



City of Seattle

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



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3014100

Address: 3062 SW Avalon Way

Applicant: Radim Blazej, Caron Architecture

Date of Meeting: Thursday, November 29, 2012

Board Members Present: Robin Murphy (Chair)
Laird Bennion
Myer Harrell
Daniel Skaggs
Norma Tompkins

Board Members Absent: None

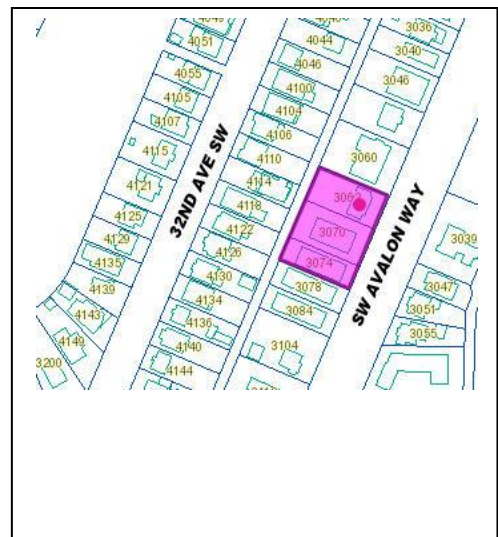
DPD Staff Present: Garry Papers, Senior Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: MR (Midrise)

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

Lot Area: 19,200 sf



Current Development: House on north half of site; two, 2 story apartment buildings on south half; site slopes approximately 30 ft from southwest corner to northeast corner, with a steep 12 foot slope and partial rockery along the Avalon Way frontage.

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

Surrounding Development: Four story apartment building adjacent to the north; 2 story apartment buildings adjacent to the south; 1-2 story houses and backyards across alley to the west; mix of houses and 3 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 single family houses with backyards and garages along the alley, with mixed ages and conditions.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Demolish existing structures and construct a new 6 story (facing to alley, 8 story facing Avalon Way) structure with approximately 81,000 sf and 107 units. A landscaped courtyard for residents and a roof terrace are proposed. Although this site has no parking requirement (SMC 23.54.015.A.table B, row M), approximately 80 parking spaces are proposed below grade, on 2 levels with a curb cut both on Avalon and the alley.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: November 29, 2012

PROJECT & DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The applicants Early Design Guidance (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

Approximately 50 members of the public attended this EDG meeting, and the following design-related comments and concerns were raised:

- Emphasized 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, and the neighborhood interest in protecting the houses on the west side of alley).
- Questioned why no shorter options or with fewer floors were studied or shown.
- 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 option C. It looks larger and taller than existing apartments to south.
- Requested the building incorporate sloped roofs and other residential features to mitigate the boxiness, especially on the façade facing adjacent houses.
- 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 primary windows should not look west over the adjacent yards or houses.
- Encouraged the courtyard and elsewhere along the alley to have large canopy trees to mitigate the bulk, and screen views to and from the proposed units.
- Requested option C to reduce height 1-2 stories, reduce bulk, and probably unit count.
- Noted that many guidelines require significant modulation and sensitive transition to lower intensity context.
- Concerned about pedestrian safety and sightlines for any vehicles exiting onto busy Avalon.
- Commented that the proposed height was less than maximum allowed with affordability bonus, but still no roof elements or trellises should be added above proposed parapets.

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 following **Citywide Design Guidelines** and **West Seattle Junction neighborhood specific guidelines** (*in italics*) of highest priority for this project.

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

A. Site Planning

- 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 supported Option C because it pushes the majority of the mass east and away from the alley and the adjacent single family zone. In addition, the 6 story wall closest to the alley should be reduced, as described under B-1 below. Primary living spaces and balconies in this west wing should be oriented north or south to ensure privacy to the west, and windows facing west should be smaller and/or include exterior louvers to improve privacy. All windows on north and south walls should be carefully placed and staggered from existing ones adjacent, to ensure privacy (because side setbacks will be 7-10 ft). Subsequent elevation drawings should include the “reflected” windows of the existing buildings north and south, and a second drawing with the recently proposed (#3013303) reflected elevation to south.

- 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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed the importance of a richly designed setback zone and privacy layering along Avalon, and the walled courts proposed. The court walls should not crowd the sidewalk, as Avalon Way will see increasing pedestrian activity. The walls should be lower (3-4 ft maximum at all locations) than shown, and incorporate fine scaled materials distinct from the masonry building wall beyond. Low landscaping should occur between sidewalk and walls, and within the courts. Retain the highly transparent street walls as shown.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the southwest facing ground level courtyard of Option C, as that position affords good daylight and provides massing setback from the alley. The Board supported the roofdeck on the north or east edges, but none on the west, and roofdecks should avoid inclusion of trellises, or any other elements that increase the perceived height.

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 issue and guideline at length because of the less intensive zone to the west, and approached the height and bulk issue in 3 ways:

- **The Board requested 3 dimensioned cross sections (including existing grade points) at both proposed parking ramps and the main lobby, to ensure the building is set as low as possible on the site, to reduce overall perceived height, and minimize the wall along the alley. The alley ramp should be as steep and curved as possible; it appears to slope down only 4-5 ft, while the Avalon ramp slopes up 17%; the Avalon ramp should be less or flat, thus the overall building lowered.**
- **Regardless of resolution of the above, the Board firmly agreed the west wall of the west wing should be reduced to 4 stories (approximately 37 ft, minimal parapet) above courtyard grade to be compatible with the context across the alley, and above that be stepped-back 20 ft minimum or approximately one unit depth across the width of that wing. Retain the reveals and modulation on that wing which mitigates bulk. It is understood that total floor area may be reduced or need re-configuring.**
- **To reduce bulk and better adjust massing to context, the step-back on the upper floors should be more pronounced, as follows: the entire west face of level 8 should be set back 5-6 ft from the primary wall below; the northeast corner should retain its distinct articulation, but use a different technique that reduces bulk, and not employ the large, wide overhang shown; the 8th floor should step back further than the 10 ft minimum on the north and south walls, to afford more daylight into the sideyards and reduce perceived height/bulk.**

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.

West Seattle Junction -specific supplemental guidance:

- ***Facade Articulation:*** *To make new, larger development compatible with the surrounding architectural context, facade articulation and architectural embellishment are important considerations in mixed use and multifamily residential buildings. When larger buildings replace several small buildings, facade articulation should reflect the original platting pattern and reinforce the architectural rhythm established in the commercial core.*
- ***Architectural Cues:*** *To create cohesiveness in the Junction, identifiable and exemplary architectural patterns should be reinforced. New elements can be introduced - provided they are accompanied by strong design linkages.*

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting the Board commented on the applicant’s explicit intent to “correlate” to the prior proposal (#3013303 by same architects) to the south: the Board noted both projects are virtually the same massing and nearly identical expressions, and the slight variations in color or proportion are not strong enough to distinguish the buildings and be compatible with context. Regardless of which project proceeds first, the second proposal should adjust, and each building should display more components and/or materials that are unique to each building. To be compatible with the development pattern and grain of the district, some components may be common to both, but that should not exceed more than half of the façade character, and each should read as a distinct building.

- 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.

West Seattle Junction-specific supplemental guidance:

New multi-story developments are encouraged to consider methods to integrate a building’s upper and lower levels. This is especially critical in areas zoned NC-65’ and greater, where more recent buildings in the Junction lack coherency and exhibit a disconnect between the commercial base and upper residential levels as a result of disparate proportions, features and materials. The base of new mixed-use buildings – especially those zoned 65 ft. in height and higher - should reflect the scale of the overall building. New mixed-use buildings are encouraged to build the commercial level, as well

as one to two levels above, out to the front and side property lines to create a more substantial base.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the strong 2-3 story base along Avalon Way, and its distinct material expression of brick or masonry. They also supported the overall composition of this building but with the massing and bulk adjustments noted in other guidelines.

- 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 supported the modulation and deep reveals shown, but noted the west facades displayed less interesting materials and color variation than the east. Since the west side faces adjacent houses and smaller scaled structures, all west elevations should employ diverse and residentially scaled materials, textures and color treatments. In particular, the recessed planes and set-back upper stories (see B-1) on all facades should use color and/or material changes. Subsequent perspective views should include adjacent context structures on both sides of the alley.

D. Pedestrian Environment

- 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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the masonry return walls at the ends of the Avalon base appear very tall and blank; windows and other design treatments should be added to give these visible surfaces pedestrian scale and interest. The same is true for the deeply recessed lobby entrance on Avalon, and subsequent perspective drawings should show this primary entrance, its materials and detailing.

- 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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted the proposed exposed wall of parking along the alley was tall, long and made of raw concrete. Regardless of the outcome to lower the parking (see B-1), any remaining exposed wall should be reduced in height, incorporate landscape pockets along its length, and use a softened material.

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

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the project should incorporate pedestrian scaled lighting along the courtyard and alley, to improve visibility and safety along that portion of the alley, yet shielded from spilling into yards across the alley. The residential court closest to the driveway on Avalon (if approved) should be angled and low to provide adequate site lines and pedestrian safety.

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.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board noted sizable canopy trees should be located along the length of the alley, to screen the courtyard and west building wing from the houses across the alley. Larger root-ball pockets or trays could be integrated into the structure above the hoods of parking stalls below. Trees should also be located in the side yards to buffer adjacent parcels. The Board clarified the courtyard along the alley is desirable, but it could terrace to the sloping grade from the building walls, so its existence does not force or determine the parking lid elevation or flat condition.

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 supported the proposed public stair up the slope in the south side yard, which provides valuable connectivity to a frequent transit street. However, that stair should be shifted close to the property line, to allow a landscape buffer next to the building, and should integrate landings, seating and a more interesting “meandering” character to improve the climbing experience. A landscape architect should be engaged to design this side yard and stair, the courtyard and other features.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board’s recommendation on the requested departures 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. **MR zone Rear Setback (SMC 23.45.518.B):** The Code requires a 10 ft setback from a rear lot line abutting an alley, to any wall over 18" high. The applicant proposes a 0 ft setback for the exposed wall of the upper parking level (0-5 ft tall) along approximately 110 ft of the 160 ft alley length.

The Board indicated serious hesitation about such a departure as presented. Depending on the outcome of efforts to lower the parking lid and building (per B-1 above) and efforts to mitigate the tall wall as presented (per D-5 above), the Board may be able to consider a revised departure with a significantly shorter, and softer wall. The landscaped courtyard abutting the lot line is desirable, but the loss of approximately 9 parking stalls in order to lower this encroachment, is not compelling since this site does not require parking.

2. **Structure Depth (SMC 23.45.528.B1):** The Code requires the structure wall along side yards to be a maximum of 75% of the lot depth. The applicant proposes a parking wall that is 94.2% of the lot depth, and upper building walls that are 84% of lot depth.

The Board noted the value of the courtyard and that lot coverage is not near maximum, and indicated some receptivity to the 84% request, but wants that considered in light of the revisions to bulk and wall length that should result from Guidance in B-1 above. They also might consider a parking wall departure above the 75%, depending on a better resolution of the tall parking wall at the lot line, noted in departure #1 above.

3. **Parking Access (SMC 23.45.536):** The Code requires all parking access to be from the alley if the lot abuts an improved alley, which this lot does. The applicant proposes *a departure to allow a second parking access off the street (Avalon Way), per the text in SMC 23.45.536.C.4: On steeply sloping lots, the Director may permit the use of both an alley and a street for access, provided that the following conditions are met: a. access from the street is to a common parking garage in or under the structure, that is underground or extends no more than 4 feet above grade. b. the siting of development results in increased Green factor score, larger ground floor amenity areas, and/or reduced surface parking area than if alley access alone is used.*

The Board was favorable toward this departure allowing both access points, considering all the parking would be common, concealed and the courtyard is better than alley-side surface parking, however they support revisions to ensure the 4 ft maximum wall criteria is met, in concert with Board guidance under D-5.

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. It is the applicant responsibility to read every section of this report and provide the required exhibits.