



City of Seattle

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



INITIAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3013303

Address: 3078 SW Avalon Way

Applicant: Radim Blazej, Caron Architecture

Date of Meeting: Thursday, November 21, 2013

Board Members Present: Laird Bennion (Acting Chair)
Todd Bronk
Robin Murphy (substitute)
Vlad Oustimovitch (substitute)
Daniel Skaggs

Board Members Absent: Myer Harrell
T. Frick McNamara

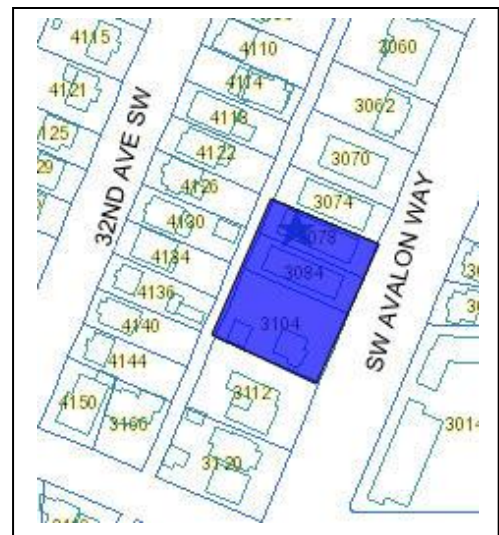
DPD Staff Present: Garry Papers, Senior Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: MR (Midrise)

Nearby Zones: (North) SF 5000
(South) MR
(East) MR
(West) SF 5000

Lot Area: 19,196 sf



Current Development: House and garage on south half of site; two, 1 story apartment buildings on north half; site slopes approximately 33 ft from southwest corner to northeast corner, with a steep 12 foot slope along the Avalon Way frontage.

Access: Vehicular access from the existing, improved alley to west.

Surrounding Development: 6 story apartment building adjacent to the south; 2 story apartment buildings adjacent to the north; 1-2 story houses and backyards across alley to the west; mix of houses and 4 story apartment buildings across Avalon Way to the east.

ECAs: Small portion of Steep Slope ECA at southeast corner.

Neighborhood Character: Avalon Way is a busy arterial with heavy traffic, buses and moderate pedestrian activity. Buildings along Avalon are a mix of older houses and low apartments, with newer 4-6 story residential buildings, and no commercial in this vicinity. To the west is a pocket of consistent SF houses with backyards and garages along the alley, with mixed ages and conditions.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Demolish existing structures on the 19,196 sf sloping site, and construct a new 7 story to Avalon Way (5 story to alley) structure with approximately 61,000 sf and 102 units. A landscaped courtyard for residents and a roof terrace are proposed. Although this site has no parking requirement, approximately 60 parking spaces are proposed below grade, on 2 levels, with a curb cut on Avalon and another access from the alley. NOTE: the current proposal is reduced height and FAR from the one described in the EDG report.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: September 13, 2012

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The EDG Design Proposal booklet includes materials presented at the meeting, and is available online by entering the project number at this website:

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Project_Reviews/Reports/default.asp.

The booklet is also available to view in the DPD file, by contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD:

Mailing Public Resource Center
Address: 700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019

Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Email: PRC@seattle.gov

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

During public comment, the following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Noted the project is adjacent to a single family zone and according to West Seattle design guideline B-1, “refined transitions in height, bulk and scale, in relationship to surrounding context...must be considered” (multiple comments restated this concern and guideline).
- Supported the color concept sketch, and the project should include vibrant colors, textures and material variety.
- Agreed that the 2 options with a continuous 6 story wall along the alley, and the adjacent SF zone, were less desirable than option C, but still concerned with bulk and scale of C. It looks larger and taller than existing apartments to south.
- Requested the building incorporate sloped roofs and other features to mitigate the boxiness.
- Noted the northeast corner is very tall, especially considering other buildings in the vicinity step-down with the slope heading north along Avalon Way.
- Opposed to any parking access off the alley, for safety concerns and congestion are there already. [Applicant responded they want to distribute the parking to not be 100% onto busy Avalon, and avoid overly steep ramps.]
- Cautioned that exterior materials must be durable and high quality.
- Encouraged the footprint along Avalon to setback and be similar to the setback of existing neighbors to the north and south.
- Requested option C to reduce height 1-2 stories, reduce bulk, and probably unit count.
- Questioned if the existing trees will be retained; applicant responded they are being assessed.
- Concerned with the addition of noise/visual screening of courtyard along alley, to not impinge on backyards of neighbors, and requested project provide alley downlighting for safety.
- Commented that the courtyard on alley of option C was odd.

INITIAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING: November 21, 2013
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DESIGN PROPOSAL

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

During public comment, the following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Noted the project is visually better than at EDG, but is still too big and not compatible with the adjacent buildings or the single family zone across the alley (several comments restated this opinion of the height and bulk).
- Stated the building should be lower and step down matching the Avalon Way slope.
- Requested adequate site lighting and/or cameras for safety and security, especially along the alley and in the side yards, but the light should not spillover onto adjacent properties.
- Requested the building incorporate sloped roofs, shingles or other residential treatments to mitigate the boxiness, especially toward the alley.
- Noted the ground floor windows along Avalon are large and transparent into living space, and suggested integrated louvers or screens to provide privacy for the ‘fishbowl’ effect.
- Stated the Avalon frontage should be less commercial looking and incorporate landscaping and material details more residential in character.
- Suggested more scale adjustments on the alley frontage facing the single family.
- Opposed to any parking access off the alley. [Staff note: code requires the alley access]
- Cautioned that the bright white exterior cladding would fade and change over time in the NW climate, and suggested less white surfaces and a warmer shade of that color.
- Encouraged more reveals and planer relief in the wall materials, especially at the top detail of the brick base, and generally more sophistication in the detailing.

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 (the Board) provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the following **Citywide Design Guidelines (A-1, A-2, etc)** & **West Seattle Junction Neighborhood specific guidelines** (*in italics*) of HIGHEST PRIORITY for this project.

These Board-selected priority guidelines are summarized below, while all guidelines are still applicable. For the full text of all guidelines please visit the [Design Review website](#).

All page references below are to the Recommendation Booklet dated “11.21.2013”.

A. Site Planning

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

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed that while not proposing commercial uses at street level, the appearance and quality of the 2 story loft units and the adjacent landscaping/public realm is crucial to establishing a pedestrian friendly street edge. They encouraged high quality, commercial grade materials and landscaping. The treatment along the alley should also be high quality and intentionally designed, not just a fence.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board supported the generous openings and proportions of the ground floor, and the proposed patios, low walls and cedar slat fence design as shown on pg 22, but requested the following refinements to that ground level:

- **Raise the floor levels of the two north units 18”-24” to afford some vertical privacy layering for occupants.**
- **Add integrated louvers or screens in all ground floor units to provide occupant privacy options, and add scale and pedestrian interest to the street.**
- **Integrate fritted or translucent glass in the glass panes to provide some privacy.**
- **Change the wall-mount fixtures or add a material ‘plaque’ behind them to create a better scale for these objects against the wall surface.**
- **Consider a deeper offset of the top brick course to create a stronger shadow and larger reveal with the white wall surface above.**

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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board encouraged the side yards to be landscaped and the proposed windows staggered to buffer the windows and privacy of adjacent neighbors (existing window overlays to be required), and the design of courtyard and roof terraces should buffer overlooks of the adjacent balconies and backyards.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board applauded the reflected window analysis (pg 10/12) and the careful placement of proposed windows to respect adjacent windows and balconies.

The Board requested a more solid, continuous row of tree canopies along the alley, to create a privacy screen to the neighbors from upper levels of the proposed building, but maintaining eye level visibility to the alley. The tree species selected should maintain leaves as long as possible, be mature at planting and have planter troughs large enough to not stunt the root balls.

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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed that both vehicular entries should consider pedestrian safety and sight lines when detail designed, yet be a minimal portal on the Avalon elevation; the Board did NOT exclude vehicle entry to only one location.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board agreed the two portals reduce alley impacts, but do not to force all vehicles onto Avalon. The Board supported all measures to ensure the sight triangles and safety of both vehicle access points, including the right-in/right-out limit at Avalon Way.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility. Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed this topic at length. They requested street elevations along Avalon, showing the full facades of adjacent 2 buildings to south and those to north. They considered the other massing options which placed the courtyard to the east, but referred back to option C in deference to the reduced bulk along the alley and the adjacent “less intensive zone”. They agreed stepping back the upper stories on all sides is warranted, especially at the west side facing the SF zone. They supported the common roof deck at the northeast, but strongly suggested reducing the overall height of the northeast corner approximately one floor. The length of the north wall, currently generating a departure request, should be studied to trim the corners, to afford light to the northern neighbors, and/or simply shortened to reduce the bulk towards the alley.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board applauded the reduction of the north wall length, and the elimination of the departure for Structure Depth. The Board appreciated the revised design is appreciably less bulky than shown at EDG, but requested the following two options (or a combination) be studied to further reduce the building height impacts, but did not request elimination of an entire floor of units:

- Reduce the current floor-to-floor heights to lower the top parapets 3-5 ft.
- Study pushing the parking deeper into the site, lowering the entire building, even if this means a steeper ramp off Avalon, and/or other implications which should be clearly shown as pros and cons at the next meeting. The Board realized a terraced courtyard might be one on these implications, to not create a moat along the alley.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

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 Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the proposed modulation and deep reveals of the massing are crucial to mitigating the bulk (especially along Avalon), and this should be supported by a high quality, durable and interesting cladding palette, on all sides. That palette should employ a range of colors, materials and textures more pronounced than those shown in the EDG sketches.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board agreed the proposed design exhibits generally good proportions, but requested the following refinements to better respond to context:

- **Maintain the dark, corrugated material attic and ‘gasket’ facing Avalon, but reduce the amount (and/or color) of that same dark material on the alley façade, where it is overwhelming, especially the three of five levels closest to the alley.**
- **Add more brick, or another masonry material, as a base on all alley façades.**
- **Reduce the large window sizes/proportions on the white bays facing the alley.**
- **Add more fine-scale and warmer materials on the alley facades, possibly a new material not found elsewhere on the project. The Board agreed the project would be cohesive even if certain materials are used only on the alley façade.**

D. Pedestrian Environment

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

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board requested the applicant consider a pass-through or pedestrian path in one of the side yards, and to carefully design a screen along the alley courtyard to protect adjacent backyard privacy and encourage an attractive and safe alley presence. The Board also applauded the 2 story scale and street

presence of the Avalon lobby, and encouraged further scale and pedestrian interest in the street-facing loft façade designs.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board recognized the side yard stair/path was no longer viable, and supported the open, fence-less design shown along the alley (pg 20).

The proposed courtyard design appears cold and minimal (pg 25), with little amenity to attract users or sociability (also see EDG guidance under E-2). The Board requested a more diverse and interesting design for the courtyard, including different paving patterns and more warm and contrasting materials such as wood and metal planters, not all concrete of identical height.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board emphasized that adequate lighting and security along the alley is key, through good design and “eyes on the alley” strategies. They also requested a full length, detailed and dimensioned elevation of the alley elevation showing the parking wall condition and materials, including landscaping and courtyard screen design. (See also Departure #1 discussion below)

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board requested larger scale elevations and more details on all lighting along the alley and side yards. The Board requested further studies to reduce the height and size of the parking vent box, and exploration of whether it can be located somewhere less visible such as the north wall onto the alley ramp.

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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed that the Avalon lobby entrance should strive to provide the elements described in this guideline.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board supported the large canopy, address numbers and bench which identify the primary lobby entrance on Avalon Way, but requested a more interesting scoring pattern at this important transition– at least similar to the residential patios nearby.

B. E. Landscaping

E-2 **Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site.** Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture, and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board encouraged maximizing the size of the roof deck, and the planted or softscape areas of the courtyard and roof deck because the site will be fully developed leaving little remaining permeable surface other than the sideyards. They also encouraged landscaping, and pedestrian features along Avalon; and trellises, play structures, seating etc in the courtyard and on the roof deck, for use and amenity to residents.

At the Initial Recommendation Meeting, the Board agreed certain blank walls needed green screens or other treatments: the 10+ ft tall south retaining wall on Avalon; all the concrete surfaces of the parking vent at the southwest corner (or a different design for venting that is less pronounced on the alley; see comments under D-8).

The Board requested a more clear and specific landscape plan at the next meeting, not showing confusing materials or designs (pg 37/38) not relevant to the proposal. Each specific tree should be clearly identified, and its height, canopy and other features at planting clearly described.

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 Recommendation meeting, the following departures were requested:

- 1. Access to Parking (SMC 23.45.536):** In brief, the Code requires all parking and service access to be from the alley, if an improved alley exists. The applicant proposes a departure to allow a second access to the lower parking level from a curb cut on Avalon Way, and cites the code provision 23.45.536.C.4 for steeply sloping sites.

The Board expressed cautious support for this departure, considering it splits the vehicle traffic onto two right of ways, but it depends on implementing full pedestrian safety measures at each access point. (D-7, D-8)

- 2. Driveway Slope (SMC 23.54.030):** In brief, the Code requires a maximum ramp slope of 15%. The applicant proposes a ramp to the alley of 20%.

The Board indicated receptivity to this departure, considering it allows the parking levels and the entire building to be lower, which supports guideline B-1, to create less bulk and height at a zone transition. Typical safety measures such as mirrors and flashing lights at the top of the ramp would be required. (D-7)

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the Initial Recommendation meeting, the Board recommended the project the project should return to the Board for an additional Recommendation meeting, responding to the specific concerns, requests and studies described above.