same height as the Bellevue building to continue the height datum line established by the BelRoy and continued by the Bellevue building through to the east end of the north building, creating a sense of continuity along the street front. This eastern portion of the north building should relate to and face the street, respond to the existing trees, north entrance area, as well as the respond to the middle Bellevue building, rather than appear as the "end" façade of the north building.

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board agreed that the east elevation of the six-story tower should better respond to the datum line and materials of the three- story building along Bellevue. The fenestration of this six-story east elevation also needs further work to create a front on this street and not appear as an end of the building.

C. Architectural Elements

C-2 <u>Architectural Concept and Consistency</u>. Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall architectural concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building.

The Board looks forward to seeing a cohesive architectural design that responds to the architecturally significant existing BelRoy apartment building and creates consistent massing

and scale along Bellevue Avenue. The Board enthusiastically supported designing the building forms and configurations of the new structures to reflect the features of the BelRoy, including unit grouping, multiple entries, single loaded corridors and skinnier building forms to allow natural ventilation and day lighting. The Board did not encourage the new building to mimic the design of the BelRoy, but rather to dialogue with and reference the BelRoy and its forms, fenestration lines, unusual unit layouts and detailing. All of the building elevations should be presented at the next meeting, including the interior elevations and the north facade of the north building.

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board was concerned that the design of the "knuckle" between the 3-story building along Bellevue and the 6-story tower was unresolved and created a relentlessly horizontal elevation. This seam needs to be detailed and further considered either with a planer shift or elimination of the 'bridge' over this prominent entry. The Board was not supportive of a departure from building length as presented.

C-3 <u>Human Scale</u>. The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements and details to achieve a good human scale.

The Board agreed that the scale of the east facing facades should integrate feature that reinforce the pedestrian scale and ground level entrances that are welcoming and comfortable.

C-4 <u>Exterior Finish Materials</u>. 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 Board strongly agreed that the material palette should respond to and take cues from the BelRoy, but not necessarily imitate the BelRoy.

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the material palette included a brick base of a similar color as the BelRoy, an off-white Swiss Pearl cementitious panel. Above the stairwells along Bellevue, FRC panels with perforated holes creating a pattern that would allow for natural ventilation, while also reflect the brick pattern of the BelRoy. These panels would have an integral color to match the cementious panel. The operable windows are a dark charcoal grey. The interior building would be clad in cedar and the gates would be open with an art deco sensibility to reflect the BelRoy. Despite the materials board, the Board felt they did not have a clear sense of how the proposed material palette would work together and be detailed. The Board would like to see for elaboration on the materials and detailing.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 <u>Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances</u>. Convenient and attractive access to the building entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.

See A-6, A-7 and E-2.

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board discussed the proposed commercial space located at the northeastern corner of the proposed building. The Board agreed that this commercial space could be more viable in its appearance and circulation (height, entry point, signage, etc). Specifically, the Board felt that the location of the entryway and commercial appearance would help make this space more functional for commercial uses.

D-12 <u>Residential Entries and Transitions</u>. For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and a visually interesting street front for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.

The Board is very concerned about the quality and openness of the interior courtyard. See A-1 and B-1.

E. Landscaping

E-1 <u>Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites</u>. Where possible, special consideration should be given to abutting streetscape and neighboring properties.

The Board discussed the preservation of the existing trees at the northeast corner of the site. Retaining the trees is important for ecological and screening reasons; however, these reasons should be balanced with the configuration of the most successful site plan. The Board stressed that the preservation of the trees should not appear as an afterthought to the building and site, but instead should be well integrated into the plan.

E-2 <u>Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site</u>. 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.

The Board is also interested in the design of the north side of the site between the north building and the property line. The landscape plan and open spaces along this corridor are important as a transition to the development to the north.

Special attention should be given to the design of the public-private open spaces within the central courtyard and along Bellevue Avenue. Clear differentiation between the semi private entry spaces and the more communal open spaces is critical. Views through and to the site are also important and within the character of the neighborhood courtyard buildings.

At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board was very pleased with the design of the courtyard, the reduction in the interior building to allow for more generous dimensions, courtyard plantings and circulation space.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

Several departures from the development standards were proposed at this time. The Board's recommendation on the requested departures will be reserved until the Final Recommendation 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.

1) **Structure Width (SMC 23.45.052):** The preferred design would require a departure to exceed the structure width standards on Bellevue. The maximum structure width allowed is (150'). The proposed structure width is 186'-6".

The Board is concerned with the configuration of the overall massing and that relief is included in the design of the facades. At the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board was not supportive of a departure from building length as presented. See discussion under C-2.

2) **Front Setback (SMC 23.45.518):** The Code requires an average of seven feet and a minimum of five feet. The proposed front setback is 5.9'

The Board indicated support for such a departure as it provides a street wall that is responsive to the existing BelRoy.

3) **Projections into Setbacks (SMC 23.45.518):** The Code allows a maximum encroachment of two feet into the required setbacks. The proposed design would project four feet into the front setback.

The Board indicated support for such a departure that would better define the residential entrances and add variation to the elevation.

4) **Sight Triangle (SMC 23.54.030):** The preferred design proposes to eliminate the required sight triangle from the garage exit.

The Board was inclined to support the proposed departure, but would like to see safety elements, such as mirrors included to alert vehicles and pedestrian alike of oncoming vehicles.