



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 6)
April 12, 2011
Notes available: May 2, 2011**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3012188
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 25,920 square foot Downtown development site is bounded by Cedar Street on the north, 3rd Avenue on the east, by Vine Street 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 and the two-story Metropolitan Press building (occupied as a Rite Aid pharmacy). There is on-grade parking for 14 vehicles just off the alley.

The proposed development will include demolition of the existing American Lung Association 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 has recently undergone 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 and has begun construction 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 28-story proposed structure would consist of approximately 310 units. Although there is no requirement for it, parking for 160 vehicles would be available in below-grade parking. A ground-floor would provide a residential entry lobby as well as some 4,000 square feet of retail uses.

ARCHITECT’S PRESENTATION

The Board chair opened the meeting at 5:30. He explained that the Board had earlier reviewed a project with the same address but that project before the Board was a new project with a new project number. The project description, the Board chair explained, was for a 27-story residential tower above at-grade retail space, for an overall height of 240 feet, and the Board’s role was to offer Early Design Guidance for the proposed development.

The DPD Land Use Planner, Michael Dorcy noted that the Design Review Board had previously reviewed a residential tower project in the same location and by the same applicant as the present project. The project had acquired additional new property and had elected to get a new project number and begin anew the design review process for the new project.

David Hewitt, the Project Architect, then began his presentation to the Board utilizing an urban design diagram showing the neighborhood context and zoning. Mr. Hewitt showed the existing trees in the neighborhood and reviewed the existing neighborhood properties. The existing buildings on the site are a Rite Aid (in the Metropolitan Press Building), and the American Lung Association. Mr. Hewitt explained that the present proposal is part of a larger a two-phase project that would eventually address the potential for expansion above the Metropolitan Press building. Phase One, the proposal before the Board for the evening, was for a residential tower on the north half of the site.

Mr. Hewitt presented the Board with three different massing diagrams. Each of the massing diagrams was the same at the base. All the presented diagrams proposed to widen the sidewalk on Cedar Street. Each of the massing diagrams would propose vehicular garage entry/exit from the alley as specified in the Land Use Code. In order to create a safe alley with enough

maneuvering space for cars and services, all three schemes would propose a 3.5 foot dedication to widen the alley (the Land Use Code requires only a 2-foot dedication).

The first massing scheme would provide a courtyard between the Phase 1 and 2 developments. The upper level corners of the building would step back, culminating in very small upper level floor plates with little modulation. This massing scheme would resemble three large stacked blocks, and would project out into the alley. The proposed base of the first massing scheme would be delicate and transparent, with edges manipulated to create interesting lines.

The second massing scheme was similar to the first but would create more terraces for residential units and more modulation at the lower levels. Different modulation would be provided toward the Seattle Heights building and the corner facing the building would be cut back. The building would also step back as it rises above the podium. The second massing scheme proposes a more substantial vertical element on the east face of the building, with a more substantial frame at the podium level. The podium would be constructed of a masonry base that would pick up on the dark masonry of the neighboring Metropolitan Press Building. The skin of the tower was predominately of glass.

The third (and preferred) massing scheme would consist of an articulated base with essentially two large “steps” in the tower element from the base to the top. This scheme proposes delicate sunscreens that would clip the lower base, but would simplify the massing. The massing pattern would maintain a rhythm with the Seattle Heights building and would respects its massing scheme. The third massing scheme is preferred because the first scheme seemed too heavy on the top with three “blocks” of massing. The second scheme seemed too busy, although the strong masonry bands were thought to provide interest. The third scheme was the more slender of the three, with metal and glass suggesting a lighter composition and sunscreens lightening the podium element.

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-3, C-4, C-6, D-1, D-3 and E-2. No departures were requested for any of the three presented schemes.

Following the presentation, the Board members asked a few clarifying questions prior to opening the meeting to public comment.

- 1) Brian Scott asked whether the project was proposing anything over the Metropolitan Press building at this time? Mr. Hewitt stated that Phase 2 would be required to go through design review, but because of Land Use Code requirements a tall tower similar to Phase 1 could not be built on the Metropolitan Press site.
- 2) Pragnesh Parikh asked whether the green terraces in the scheme were proposed as public spaces. Mr. Hewitt stated that the upper level terraces would be private either for individual units or for open space for building residents. The large green space between Phase 1 and 2 developments was proposed to add a softness to the views from above for both residents of the proposed building and for neighbors.
- 3) Gabe Grant asked whether the Metropolitan Press building is a landmark? Mr. Hewitt stated that no, it is not, but that it is a highly regarded building.

- 4) Shari Olson asked whether the glass on the outside of the tower is intended to be a smooth skin? Mr. Hewitt said yes.
- 5) Shari Olson also asked why the elevations on all of the schemes overhang the alley? Mr. Hewitt stated that the floorplates are really small on this site because of the green streets requirement, so they had to push back over the alley.
- 6) Gabe Grant asked whether Phase 2 could be built—does the Land Use Code require tower spacing here? Mr. Hewitt stated that no tower was proposed here, so no tower spacing would apply.

Public Comment

- 1) A resident of the Seattle Heights building across the alley stated that the alley, even with a proposed 3.5 foot dedication, was still too narrow. Seattle Heights also exits its garage onto the alley, and the Seattle Heights' loading dock is also located there. She stated that when you add cars to the alley, and more deliveries, it's going to be very difficult to drive in the alley. She requested that the building set back even more from the alley to allow a wider drive aisle. She also requested that any venting for the project be directed away from Seattle Heights.
- 2) Another resident of Seattle Heights commented that the Space Needle was an iconic structure and expressed her hopes that the project would be sensitive to preserving views of the needle from everywhere, even peek-a-boo views. She agreed with the comments expressed by the other resident of Seattle Heights regarding the alley.
- 3) A third resident of Seattle Heights (for 9 months) noted that he was an urban planner and wanted to live in an iconic building, which he found in Seattle Heights. He likes the lighting on top of Seattle Heights. He hoped the Board would look at a tapered building. The project would create shade and shadow on Seattle Heights' open area at the north part of their building, which now gets sun in the winter. He suggested that the Board require a master plan for the Phase 1 and Phase 2 developments since the projects needed to be integrated. The entry of the proposed building should be iconic – “you need to know where the entrance is—make it a statement with materials and colors.” When you make an iconic building it will last. The resident, Larry Yenglin, handed in a 3-page comment letter to DPD expanding the design comments delivered at the meeting.
- 4) The president of the Homeowners' Association of the Seattle Heights building, Harold Seaburg, introduced the former President of the Association, Tom Eanes, who offered the Board a copy of the Board's previous guidance and design review minutes from the previous project in September. The previous project, he noted respected Seattle Heights by pulling elements of the building away from Seattle Heights; in exchange for this, the Board granted a departure that ultimately allowed the building to gain extra developable area. Although this is a different proposal, he noted, it is the same site, and should be held to the same guidelines as before. There was nothing in any of the three massing diagrams presented this time, he stated, that showed the development pulling away from the Seattle Heights building. In fact, the new project did the opposite. Just because this building does not propose a request for any departures, he noted finally, does not mean that the project should not be required to acknowledge and address the presence of Seattle Heights.
- 5) The Seattle Heights' resident who had spoken first commented again and asked if there was a way to put in two big buildings on this site rather than just one? The Land Use

Planner stated that the Land Use Code would not allow two 240-foot tall buildings in this location.

- 6) Finally, another member of the public commented that he thought that the Board should look on the impact of the project on several existing buildings. There are empty retail spaces and empty parking lots everywhere, he noted, and asked: Why doesn't the project develop in one of these other locations?

Board Discussion/Early Design Guidance

One of the Board members stated that she liked the preferred massing alternative for the same reasons as Mr. Hewitt did: it was a well-integrated scheme and it turned the corner better. She noted that she was looking forward to seeing this scheme developed in greater detail. She hoped that the designer's experience of already designing a similar project on this site would allow the designer to really show a significant amount of detail at the recommendation meeting.

Another Board member commented that the interaction of the building and the alley would be important, and that it would be important to deal with the issue of the extra traffic on the alley. He liked the pedestrian-related corner at 3rd and Cedar and also was looking forward to a more detailed rendering of the building. He recommended that the development team should remember the types of details that were included in the previous project, especially the canting away from the alley at the upper levels that gave the previous proposal not only a commodious fit at the beltline of the alley but provided a certain éclat to the overall design of the structure.

Another Board member noted that both options 2 and 3 did a good job of breaking down the massing, but that option 3 had more "character." The modules of the building broke down in different directions, and brought more sunlight into nearby buildings. Keeping Phase II small, he noted, would help add value to this project as well. He also stated that under the SEPA process the project might need to study the impact of the new traffic on alley operations, but that this is not something that the design review board looks at. He commented that he particularly liked the landscaping at the street level and appreciated the way the proposed building turned the corner for people at street level.

The Board chair stated that he concurred with his fellow Board members regarding the massing scheme. He commended the design team for providing underground parking and utilizing alley access. The width of the alley was said to be an issue for him and he noted that he was unsure where the loading functions would occur and not conflict with other uses in the alley. He requested more information to understand how the alley would operate. He also stated that right now the top of the building just stops at the sky and that he would like to see more detail how the top of the building might relate to the skyline. Another Board member interjected that he thought that the skyline detail would come as the building is further developed.

One Board member disagreed with the Chair and stated that since this is a modern building, similar to the Norton Building which has no cornice but is clean where it meets sky, she would like the top of this building to be kept fairly clean. The Board chair responded that he is concerned with how a plain top may look from a distance. He then stated that he agreed with the concerns of two other of the Board members about the moves the previous project took. This project, like the previous development proposal on the site, would need to think about how it is impacting its close neighbor across the alley, Seattle Heights, and would need to tell the Board

the design thought process it has going through at the time of the next meeting. He then observed that the southern façade looked less finished than the other facades. This façade is just as important, he commented, and will continue to be seen in the future even with the construction of Phase II. The south façade stood in need of more development and the Board would expect that design development to be shown in greater detail, and in renderings both at close hand and at a distance, when the development team returned for a recommendation meeting.

Having made those comments, the Board agreed in their recommendation that the project should move on to the recommendation stage.

DESIGN 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 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.

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 liked the way the orthogonal base re-enforced the existing urban form while still leading the pedestrian around the corner at Third and Bell.

A-2 Enhance the Skyline

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

As noted in the Board deliberations above, there was some discussion regarding whether the structure should wear a cap and what a proper cap to this structure would be.

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 (Metropolitan Press Building) located at the

corner of 3rd Avenue and Vine Street. Associated with the Board discussion there had been several comments by Board members regarding gestures, as had been incorporated into the design of the earlier iteration of a structure on the same site, that would acknowledge, without necessarily being deferential to, the structure across the alley (the Seattle Heights building).

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 Metropolitan Press building at 2603 3rd Avenue. Remarks under B-1 above indicate the Board's interest in how this transition will be handled.

B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form and Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area

Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development

The Board was not interested in slavish imitation of attributes but rather an acknowledgement of datum points and siting characteristics within the neighborhood, relating both to vintage and newer construction.

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 a general affinity for alternative three which maintained an orthogonal relationship at the base with both Cedar Street and Third Avenue. 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. Wrapping the proposed Green Street amenities around the corner at Third Avenue and Cedar Street and clearly linking the two pedestrian realms was a significant

gesture. Building overhangs and overhead weather protection along both street-facing facades would also be essential elements of the integrated wrap. 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-2 Design Facades of Many Scales

This guideline was cited in reference to the Board's discussions regarding the importance of the composition and detailing of the south façade.

C-5 Encourage Overhead Weather Protection

This was cited by the Board as always of major concern for downtown projects.

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.

Following up on several comments from members of the public, the Board emphasized their own concerns that the alley façade and its relationship to the structure across from it was an important issue for them as it had been in the earlier proposal of a building for this site. Among those concerns would be the impacts of utility equipment. Additionally, several considerations that are contained in the Belltown supplemental guidelines were applicable. 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

D-2 Enhance the Building with landscaping

Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping, which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material.

A is the integration or "wrap" of landscaping and amenity features where the pedestrian realms of Cedar Street and Third Avenue meet. 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 residential entry off Cedar Street provides a opportunity to create a special downtown space, given the challenge to integrate this area into the Green Street improvements along the 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.

D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting, and D-6 Design for Personal Safety and Security

Each of these guidelines were selected to be of highest priority as they need to be applied in particular to the ground-level alley façade treatments and generally to upper-level alley-façade treatments.

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.

E-3 Minimize the Presence of Service Areas

Locate service areas for trash dumpsters, loading docks, mechanical equipment and the like away from the street where possible. Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.

These two guidelines were called out as being of highest priority to the success of the project particularly as impinged on development of the alley area and alley façade. Among other considerations, the Downtown guidelines call for using a portion of the top of the parking level (in this case, entry) as deck, patio, or garden....The Board also indicated a desire to see demonstrated the functional interactions and potential conflicts between garage entries on either side of the alley since Seattle Heights already has a garage entry directly across from that proposed as part of the new development.

Since compatibility between neighbors was a major motif of the meeting, the Board encouraged the design team to explore options that might reduce conflicts between garage entries and utility functions at the alley. (There is no supplemental guidance under these heading provided in the Belltown-specific guidelines.)

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.