



City of Seattle

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

**FINAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING
OF THE
DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
February 4, 2014**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Project Number: 3013951

Address: 807 Stewart Street

Applicant: Dave Schneider, LMN Architects, for R.C. Hedreen Co.

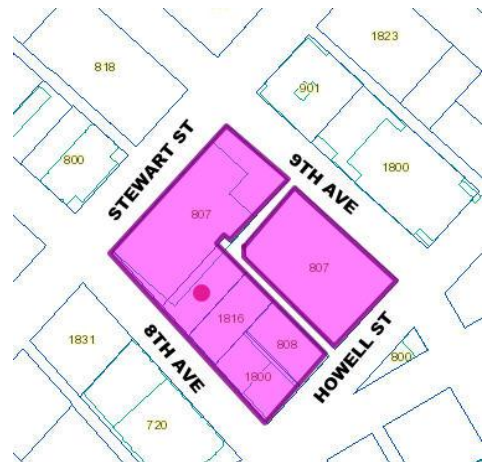
Board members present: Gabe Brant (Chair)
Gundula Proksch
Murphy McCullough
Pragnesh Parikh

Board Members Absent: Mathew Albores

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The full block development site is bounded by 9th Avenue on the east, by 8th Avenue on the west, by Stewart Street on the north and Howell Street on the south. It is trapezoidal in shape, comprising close to 98,000 square feet in area, with approximately 354 feet along 8th Avenue, its broadest front. The site is zoned Downtown Office Core 2 with a 500-foot height limit (DOC 2 500/300-500).



There are currently three structures located on the site, including a 3-story masonry building that formerly functioned as the Greyhound Bus Terminal. The proposed development is for a 43-story hotel building, with approximately 1,680 guest rooms located above ground floor retail/restaurant/lobby space totaling approximately 45,500 square feet. The hotel would rest upon a podium occupied by approximately 150,000 square feet of meeting rooms and ballroom space. Atop the podium and at the opposite side of the podium from the hotel would be an apartment building containing approximately 154 affordable residential units. Six levels of underground parking would accommodate approximately 700 automobiles. Twelve truck-loading bays would also be accommodated below grade. As proposed in the preferred scheme, the common parking garage would take access from an interior drive connecting 9th and 8th Avenues. Trucks would utilize a separate entry/exit off 8th Avenue. Project work for the proposal would include landscape and pedestrian improvements along all four encompassing streets, with significant "Green Street" improvements proposed for 9th Avenue.

Earlier Meetings-- Early Design Guidance Meeting: April 16, 2013

At the conclusion of the first Early Design Guidance meeting held on April 16, 2013, the Board had recommended that the project be returned for a second early design guidance meeting. For the second meeting the Board asked to see a more thorough analysis of the functionality of the through-block driveway as well as refinements in its alignment and details of the vehicular and pedestrian interfaces along its length. In addition, the Board wished to see a further discussion of the appropriateness of a two-way directionality for the vehicular traffic through the drive. Another area for a more detailed discussion requested by the Board was the affordable housing component of the proposal, specifically including the location and details regarding the residential entries, storage and amenity spaces.

Other areas indicated for additional detail and information were the following:

- Shadow impacts;
- General Pedestrian safety and security concerns;
- Location and treatment of employee entries;
- Access to the underground parking;
- Details of the operation of truck loading and unloading;
- Details of the 9th Avenue Green Street park space;
- Further information regarding how the building met the street on all four sides.

Second Early Design Guidance Meeting—June 18, 2013

During the Second EDG meeting, June 18, 2013, the Board noted that there were two elements of the proposal that were in need of further discussion and resolution: the through-block connection and the residential component of the project.

Regarding the through-block connection, the Board were convinced of the concept and it's basic configuration. They favored the way this design move eliminated disruptive loading and unloading and the need for back-of-house functions that set their backs to the street. infinitely flexible. But when all was said and done, the through-block drive enabled retail to wrap the block, eliminated dead zones along the street frontages, and provided a unique opportunity enlivening the streets. A two-directional through-block connection was appropriate to serve the functionary needs, of the proposal but design challenges remained to make the connection into a safe and inviting pedestrian space.

Further, the Board members were agreed that the housing component of the proposal had not been presented in great enough detail and there remained basic elements of the design of the housing component that needed further clarification.

Other issues, needing further resolution, related to the appointments of the proposed staff entry ; resolution of potential ambiguities relating to private and public space as they affected the parcel park on 9th Avenue; potential conflicts in assuring a human scale at the pedestrian level; and details of how retail spaces would actually work. The Board also noted that it would be beneficial to both the Board and the public to be clear about the amenities being offered, clarifying which public amenities were related to the alley vacation and which to Code requirements for height, etc? These items should be addressed at the Recommendation Meeting.

BOARD DELIBERATIONS

No additional guidelines were cited nor was specific guidance added to the guidelines, other than that which had been given at the first Early Design Guidance meeting. The Board agreed to recommend that the proposal proceed to MUP intake and the recommendation stage of Design Review. In doing so, the Board requested that the Recommendation meeting once again would be a "double meeting, " and that the first part of that meeting should focus on a thorough presentation of the housing component of the program, with the remainder of the time devoted to the overall program with a focus on the design and proposed activities of the ground plane of the project.

DESIGN DEPARTURES

During their earlier presentation the applicants had identified three departures from development standards they were seeking. Each had to do with façade modulation (SMC 23.49.058.B.1) and would affect the building's appearance on Stewart Street, Howell Street and on 8th Avenue. At that time the Board indicated that they had no major concerns with the requests. The Board did not directly address the departures requested at the second early

design guidance meeting, but it was expected that a clear statement of departure requests, as well as an explanation of how such requests better meet the intentions of the design guidelines, would be presented at the forthcoming Recommendation Meeting.

INTERIM RECOMMENDATION MEETING—October 1, 2013

After Board introductions, the meeting began with the design team's background summary and general overview of goals and the proposal and then moved, as the Board had requested at the previous meeting, to a detailed exposition of the affordable housing component of the project.

The presentation proceeded to portray a developed schematic design for the housing units, amenity spaces, private entry lobby, access, management office, and laundry, loading and storage facilities (see pp.58-69 of the booklet prepared for the October 1, 2013 meeting and available through the DPD Design Review website). 154 residential units, comprised of 118 studio, 14 one-bedroom and 22 two bedroom units, are to be located along the north edge of the project along Stewart Street and above the hotel meeting rooms and ballrooms. A covered outdoor amenity area would be located within a two-floor space adjacent to indoor amenity areas and carved as a notch between the third and sixth residential levels.

During the portion of the meeting set aside for the Board to ask questions of the design team just about the affordable housing component of the project, details of the unit mix were discussed as were details regarding: proposed windows (they would be operable in each of the units), the choice to place the outdoor amenity area within the "notch" rather than on the roof (it was thought it would be used for a greater percentage of the year), and attenuation of sound and vibrations since the inner portion of the building block containing the housing would also contain mechanical equipment (acoustical studies and engineering solutions are underway).

The presentation then focused upon the broader site, the ground-level lobby and retail uses, the functionality of the through-block connection, the street improvements in general and the parcel park in particular (see the packet, pp.74-95, for particulars). Questions from the Board members were focused on lighting details (and the desire to see a more detailed lighting plan), the year-round use of the outdoor spaces at each street front, and the interplay of park-like spaces and overhead weather protection.

After listening to public comments that ranged from unqualified endorsements of the proposal to critiques of various aspects of the project as presented—primarily unresolved intermingling of private and public cues in the through-block connector and parcel park areas and the need for further moves to get the on-site housing right—, the Board began their deliberations with a look at issues concerning the housing component of the project. Although there was some discussion regarding the mix of unit sizes and the adaptability of the residential amenity spaces for families, the three members of the Board present were agreed that the presentation had the thoroughness that they had previously requested and that the housing, both in concept and

detail, was successfully designed. There was a good match between the units and the amenity spaces proposed. It was noted that the residential lobby was a grand space and located at the right spot, but that the way the lobby met the street might be in need of further clarification and refinement. The “front porch” of the residential portion of the structure, as it had been described, didn’t work for the Board as a “front porch.” It was suggested that the area at the 9th Avenue entry could be in danger of being compromised by the “coffee shop” it abutted. After discussion,, however, The Board agreed that the space at the residential entry, being part of the overall 9th Avenue Green Street/ parcel park frontage, in order to be successful, should be approached as a shared space, one not exclusively given over to any single use.

Discussion then centered on the overall ground plane of the project, portrayed in a large transparent model as part of the presentation. The Board expressed their gratitude for the clarity of the model and expressed appreciation for the direction the configuration and appointment of various spaces and uses had taken. The design had maximized the retail uses and transparency along the street edges, enlivening the pedestrian environment, while the through-block connection took traffic off the street, “sucked up the problems of the street,” and offered the promise of a truly grand and open space that was capable of transcending its purely functional role. At the utilitarian level It was great solution; at the aesthetic level, the Board would await those refinements, choice of materials, lighting design, paving design, programmatic elements, that would nudge it toward greatness.

Other guidance from the Board regarding the ground plane of the proposal focused primarily on the 9th Avenue Green Street/ parcel park. Suggestions for further consideration and presentation at the next Design Review meeting included: a desire to see winter uses of the building’s periphery, the need for a lighting plan that included both the periphery and the through-block connection, and a detailed examination of the upper tower, one that included details of wall and surface systems, materials, window configurations and locations.

DESIGN DEPARTURES

During their first presentation the applicants had identified three departures from development standards they were seeking. Each had to do with façade modulation (SMC 23.49.058.B.1) and would affect the building’s appearance on Stewart Street, Howell Street and on 8th Avenue. At that time the Board indicated that they had no major concerns with the requests. The Board did not directly address the departures requested at the second early design guidance meeting, but it was expected that a clear statement of departure requests, as well as an explanation of how such requests better meet the intentions of the design guidelines, would be presented at the Recommendation Meeting, where an additional two departures from development standards were requested (see pages 30-33 for a detailed account of the proposed departures). It is expected that all departures will be clearly identified and explained at the upcoming recommendation meeting, at which time the Board will formally respond to these requests.

SECOND RECOMMENDATION MEETING—November 19, 2013

All five members of the Downtown Design Review Board were present for the meeting which began with Board introductions followed by the design team's recapitulation of the design development to date, and then a focus on the envelope design, as the Board had requested at the last recommendation meeting.

Some massing adjustments had been made to the building's shell, principally affecting the central ballroom, conference and meeting room areas. Otherwise the building concepts and forms fairly remained as shown at previous meetings.

For design details, see the packet, especially pp.34-57, at:

<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/aboutus/news/event/DesignReview/SearchPastReviews/default.aspx>

The building facades, it was explained, would be "combined of a mixture of precast concrete and transparent glass, with each of the individual elevations responding in a unique manner to the adjacent conditions of program, context, and massing." The primary expression of the building would be integrally-colored, white precast, sand-blasted concrete panels with glass punched openings. A secondary expression and system would be composed of a darker, gray-colored concrete panel that would stand as a contrast to the white concrete components. A tertiary expression would consist of a combination of clear vision and spandrel glass and spandrel panels. The west and east ends of the hotel tower would be subdivided into three contrasting parts in order to accentuate its slender proportions.

DEPARTURES

Three departures were requested from the requirements of SMC 23.49.058.B.1, which would require modulation of the façade above 85 feet in height for any part of a structure located within 15 feet of the property line. This would apply to the facades facing Stewart Street, 8th Avenue and Howell Street. Modulation would be provided in each instance, but in a manner that would respond more precisely to different functional requirements and to the underlying design concept and expression. A fourth departure related to the proposed parcel park on 9th Avenue. The proposed parcel park would exceed by more than double the contiguous space requirement of 3000 square feet but would not meet the requirement that would not qualify space with a dimensional width of less than 30 feet. The principal space area of the of the proposed parcel park would vary between 25 and 31 feet in width. A fifth departure request was to increase the allowable width of the curbcut along 8th Avenue that would serve large truck access and egress from the underground loading bays.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment was sparse and focused on the parcel park, its overall design, its interplay with the structure (the private/public tensions), and the design and location of proposed benches.

BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS

The Board's discussion began with a summary of issues thought to be unresolved or still problematic for the success of the proposal. There should be more opportunities to express the program behind the façade. The lighting scheme and art elements as described for the project were still "too aspirational" and without "declarative" substance, as were some of the other elements, such as the sidewalk ribbon ("still blue?"). Which of these elements are actually going to be included in the project? There was some extended discussion regarding the ground level residential amenity space at the corner of 9th and Stewart, with strong feelings, and disagreements whether the space should be exclusive or clearly integrated into the weave of the Green Street and parcel park and whether it should easily permeable from the commercial entity proposed for the inside corner. But primarily the deliberations focused on the building envelope, its materials, colors, textures, and parts related to parts and the interaction of windows and opacity at the building's skin.

The Board agreed that there were many laudable things about the building; the concept and program were fine (particularly the inclusion of affordable housing); the ground plane, including the through-block connection, was generally successful (though some better renderings are needed); the overall massing was good. The choice of materials and finishes, however, were generally thought by the Board to be going in the wrong direction. This included the choice of materials and textures (or lack of textures), colors, monotony of windows. The building surface above the ground plane was characterized as "too minimalistic," "stark," and "relentless." There should be more opportunities to express the program behind the façade and to bring the energy of the ground level up throughout the building. This area should not be a black box. As shown, the welcome "noise" of the street level was deadened by the upper-level façade treatment. The purported gesture to the shift in the urban grid, spoke of in earlier iterations, was also less apparent in the current, heavier treatment of this lower façade.

Overall, the façade treatment was thought to be too homogeneous, too drab, "too unrelenting." The Board thought the choice and disposition of materials for the upper façade were too problematic to be approved with conditions. Energy and life need to be injected into the upper floors, and perhaps best concentrated on those floors immediately above the ground plane where there were opportunities to express more of the program of the building.

The most daunting of the tasks might well be the breathing of life into the podium itself. To date, little information has been revealed in plan or preciseness regarding the places of "meeting rooms" and "pre-event spaces," but there was something tantalizing, if unknown, about the "ballroom." And not one, but two of them. Some earlier renderings of the Howell

Street façade had suggested a surge of upward kinetic energy with clear glimpses of floor-to-floor conveyances and people moving up through the building to the meeting rooms and ballroom spaces. In the latest iterations of the design, that sense of movement appeared muted.

On the Howell Street side, at the residential façade, an “incision” into the podium interior had been a tactical design move well-received by the Board. This was thought by the Board to be the most successful façade to date. Were there not still other opportunities for expression of the program behind the façade? The building’s exciting programmatic elements should not be hidden. The podium should not simply sit there as a dark box. Could there not be some adroit gestures that might successfully intrigue us and produce a ripple or flutter in the otherwise impenetrable architectural curtain?

Analytically the architectural task for instilling life into the hotel tower itself was not terribly different from that posed to the designer of a tall residential or office tower, that of engaging and guiding the eye up from the base and back down again and instilling in the one so engaged at least a modicum of delight.

The Board unanimously agreed that the above concerns needed to be addressed in order to achieve a successful design; the proposal needed further development before being returned for another recommendation meeting.

Final Recommendation Meeting –February 4, 2014

The design team explained that the presentation would focus on those elements and issues that had been requested by the Board at the previous meeting. It was noted, however, that there had been two significant changes to the project which would affect the presentation and review. First, the Green Street Parcel Park had been removed from the FAR bonus amenity program and replaced with a Green Street sculpture garden that would be proposed as part of the alley vacation public benefit package to be reviewed by the Design Commission. The proposal also included a relocation of the residential open-space amenity area to the rooftop of the residential tower and away from the ground level of 9th Avenue. The focus of the evening’s presentation would be the applicant’s responses to the Board’s comments at the previous meeting regarding the building’s exterior and proposed refinements and changes to massing, upper-level transparency and material choices. Finally, there would be a presentation and explanation of departure requests, totaling nine in number.

The revised design showed a layered façade system that allowed vertical modulation and setbacks on the east and west podium facades. The system additionally allowed glazing to be placed perpendicular to the street axis, permitting oblique views along the lengths of 8th and 9th Avenues. The residential amenity area that had been adjacent to the residential entry on 9th Avenue was replaced with a rooftop private outdoor area that was open to the sky.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Following the applicant's presentation and a few clarifying questions from the Board, comments were elicited from members of the public. Seventeen individuals had signed in to become parties of record at the meeting. Among their comments:

- The sculpture garden was a "fantastic" addition to the proposal, and the quality of materials indicated would ensure that it would be a special place downtown;
- The public openness of the space proposed would be a valuable addition to an area now devoid of wholesome activity at night.

BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS

The Board chair identified six areas for the members reflections and comments:

1. Ground plane
2. Residential open space
3. Vertical modulation along the podium and termination at the base
4. Openings in the lower portions of the tower
5. Overall Composition and scale
6. Requested Departures

Addressing the ground plane treatment, the Board members agreed that a remarkable feat of the project was the location of the back-of-house activities below grade which allowed for a delightful amount of street-level transparency. The through-block connector, in addition, had achieved a high-level of legibility; the ceiling art-lighting of that space held out promise for something truly special, depending on the artist who would be selected for the design. The Board cautioned that the building transparency on the ground plane should not be compromised by the choice and placement of elements of the sculpture garden. These unified elements of the design were "something we don't do in Seattle."

The transference of the residential open space from the sidewalk level to the roof-top was a good move for the residents and removed a potential for an awkward relationship to the larger park area.

The reconfigurations and additions of vertical elements on portions of the façades along the podium were noted as desirable and generally successfully. After some discussion the Board decided to condition their approval of the design on the design team's working with the planner to achieve a refinement of the areas where the vertical elements meet the base of the wall. As shown in drawings prepared for the meeting, the base of the vertical elements terminated in a horizontal band that seemed to lack sufficient substance. The base as depicted appeared out of keeping with earlier depictions of a joinery system that suggested greater continuity and coherence with the treatment of the skins of the adjoining towers.

The fuller glazed openings in the lower tower above Howell Street were thought to recapture some of the energy that had been desirable in the earliest drawings of the façade. Continuing the larger glazed openings of the towers on both Howell and Stewart Streets and orienting them to engage and overlook the 9th Avenue sculpture park was acknowledged as a deft move. Some members of the Board, happy with the way the lower sections of the hotel tower had been successfully energized, expressed slight misgivings regarding the upper hotel tower which might be perceived as monotonous, perhaps even “brutalist” against the skyline. Nonetheless it was agreed that attention to details and the care with which the materials were treated would make a big difference in whether the tower was seen as big and massive or sleek and simple. In the end, the Board members present unanimously recommended approval of the design, with the proviso that the design team continue to work with the DPD planner to find a better resolution for terminating the vertical elements at the base of the podium on 8th and 9th Avenues.

DEPARTURES FROM DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Nine departures were requested from development standards (see the packet, pp.56-65, available on-line).

<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/aboutus/news/event/DesignReview/SearchPastReviews/default.asp>

Three of the departures had to do with façade modulation requirements on 8th Avenue and on Stewart and Howell streets (SMC 23.49.058.B1), one dealt with street level uses (23.49.009.B.1), three with curb cuts, number and widths (23.54.030.F.2.a.4, 23.54.030.F.2.b.2), and one with distribution of covered and unenclosed residential recreation areas (23.49.010.B.1,2). . The Board members present unanimously recommended approval of the requested departures, noting that in a proposal of this complexity and size each of the departures better met the intentions of the Design Guidelines, and with the proviso that the design team continue to work with the DPD planner to find a better resolution for terminating the vertical elements at the base of the podium on 8th and 9th Avenues.