



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3012801

Address: 7216 Aurora Avenue North

Applicant: David Jarrell

Date of Meeting: Monday, July 16, 2012

Board Members Present: Joe Hurley
Peter Krech
Christina Pizana

Board Members Absent: Salone Habibuddin
Martine Zettle

DPD Staff Present: Bruce P. Rips
Beth Hartwick

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Neighborhood Commercial Three with a 40' height limit (NC3 40)

Nearby Zones: The NC3 40 zone extends north and south along the Aurora corridor from W. Green Lake Dr. N. to N. 80th St. West of the Aurora frontage, Lowrise Two zone (LR2) is clustered along Linden Ave. N. The Single Family 5000 zone borders the site to the east and surrounds the cluster of LR2 and NC3 zoning.



Lot Description: The 8,735 sq. ft. parcel’s perimeter is bound by Keen Way N. on the north, Aurora Ave. N on the west, and an alley on the south. The site’s eastern edge lies adjacent to a single family home.

Current Development: A small one-story commercial building, surrounded by parking, occupies the property’s eastern edge.

Access: Alley access for vehicles.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: The site is located at a transition point of various uses with their associated characteristics and between the built environment and the recreational opportunities of Green Lake, a half block south of the site. To the west Aurora Ave (State Route 99) changes from an uninterrupted highway to a stop and go traffic-light controlled road with street parking. Across Aurora Avenue are mostly single story masonry and wood frame buildings housing businesses such as Beth’s Café, representing Seattle’s past. The site is also located at the beginning of the commercial zone that stretches to the north along Aurora Avenue up to the city limits. A few blocks to the north is a PCC reflecting the ‘newer’ Seattle. In 2009 a four-story apartment building was built on the former Twin Teepee’s site across Aurora Ave and to the south.

The site is bound on the south side of the alley by a gas station and across Keen Way N. to the north by a 7-Eleven. Directly to the east of these commercial properties and the subject lot is a single family zone. Most of the residences were built in the 1920’s to early 1930’s and are in good condition. They are mostly variations of the English Cottage style with a smattering of Mediterranean influenced design. As mentioned above, Green Lake Park is to the south, providing view opportunities.

ECAs: No mapped environmental critical areas.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a four-story structure with commercial space (16 live-work units) at and above street level, 18 residential units and 22 parking spaces. An existing commercial structure would be demolished.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant presented three massing options for a four story building. The massing of Options 1 and 3 are very similar and appear to maximize the allowable floor area ratio (FAR). On one extreme, Option 1 provides slight articulation of the facades and on the other Option 3 shows a

saw-tooth pattern that articulates the units of the Aurora Ave. Option 2 attempts to reduce the massing along Aurora Ave by setting back a portion of the upper floors above a podium. All three options provide the required 15' residential setback along the east lot line with six columns of balconies over a plinth.

Option 3 has live/work units on all floors facing Aurora Avenue and apartment units on the residential facing east side of the building. The live/work units at grade would have individual entries while the units in the stories above grade would share a corridor with the apartments. The pedestrian entry access is located along Aurora close to the corner at Keen Way North.

Vehicular access to an at grade parking garage is through the alley. Plans for Options 1 and 2 were not provided.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nine members of the public affixed their names to the Early Design Guidance meeting sign-in sheet. Speakers raised the following issues:

General

- Applicant needs to provide more information about proposal, especially height.
- The project is maximizing the site and asking for departures without giving back to the neighborhood.
- Applicant needs to provide elevations showing the height of the garage wall at the alley and east elevation.

Relationship to Neighborhood and Adjacent property

- The structure would block light to the adjacent house. The Board should be mindful of the transition in zones.
- The proposal will cast shadows on properties to the east.
- The structure should provide a 'soft' non-commercial entry to Green Lake.
- The building should possess a green, non-commercial character.
- Design the project to reflect the adjacent single family character through dormers, etc. to avoid a boxy monolithic look.
- How will project relate to the park?
- Project should have a gateway element.

Interface with Aurora Ave. and Keene Street

- Building should be set back from the lot lines to provide wider sidewalks.
- Building should provide color and activity along Aurora Avenue for a pleasant walking experience.
- Project should provide neighborhood commercial activity along Aurora to create an inviting pedestrian environment.
- Project needs to provide a strong street edge – not tacked on design.

Parking

- Overflow parking will occur on the streets as the proposal is providing only 21 parking spaces for 34 units.
- Interface of parking along Keen Way N. is important.

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.

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

- **Views of Lake:** Numerous streets offer views of, and pedestrian access to, the lake. Consider siting the building to take advantage of these views and to enhance views from the public right-of-way. Methods to accomplish this include setting the building back from lake views, placing landscape elements and street trees to frame views rather than block them, and providing pedestrian spaces with views of the lake.
- **Curved and Discontinuous Streets:** The community's street pattern responds to the lake by breaking with the city's standard north-south and east-west grid pattern. This creates numerous discontinuous streets, street offsets, and curved streets, which are an aspect of the community character. New development can take advantage of such street patterns by providing special features that complement these unique spaces.

This proposal should address the site location's duality as it sits between the Aurora Ave N. commercial corridor and a single family neighborhood. The Board expressed its comfort with the idea of an elevation responding to the Aurora context and a different massing strategy facing the adjacent residential neighborhood on the east.

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

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

A continuous street wall is an important design consideration within Green Lake's commercial and mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented areas.

- **Aurora Avenue North:** A continuous street wall is less of a consideration on Aurora Avenue N, where numerous parking lots punctuate the streetscape. In this area, a more pleasant and consistent streetscape can be achieved by reinforcing the rhythm of alternating buildings and well-landscaped vehicle access areas. Parking lots should be placed at the rear and to the sides of buildings, and the buildings should be located near the street. Parking lot landscaping and screening are particularly important in improving the appearance of the Aurora Avenue North corridor.

The Board preferred a stronger Aurora street edge similar to Option # 2 than the serrated or saw-tooth plan illustrated in Option #3. The commercial space should echo the older, traditional storefronts nearby on Aurora. It would begin to mend the streetscape damaged by the poor siting conditions representative of the existing structure, the 7-Eleven and the service station.

The Board doubted the viability of live work units and felt they were there to avoid having to provide parking. The Board members prefer a vibrant commercial frontage along Aurora Avenue.

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

The Board preferred a lobby and office or retail commercial space at street level along Aurora rather than small live/work units. The preliminary departure request for an increase in the maximum residential width was opposed by the Board members.

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

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

Pedestrian activity is a high priority in the Green Lake business areas. It is recognized, however, that within commercial zones, the appropriateness of traditional storefronts may depend upon location, adjacent properties and the type of street on which the development fronts. In the case of a mixed-use building, for example, at the intersection of an arterial and a residential street, it might be more appropriate to place non-storefront commercial facades on the quieter residential street. In such cases, the following can contribute to a commercial facade that exhibits a character and presence that achieves a sensitive transition from commercial to residential uses:

- slightly less transparency than a standard storefront window;

- recessed entries;
- landscaping along the building base and entry; and
- minimized glare from exterior lighting.

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 questioned the appropriateness of decks or balconies overlooking a single family lot.

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.

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

- **Residential Buildings:** Residences on the ground floor should be raised for residents’ privacy, if allowed by site conditions. Well landscaped, shallow front yard setbacks are also typical and appropriate.
- **Mixed-Use Buildings:** For mixed-use buildings with residential units over commercial ground floor uses, consider locating the primary residential entry on the side street rather than in the main commercial area. This maintains a continuous commercial storefront while increasing privacy for the residential units.

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

The Board discouraged the applicant’s idea of creating a “gateway marker” at the corner of the alley and Aurora Ave. Although the corner would have considerable exposure from Aurora Ave, the Board did not think that the corner condition on an alley warranted special treatment beyond providing consistency to the overall building design concept.

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.

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.

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

- **Distinct Architectural Themes and Styles:** Aurora Avenue North Corridor - Recognize Aurora's 1920-1950 commercial character while making the area more friendly to the pedestrian. Residential Urban Village - Build on the core's classical architectural styles (e.g., community center, library, Marshall School, VFW building). Tangletown (55th/56th Street corridor and Meridian) and 65th/Latona – Build on both commercial areas' human scale elements, particularly the traditional storefront details and proportions of early 1900s vernacular commercial buildings.
- **Signage:** The design and placement of signs plays an important role in the visual character and identity of the community. While regulatory sign review is not in the purview of design review, integration with the overall architectural expression of a building and appropriate scale and orientation are important design considerations. Franchises should not be given exceptions to these guidelines. Except within the Aurora Avenue North corridor, signage should be oriented to pedestrians.
- **Facade Articulation:** Multi-family residential structures - The façade articulation of new multifamily residential buildings (notably in Lowrise zones) should be compatible with the surrounding single-family architectural context. Neighborhood commercial structures - Modulation in the street-fronting façade of a mixed-use structure is less important when an appropriate level of details is present to break up the facade.

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.

The subject site's relationship to both a cohesive single family neighborhood and an active commercial corridor provides a fascinating challenge to the architect. This duality can be exploited in a positive sense. To achieve architectural consistency, however, the architect will need to endow the overall design with a gestalt or seamlessness.

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

C-4 Exterior Finish Materials. Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.

At the next EDG meeting, the applicant should develop character studies indicating potential materials.

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.**

Green Lake-specific supplemental guidance:

- **Make Aurora More Pedestrian Friendly:** Although Aurora Avenue North is likely to retain its automobile-oriented character, new development should make the entire Aurora corridor more friendly to pedestrians by encouraging: Street-fronting entries, Pedestrian-oriented facades and spaces and overhead weather protection.

The Board emphasized the importance of making the Aurora Ave storefronts pedestrian oriented. Canopies, recessed entries, change in paving patterns, large storefront windows are examples of architectural elements to enhance the pedestrian experience.

- 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 placement of enclosed parking facing Keen Way N. would potentially create a blank wall at grade. This would also not likely comply with land use code requirements. In addition, locating parking adjacent to a street in a commercial zone without an intervening use would potentially not meet the land use code (SMC 23.47A.032B.1.b).

- 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.**

The applicant requested a departure from the size of the solid waste storage space. However, the citation in the EDG booklet has been preempted in recent years with new standards. These standards should be considered. Any departure from the size of the storage room would need to be vetted with Seattle Public Utilities before the Board and DPD could approve.

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

The applicant will need to address how the project design will ensure personal safety and security for pedestrians and tenants.

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

At Recommendation stage, the Board will review the signage for the commercial use. Should the applicant continue to provide live/work units on the upper floors, it will be incumbent upon the applicant to provide signage for the businesses on these floors.

- D-10 Commercial Lighting. 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.**

At the Recommendation meeting, the applicant will need to provide a concept lighting plan for the commercial spaces particularly along Aurora Ave.

- D-11 Commercial Transparency. 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 development of the storefronts along Aurora will be of special interest to the Board as the project evolves.

- D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions. For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and a visually interesting street front for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.**

E. Landscaping

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

The applicant's proposed a trellis over the Keen Way sidewalk. Staff Note: It is problematic whether the Seattle Department of Transportation would allow a structure such as a trellis in the right of way.

- 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.**

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

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

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

- 1. Residential Uses at Street Level (SMC23.47A.005C3):** The Code requires residential uses may not exceed, in the aggregate, 20 percent of the street level street facing façade, when facing an arterial or within a zone that has a height limit of 85 feet or higher. The applicant proposes to increase the maximum residential width from 20% to 30%.

At the Early design Guidance meeting, the Board indicated its opposition to the departure request preferring the existing limits on the residential space and emphasis on commercial use.

- 2. Non residential street level requirements (SMC23.47A.008B3a):** The Code requires non residential uses shall extend an average of at least 30 feet and a minimum of 15 feet in depth from the street level street facing façade. The applicant proposes to reduce the average commercial depth to 24 feet and minimum depth to 14.75 feet.

The Board indicated its preference for a strong commercial edge condition along Aurora Ave. See guidance in the Priorities and Board Recommendation section.

- 3. Parking Space requirements (SMC23.54.030B1b):** The Code requires that when more than five parking spaces are provided, a minimum of 60 percent of the parking spaces shall be striped for medium vehicles. The minimum size for a medium parking space shall also be the maximum size. Forty percent of the parking spaces may be striped for any size, provided that when parking spaces are striped for large vehicles, the minimum required aisle width shall be as shown for medium vehicles.. The applicant proposes to reduce minimum percentage of medium parking stalls to (40) percent.

The Board noted the parking area impacts on the commercial storefronts. The reconfiguration of the commercial area as discussed in the Board would allow the Board members to reconsider the benefits of the departure request.

- 4. Backing Distances (SMC23.54.030C2):** The Code requires that except for lots with fewer than three parking spaces, ingress to and egress from all parking spaces shall be provided without requiring backing more than 50 feet. The applicant proposes to increase maximum the backing distance from 50 feet to 73.5 feet.

Staff Note: The Land Use Code requires a use between the parking area and the Keen Way right of way (SMC 23.47A.032B.1.b). Since neither the applicant nor the Board appeared cognizant of this provision, the applicant will need to address the condition in the project's redesign.

The Board indicated its willingness to review a departure allowing an extended backing distance.

- 5. Solid waste and recyclable materials storage and access (SMC 23.54.040D1):** The Code requires that for developments with 8 or fewer dwelling units, the minimum horizontal dimension (width and depth) for required storage space is 7 feet. For developments with 9 dwelling units or more, the minimum horizontal dimension of required storage space is 12 feet. The applicant proposes reduce required trash recycling room depth to 3'-7".

The code section cited by the applicant has been revised. The current code requirement is shown above and will need to be considered. See Board guidance D-6.

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended that the project should return to the Board for an additional EDG meeting.

The Board noted the lack of urban analysis and a paucity of information for the options. The applicant should review exemplary EDG packets (available on the web) to ascertain the Board's expectations.

The applicant's reasons for the departure requests were primarily based on site constraints which would require an application for a variance. Rationale for a departure request must be based on how the departure better meets the specific design guidelines.