



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE EAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3012930

Address: 1321 Seneca Street

Applicant: Jim Westcott

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, May 02, 2012

Board Members Present: Dawn Bushnaq
Wolf Saar
Chip Wall
Bo Zhang

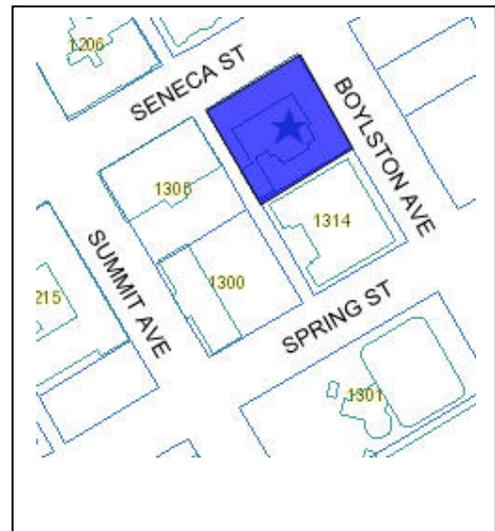
Board Members Absent: Ric Cochrane
Lisa Picard

DPD Staff Present: Bruce P. Rips
Lindsay King

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Highrise (HR)

Nearby Zones: North: At E. Union St., zone changes from HR to Midrise (MR) and Neighborhood Commercial Three with a 65' height limit (NC3P-65) in a pedestrian zone.
South: At Madison St., zoning shifts to NC3P-160' and Major Institutional Overlay (MIO) with 70' height limits.
East: East of Harvard Ave, the zoning changes from HR to NC3P-65.
West: Mostly HR zone with a MIO west of Summit St.



Lot Area: 14,400 sq. ft.

Current Development: Temporary parking lot.

Access: Alley access

The site occupies the northeast portion of the block at the intersection of Boylston Avenue and Seneca Street. An alley services the site off of Seneca St. Across the alley lies a two story wood framed structure housing a clinic. Sharing a property line to the south is the Hilltop Court, a six story apartment building with retail on the ground floor. The Seattle First Baptist Church, a designated city landmark, occupies the block to the east.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character:

This portion of the First Hill neighborhood lies within an area defined by Madison Ave Boren Ave, Broadway and Union St. Two major institutions define the area's borders ---Swedish Hospital and Virginia Mason. The street grid changes at Union St. and Broadway lending interest and complexity to the neighborhood. In general, the area is characterized by lowrise and midrise apartment and commercial buildings. The First Hill Plaza, the tallest building in the neighborhood, lies to the southeast. Landmarks in the immediate vicinity include Seattle First Baptist Church, Stimson Green House and Dearborn House. Several other city landmarks lie just north of E. Union St.

ECAs: No mapped environmental critical areas.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a 23-story structure containing 204 residential units above 1,475 square feet of commercial space and four levels of below grade parking.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant illustrated three basic massing schemes with commonalities of a four-story plinth, below grade parking accessed from the alley, retail or live/work units lining Boylston Ave. and residential lobby/amenity areas fronting onto Seneca St. Scheme A, a code compliant option, comprises a four-story plinth, approximately matching the heights of other structures in the vicinity, and a larger, undifferentiated vertical shaft slightly stepped back from the buildings to the south and to the west. Less significant setbacks occur on the Seneca and Boylston streets. The pronounced four story podium remains in Scheme B; however, the upper mass has greater modulation at the corners and a smaller floor plate at the three uppermost levels. Scheme C resembles a series of five stacked boxes. The shifting boxes appear somewhat engaged or

interlocked with one another. The largest setback for the structure occurs at the south property line, ranging from 15 to 20 feet. The setback at the alley varies from two feet to ten feet for most of the structure's height.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Forty members of the public affixed their names to the EDG meeting sign-in sheet. The speakers raised the following comments:

Appearance & Character

- The proposal is humongous and doesn't fit the neighborhood. (Repeated by other speakers.)
- The building does not relate to First Hill Plaza. 1st Hill Plaza which has a two story base and a substantial amount of surrounding open space.
- Use brick, stone and terra cotta---materials in keeping with the neighborhood. (Mentioned frequently by the speakers.)
- The building resembles a commercial tower.
- The building is scary and unsettling. It doesn't look like a residential building.
- Make this building look residential in appearance. This will set a precedent for neighborhood development. The methadone clinic is temporary. Lots of new development will occur on underutilized properties.
- This is a very threatening structure. An aluminum and glass structure is not what the neighborhood supports.
- The design should be residential in character. It should respect the people who live in the neighborhood.
- Where is the DNA (the character) from the neighborhood buildings in the proposed structure? The building should resemble the existing structures in the vicinity.

Parking

- The ratio of .6 parking spaces per unit is insufficient for the number of dwelling units.

Open Space/Streetscape/Setbacks

- The building should not have setbacks at Seneca and Boylston streets. Greater setbacks should occur at the south property line (adjacent to the Hilltop Court) and the alley. Do not grant a departure for a two foot setback at the south property line.
- Add amenities for the exterior open spaces. Install benches. Treat Boylston Ave. as a green, pedestrian oriented street.
- Place amenities and setbacks on Boylston St.
- Install low-level lighting shielded to project downward.
- Install places for canines to defecate as their waste kills the landscaping.
- 15' setbacks along the streets will create places for undesirable people to hang out. Any open space is going to create problems.
- The entrances need to be accessible for the retirees who live in the area. There are lots of children on the sidewalks during the day.
- The methadone clinic is committed to the property. Its presence generates heavy pedestrian traffic.

Traffic

- The traffic on Summit Ave is generated by the clinics.

- Note that the future streetcar station at Marion St. and Broadway will cut off traffic on Boylston Ave.

Miscellaneous

- Ensure that the service functions operate well.
- First Hill Plaza gave up air rights to be built.
- There is a large, drug dependent community requiring the use of clinics in the area.

DPD received approximately 25 letters reiterating many of the same comments received at the EDG meeting. Additional themes included the following:

Circulation

- The proposal increases the potential for exacerbating neighborhood traffic congestion.
- Construction safety near the Sound Transit tunnel is an important consideration.

Impacts on Neighbors

- Blockage of sunlight.
- Glare produced from a predominately glazed building.

Recommendations

- Limit the building’s height to 160 feet.
- Minimize setbacks from the rights of way.
- Design an aesthetically appealing roof with screening for mechanical equipment.
- Give special priority to those guidelines which seek to provide for compatibility with the surrounding community while respecting adjacent properties.
- Locate loading and solid waste storage underneath the building.
- Deny the three departure requests.

Other considerations

- The proximity of the methadone clinic.
- The area’s shallow water table.
- Develop a new zoning overlay for the vicinity.

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.

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

The Board characterized the proposed setback widths at the ground plane along Seneca St. and Boylston Ave. as overly generous (even heroic). This is particularly true for Option # 3. The diagrams presented at the meeting do not reveal enough information about the character of the neighborhood for the Board to know whether these wide setbacks are appropriate and how their design responds to security concerns of the neighbors.

The different characteristics of Seneca and Boylston should inform the design at the ground plane. Boylston appears to be more pedestrian oriented. Further analysis of the neighborhood character is necessary. In addition, the programming of uses within the first level should also influence the design of the streetscapes.

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

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

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 noted its reluctance to consider recommending departure request #3, reducing the ground plane setback at the south property line to two feet, given a representative of the Hilltop Court's opposition. The added depth of the setback at the upper portions of the podium seemed reasonable.

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.

See guidance for A-2. The Board registered its consternation toward the overly generous setbacks along Seneca and Boylston and asked for further analysis.

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

The 15 foot setbacks along the streetscape (Option # 3) would create problematic open spaces. As mentioned in other guidance, the Board requests more analysis of how the proposal adopts established urban patterns on First Hill.

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.

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.**

The Board conveyed its reticence to encourage a bold or ambitious design such as Option # 3 without additional information describing the applicant's attitude toward the structure's relationship to its context. The issue of setbacks along Seneca and Boylston has been discussed in other sections. If the applicant pursues Option # 3, the architects will need to provide 1) more analysis of the urban patterns, buildings and landscapes within the neighborhood and 2) character studies of the tower and how the stacked or engaged boxes, the leitmotif of the proposal, addresses issues of neighborhood scale, materials and prevailing architectural elements (fenestration patterns, pier and spandrel, and building form).

The massing and the street level setbacks for options #2 and 3 resemble more traditional building forms (albeit the grids inadvertently suggest office rather than residential structures). The Board expressed its comfort with the applicant proceeding to the Master Use Permit (MUP) stage should the applicant choose to develop one of these massing approaches. Concerns regarding these options' relationship to their context, scale etc., as described for Option # 3, would still be germane.

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.**

P. 14 of the supplementary information and pp. 14-15 of the booklet begin to suggest underlying urban patterns and building forms within the neighborhood in spite of the salmagundi of architectural styles. As design development of any of the three options proceeds, the architect must produce a convincing visual argument that the choices made represent a thorough understanding of this portion of the First Hill context.

- 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.**

Although it goes without saying that any elaboration of one of the three options requires architectural consistency from small detail to building form, the third scenario, in particular, has a higher hurdle due to its unusual form.

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

Depending upon the execution of the stacked boxes (Option #3) concept, the design's scale should not overwhelm the intimate residential character that much of the neighborhood exudes.

The architect's investigation should recognize that the building will be experienced from a variety of distances. The proposed structure should speak to those distances just as the First Baptist Church is experienced differently from both a variety of directions and distances.

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.

Should the architect choose to create a mostly transparent or porous base, then the programming of the uses along the two perimeter streets should engage the streetscape. Alternatively, a design emphasizing the street wall lined with residential uses and composed of predominantly opaque materials is also a suitable strategy. At the next Board meeting, the choice should be evident.

Do the stacked boxes have different materials depending upon their height? Do the base and possibly the lower boxes want to be a different material than the upper boxes? These considerations should be studied by the architect and brought forward at the next meeting.

The applicant will need to produce character sketches that illustrate the choice of materials or the range of materials being considered. The Board emphasized the desire for a richness of materials and noted that stone and brick were commonly found on First Hill.

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.

Use principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) to influence the decision making for the landscape and streetscape designs.

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.

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 Board requested more descriptive information showing how the services areas function. Where is the waste storage area? How will it be delivered to the recycling and garbage trucks? Will there be an exterior storage area on the alley?

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

See guidance for D-1.

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

A considerable portion of the alley has exposure to Seneca St. Materials should wrap around the corner from Seneca into the alley.

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.

As design development occurs, the quality and placement of signage for the live/work or commercial spaces will be reviewed by the Board.

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.

The Board expects the submittal of a lighting plan for the exterior commercial spaces prior to the Recommendation meeting.

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.

As design progresses, the character of the storefronts or live/work units facing Boylston Ave will need to meet the aspirations for a pedestrian oriented streetscape.

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.

Other than offering vicinity photos and some text, the applicant has not fully investigated the context in which landscaping choices should be considered. How do the insights from this analysis inform the design? Is the proposal a tower in a garden or does it evoke a more traditional urban pattern in which the building sits close to the adjacent streets?

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 concerns noted by the public and the Board as reflected in the guidance provided in A-2, A-6, A-7 and E-1 should influence the decision making as the landscape design develops.

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. The applicant proposes a departure from SMC 23.45.518 requiring lot lines abutting neither a street nor alley to have a minimum 20 foot setback above 45 feet. The applicant initially requests a 15' setback above 150 feet on the south side.
2. The applicant proposes a departure from SMC 23.45.518 requiring lot lines abutting a street to have a 10' minimum setback above 45'. The applicant diagrammed a five foot setback above 150' on the west side.
3. The applicant proposes a departure from SMC 23.45.518 requiring lot lines abutting neither a street nor alley to have a seven foot average (five foot minimum) setback at or below 45'. The applicant proposes a two foot setback on the ground floor and 15' setback on floors two through four.

In order to provide meaningful consideration of the departure requests, the Board requested more information regarding the impacts of this project to future construction around it. The

setbacks on the south and west sides, the non-street conditions, would have the most impact on existing and future development of the adjacent sites. The Board also noted its concern about the setback departure close to the Hilltop Court after the representative spoke in opposition to it.

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended that if the development team chooses to pursue Option # 3 the applicant would need to return for a second EDG meeting. Should the team decide to pursue Options #1 or 2, the Board expressed its confidence that the guidance was sufficient enough for design development to proceed to Master Use Permit and ultimately a Recommendation meeting.

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