



## EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE EAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3013479

Address: 800 Columbia Street

Applicant: Jim Westcott

Date of Meeting: Wednesday, March 06, 2013

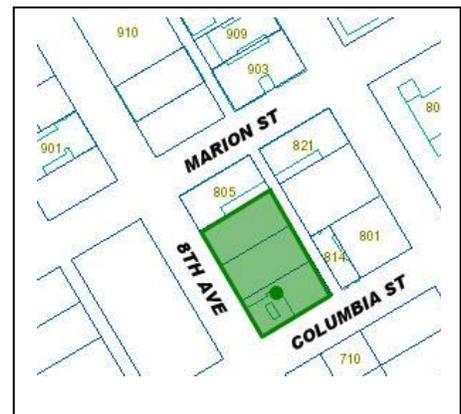
Board Members Present: Dawn Bushnaq  
Ric Cochrane  
Lisa Picard  
Wolf Saar  
Chip Wall

DPD Staff Present: Bruce P. Rips

### SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: High Rise (HR)

Zoning Patterns: HR zoning to the east, north and south from the site. Across Eighth Ave. the zoning changes to Neighborhood Commercial Three with a 160 foot height limit (NC3 160). NC3 forms a corridor along Madison St. Boren Ave divides much of the HR zone on First Hill from the NC zoning for the major institutions. West across I-5 zoning transition to Downtown Office Commercial (DOC).



Lot Area: 21,600 square feet. Although much of the site was graded due to the parking lot and the former office building, the site's declension begins on the east at the alley and slopes approximately 18 feet to Eighth Ave.

Current Development: Surface parking and vacant lot.

Access: Alley and Eighth Avenue.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: The proposal site lies on the northeast corner of Eighth Ave. and Columbia St. Mid-rise apartment buildings occupy the adjacent parcel to the north and on two sites across the alley to the east. Larger residential towers rise across Marian St. (M Street) and Columbia (Skyline). Directly across Eighth Ave lies the Polyclinic parking garage serving its medical office building. Other notable nearby buildings include the Lands at Eighth and Marian and St. James Cathedral and its complex of buildings. While the greater First Hill neighborhood is home to several large major medical institutions, the Eighth Ave. corridor provides an intimate streetscape with mature street trees, small restaurants, a performing arts complex and retail uses. The recently constructed towers fronting Eighth Ave possess by and large sensitivity to the streetscape by forming a two to three story base and offering generous open spaces close to the street. Other prominent land uses in the neighborhood include surface parking lots and mid-rise brick apartment buildings.

ECAs: The site has a mapped steep slope along the alley.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a 300 foot residential tower (with 45' feet of additional mechanical and roof top amenity area) housing 300 dwelling units with four levels of below grade parking.

## DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicant submitted three design options. The width of the massing along Eighth Ave. corresponded to the proposed proportions and size of the adjacent open space or park; the wider and squatter the building mass, the smaller the park. Conversely, the taller and more slender the mass, the wider the park appears. The applicant did not present studies in the EDG packet for a park placed at mid-block (with its axis on St. James Cathedral) preferring the Eighth and Columbia corner to maximize solar conditions. At the EDG meeting, discussion did light on this issue. The applicant, however, provided several options illustrating why a ramp from the

alley to a below grade parking garage would consume much of the lobby and street frontage as well as the second floor.

The applicant's preferred scheme (one illustrated with much greater articulation than the other two options) lies close to the four story brick apartment building at the corner of Eighth and Marion St. The massing possesses three key visual concepts: interlocking volumes, a series of vertical layers and public gestures. The segment tower comprises a large mass representing most of the total floor plate as it wraps around a taller, slender vertical element on its southern flank. A gasket or vertical recession (potentially housing balconies) divides the two volumes on the Eighth Ave elevation. A fin extending the entire height of the tower further defines the break between the slender southern mass and the larger mass. The image of a recessed vertical column with a fin repeats itself on the south façade dividing the two large volumes once again. The composition forms a strong vertical corner although due to the park's location does not sit at the intersection of the two adjacent streets.

The architect at this point has not explicitly identified exterior materials. Still, the design reveals a series of layers beginning with a horizontally positioned frame hanging over the entrance on Eighth Ave. Behind the frame and rising above it, a building skin defines the larger volume wrapping the differently articulated southern volume and then a layer of glazing defines a volume within that reveals itself at the lobby and in the two vertical recessions. The public gestures, the elements projecting from the larger building mass and appeal to the casual viewer, include the framing device, ostensibly to define a podium, and a cantilevered, chevron shaped roof top canopy. From their appearance, each of these suggests a play of solid and void relationships and attempts to add drama to the pedestrian streetscape and the skyline.

The ground floor includes a lobby, driveway access to the garage and storage all facing Eighth Ave. The other salient feature, a fitness room, at this level occurs below grade inserted into the hill beneath the upper tier of the proposed park. This scenario would create improvements to the alley in order to provide access to loading and service areas.

The park design represents an important element of the proposal. The applicant explored numerous design concepts including a variety of terraces cascading down the incline along Columbia St. and alternatively a mostly level space surrounded by dramatic walls at the perimeters. The preferred scheme, a more bifurcated approach, establishes a larger level area close to the Eighth Ave grade on the west side framed by a water feature on the south and an allee of trees on the north side. Stairs climb to a smaller and less well defined second level (located above a fitness room) that connect by a secondary set of steps to the Columbia St. sidewalk but not the alley.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Approximately 20 members of the public affixed their names to the Early Design Review sign-in sheet. Speakers raised the following comments:

### Park/Open Space

- Prefers Option # 3 for its open space. This space should be green, public and accessible.
- The water feature is problematic. There are social and economic issues as to whether a fountain of this size would succeed.
- Having white noise from the fountain is a good way to deflect the noise from I-5.
- Eliminate the water feature.
- Eliminate or minimize the steps in the park.
- Plant large trees in the park, not ornamental ones.
- Use pervious paving in the open space.
- Build a landscape barrier between the fitness area and the open space.
- Ensure public access to the open space.
- Think about safety issues for the park. Need quality lighting. Use the 1<sup>st</sup> Hill community designated lighting fixtures.

### Eighth Avenue

- Preserve the greenness of 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Ave is pedestrian oriented, dense and diverse.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Ave is a pedestrian arterial.
- A green pedestrian corridor begins at Freeway Park and continues southward. The landscape features along 8<sup>th</sup> Ave and the park should complement this sward.
- The city should create a street park on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- There should be a more generous planting area between the sidewalk and the structure along 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Ave is difficult to navigate with a car. There is too much traffic. Where will cars park on the street? The garage entrance should be on the alley.
- A-2, E-1 are important guidelines.

### Building Program

- The fitness center is in a regrettable location.
- The loading dock on the alley should accommodate large trucks.

### Access

- Supports garage access from 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.

### Building Design

- The building looks institutional or corporate.
- Preserve the setback at the lower portions of the building.
- The materials and architectural elements (referred to as bundles in the packet) are not well defined.
- Highly reflective materials on the facades will create unwanted glare.
- A-2. The banner wall as a pedestrian oriented element is office like in appearance.

### Other

- The neighborhood has an underserved population.

- Scrutinize the letter of agreement between the developer and the city. The open space must be in perpetuity.

DPD received several letters from the community. In summary, these letters repeat many of the themes mentioned in the above outline. The letters support the largest amount of area for the park but desire more green space and trees than shown in the concept drawings. The fountain and stairs seem unnecessary or too large. Maintaining the water element may generate significant maintenance issues over time. The park design ought to be inviting and accessible for all. A wider area in front of the building should be devoted to planting to be compatible with the existing green space between Cherry and Columbia streets.

## 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.**

Discussion of the site's topography focused on the merits of a vehicular ramp from the alley accessing the garage and the appropriateness of a two tiered park. The deliberation of the latter issue did not resolve the park design.

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

The Board prefers a greater amount of landscaping between the Eight Ave sidewalk and the lobby. It ought to recognize that the buildings in the Highrise zone are different from those in the nearby Neighborhood Commercial zone. The existing streetscape along the Eighth Ave. corridor reflects the greater emphasis on landscaping in the HR zone. The residential Skyline project (within the HR zone) possesses a lushly landscaped area for its length along Eight Ave. This greensward progresses toward the south. To the north of the site, the commercial zoning classification predominates with the newer buildings forming a more urban streetscape until the zoning classification transitions back to the HR zone north of Madison and Spring Streets as the corridor approaches Freeway Park and the softening of the landscape reveals itself again.

The framing device overhanging the streetscape, the Board observed, is too monumental for the intimate streetscape occurring along Eighth Ave. The base ought to appear much more compatible with the materials and textures that already exist along the corridor. The monumentality of the lobby glazing, the columns, and the framing device relate directly to the shaft and the roof top canopy rather than to the brick, the canvas and metal awnings, the storefront windows, the balconies and the other delicate features that create Eighth Avenue's pleasant streetscape.

**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.**

Unless it is well designed and well programmed the park in itself will not likely encourage human activity. The creation of an intimately scaled building base (see A-2, D-1 and E-2) related to the surrounding buildings should reinforce existing edge conditions. Note that above M Street's brick base the tower steps back from the street. The two Skyline towers are also pulled back from the right of way leaving a generous landscaped area.

**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 proposal forms a party wall with a portion of the adjacent structure to the north and introduces a dog run nearest the windows of the same building as it steps back from the property line in concert with the adjacent Clarwood apartments.

**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 A-2 and E-1.

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

**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.**

After reviewing the ramp configurations from the alley, the Board members agreed that the garage access could occur on Eighth Ave.

**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 endorsed the placement of the open space at the corner of Columbia and Eighth Ave to maximize solar exposure.

## **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.**

Provide a scale to the proposal's lower floors commensurate with the level of detail and materials comprising the nearby residential buildings. As described in guidelines A-2, A-4 and C-1, the concept design does not achieve the intimacy of scale or fine grain that the Board expects and the speakers from the neighborhood desire.

## **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.**

The Board conveyed its desire that the proposal relates to and enhances the existing neighborhood character. The site lies within a cluster of mid-rise residential buildings poised between larger institutional and commercial structures---an occurrence elsewhere on First Hill. The upper level portions of the tower, as opposed to the base, may engage in a visual conversation with the other tall buildings both nearby and across the freeway, but the lower portion should be of the neighborhood street.

- 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 efficacy of several of the prominent design elements (p. 31 of the supplemental drawings) ---the cantilevering roof, the podium frame and "spine element" --- received considerable doubts from the Board. The elements lacked cohesion and a convincing narrative that ties them together. The chevron shaped roof form echoes the neighboring Skyline project, but is this form important enough to repeat or celebrate?

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

See guidance provided for A-4 and B-1.

- 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.**

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

The appearance of the garage door will be an important consideration.

## 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.

The applicant preferred design for the corner park received significant criticism. Overall, the design's appearance resembled something fitting for a corporate campus rather than a neighborhood center. The space should aspire to the magical and unexpected. It ought to house elements that engage the community. Each of the significant elements---the water feature, the steep stairs, the extensive quantity of paving, the entry canopy and the high retaining walls---provoked Board reaction. The design ought to maximize the amount of trees and green space. The water fountain, occupied too much space, and seemed superfluous in Seattle's climate. The entry canopy, parallel to Eighth Ave., acts to privatize the space, forming a visual demarcation between the public sidewalk and an open space that appears adjunct to the apartment tower. Access to the upper area could be accomplished by using the sidewalk. The stairs appear both daunting, with the two landings higher than eye level of the person standing below, and utilitarian. High walls on the perimeter of three sides of the park's lower portion may feel overwhelming as well.

Focus of the redesign should concentrate on more extensive green spaces, specification of large trees, and community oriented facilities. Collaboration among the developer, the Parks and Recreation department, and the neighborhood community is encouraged.

- 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-3 **Retaining Walls.** Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where higher retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscapes.

As mentioned in D-1, the height of retaining walls in the park design raised concerns.

- D-5 **Visual Impacts of Parking Structures.** The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape.

**Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.**

Discussion briefly focused on the departure request for the garage door. Due to its presence on Eighth Ave., the size of the garage door should be minimized as much as possible.

- 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.**

Discussion did not focus on this guideline. The applicant proposes to use the alley for access to the service areas.

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

The design of the park, in particular, will be scrutinized for responsiveness to safety and security concerns.

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

- .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.**

Although the subject proposal lies within a Highrise residential rather than a commercial zone, the notion that the building ought to enhance the character of the streetscape as described above was endorsed by the Board and the community members in attendance.

## **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 character of the landscaping between the sidewalk and the structure should complement the primacy of the pedestrian orientation along Eighth Ave. Without commercial uses, the structure ought to step back at street level to create a lush and more welcoming face to the streetscape. For additional guidance see E-2.

**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.**

Planting in front of the structure along Eighth Ave. should be robust. Bring the greenscape of the park around to the front of the building. The design should reinforce the charming pedestrian corridor that stretches from Freeway Park to James St. The design of the Eighth Ave. frontage (see p. 34 of the supplementary drawings) minimizes (if not eliminates) planting between the sidewalk and the structure. The entrance and lobby will need to be setback from the property line and the fin eliminated.

Board members repeated that the park should be a treasure.

**E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as high-bank front yards, steep slopes, view corridors, or existing significant trees and off-site conditions such as greenbelts, ravines, natural areas, and boulevards.**

See the guidance provided for D-1.

## **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. Highrise Setbacks.** Seattle Municipal Code (SMC section 23.45.518) requires 20' setback above 45' at lot lines abutting neither a street nor alley. The applicant proposes a 15' setback above 45' on the north elevation. The Board indicated its preliminary inclination to support it.
- 2. Highrise Setbacks.** Seattle Municipal Code (SMC section 23.45.518) requires a ten foot minimum setback above 45' at lot lines abutting the street (Eighth Ave.). The applicant proposes to eliminate this setback along Eighth Ave. The Board indicated that improved clarity of overall design and the design of the setback at the lower levels would determine whether the Board could accept the departure request.
- 3. Highrise Setbacks.** Seattle Municipal Code (SMC section 23.45.518) requires a seven foot average setback below 45' from lot lines abutting the street. The applicant proposes eliminating this setback. The Board indicated that improved clarity of design and desire for a wider planting area between the sidewalk and the structure would determine whether the Board could accept the departure request.

4. Highrise Setbacks. SMC 23.53.035 requires a ten foot minimum setback above 45' at lot lines abutting an alley. The applicant proposes to a three foot setback at the alley. The Board indicated its preliminary support.
5. Screening of Parking. SMC 23.45.536D.3.a. Garage doors may be no more than 75 feet in area. The applicant proposes a 189 sq. ft. door. The Board indicated that its support rests on the door's design and an attempt to minimize the door's size.

## **BOARD DIRECTION**

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.

## **STAFF NOTES**

The introduction of supplementary sheets at the time of a Board meeting adds confusion (in spite of good intentions to clarify issues) to the proceedings and does not provide adequate time for the Board, the public and city staff to review new material. The applicant needs to send new material to city staff for review and distribution prior to the meeting.

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