



City of Seattle

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

**RECOMMENDATION
OF
THE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (AREA 7)
September 28, 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)
Gabe Grant
Jan Frankina
Sheri Olson
Pragnesh Parikh
Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The 12,960 square foot Downtown development site is bounded by Cedar Street on the north, 3rd Avenue on the east, 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 five 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 19 story structure proposed for the site would consist of approximately 204 units. Although there is no requirement for it, parking for 134 vehicles would be available in four levels of below-grade parking. The ground-floor would provide a residential entry lobby as well as some 4,000 square feet of retail commercial uses.

ARCHITECT’S PRESENTATION

The architect presented a proposed structure that was a development of the previously presented “Alternative 3” and that provided an orthogonal base re-enforcing the existing urban form, while the upper sections were generally canted away from the residential Seattle Heights tower across the alley. He recalled how at the Early Design Guidance meeting the Board had responded favorably to the general dynamics embodied in the preferred alternative which provided a generally slender form stepped back from the Green Street (Cedar) with the tower segments canted in a northeasterly direction. In further deference to the residences across the alley an additional 18” setback (in addition to the required 24” setback) would provide an alley separation of 21’-6” between the base of the two structures. The proposed project’s east corner, adjacent to the Rite Aid building, had been set back above the third level to create an edge that was intended to be closer in scale to that structure. The massing of the south façade included setbacks that enabled opportunities for glazing along that façade and the material cladding of that façade was intended to be fully congruent with the cladding proposed for the other facades. The residential “garden entry” that had been inchoate in the early design guidance and which had “intrigued” members of the Board had been replaced by an enclosed vestibule and two-story residential atrium which brought the ground-floor façade at that point closer to the street.

Following the presentation there was discussion on the nature of the departure from the minimum lot size of 19,000 square feet; one Board member sought clarification on the efficacy of the design gestures embodied in the proposed structure that were intended to provide a harmonious transition between itself and the Rite Aid building next door.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Eleven members of the public signed in as parties of record, and several commented on the proposal. A spokesman for the Belltown neighborhood land use and environmental subcommittee thought the departure from minimum lot size requirements to gain additional height went against the intent and letter of the Land Use Code and should not be allowed. This thought was echoed by a second member of the public. One person noted that there should be additional parking required. Another recalled discussion of noise control at the alley and inquired into sound attenuation features of the proposed structure. Finally, a resident of the Seattle Heights building across the alley commended the design team on the alley setbacks, the canting of portions of the tower away from the alley and other elements of the design which were considered to be neighborly gestures.

BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS

The Board chair began deliberations by pointing to the positive features of the presentation. Four of the Board members were agreed that the design presented a strong urban form that would provide a well-designed building for Seattle and the neighborhood. The relatively slender tower with its play of orthogonal and canted segments was thought to respond effectively and creatively to the special demands of the site. The four board members were also agreed in recommending approval of the requested departures. The request of the departures was considered judicious, with each of the departures contributing to an integral and creative design that was thought to be responsive to the demands of the site.

One of the board members disagreed with the other four members, however, maintaining that each of the departure requests contributed to a structure that was overbearing in its height, bulk and scale and generally ill suited to the demands of the site. The proposed building did not provide a harmonious transition to the building abutting the site to the south, nor did it provide a harmonious transition to the lower height limits of the adjacent zone.

Four members of the Board voted to recommend approval of the design as presented, to recommend approval of the requested departures and to do so without recommending any conditions of their approval.

In the view of the majority of the Board members (4 of 5), the proposal 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 design, one that promoted both visual interest and pleasing variety in the Downtown skyline and added richness and variety to the Belltown

streetscape (Guidelines A1 and A2). In their view the building did provide a harmonious transition between itself and the two-story older building located at the corner of 3rd Avenue and Vine Street (Guideline B2). The proposed structure was a well-proportioned and unified building, exhibiting a coherent architectural design (B4), one that promoted pedestrian interaction (C1). The facades were active and modulated (C3), with inviting entries (C4) and with thoughtful consideration given to the alley façade and the relationship to the residential units facing the new structure from across the alley (C6). The design provided inviting and usable open space for residents of the building (D1). The plans for the Green Street hardscape and plantings indicated a thoughtful design for street-level open space that provided elements that helped to define the place and create a broader environment where building and streetscape are in harmony (D2 and D3).

Roof-top planting areas at levels 2 and 6 were among the design elements shown that would, in the majority of the Board’s opinions, reduce the visual prominence of the garage entry and utility functions for neighbors across the alley (E2).

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES REQUESTED BY APPLICANT

Departure Summary Table

| STANDARD | REQUIREMENT | REQUEST | APPLICANT’S JUSTIFICATION | Board’s Recommendation |
|---|---|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Development Standards based on Minimum Lot Size SMC 23.49.153 | Lots less than 19,000 square feet in size are restricted to 125’ building height (lots at least 19,001 square feet may be developed to 240’ height) | 180’ height proposed for lot size of 18,960 square feet. | The proposed departure provides for additional setbacks at the west and south property lines, creating a taller but more slender tower that cants away from the structure across the alley. | Approved by 4 of 5 Board members |
| Green Street setback requirements, 86’ in height and above SMC 23.49.166 | 10’ setback between 65 and 85’. Between 86’ and 240’ by formula (H-85’ x.2 +10’), where H = highest point of structure within 120’ of Green Street property line. | Setback above 65 feet varies , with a niche provided where the canted portion of the tower along the façade intersects the upper portion of the façade aligned orthogonally with Cedar Street. | Overall effect is that of a well-modulated slender tower that creates a great deal of architectural presence on the site. Additionally, the proposed design sets back the ground-level façade along the Green Street, providing landscaping at the pedestrian level. | Approved by 4 of 5 Board members |
| Maximum wall dimension on Avenues in DMR zone SMC 23.49.164 | 90’ maximum wall dimension on 3 rd Avenue for portion of façade between 66’ and 125’ | A 97’-6” wide wall dimension is proposed along 3 rd Av for portions of the façade above 65’ | The wall imposes a strong orthogonal presence along 3 rd Avenue which serves as a foil and pleasant contrast for the canted segments of the tower further to the west. | Approved by 4 of 5 Board Members |

In addition to the above departures identified at the Early Design Guidance phase of the project, the design team had added an architectural feature on the top-most portion of the Third Avenue

façade. It was a 27-foot vertical support beneath the cornice, approximately 18 inches in width and projecting 20 inches from the façade. It would project into the right-of-way and the applicants were seeking a departure from SMC 23.53.035, Structural Building Overhangs, which would limit the vertical dimension of this projection of a purely architectural or decorative character to a maximum horizontal dimension of 1 foot and a vertical dimension of 2 ½ feet. The vertical support imparted additional visual interest to the tower cornice and provided a framing element that added greatly to the composition of the overall façade. This request for a departure was approved by four of the five Board members.