



City of Seattle

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

**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES
OF
THE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (AREA 7)
April 27, 2010
Notes available: May 14, 2010**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3011119
Address: 2625 3rd Avenue
Applicant: Sean Sullivan, Hewitt Architects, for Third & Cedar LLC
Board members present: Brian Scott (Chair)
Dan Foltz
Gabe Grant
Sheri Olson
Board member absent: Jan Frankina
Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The 12,960 square foot Downtown development site is bounded by Third Avenue on the north, 9th Avenue on the west, by a two-storied commercial building to the south and an alley on the west. Included within the development site is a single-story commercial building completed in 1954 and currently occupied as the American Lung Association building with on-grade parking for 14 vehicles just off the alley.

The proposed development will include demolition of the existing building and elimination of the surface parking. All the parking for the proposed new development will be located below grade. Third Avenue is a principal transit and the right-of-way directly in front of the proposed new structure is currently undergoing development to accommodate a soon-to-be-implemented Rapid Ride transit system.



The site and surrounding block, together with the full block to the south and half blocks to the east and west are zoned DMR/R240/65. The block to the north is zoned DMR/C 125/65. There are six different zone designations within a two block radius of the development site within this section of the Belltown neighborhood. The area exhibits a variety of buildings, interspersed with surface parking lots, with a large, newer mixed-used/residential development, the Seattle Heights building, directly across the alley to the west. A 165-foot residential tower above an office and retail base, the “Alto” apartments, has been approved for the similarly-sized lot directly to the east across Third Avenue.

The site slopes perhaps 5 feet from east to west between Third Avenue and the alley as it mimics the waterwards slope of Cedar Street which cascades toward Elliott Bay more precipitously once it crosses First Avenue. Cedar Street is a designated Green Street with special street level requirements, including a combination of design features to enhance the pedestrian environment and its experience.

The residential portion of the structure proposed for the site would consist of approximately 200 units. Although there is no requirement for it, parking for 136 vehicles would be available in four levels of below-grade parking. A ground-floor would provide a residential entry lobby as well as some 5,000 square feet of retail uses.

ARCHITECT’S PRESENTATION

The quarter-block development site is relatively small site for contemporary downtown development and, as explained by the design team, poses some particular challenges because of zoning Code restrictions. David Hewitt of Hewitt Architects gave the applicant presentation. He provided a contextual analysis of the vicinity and site and a summary of the proposed development. He then explained how a departure from the requirements of SMC 23. 49.153. The Code section reads as follows:

SMC 23.49.156 Downtown Mixed Residential, minimum lot size.

- A. There shall be a minimum lot size of nineteen thousand (19,000) square feet for any structure over one hundred twenty-five (125) feet high.

- B. To meet the minimum lot size requirement, a lot may be combined with one (1) or more abutting lots, whether occupied by existing structures or not, provided that:
 - 1. The total area of the combined lots meets the minimum lot size requirement;
 - 2. All lots have frontage on the same avenue;
 - 3. Any existing structure does not exceed a height of one hundred twenty-five (125) feet;

4. The coverage of both the proposed and any existing structures meets the coverage limits established in Section [23.49.158](#); and

5. The fee owners of the abutting lot(s) shall execute a deed or other agreement, which shall be recorded with the title to the lots, which restricts future development to a maximum height of one hundred twenty-five (125) feet for the life of the proposed structure; and which precludes the use of the lot(s) in combination with any abutting lots for purposes of meeting the minimum lot size requirements of this section.

Essentially, the Code section says that lots less than 19,000 square feet in size are restricted to 125 feet in height in the zone which otherwise would allow structures on larger lots to be developed to 240 feet in height. The applicant would argue for a more equitable distribution of allowable height on the site, one that would be provided by the Board's granting the development a departure (among others) from the required lot size to be able to construct a tower above 125 feet. This would not be a departure from the zoning-allowed height limit, which is 240 feet, but from the restrictions on height within the allowable height envelope relative to the total square foot size of the development site.

Mr. Hewitt then described and graphically portrayed three alternative development schemes or "stacking" alternatives, one 125 feet in height and requiring no departures from development standards, one 160 feet in height that would require, in addition to at least one other departure, a departure from the lot size restriction, and a third that would reach to 180 feet in height and require the same basic departure as the second scheme together with a departure from required "Green Street" setbacks on the upper four floors.

The third and preferred scheme would allow creation of a tower more slender, and potentially more elegant, than that allowed by the Land Use Code, but would provide, in the design team's estimation, several other design advantages. Primary among these were: allowing for a friendlier relationship to the alley facing units of the Seattle Heights tower across the alley, providing a street-level setback on Cedar, the "Green" street, and providing for greater glazing on the south-facing facade. The third alternative, it was also suggested, would provide a truer transitional step between the 240-foot zone and the 125-foot zone which begins at the centerline of Cedar Street.

Reference was made to page 3 of the design review presentation packet where the applicants had selected those design guidelines which they thought were most pertinent to this project. Among these were the following: A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, B-4, C-1, C-4, C-6, D-1, D-3 and E-2.

Following the presentation, the Board members asked a few clarifying questions prior to opening the meeting to public comment. There was some further discussion on the nature of the departure from the site size of 19,000 square feet; one Board member sought a clarification that indeed both alternatives two and three would require a departure from the Green Street setback at some of the upper floors; greater clarity was sought and offered regarding the amount of glazing that would be on the south-facing façade.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Eight members of the public commented on the proposal. A spokesman for the Belltown neighborhood land use and environmental subcommittee noted that the group had not taken a position on the proposal but offered his personal views on the project, noting on the positive side the efforts to cant the building to preserve views and to activate the alley. Nonetheless, he thought the departure from minimum lot size to gain additional height went against the intent of the Land Use Code and did not favor the departure. This was echoed by a second member of the public. One person noted that there were existing problems with a back-up of traffic on Cedar Street with cars entering the alley. The addition of underground parking in the new proposal taking access from the alley could exacerbate an existing problem. Several comments were made in reaction to the applicant's intent to be a good neighbor to the residential units across the alley. There was some appreciation voiced by some living in the upper units for the gestures of angling and moving the project away from the alley. Some on the lower floors noted that their views would not be improved. Areas of general concern for upper and lower residents were those of alley-side noise and adverse visual impacts. There were several requests for special attention being paid in design development to the impacts of ventilation and mechanical equipment and rooftop views across the alley.

BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS

The Board chair began deliberations by pointing to some of the positive features of the presentation; the decision not to provide parking above grade on site and the obvious concern for impacts on the neighbors across the alley were singled out as commendable. A Board member noted that a lot of thought had already gone into the massing and stacking options and into the choices made for meeting the two street frontages as well as the alley. Another expressed appreciation for the gymnastics displayed in arriving at and exploring three distinctively different schemes. A fourth Board member confirmed the design team's choice for the orthogonal base of the structure indicated in the schematic plan for alternative three since it provided for a stronger and better expressed urban form and would provide a better building for Seattle and the neighborhood.

PRIORITY 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 those guidelines found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Downtown Development* which are to be considered of highest priority for this project. In doing so, the Board confirmed the applicants' list of selected guidelines but added Guideline C-3 to the list. In addition, guidelines which are to be considered of highest priority for the project were cited from *Design Guidelines for the Belltown Urban Center Village* where applicable. There are no supplemental Belltown guidelines for A-2, B-4, C-4, or E-2.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

A Site Planning and Massing

A-1 Respond to the Physical Environment

Develop and 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 guideline above was chosen by the board to be of high priority. The Board noted that the proposed development indicated under "Alternative 3," with its orthogonal base re-enforcing the existing urban form, and upper sections canted in deference to its neighbor across the alley indicated a thoughtful and strong direction for future design development. Belltown guideline A-1 would encourage windows at street level along the slope of Cedar Street and landscaping to provide a pedestrian friendly streetscape.

A-2 Enhance the Skyline

Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety the downtown skyline.

The Board responded favorably to the general direction indicated in Alternative 3, which presented a generally slender form, stepped back from the Green Street and with segments canted toward the northeast. One Board member called for more views of the structure, particularly showing it from 3rd Avenue and showing in further detail the south façade and its relationship with the building on the half block to the south. (There are no Belltown supplemental guidelines for A-2.)

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 members were pleased that the scheme of alternative 3 showed promise of a visually attractive building that could add richness and variety to the existing Belltown landscape. Additionally, the Belltown guidelines would require a harmonious transition between the intended tower and the two-story older building located at the corner of 3rd Avenue and Vine Street. Associated with the Board discussion there had been requests for detailed graphic information relating to the façade that would face the neighboring building to the south.

B-2 Create a Transition in Bulk & Scale

Compose the massing of the building to create a transition to the height, bulk and scale of the development of nearby less intensive zones.

New buildings should be compatible with the scale of development surrounding the building site and the Belltown guideline extends the consideration of sensitive transitions to abutting structures within the same zone, in this case the Payless Drug building at 2603 3rd Avenue. Remarks under B-1 above indicate the Board's continuing interest in how this transition will be handled.

This site is also located at the edge of a zoning height change along the Cedar Street façade and the Board's initial response to the proposed development was favorable to the design departures from the green street setback and additional height for a slimmer tower since it allowed for potentially sympathetic and sensitive massing relationships to the Payless building and the Seattle Heights building as well as structures in the less intensive zone across Cedar Street.

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 indicated their affinity for alternative three which maintained an orthogonal relationship at the base with both Cedar Street and Third Avenue and the upper portion of the tower with Third Avenue, while pulling the massing away from the alley and canting the angle of a portion of the tower away from the alley. The Board would await the development of that design to adjudge the success of the integration of the various elements of the building into an integral whole. (There are no supplemental Belltown neighborhood guidelines relating to B-4.)

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.

Development of the new Rapid Ride bus stop in front of the building on Third Avenue will be a pedestrian generator on an already busy pedestrian street. The proposed Green Street amenities should wrap around the corner at Third Avenue and Cedar Street and clearly link the two pedestrian realms and the internal uses of the building and its openings onto the streets should re-enforce this pedestrian wrap. Building overhangs and overhead weather protection along both street-facing facades would also be essential elements of the integrated wrap. The pedestrian entry needs to be a truly inviting space, well integrated within the Green Street amenities. Pedestrian-scale sidewalk lighting, especially at entries, seating and creative landscape treatments, including planters and trellises, water features and inclusion of art elements, and accent paving are some of the specifics detailed in the Belltown-specific supplemental guidance to C-1.

C-3 Provide Active—not blank—facades
Buildings should not have large blank wall facing the street, especially near sidewalks.

The above Guideline was identified by the Board to be of highest priority for the project, but with little specific comment except to point out that code requirements could result in significant blank walls along the south façade, that facing the Payless building property. The proposed design should not include any blank facades and the design team was especially encouraged to find ways to minimize any sizeable expanses of blank wall space on the alley or south facades. (There is no supplemental guidance for this Guideline provided in the Belltown specific guidelines.)

C-4 Reinforce Building Entries

To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce building entries.

One primary entry would be that into the retail space, although there could be more than one entry into the space designated for commercial/retail use. According to the schemes presented there would be one entry for residents of the building into a residential lobby. The Guidelines for Downtown development note that entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street. Scheme 3 shows a “garden entry” off Cedar Street where the actual entry doors would be largely invisible from the street. Members of the Board were intrigued by the concept but cautioned that the successful execution of the garden entry would require careful management of those amenities like lighting and wayfaring and signaling that would promote a sense of comfort and of homecoming and of safety as well as the successful encouragement of the interaction of residents and their neighbors. (There is no additional guidance offered in the Belltown supplements for this guideline.)

C-6 Develop the Alley Façade

To increase pedestrian safety, comfort and interest, develop portions of the alley façade in response to the unique conditions of the site or project.

During their deliberations the Board had found the intention to respect the alley units of the Seattle Heights residential building to be commendable. Following up on several comments from members of the public, however, the Board emphasized several considerations that are contained in the Belltown supplemental guidelines. In designing a well-proportioned and unified building, the alley façade is not be ignored. It should be treated with form, scale and materials similar to the rest of the building, thereby creating a coherent architectural concept. Of special concern should be the visual impact of utility equipment and special efforts should be made to reduce the noise impacts of HVAC equipment. Views of the wedge-shaped rooftop of the parking entry and utility component should provide as pleasant an experience as possible from the alley face units of the proposal as well as from residences across the alley.

D-1 Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space

Design public open space to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents and workers, views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.

An evident challenge for the project is the careful integration of the residential “garden entry” with the Green Street landscaping and amenities along Cedar Street and the Board expectantly awaits that elaboration. Another challenge is the integration or “wrap” of landscaping and amenity features where the pedestrian realms of Cedar Street and Third Avenue meet. The

design team is reminded, as noted in the Downtown guidelines, that the design of planters, landscaping, walls and other street elements should allow visibility into and out of any open spaces at the ground level. As noted in the Belltown specific guidelines for D-1, the successful design of an open space adjoining a sidewalk is determinative of the success of creating a broader environment where building and streetscape are in harmony.

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 “garden entry” off Cedar Street provides a great opportunity to provide a special downtown space, especially as this is integrated into the Green Street improvements along this half block of Cedar Street. There is also a special opportunity to wrap the Green Street ambience around to Third Avenue. The sidewalk along Third Avenue should not be relegated to the utilitarian designation of “bus stop.” As noted in the Belltown supplemental guidelines, new installations on 3rd Avenue should be “civic” and substantial and reflective of the role the street plays as a major bus route, but with creative design the sidewalk along 3rd Avenue in front of the proposed structure can still be imbued with a memorable sense of place that will be associated with the building.

E-2 Integrate Parking Facilities

Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments or suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by

Among other considerations, the Downtown guidelines call for using a portion of the top of the parking level (in this case, entry) as an outdoor deck, patio, or garden....In an interchange between the design team and the Board there was a brief discussion of the possibilities for the parking-entry/ utility area which included a “green roof” and a “green-wall” at the alley. Since the friendliness between neighbors was a major theme of the presentation, the Board encouraged the design team to explore a variety of options that would reduce the visual prominence of the garage entry and utility functions for neighbors across the alley. (There is no supplemental guidance under this heading provided in the Belltown-specific guidelines.)

Departures from Development Standards:

Alternative 1 presented by the design team was a code-compliant scheme and would require no departures from development standards. Alternatives 2 and 3 would each require a departure from SMC 23.49.153, which requires a minimum lot size of 19,000 square feet for a structure to exceed 125 feet. Alternative 1, additionally, would require a departure from SMC 23.49.164, which limits any wall dimension along 3rd Avenue to 90 feet; the scheme would require walls 99 feet in length at building levels 7,8, & 9. Alternative 3 would require an additional departure from SMC 23.49.166 which would require a setback along Cedar Street (the “green street”) of portions of the structure between 86 and 240 feet in height to be calculated according to the

formula, $(H-85' \times 0.2 + 10')$. The proposal would “average” the green street setbacks and require a departure for the top 5 floors.

The Board indicated that they would be willing to consider granting the requested departures provided the design development adequately addressed any concerns expressed and addressed the guidelines and guidance specified by the Board.

The Board further recommended that the applicants should proceed to design development and MUP application.

Staff Comments:

DPD concurs with the Board’s recommendation that development of the design should follow the Board’s General Directives and Guidelines selected to be of highest priority for the project as noted above and proceed to MUP application.