City of Seattle

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

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE
NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number:	3012320
Address:	3926 Aurora Avenue North
Applicant:	Clark Design Group
Date of Meeting:	Monday, October 17, 2011
Board Members Present:	Salone Habibuddin Joseph Hurley Christina Pizana Martine Zettle
Board Members Absent:	Peter Krech
DPD Staff Present:	Bruce P. Rips

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone:	Commercial One with a 40' height limit (C1-40)
Nearby Zones:	North: C1-40 along the two block fronts of Aurora Ave. N. South: C-40 along the two block fronts of Aurora to N. 38th St. East: Lowrise 3 (LR3) and Lowrise 2 (LR2). West: LR2 along Linden Ave. N.
Lot Area:	36,271 square feet (.75 acres). The site descends roughly 16' from the northwest corner to the southeast. Along N. 40th the slope falls toward the east approximately six feet.

Current Development:	Vacant
Access:	Aurora Ave. N., North 40th St. and alley
Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character:	The site lies along the Aurora Ave. N. corridor. Commercial and single and multifamily residential uses front onto the street. To the south of the site, three houses border the subject property. Primarily two and three story multifamily apartments and townhouses sit to the east on the other side of the alley. Larger four-story commercial and multifamily buildings line Aurora Ave across N. 40th St. and N 39th St. A vacant parcel occupies the southeast corner of Aurora and N. 39th Streets. To the west, an eclectic mix of single family, small scale retail and office buildings are assembled on Aurora.
ECAs:	No Environmentally Critical Areas

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a four story extended stay hotel with 125 guest rooms (some have multiple bedrooms) and approximately 125 parking spaces. Vehicular access is proposed for Aurora Ave. N. and the north/south alley behind the property.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant presented three alternative design schemes at the EDG meeting. Each of the schemes illustrates a sizeable drop-off area with two curb cuts and canopy approximately in the middle of the Aurora block. Each option also shows a four-story building with a parking plinth on the southern half (visible on the south and east elevations) and three stories of hotel rooms. The northern half of the proposed structure houses semi-public rooms for hotel guests (meeting rooms, exercise room and pool, business center) and three floors of hotel rooms above it. The hotel parking garage is accessed from the alley. Option A, shaped like an elongated "I" has a central wing housing the entry and lobby area behind an extended drop-off area. Two smaller, perpendicular wings flank the central wing on the north and south. These approach both the east (alley) and west (Aurora Ave) property lines. Behind the central wing, the designers locate an outdoor patio area and a narrow bank of open space along the east property line.

For Option B, the hotel program remains essentially the same. In plan, the building shape resembles a squared-off number "2". The guest drop-off area, located slightly toward the north along Aurora Ave., extends deeper into the site pushing the lobby roughly 55 feet from Aurora Ave. Guest services remain located along the north end of the site near grade along Aurora Ave. and N. 40th St. Similar to Option A, the parking garage reveals itself near the houses bordering on the south and along the east property line.

Option C modifies the approach of Option B. The curb cuts and the guest drop-off occur toward the south end of the site facing Aurora. The bulk of accessory uses (meeting rooms, pool and exercise room) lies north of the entrance. Similar to the second option, the drop-off area is deeper and quite wide to accommodate buses from the expected cruise ship business. The northern mass comes directly out to Aurora Ave. and N. 40th St. The southern section, which appears to interlock with the northern half at the center of the site, steps back to accommodate the drop-off area and then forms a large wall that approaches the south property line and then turns to the alley.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 17 members of the public affixed their names to the mailing list. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

Impacts on the alley:

- Ensure that the lighting on the alley does not spillover onto the other properties yet the lighting must help keep the alley secure.
- There should be green space on the back side near the alley.
- The traffic from the hotel will impact the tenants east of the alley.
- The hotel will produce increased amounts of noise (garage door), car headlights and other lights on to the alley and the neighboring residences. (mentioned several times)
- The applicant has not provided any visual information about the back side of the proposal.
- Do not place a blank wall along the alley.
- The alley is too narrow for the amount of vehicles required to use it.
- The alley serves as an incubator for crime, theft and graffiti.

Security:

- The project should be secure from drug dealers and addicts who thrive on the Aurora Ave. corridor.
- The rooms shown at grade are susceptible to drug dealers.

Programming:

- The plans show very little green space compared to the previous multifamily proposal.
- The project doesn't add anything to the neighborhood. Will there be public rooms available for rent?
- Provide drawings of the garden.

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 of highest priority for this project.

The Citywide 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.**

Concept C's broken and interlocking building mass begins to adjust to the site's significant north/south slope. It is possible that by further accentuating the height differences the building would provide more visual drama from the streetscape.

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

In this circumstance, the proposal ought to be an example of not only how to do a building correctly on a major arterial but also how it appropriately transitions to a lower scale neighborhood.

A-3 **Entrances Visible from the Street. Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.**

The Board acknowledged that Concept C provides the formal entrance with the most exposure from Aurora Ave. Although the architect rendered an entry canopy on all of the concept drawings, she conveyed doubt as to whether a canopy or porte cochere would be included in the proposal.

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

In particular the facades facing the N. 40th St. and Aurora Ave. N. street edges should possess a human scale that encourages pedestrian activity. Landscaping will complement the architect's intention of providing both a safe and meaningful pedestrian experience.

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.**

The Board will give careful review of the building's relationship to the properties to the south and east at the Recommendation meeting. It is important that the building convey sensitivity to the transition to the next zone.

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.**

See Board guidance for D-8.

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

Locating the most public rooms at the northwest corner and along both street frontages ought to enhance the building's relationship to the neighborhood. Increased transparency will acknowledge the corner without calling unnecessary attention to it. Having this corner of the first floor sunk below sidewalk grade may be problematic.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 **<u>Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility</u>. 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.**

The Board supported Concept C as the most viable of the massing studies. The interlocking volumes, with the southern mass pushed away from Aurora Ave., relieves drivers and pedestrians on Aurora from enduring a 320 foot long wall.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-1 **<u>Architectural Context</u>. 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.**

The Aurora Ave. corridor possesses an eclectic mix of land uses and building styles. Newer structures tend toward decorated sheds sited close to the street front. Older structures include single family houses expanded and converted to commercial uses and older one and two story commercial structures. Unlike Aurora Ave. as it passes through the City of Shoreline, there are little public amenities or landscaping that unify the streetscape.

C-2 **<u>Architectural Concept and Consistency</u>. 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 **<u>Human Scale</u>. The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.**

This guidance, particularly relevant for the structure's relationship to the street edges and the alley, encourages the applicant to provide pedestrian amenities and architectural features that create a strong sense of place.

C-4 **<u>Exterior Finish Materials</u>. 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.**

The choice and compositional arrangement of exterior materials will reflect the desire of the applicant to provide a building that addresses two important scales--- the pedestrian / hotel guest and the vehicular oriented Aurora corridor.

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

The Board urged the applicant to explore locating the garage entrance to the northern half of the alley which would lessen the impact of the potentially considerable hotel traffic on the alley and the neighbors. Acknowledging the potential for added project costs, the Board reserves judgment until the architect provides studies exploring alternative garage access locations.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 **<u>Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances</u>. 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. …**

The Board emphasized the special importance of this guidance. Both the public open space near the building entrance (an extension of the lobby) and the more private garden for the hotel guests must feel secure yet not so fortress like that it inhibits the potential for social life. The project offers intriguing spatial and landscape possibilities that visually connect the entrance, lobby, great room and outdoor patio. Enhancing the flow through these spaces would provide a series of related indoor and outdoor courts that give resonance to the ancillary pool, exercise and meeting rooms.

D-2 **<u>Blank Walls</u>. 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.**

See Board comments for Guideline D-5.

D-3 **<u>Retaining Walls</u>. 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 **<u>Visual Impacts of Parking Structures</u>. 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.**

Concept drawings show portions of the garage visible to neighbors on the south and east. The walls and garage door should not be an afterthought but carefully designed and integrated into the building's overall design concept.

D-6 **<u>Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas</u>. 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.**

The architect indicated her intention of locating the waste and recycling storage area in or near the garage accessed from the alley.

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

The Board shared the neighbors' concerns for providing a safe and secure environment. The applicant must give careful consideration to how criminal activity occurs in the vicinity and convey how the hotel's programming and design enhances personal safety and security without creating defensible spaces that resemble a fortress. The design of the proposal should encourage the guests to walk into Fremont or along Stone Way N. Intelligent integration of lighting design, location of open spaces, landscaping, building transparency, and placement of entrances contribute to an environment beneficial to the neighbors, the hotel guests and employees.

The architect should consider the in-between, less exposed spaces that potentially harbor illicit activity. The design should evidence that the spaces between the hotel and the south property line and the alley are both secure and respectful of adjacent properties. In addition, the Board asks how the applicant resolves the issue of placing guest rooms at grade on the south end.

Where the sidewalk meets the two curb cuts along Aurora Ave, the pedestrian pathway across the two ends of the semi-circular driveway should have a visual signal such as a separate texture or striping that warns the drivers of pedestrians.

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

The alley acts as an interface between two zones (lowrise and commercial) with distinctly different purposes. Design of the alley façade and the building's various function rooms along the alley should recognize the alley's use by neighbors and the fact that a considerable number of residents' primary view looks toward the proposed hotel.

D-9 **<u>Commercial Signage</u>. Signs should add interest to the street front environment and should be appropriate for the scale and character desired in the area.**

The Board urged the applicant to provide signage in the spirit of the old roadside, Highway 99 signs. The Board has the authority to recommend signage that goes beyond the brand signs for lodging and commercial uses. The Board expects to see an exploration of alternative designs. Consider, as well, designs that could be integrated into the building concept. More than most projects, this project should have great commercial signage---something that people will want to see.

D-10 **<u>Commercial Lighting</u>. Appropriate levels of lighting should be provided in order to promote visual interest and a sense of security for people in commercial districts during evening hours. Lighting may be provided by incorporation into the building façade, the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, in landscaped areas, and/or on signage.**

A well developed lighting plan is required for the Recommendation meeting. This plan must address light and glare and light spillage on to neighboring properties. Examples of light fixtures should be included in the Recommendation packet. The quality of lighting along the three rights of way is critical to pedestrian and neighborhood security.

D-11 **<u>Commercial Transparency</u>. Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.**

The architect should provide a considerable amount of transparency along N. 40th St. and Aurora Ave. N. for the most public areas of the extended stay hotel. This will provide a greater connection between the hotel and the neighborhood.

E. Landscaping

E-2 **<u>Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site</u>. 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.**

Look at providing a landscape buffer along the alley. Raised planters or some other built up edge could be appropriate.

E-3 **<u>Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions</u>. 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.**

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 did not request departures from the Land Use Code.

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.

At the Recommendation meeting, the Board asked for specific documentation including vignette sketches along the alley from a pedestrian perspective and detail sketches showing the entire experience of the building. Every detail of the alley should be carefully documented. In essence, the Board would like to understand the entire alley experience.