



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE EAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3011809

Address: 751 Marion Street

Applicant: Mike Omura of Mithun Architects

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, January 05, 2011

Board Members Present: Sharon Sutton (Chair)
Evan Bourquard
Dawn Bushnaq
Clint Keithley
Wolf Saar

Board Members Absent: Lisa Picard

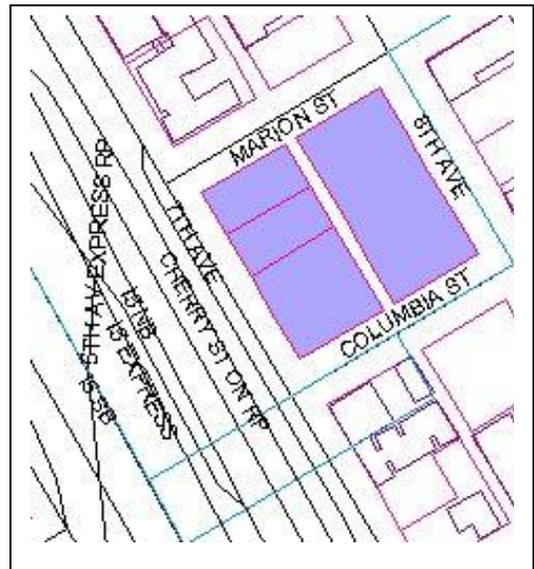
DPD Staff Present: Shelley Bolser, Senior Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Neighborhood Commercial NC3-160

Nearby Zones: (North) NC3-160
(South) NC3-160
(East) Highrise (HR)
(West) Downtown (DOC1 U/450/U)

Lot Area: 57,600 (28,800 per development site)



Current Development: The existing site is occupied by surface parking spaces. The platted alley allows access to the site at the south property line, but dead ends at a retaining wall at the north property line. The site is steeply sloped from east down to west, and somewhat sloped from south down to north.

Access: There are four existing curb cuts at 7th Avenue and one point of alley access from Columbia Street.

Surrounding Development: The surrounding development includes a wide mix of building types and context. I-5 is located immediately to the west, with an off-ramp that parallels 7th Avenue in front of the site. Downtown is located on the other side of I-5 from the site.

Surrounding Development: A new office building and new mixed-use residential and commercial buildings are located to the north and northeast. Early to mid-20th century residential and office buildings are located to the east and south. A new senior housing development is located to the southeast. Some of the parcels to the east and south are also occupied by surface parking lots.

ECAs: There are no Environmentally Critical Areas mapped on the site, but the slopes at the edge of the site are 40% grade or more. The proposal is currently in review for an Environmentally Critical Areas Exemption for these slopes.

Neighborhood Character: The First Hill neighborhood is densely developed with a wide variety of uses and building types, ranging from approximately 3 to 20 stories. Nearby development includes institutions (hospitals, religious institutions, O’Dea private High School), early-20th century to new residential buildings, mid-20th century to new office buildings, and a large variety of commercial street level development.

Neighborhood Character: The neighborhood is well served by transit and has a high level of pedestrian activity. The M Street Grocery a block north at Madison Street and 8th Avenue draws a lot of foot traffic. The nearby arterials are heavily used by pedestrians, transit, and vehicles. Many of the non-arterial streets include mature street trees and higher density residential development.

The proximity of the site to Downtown is also part of the neighborhood character. Although I-5 places a hard barrier between the neighborhood and downtown, there are some pedestrian and vehicular connections between First Hill and downtown. The nearest such connections for this site are at Madison Street and Cherry Street.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed development includes a combination of surface, structured, and below-grade parking on two parcels separated by an alley. The total proposal includes approximately 450 parking spaces. A 'drop-off' area is also proposed near the northwest corner to allow Polyclinic patients to easily access the proposed new southwest entry at the 701 Madison Street building. The applicant preferred option is a partially below grade parking garage at the east parcel, the top level of which would be even with the grade at 8th Avenue. The west parcels would be developed with surface parking, the drop-off area, and terraced landscaping.

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DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Three alternative design schemes were presented. All of the options include structured parking and surface parking, with a drop-off area at the northwest corner.

The first scheme (Option A) showed a 6-level parking structure on the west lot with the code required use separating the street level parking from the sidewalk. Five of the levels would be visible above grade. The east lot would remain as existing surface parking.

The second scheme (Option B) showed a 2-level parking structure along 7th Avenue and a four level parking structure along 8th Avenue. One level would be visible above grade at 7th Avenue and two levels would be visible above grade at the alley. The top floor of the garage would be level with 8th Avenue.

The third scheme (Option C) showed the applicant preferred alternative, which has a five level parking garage on the east lot with surfaced parking on the west lot. Two stories of the parking garage would be visible from the alley, with the surface of the parking garage approximately level with 8th Avenue.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately five members of the public signed in with mailing addresses at this Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- First Hill Neighborhood Association provided a written letter to the Board with the following issues:
 - The proposed development should work to improve the adjacent sidewalks with new sidewalk areas, protect street trees, and provide low level lighting.
 - There will be a new park across the street from this site, where there is an existing surface parking lot at 8th Avenue. The proposal should respond to the views from this proposed park, and minimize any shadows cast on the park.

- Landscaping should be maximized at this site to off-set air quality from existing and proposed traffic.

PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

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. The Board identified the Citywide Design Guidelines & Neighborhood specific guidelines (as applicable) of highest priority for this project.

The Neighborhood specific guidelines are summarized below. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed how the proposal relates to the unusual site characteristics such as the steeply sloping grade from east to west, the proximity to I-5, and the views across the site to downtown. The applicant has proposed structured parking that is level with 8th Avenue and surface parking and planting which terraces down to 7th Avenue.

The Board noted that due to the grade changes across the site and the context of residential development and the future park to the east, the design should include careful treatment of all facades including surface and rooftop parking areas. The Board described the surface and rooftop parking areas as a “fifth façade.”

The Board expressed appreciation for the terraced landscaping and rain garden proposed near 7th Avenue, but noted that an equivalent or greater amount of landscaping and design consideration is needed at the 8th Avenue and Marion Street edges. There is a greater amount of pedestrian activity in these areas and more residential character than 7th Avenue, and therefore even more need to design the proposal with consideration for neighborhood context.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that the proposal will need to create a positive streetscape at this site. The streetscape design should maximize the existing mature trees at 8th Avenue and the future pedestrian activity at 8th Avenue and Marion Street. The applicant should consider pulling back the parking from these street frontages to provide wide landscaped areas for pedestrians. Another possibility is to lower the parking roof structure to increase views to downtown from 8th Avenue.

The Board also noted the importance of designing to maximize the future park across the street mid-block at 8th Avenue. The proposed design could include a visual break in the parking structure with a large landscaped area corresponding to the park location across the street.

A-4 Human Activity. New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.

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.

A-10 Corner Lots. Building on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and public street fronts. Parking and automobile access should be located away from corners.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed existing and future pedestrian activity. Existing pedestrian activity adjacent to the site is low, but it will likely increase as a result of the new mixed-use tower at 8th Avenue and Columbia Street and the proposed Polyclinic building entrance at the corner of 7th and Marion.

The Board questioned the need for a proposed curb cut and on-street drop off area near the corner at 751 Marion Street. The proposed curb cut occupies pedestrian sidewalk area and could create a hostile pedestrian environment with vehicles crossing an additional point in the sidewalk between 7th and 8th Avenues. A departure would be required for this curb cut, and the applicant will need to demonstrate how the curb cut creates a project that better meets the intent of the design review guidelines. As currently proposed, it appears the proposed curb cut conflicts with design review guidelines A-4, A-8, and A-10.

The Board noted that the design of the proposed development should consider pedestrian opportunities and maximize those opportunities to encourage human activity on the street, as well as minimizing the impact of automobiles on the pedestrian environment. The design should increase pedestrian connectivity and human activity at all the edges of the site, since pedestrians will likely travel between the parking lots and the surrounding uses.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

- 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 concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its facade walls.
- C-3 **Human Scale.** The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.
- 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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that grade changes and uses across 8th Avenue will result in highly visible parking surfaces. These surfaces should be treated as a “fifth façade” and designed with interesting and lively treatments and high quality materials.

The design should include careful detailing of all facades, including parking structure walls, terraced areas, and parking surface treatments. Façade surfaces should result in a cohesive overall design with a human scale at the street level and alley.

D. Pedestrian Environment

- D-2 **Blank Walls.** Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.
- D-4 **Design of Parking Lots Near Sidewalks.** Parking lots near sidewalks should provide adequate security and lighting, avoid encroachment of vehicles onto the sidewalk, and minimize the visual clutter of parking lot signs and equipment.
- D-5 **Visual Impacts of Parking Structures.** The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

The Board’s Early Design Guidance comments related to these guidelines are described above, in response to guidelines AI-1, C-2, C-3, and C-4.

- D-6 **Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away

from the street front where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board acknowledged that the proposed parking structure would be mechanically ventilated. Mechanical ventilation will result in exterior louvered panels, vents, and other equipment. The Board directed the applicant to design these items to be part of the overall architectural concept. The mechanical equipment should be integrated into the design as an aesthetic element that enhances the overall design concept.

E. Landscaping

E-1 Landscaping to Reinforce Design Continuity with Adjacent Sites. Where possible, and where there is not another overriding concern, landscaping should reinforce the character of neighboring properties and abutting streetscape.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed the potential future park that is proposed across 8th Avenue from the site. The proposed design should maximize this future benefit by including a mid-block landscaped area at the subject property, maximizing the views from this mid-block point at 8th Avenue, and using a plant palette to enhance the future park and the existing streetscape at 8th Avenue. Any fencing or screening at 8th Avenue to separate the rooftop parking from the street level should be designed to artistically enhance the streetscape.

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

E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as high-bank front yards, steep slopes, view corridors, or existing significant trees and off-site conditions such as greenbelts, ravines, natural areas, and boulevards.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board recognized the challenges associated with the slopes at this site. The Board noted that the result may be similar to an earthwork sculpture, rather than a typical building proposal. As described in response to guidelines above, the surface areas of parking and terraced landscapes should be designed carefully as a fifth façade.

The surface treatments may include hard materials and plant materials. The Board directed the applicant to design the proposal with sustainability in mind, specifically how

the proposed materials and parking surfaces can deal with reflectivity in an aesthetic way and reduce storm water runoff.

The Board also noted that lighting should be incorporated to enhance the proposal, including lighting in pedestrian areas at 8th Avenue. All lighting should be pedestrian in scale. The applicant can also reference the First Hill Neighborhood Association design efforts for lighting suggestions.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) 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(s). The Board's recommendation will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departures were requested:

- 1. Access to Parking (23.47A.032.A.1.a):** The Code requires vehicular access from the alley, unless otherwise permitted by the Director. The applicant proposes to take vehicular access from the alley and a new curb cut at Marion Street, near the intersection of 7th Avenue and Marion Street.

The Board questioned the need for this proposed departure, since the proposed curb cut would interrupt the sidewalk and additional on-street loading is also proposed. The location of the proposed curb cut close to the intersection is also a concern. (See response to guidelines A-4, A-8 and A-10 for more detail)

- 2. Location of Parking (23.47A.032.B.1.b):** The Code requires that parking within a structure shall be separated from the street-level, street facing facades by another permitted use. The applicant proposes to place parking directly adjacent to the street-level street facing facades.

The Board indicated that they will continue to entertain this departure, but the applicant should work to maximize the landscaping opportunities at the site, design the surface and roof parking areas with the same level of effort as the street facing facades, and incorporate artistic elements in the screening/fencing at 8th Avenue and the mechanical ventilation equipment for the garage. (See response to guidelines A-1, A-2, C-2, C-3, C-4, D-2, D-4, D-5, D-6, E-1, E-2 and E-3 for more detail)

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.