



## FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

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Project Number: 3012441

Address: 2720 Fourth Avenue

Applicant: Julia Nagele, Hewitt Architects, for 4th & Denny LLC

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Board Members Present: Matthew Albores  
Gabe Grant (Chair)  
Brian Scott

Board Members Absent: Sheri Olson  
Pragnesh Parikh

DPD Staff Present: Shelley Bolser, substituting for Michael Dorcy

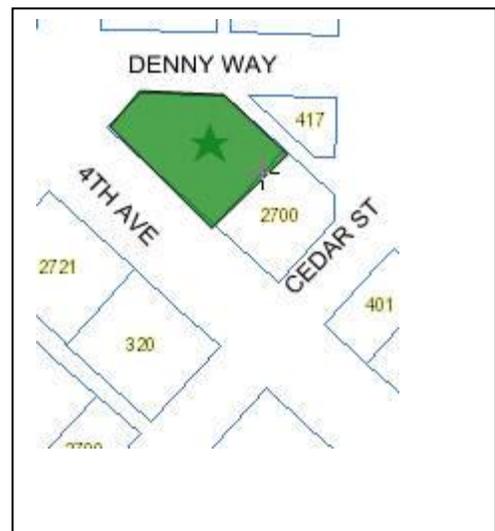
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### SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: DMR/R 125/65

Nearby Zones: (North) SM 85  
(South) DMR/L 240/125  
(East) DMR/R 125/65  
(West) DMC 85

Lot Area: Pentagon-shaped, relatively flat,  
circumscribed by Denny Way, 4th  
Avenue and an alley.



Current Development: Surface parking lot.

Access: Single access from the alley located northeast of the site.

Surrounding Development: Development on the block consists of commercial and residential structures, varying between two and six stories in height. Across 4th Avenue are two residential structures, one 3-stories and the other 5-stories in height. Across Denny Way to the north is the Fisher Broadcasting Plaza, a development which consists of two substantial commercial buildings that fill the entire block.

ECAs: There are no environmentally critical areas on site.

Neighborhood Character: The immediate Belltown neighborhood is a mixture of important older historic buildings and newer buildings. The public area along 4th Avenue sports a rich canopy of mature oak trees. The site is just south and west of Tillicum Place, a recognizable and established urban node dating from the earlier twentieth century with small scale retail shops, mature street trees and a landmarked statue of Chief Seattle. The development site lies within a pedestrian friendly enclave that is only a short distance from Denny Park and many of the Seattle Center's main attractions, including the Pacific Science Center, the Space Needle, the Experience Music Project and the Dale Chihuly Glass Exhibition pavilion and garden just now undergoing construction.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed mixed-use residential project will be comprised of ground level retail shops totaling approximately 5,000 square feet and 12 floors of approximately 167 residential units. The structure will contain three stories of below-grade parking for 105 cars accessed off the alley.

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: August 9, 2011**

## DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

At the Early Design Meeting David Hewitt of Hewitt Architects made the presentation for the design team, noting the rich opportunities offered by the site and providing three different design schemes for the site. The preferred scheme was said to provide for a strong architectural expression at the intersection of 4th Avenue and Denny Way while maintaining a well-defined street edge along each frontage. The site design for the preferred scheme would address each of the two street frontages (Denny Way and 4th Avenue) distinctively. The treatment along 4th

Avenue would retain the mature street trees and improve their condition by expanding the pit openings and the ground cover adjacent the trees. On Denny Way the existing street trees would be replaced with more robust specimens and with a continuous planted buffer to provide greater comfort for pedestrians traversing the sidewalk paralleling the high volume traffic path. Where the two streets meet, the existing maple trees would remain with the at-grade retail façade set back from the property line to allow for a broadened landscape area along this edge.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Approximately ten members of the public attended this Early Design Review meeting. The following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Stated that corrugated metal siding should be eschewed as a cladding material and that highly reflective glass in storefronts, diminishing transparency into the interiors of the building, was as bad as a blank wall.
- Encouraged activation of the alley by treating it as more than just a utilitarian and functional space; something like a café on the alley was also encouraged.
  - Concerned with graffiti as a problem in the area.
  - Encouraged providing ample parking spaces so spaces could be leased to those living and working nearby who were without parking.
  - Retail spaces should not be too small.
  - Use of large stones as part of landscaping pallet was discouraged sine gathering such materials and using them to break glass storefronts was viewed as a problem.
  - Overhead weather protection welcomed.
  - Preserve existing quality of light in the alley.

<b>INITIAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING: November 8, 2011</b>
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## **DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

David Hewitt made the presentation for the design team. The proposed mixed-use structure is to be comprised of ground level retail (6,092 square feet) set atop three floors of below grade parking to accommodate 89 vehicles, with 13 floors of residential units (totaling 167 units) above.

It was noted that the proposal borrowed from the existing neighborhood character and existing color palette of the immediate area, continuing the base retail level rendered in dark-framed fenestration topped with transom windows and canopies. It was also noted that the neighborhood showed a broad diversity in architectural character and detail due to contrasts in scale from a broad spectrum of architectural periods. Tilicum Place was marked by smaller structures dating from the turn of the twentieth century into the 1920's, while the Seattle Center structures and elevated monorail dated from the 1960's. There was also an a mixture of

relatively contemporary structures, such as the large Fisher Plaza directly across Denny Way from the development site.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately two members of the public attended this Initial Recommendation meeting.

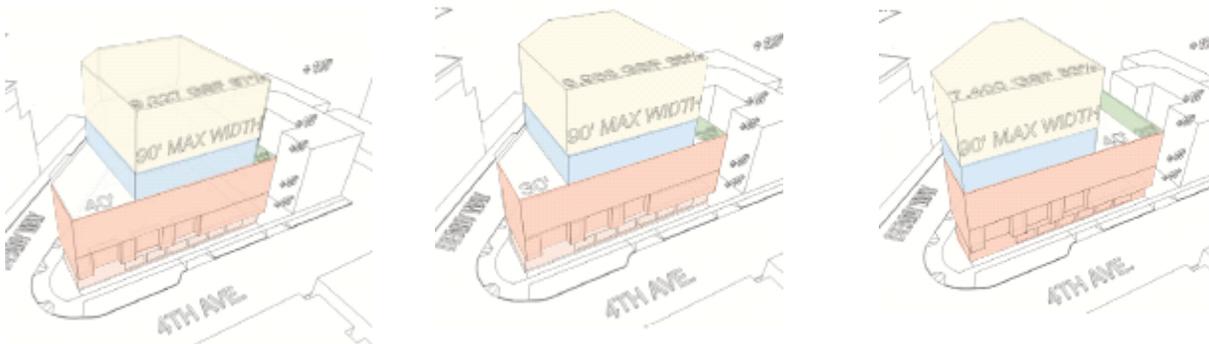
Public comment elicited by the Board complimented the design team on the overall design and on concerns raised by the public and Board at the EDG meeting. It was noted that the proposed design had responded well to concerns regarding materiality of the structure, concerns of safety and respect for the neighborhood context.

## FINAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING: December 13, 2011

### DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant explained that this additional Recommendation meeting was required because an additional design review departure was identified after the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposed departure was for a 20' area near the north portion of the building. The departure would allow the upper stories of the corner element to be connected to the rest of the building. Without the departure, a 20' separation would be required between the upper portions of the building. This would require a second elevator, and the applicant would be unlikely to construct such a building. Therefore, without the departure, the applicant would reduce the building width and modulation at the upper stories.

*Proposed design with departure*



*Possible massing options without departure*

## PUBLIC COMMENT

One member of the public arrived after the Recommendation meeting was concluded, but the Board, applicant and DPD stayed to answer questions. The individual had questions about the window locations, the start of construction, and vehicular access.

## 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 Downtown Design Guidelines of highest priority for this project.

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

### A. Site Planning & Massing

#### *Responding to the Larger Context*

**A-1 Respond to the Physical Environment. Develop an 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.**

*At the Early Design Guidance meeting, the Board agreed with the applicants' choice of this guideline as one of highest priority for the success of the project, noting the high visibility of any development on the site.*

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The site is in a transitional area comprised of varying building scales and at a neighborhood boundary. The lower levels of the proposed building form distinct street facades while the upper levels are oriented to respond to multi-directional views available to the units.*

*The Board, in turn, acknowledged the wisdom of treating the separate facades (including the alley) as separate challenges in need of separate solutions.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**A-2 Enhance the Skyline. Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.**

At the Early Design Guidance MeetingThe Board noted that the site sat at the edge of a transition zone, both literally as a land use designation and as a neighborhood designation, and emphasized that the transition needed to be reflected especially in the upper facades.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The upper building mass provides transitions between two multi-story vertical bays at the alley and at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Denny.*

*Although segments of the building maintain a rectilinear relationship with the skewed grid south of Denny Way, the Board thought that the chosen massing imparted a pleasing dynamic quality and vibrancy to the upper portions of the structure where it met Denny Way and the transition to a completely new grid.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

## **B. Architectural Expression**

### ***Relating to the Neighborhood Context***

#### **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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the proximity to Tillicum Place and briefly discussed the importance of cognizance of that fact without going into detail about how that proximity should impact actual design choices that were to be made as design development took place.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Like structures within the neighborhood, the proposal makes an architectural gesture from its own time. The massing continues the form and scale of neighboring residential buildings while the ground level retail makes strong connections to the sidewalk and public realm.*

*The Board agreed that the proposed structure was a thoroughly modern building that fit into the specific context because of the gestural moves in the overall massing and in the details of the various facades at the pedestrian scale.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**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 development in neighboring or nearby less intensive zones.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the site class for transitions to a variety of zone edges, to the north and to the southeast and to the southwest.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The proposal acknowledges the form of existing residential structures to the south by extending a horizontal datum line at the 60-foot mark and responds to the fine-grained scale of structures surrounding Tilikum Place via façade projections steps in the building mass.*

*The Board acknowledged the success of the design to provide a transition at the intersection of these various zones.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form & 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted one of the characteristics of nearby older development is a sense of intimacy that structures have with the street and the pedestrian realm; store fronts should avoid display of a generic relationship to the public realm at street level.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Retail frontage will continue the street frontage into the alley. At ground level the structural columns are proud of the building skin. Retail entries are recessed. Window mullions and canopy coverage define a pedestrian scale.*

*While not facing directly onto Tilikum Place, the proposed structure successfully related its sidewalk and retail level to the smaller scale of buildings constructed in 1900 and in the 1920s.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

- 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, this was identified as a guideline of highest priority by both the applicant and the Board.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The building’s massing is organized along each of the facades to respond to the various contexts. It steps down along the alley, reducing the scale of the building to respond to the smaller scale structures of Tilikum Place.*

*While making important gestures to the complexity of the neighborhood context, the proposed building, in the Board’s estimation, had acquired a strong, unified and forceful identity of its own.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

## **C. The Streetscape**

### ***Creating the Pedestrian Environment***

- 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, echoing some of the remarks of members of the public, members of the Board discussed the potential negative impacts of hiding spots behind the columns and the recesses inviting unsavory and unwanted uses.

*At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, columns shown at the EDG meeting have been eliminated to enhance safety and pedestrian activity.*

*The Board was agreed that the design team had created a welcoming pedestrian environment around the building and that steps had been taken to make it a safer environment in terms of the responses made to the EDG guidance.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**C-3 Provide Active—Not Blank—Facades. Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, in choosing this as a guideline of highest importance, the Board referred to the remark by a member of the public stating that a storefront window of highly reflective glass could create a negative experience equal to that of a blank wall along a façade.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Building has high degree of ground-level transparency, with clear glass and reflections minimized by overhead shading.*

*The Board acknowledged the clarifications made by the design team to address concerns of safety connected to this guideline.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**C-4 Reinforce Building Entries. To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce the building’s entry.**

At the Early Design Guidance meeting, this was selected as a guideline of highest priority but without further specificity on the part of the Board members.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Façade is recessed and entry canopy is elevated above surrounding weather protection.*

*The Board acknowledged gestures undertaken by the design team to address this concern.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**C-5 Encourage Overhead Weather Protection. Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit, overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the correct integration of pedestrian pathways recessed beneath upper portions of the structure and canopies or other forms of overhead weather protection along the various street fronts was regarded by the Board as “critical” to the success of the project and achieving the goals of establishing an inviting, comfortable and safe pedestrian environment.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Overhead weather protection is planned along the full extent of the 4th Avenue and Denny Way facades. The building is set back 5-feet from the Denny Way property line.*

*In acknowledging approval of the proposed weather protection for the project, the Board recommended approval of the departure request to modify the width of the overhead weather protection to accommodate the trees along the Denny Way façade.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, The alley should in this instance be considered a special place and, among other considerations, future design development should explore whether the parking entrance/exit should be the only ground-level “opening,” conceptual or actual, onto the alley.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The transparent retail storefront turns the corner at the alley to activate the alley and provide visual access into the space for both pedestrians and drivers coming along Denny Way. Building-mounted lighting fixtures will extend along the alley façade of the structure.*

*The Board discussed at some length the design proposal for the alley façade. In the final analysis, if the alley were a special place, it wasn't that special of a special space. It might be different if the alley faced directly onto Tilikum Place, but the actual relationship was more oblique. The design presented offered several gestures that had responded to the Early Design guidance—lighting along the faces, substantial materials at the pedestrian level, wrapping the retail opening around to the alley from Denny Way. At discussions end, it was determined that the building needed a “back of House,” and it was agreed that the gestures proposed would make it more than just another alley façade.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

## D. Public Amenities

### *Enhancing the Streetscape & Open Space*

- 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, relating to D-1 and D-2, both the enhancement of the existing 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue tree canopy area and the establishment of a buffer between pedestrians and vehicles along Denny Way were affirmed by the Board as significant and positive moves.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: Street-frontage landscaping responds specifically to the environment and existing conditions of the street fronts. 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue treatments will preserve and celebrate the existing street trees. The existing trees along Denny Way will be replaced with new trees and continuous tree beds along the curb lines. The large curb bulb, with existing mature trees, will be enhanced with taller landscaping and refinements to strengthen the transition onto Denny Way.*

*The existing plantings in the right-of-way abutting the space, especially on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue (and across 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue from the site) already made the site particularly attractive and the Board agreed that plans for preserving and enhancing the natural assets of the site were compelling and commendable.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

- 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.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted that an outstanding example of the successful interplay of private and public realms was less than a block away at Tillicum Place and might prove a valuable model for the successful creation of ground-level amenity areas at this site.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: The residential entry and lobby are highlighted by a faced indentation, framed by the trunks of two of the mature street trees that will remain*

*in place. Pedestrians will have opportunities to walk close to the building façade along Denny Way and away from the curb and high-volume traffic. A “shortcut” sidewalk will be provided south of the re-planted curb bulb.*

*The Board was satisfied that what was proposed for the site would produce a distinctive place.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting. To promote a sense of security for people downtown during nighttime hours, provide appropriate levels of lighting on the building facade, on the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, and on signage.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, referring to both public comments and observations by various Board members, the Board emphasized the priority that should be given to guidelines D-5 and D-6, with particular scrutiny to be given to recesses and voids in the ground-level facades and to areas that might be hidden behind columns.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting: response to D-5 and D-6: Signage will consist of blade signs below the canopies as well as window signs for retail tenants. Under-canopy lighting will illuminate sidewalk surfaces and provide a sense of security. Building-mounted lighting will be provided along the alley.*

*The Board was satisfied that the provisions for the retail frontages along Denny Way and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and residential entry on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue would make for a successful project. See under C-6 above comments regarding discussions of alley façade improvements.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**D-6 Design for Personal Safety & Security. Design the building and site to enhance the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security in the immediate area.**

Guidance and Recommendations reflect those in response to D-5.

## E. Vehicular Access & Parking

### *Minimizing the Adverse Impacts*

**E-1 Minimize Curb Cut Impacts. Minimize adverse impacts of curb cuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.**

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, regarding E-1, E-2 and E-3 the Board merely acknowledged that the design team appeared to be headed in the right direction in dealing with the impacts of parking and necessary service functions. Additionally, they referred to earlier comments from both the public and the Board regarding potentials for special development the alley offered to the site.

*Initial Recommendation Meeting:* Alley-level face of the structure would be of attractive, solid materials. Building-mounted lighting will be provided along the alley. Treatment of openings would respect relationship to nearby Tilikum Place.

*For the Board's deliberations and remarks, see under C-6 above.*

Final Recommendation Meeting – The Board reiterated their recommendations from the Initial Recommendation meeting. The proposal meets this guideline.

**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.**

Guidance and Recommendations reflect those in response to E-1.

**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 front where possible. Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.**

Guidance and Recommendations reflect those in response to E-1.

### **DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) was based upon the departure's potential to help the project better meet the design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s).

- 1. Overhead weather protection and lighting (23.49.018):** The Code requires a minimum overhead canopy depth of 8 feet. The applicant proposes to reduce the overhead canopy on the Denny Way frontage to a depth of 6 feet.

This departure would provide an overall design that would better meet the intent of Design Review Guidelines A-1, C-1, and D-2, by allowing new street trees with proper canopy clearance, which will buffer the sidewalk from the traffic.

The Board unanimously recommended that DPD grant the departure.

- 2. Structure width, depth and separation requirements (23.49.164):** The Code requires a maximum building width of 90' for structures taller than 65' and located on Avenues. The applicant proposes a structure width of 129' on 4th Avenue, with 20' deep modulation separating the upper story 90' wide façade from the upper story 39' wide façade on 4th Avenue.

This departure would provide an overall design that would better meet the intent of Design Review Guidelines A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, and B-4 by providing an interesting corner element at Denny Way and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, by responding to the context of nearby building heights, and by providing a cohesive design for the building on this unusually shaped site. The Board unanimously recommended that DPD grant the departure.

## **BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

**The recommendation summarized below was based on the design review packet and materials shown and verbally described by the applicant at the November 8, 2011 and December 13, 2011 Design Recommendation meetings. After considering the site and context, hearing public comment, reconsidering the previously identified design priorities and initial recommendation conditions, and reviewing the plans and renderings, the three Design Review Board members unanimously recommended APPROVAL of the subject design and the requested development standard departure from the requirements of the Land Use Code (listed above), without any conditions.**