EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3012306
Address: 3261 SW Avalon Way
Applicant: Steve Fischer
Date of Meeting: Thursday, July 28, 2011
Board Members Present: Christie Coxley
Myer Harrell
Robin Murphy
Norma Tompkins
Board Members Absent: Brandon Nicholson (recused)
Daniel Skaggs
DPD Staff Present: Bruce Rips

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Midrise (MR)
Nearby Zones: North: MR along SW Avalon Way. Single Family (SF 5000) to the north.
South: Single Family 5000
East: MR along SW Avalon Way.
West: Neighborhood Commercial Three with a 65’ height limit at 35th Ave. SW. Commercial 1 65 (C1 65) farther to the west.
Lot Area: Total area equals 24,000 sq. ft. (200’ by 120’). The grade changes approximately 14 feet descending from the SW corner to the NE corner. Topographically, the site is located on the eastern flank of the West Seattle hill. The site perches on a south-facing hillside overlooking the West Seattle stadium and golf course.

Current Development: Five parcels occupied by four single family houses. One parcel is vacant.

Access: Current access occurs from SW Avalon Way.

Located at the northeast edge of the West Seattle Junction Hub Urban Village, the project site lies along a segment of SW Avalon Way that has evolved from primarily single family houses to a denser, multi-family neighborhood. Some mid-century apartment buildings appear to remain viable. The change to higher and denser apartment buildings began in the early 1990s. Several of these were built before the beginning of the city’s Design Review program.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: SW Avalon curves uphill in three long blocks with the low end starting at the W. Seattle Bridge and rising up to join the minor arterial 35th Ave. SW and the major arterial Fauntelroy Way SW, as tertiary access to the West Seattle Junction and surrounding neighborhoods. The lower end of SW Avalon Way is zoned LR1 and is dominated by industrial uses, the Seattle port facilities and railroad infrastructure associated with Harbor Island. The Nucor steel plant dominates the intersection of SW Avalon Way the W. Seattle Bridge. A few commercial buildings are remants of the early 20th century township of Avalon.

Towards the west of the site, zoned NC3 65, C1 65 and LR3, much of the development is focused on automobile access to and from the upper deck of the W. Seattle Bridge. Uses include a handful of chain restaurants and a combination of convenience stores and gas stations. Farther to the southwest, an area, once dominated by auto sales and service lots, is in various stages of redevelopment. At the intersection of Fauntleroy and SW Alaska Way, the traffic splits to continue either to the residential area or the Fauntleroy ferry terminal or to climb five blocks west to the primary commercial and retail spine of the West Seattle Junction. Beyond the commercial and mixed uses listed, the surrounding neighborhoods are primarily occupied by single family homes, reflecting their SF 5000 zoning. South of the project, beyond an unimproved alley, a city park includes the W. Seattle Stadium, the W. Seattle Golf Course and Camp Long. Beyond the park and towards Elliott Bay lays the low-lying residentially developed Delridge valley all of which drains into the Longfellow Creek watershed.
ECAs: No mapped Environmentally Critical Areas on the subject site.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to design and construct a six-story residential building (approximately 117 units) with below grade parking (projected 117 spaces) in a Midrise zone. Access would occur from SW Avalon Way. The proposed development would require the demolition of four single family houses.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant presented three massing alternatives or scenarios. The first option, a code compliant scheme that resembles a large, un-modulated rectangular volume, has seven floors, a single curb cut, a driveway removed from the street side and generous setbacks from both the west and south property lines to reduce impacts on the adjacent building and on the park respectively. The bulk of the mass is shifted to the southeast opening up sight-lines from SW Avalon to the south. The distinguishing features of the second option include two curb cuts on SW Avalon Way, an entry courtyard facing SW Avalon and a smaller open space at the rear. The modified “H-shaped” mass has four towers at each of the four corners, modulating the façade of each elevation. The structure would be six floors with parking both at and below grade and would sit at and near the south property line. The third scheme, also an “H-shaped” mass in plan, closely resembles option #2 with the exception that the two major open spaces ---a public court facing SW Avalon and a more private one overlooking the park--- are similar in size. The towers at the building’s corners are slightly set back from the south property line.

Beneath the planting strips adjacent to the sidewalk, a six to eight inch concrete combined sewer and storm water mainline prevents the planting of street trees. This may change later after replacement of the pipe.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nine members of the public affixed their names to the sign-in sheet. Several members of the public provided the following comments:

- A building with a 75’ height limit is out of scale with the neighborhood.
- Buildings step down the hill toward the east. The proposed building would pop up over the building to the west ruining the building height pattern.
- The proposed structure is too close to the adjacent building to the west. Option #1 is the best option. It causes the least shadow on the neighboring building.
- Please clarify parking requirements in an Urban Village.
- Please clarify why SDOT does not want street trees in front of the site.
• All of the other buildings along SW Avalon respect the rear setback. Why should this project receive a departure for it?
• Show what can be seen from the roof top at the next Board meeting. Green roof tops are preferable.
• Alleviate most street noise for the comfort of the residents in the front units.
• Don’t use metal as a veneer. The material is out of character with the neighborhood.

### 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.

The proposed structure should appear to step up SW Avalon viewed from the east just as the other multi-family buildings do.

Capitalizing on views to the golf course is encouraged.

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

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

A pedestrian-oriented streetscape is perhaps the most important characteristic to be achieved in new development in the Junction’s mixed use areas (as previously defined). New development—particularly on SW Alaska, Genesee, Oregon and Edmunds Streets—will set the precedent in establishing desirable siting and design characteristics in the right-of-way.

Due to the placement of a concrete combined sewer main beneath the planting strip, Seattle Department of Transportation discourages street trees in the planting strip for the foreseeable future. The applicant should plant trees on the property side of the sidewalk. The Board endorsed the idea of the courtyard facing SW Avalon St.
A-4  **Human Activity.** New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

An active and interesting sidewalk engages pedestrians through effective transitions between the public and private realm. Particularly in the California Avenue Commercial Core, proposed development is encouraged to set back from the front property line to allow for more public space that enhances the pedestrian environment. Building facades should give shape to the space of the street through arrangement and scale of elements. Display windows should be large and open at the street level to provide interest and encourage activity along the sidewalk. At night, these windows should provide a secondary source of lighting.

The front courtyard should help enhance the pedestrian experience along SW Avalon.

A-5  **Respect for Adjacent Sites.** 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.

Due to the relationship of the multifamily building to the west, the Board stated that the structure should be pulled back from its proposed proximity to the west property line and, at the least, comply with the land use code regulations for setbacks in the Midrise zone. The design of the facades should respect the privacy of the residents who live in the adjacent buildings.

The presence of a large wall sheltering the parking garage on the park across the alley and the request for a reduction from the rear setback requirement concerned the Board.

A-6  **Transition Between Residence and Street.** For residential projects, 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 looks forward to reviewing the design of the front courtyard.

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

The courtyard spaces may be too generous. In order to reduce the proposed encroachment on the side setbacks, the courtyards could be reduced in size.

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.

The Board prefers one curb cut. Similar to another structure on SW Avalon Way, a single curb cut and driveway could access separate levels of a parking structure. Given that the site lies within an urban village, a bike route, the multi-family structures generate considerable pedestrian activity and this guideline states that siting should minimize the impact of vehicles on the pedestrian environment, one curb cut would promote safety, provide more parking opportunities on the street and generally have less overall impact.

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The applicant would need to prove to the Board that a ramp would not be physically feasible.

**B. Height, Bulk and Scale**

**B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility.** 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 near-by, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

**West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:**

Current zoning in the Junction has created abrupt edges in some areas between intensive, mixed-use development potential and less-intensive, multifamily development potential. In addition, the Code-complying building envelope of NC-65’ (and higher) zoning designations permitted within the Commercial Core would result in development that exceeds the scale of existing commercial/mixed-use development. More refined transitions in height, bulk and scale—in terms of relationship to surrounding context and within the proposed structure itself—must be considered.

The Board found the notion of anchoring the proposed structure with four towers problematic. The conditions at the four corners all differ and warrant variety in the massing in response. The lack of corner conditions formed by street intersections further argues against the plausibility of four towers. The argument for the tower at the northeast corner most convinced the Board as it would announce the building to drivers and pedestrians ascending SW Avalon from the West Seattle Bridge.

The impingement on the setbacks should be reconsidered by reducing the size of the courtyards. These seem large and unnecessarily force the structure to spread out.

The elevations over emphasize the vertical, creating a busy or anxious façade of multiple columns of bays, towers and balconies, which reinforces the sense that the building mass crowds the neighbors and the street.

The larger shifts in plane, the simple modulations that form the courtyards, were encouraged by the Board. The plethora of smaller modulations with their further differentiation by changes in materials and colors works against the clarity of the tripartite scheme. Issues of scale (reducing the horizontality) can be addressed by other techniques.
C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-1 Architectural Context. New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

- Facade Articulation: To make new, larger development compatible with the surrounding architectural context, facade articulation and architectural embellishment are important considerations in mixed use and multifamily residential buildings. When larger buildings replace several small buildings, facade articulation should reflect the original platting pattern and reinforce the architectural rhythm established in the commercial core.
- Architectural Cues: New mixed-use development should respond to several architectural features common in the Junction’s best storefront buildings to preserve and enhance pedestrian orientation and maintain an acceptable level of consistency with the existing architecture. To create cohesiveness in the Junction, identifiable and exemplary architectural patterns should be reinforced. New elements can be introduced - provided they are accompanied by strong design linkages.

The Board noted that the tripartite massing scheme of the north façade reflects the architectural rhythm established by the midrise buildings up and down SW Avalon Way.

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.

West Seattle Junction-specific supplemental guidance:

New multi-story developments are encouraged to consider methods to integrate a building’s upper and lower levels. This is especially critical in areas zoned NC-65’ and greater, where more recent buildings in the Junction lack coherency and exhibit a disconnect between the commercial base and upper residential levels as a result of disparate proportions, features and materials. The base of new mixed-use buildings – especially those zoned 65 ft. in height and higher - should reflect the scale of the overall building. New mixed-use buildings are encouraged to build the commercial level, as well as one to two levels above, out to the front and side property lines to create a more substantial base.

See Board guidance for B-1.

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

West Seattle Junction-specific supplemental guidance:
• Facades should contain elements that enhance pedestrian comfort and orientation while presenting features with visual interest that invite activity. Overhead weather protection should be functional and appropriately scaled, as defined by the height and depth of the weather protection. It should be viewed as an architectural amenity, and therefore contribute positively to the design of the building with appropriate proportions and character.

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.

Facades should be residential in character. The Board accepted the notion that the proposed building may have metal siding. Extensive amounts of the material may not be appropriate; however, detailing of materials will be scrutinized once the design develops. Few buildings with the exception of the new building at the southeast corner of SW Avalon and 35th Ave SW make extensive use of metal.

C-5 Structured Parking Entrances. The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.

The Board prefers one curb cut and a single driveway. See A-8.

D. Pedestrian Environment

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

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

Design projects to attract pedestrians to the commercial corridors (California, Alaska). Larger sites are encouraged to incorporate pedestrian walkways and open spaces to create breaks in the street wall and encourage movement through the site and to the surrounding area. The Design Review Board would be willing to entertain a request for departures from development standards (e.g. an increase in the 64% upper level lot coverage in NC zones and a reduction in open space) to recover development potential lost at the ground level.

The proposal with its courtyard fronting SW Avalon Way would create a break in the street wall and provide an opportunity for a lively pedestrian oriented open space.

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.
The back of the parking garage would potentially present a large blank wall to the stadium. The applicant has offered to landscape the alley to mitigate the wall’s presence and, perhaps, to remove existing trees from obstructing views to the south. Based on aerial photographs, the unimproved alley, however, appears to be densely planted with trees. (A survey will determine the precise location of the trees.) SDOT would need to provide permission to the applicant to landscape the alley. Because the alley is not within the site, a landscape plan would not necessarily provide a clear nexus for potential conditions and departures that the Board may want to place upon the proposal.

D-3 **Retaining Walls.** Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where higher retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscapes.

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.

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

- Parking structures should be designed and sited in a manner that enhances pedestrian access and circulation from the parking area to retail uses.
- The design of parking structures/areas adjacent to the public realm (sidewalks, alley) should improve the safety and appearance of parking uses in relation to the pedestrian environment.

The parking garage may have visual impact on the two adjacent structures and upon the park to the south. Reducing the size and scale of blank walls is encouraged.

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.

D-7 **Personal Safety and Security.** Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.

D-8 **Treatment of Alleys.** The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.

See Board guidance for D-2. An applicant design for the unimproved alley would need a commitment from SDOT. The Parks and Recreation Department may need to be part of the discussion.
E. Landscaping

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.

The Board looks forward to reviewing the landscaping of the proposed courtyards. It noted the preponderance of deciduous plants. This should be tempered with evergreens. A detailed landscape plan is required for the Recommendation meeting.

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.

Appropriate landscaping at the side setbacks would provide some visual and noise mitigation for the neighboring residents.

A lushly planted courtyard facing SW Avalon Way would mitigate the lack of street trees due to the sewer main beneath the planting strip.

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 applicant preliminarily requested departures for rear and side setbacks and structure width and depth. The Board indicated its unwillingness to entertain departures for the side setbacks given the proximity of the adjacent midrise buildings. A departure for structure maximum width may have some bearing upon the quality of life for the neighbors as well. This request would need to be diagrammed, showing how it would impact the neighbors, and quantified. Rear setbacks and structure maximum depth would likely have impacts on how the building is perceived from the park and the unimproved alley.

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.