



City of Seattle

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



INITIAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3014176

Address: 3210 California Avenue SW.

Applicant: Jodi Patterson-O'Hare, for Intracorp

Date of Meeting: Thursday, November 21, 2013

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

Board Members Absent: T. Frick McNamara
Meyer Harrell

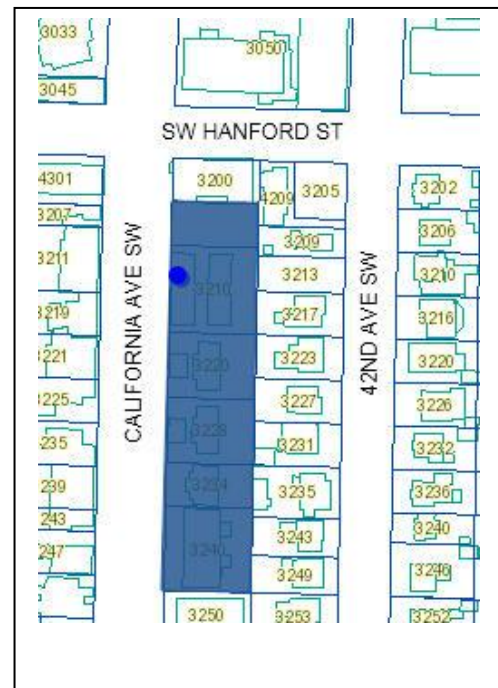
DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: NC2-40'

Nearby Zones: (North) NC2-40'
(South) NC2-40'
(East) SF 5000
(West) NC2-40'

Lot Area: The site is rectangular in shape , sharply sloped downward from east to west and totals 44,692 square feet in size.



Current Development: The site is currently occupied by a surface parking lot and a mixture of five single and two-story residential and commercial buildings that are scheduled for demolition. There are a few smaller trees on site, and some street trees within the planting strip running along California Avenue SW. A large sequoia, designated by the City as an “exceptional” tree lies just east of the development site and a third of the way south of the north edge of the site. Provisions will be undertaken by the developer to protect the tree and its root zone.

Access: There is no alley connecting to the site and two new curbcuts along California Avenue SW are proposed as access to the site. Six existing curbcuts would be removed.

Surrounding Development: Directly to the north and south of the site are two modest, three-story multi-family structures that bookend the site. Lowrise multi-family and commercial structures run along the opposite side of California Avenue SW. Directly across SW Hanford Street to the north is a church building and parking lot, and northeast of that sits West Seattle High School. Directly north of those sites lies Hiawatha Playfield and north of the playfield the core commercial area that embraces a narrow strip along SW Admiral Way as well as California Avenue SW. The site lies within the Admiral Residential Urban Village. Outside the cruciform urban village lies large swaths of single family zoning developed with single-family residences. That vicinity characteristic of generally small-scale single family residences is the condition directly to the east of the development site

ECAs: There are steep-slope identified environmentally critical areas on or abutting the site to the east. The site is generally level along California Avenue SW, but rises approximately 6 feet from its southwest the four hundred plus feet to its northwest corner.

Neighborhood Character: As noted, the site lies along the narrow central spine of the Admiral Urban Village and is located south of the central junction of SW Admiral Way and California Avenue SW. An older pattern of development, intermittently in place along California , is that of low scale commercial buildings and surface parking lots, with some homes converted, or partially converted to commercial uses abutting California Avenue SW. Newer mixed-use buildings, with commercial/retail space at grade and residential above are gradually overlaying the older pattern along the arterial.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a five-story mixed-use building containing approximately 155 residential units, 4,800 square feet of commercial space and 3,400 square feet of live-work space at grade, and parking for approximately 171 vehicles.

DESIGN PRESENTATION

At the first Early Design Guidance meeting, the third and preferred scheme presented by the applicants pulled its mass further from the east property line and the upper floors were separated by a courtyard at the second residential level in order “to create the appearance of 2 separate buildings.” One feature of the design as presented at the first EDG meeting was the protection of an “exceptional” sequoia, located to the east of the site and located in a neighbor’s rear yard. The Board directed that at a second Early Design Guidance Meeting the applicant provide a fourth massing alternative, one that would more adequately mitigate for the length of the building and break the building’s mass into three pieces instead of two. Additionally, it was requested that the design team explore how the commercial component, moved to the north end of the structure, might invigorate the pedestrian experience along that portion of the west façade.

Modifications presented at the Second Early Design Guidance Meeting showed the structure divided into three discernible parts instead of two with the northernmost break centered on the exceptional redwood tree east of the site. A glazed sky-bridge was inserted across this break, reducing the number of mechanical penthouses. In addition, the 4,700 square feet of commercial space was moved to the northern end of the structure, residential units were removed at street level along California Avenue SW, the live/work units were moved to the south end and presented as convertible to “true commercial.” Compositionally, the California Avenue SW façade was divided into 25-foot modules

At the second EDG meeting, it was generally agreed among the Board members that the revised preferred scheme, with the “three buildings,” was a marked improvement over the “two building” scheme from the first Early Design Guidance meeting. The Board was pleased with the thorough analysis that accompanied the latest presentation. The placement of the commercial space at the north end of the ground floor, doing away with the ground level residential movements and provisions to make the live/work spaces totally transformable into genuine commercial spaces were welcomed moves in the design along California Av SW. The design team was commended for making these changes and for the way the building now related to the sidewalk and street. Some time was spent discussing the width of the spaces between building and suggestions for a wider gap in front of the redwood to provide more sunlight to the tree. There was some discussion about moving the skybridge to connect the gap between the second and third buildings, counting from the north, and about the width limits for a bridge, whether north or south. One suggestion for consideration was to push the lobby area and entry away

from the street, a gesture that would relate the entry more dramatically to the two gaps between buildings.

One particular area of concern was the east façade of the building. While the applicants voiced a desire to keep that façade “quiet” and simple, the Board did not want the design team to make it too bland. The Board members urged the designers to go all away around the building with design; “don’t lose interest in the rear of the building,” one Board member cautioned.

Although there were many elements of a project this size which had not had exhaustive treatment or discussion, the Board agreed that the project could proceed to design refinement and MUP application and then return to the Board for a Recommendation Meeting. In doing so, the Board gave this specific guidance, among other observations: study a wider gap between buildings at the north, one that might provide greater solar benefits to the tree; provide a more detailed study of the east façade and the ways its windows, etc. will interact with neighbors to the east, their privacy and comfort, while showing a façade that is responsive, quiet and simple, but not bland or with a “back of the building look.” And finally, as a guideline for the material pallet that will be settled upon: think of a vocabulary that speaks of three separate but closely related buildings.

Otherwise, the general guidance for future design development would be that contained in the Guidelines and guidance determined to be of particular relevance to the site and proposal as specified at the first Early Design Meeting.

INTERRIM RECOMMENDATION MEETING—November 21, 2013

The design team began with a focused presentation, explaining the applicant’s responses to the particular guidance offered by the Board at the last (second EDG) meeting. As directed by the Board, the project, at the time of the second EDG meeting, has been broken into three blocks or “buildings.” In the present iteration the south “building” had been stepped up four feet from the level of the two north “buildings.” This had meant recalculating the height of the two north towers separately from that of the south tower, and necessitating a request for a departure from SMC 23.47A.008, which would require that non-residential uses at street level have a floor-to-floor height of thirteen feet. In this instance, five of the six live/work spaces, would fall short of the 13-foot floor-to-floor height requirement. In response to the Board’s earlier directive that the towers should be varied but appear at the same time related one to the other, a mirror pattern of frames and recessed planes created a symmetrical link between the two north towers while a pattern of similar frames and recessed planes on the south “buildings” created a near-symmetry internally consistent within the California Avenue facing façade of that portion of the overall structure.

A second directive of the Board had been to design the east façade so that it conveyed a sense of quiet but not merely a back of structure that had not been carefully designed. As had been noted at earlier meetings, the respect for adjacent properties at the rear of the site had been enhanced by increasing the required 15-foot setback to an averaged 18.38-foot setback. The east facades had been eroded and modulated more subtly than the front façade while maintaining the color and integrity of the overall building composition. It was noted that the

proposed development would sit well downhill from the homes to the east and that existing topography would limit the eastern exposure of the structure to a 2-1/2 to 3-story height. In addition, the design has proposed smaller window openings and fewer decks along that side. Current plans showed a variety of landscaped spaces at the second level, including a common outdoor space sitting below the exceptional redwood tree. The back edge of the property would also contain a series of patios off individual residences. These spaces, situated considerably below the levels of the adjacent rear yards, would be integrated with larger planted areas that would constitute a landscape buffer between the proposed structure and those yards. This would allow for deep-rooted trees and shrubs to be planted along the property edge, allowing for a more effective buffering. The presentation concluded with a more detailed look at these spaces, as well at the roof garden and other amenity spaces.

Public Comment

Comments from the public consisted of the following remarks and observations:

- The proposed white should be warmer, creamier;
- Pedestrian bridge between buildings is too dense, has lost any transparency;
- Structures need a cap at the top, stronger reveals;
- The allowed Solar penetration to the east is inaccurately portrayed; simulations do not account for eyebrow overhangs on the east facades; the gap between two north structures doesn't do anything to improve solar exposure;
- Windows on the east-facing façade are not arranged to provide privacy for structures to the east; proposed landscaping trees are not enough to provide an adequate buffer;
- Proposal still too tall and bulky; it blocks views of the Olympic mountain range from homes to the east; it blocks solar penetration to east; it should be a 4-story structure;
- A gigantic building; 5 floors are too many; would be ok with 4, thrilled with 3;
- Should not be live/work spaces along California Avenue SW, but rather genuine commercial space;
- Project will make California Avenue SW more walkable and be an asset to neighborhood.

Board's Deliberations

Regarding the east facades, there was some discussion whether wrapping the colors around from the front of the buildings achieved the "quiet" that was part of the earlier guidance. Although the applicants had spoken of "smaller" windows on the east façades, some members of the Board thought that there was no clear demonstration of how the proposed windows related to the rear windows of the single-family structures to the east nor how a more robust demonstration might affect choices of location and sill heights as well as size. There was also a desire expressed to have more information regarding the private plaza areas designated for individual residential units, especially regarding choices in materials and greater specificity for plantings at the property edge. Any development of the east facades should minimize the parapets and shrink the tops of the facades as much as possible.

Regarding the California facades, the Board members were generally agreed that the choice to push down the north two buildings and to create the height change at the south building were good moves. Reducing the floor to floor heights of the proposed live/work units, said to result

from this move, was not so enthusiastically welcomed, especially since the Board favored the convertibility, if not the outright conversion, of these units to retail spaces. The Board did not convey a strong sense of their willingness to grant the departures requested to approve the under-height spaces.

The entry plazas were considered moves in the right direction, and possibly there should be even more of them. As shown, however, they were generally thought not to be generous enough in size, especially if they were to function as outdoor extensions of the retail spaces within. They needed, as expressed by one Board member, “to be brought out to the curb.” Overall, the retail base was characterized as “too weak” and “too delicate” overall and in need of gaining both muscularity and individualization.

There was discussion regarding the bridge between the two north structures, with some concerns that, as depicted in the drawings, there was little transparency evident. The design team was asked about the width of the opening that potentially afforded views of the redwood tree behind the property. It was indicated that the opening shown was that which maintained the rhythm that had been said by a couple of the Board members to create a discernibly positive effect. It was argued that given its location, even if less opaque, the bridge would not afford the desired views through it, certainly not to drivers, barely to pedestrians. At any rate, the Board requested to be shown more details regarding the bridge’s structure and materiality.

The California Avenue SW façade was, in the final estimate, a work in progress and one that needed more study and refinement. The frames were thought too-heavy, even “cartoonish,” at least as rendered in their choices of color. Though modulated, the masses of the buildings presented “one big field of gray,” which besides contributing to a certain heaviness, contributed to a sameness that created a sense of one long building, the perception that the modulation should have been working to overcome.

Given the challenges that remained, the Board were agreed that the issues raised could not be addressed nor the deficiencies in the design be brought around through the Board’s conditioning. The Board requested that the project be returned for an additional Design Review Recommendation meeting.

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