



City of Seattle

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



FINAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING 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, April 03, 2014

Board Members Present:
Laird Bennion (Chair)
Todd Bronk
T Frick McNamara
Daniel Skaggs

Board Member absent: Myer Harrell

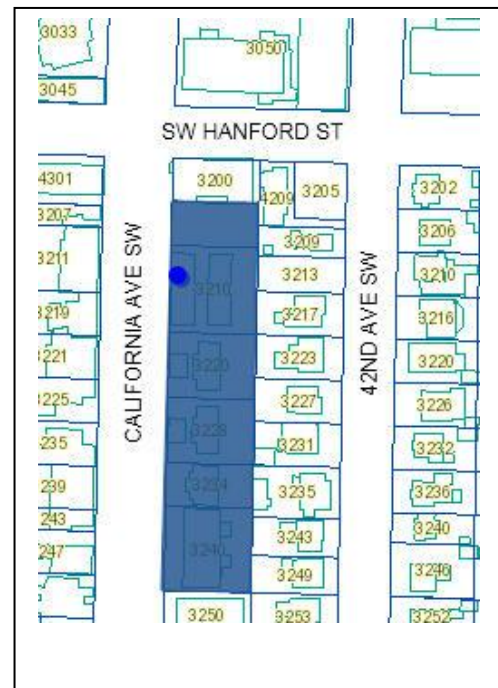
DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

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 along the sidewalk from its southwest corner 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.

EARLIER 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 as 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, if they were all to remain as live/work units.

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.

PRESENTATION AND DELIBERATIONS -February 6, 2014

The architects' presentation began with a brief recitation of issues that the design team believed to have been resolved, either earlier or in the current presentation. These included: a strong retail front, the principal portion of which had been moved to the northern end of the project at the Board's behest and given greater individuation of discrete spaces and a certain muscularity through double height brick pilasters. The human scale of the California Avenue street-level façade had been enhanced by recessed retail entries, residential lobbies and overhead canopies, variegated according to the intended and attendant uses. The accent materials along the base, in addition to brick, included wood composite panels, architectural concrete finishes and anodized aluminum storefront windows of various heights and configurations.

The east-facing façade had been eroded and modulated more so than the west façade with insets varying from 2 to 8 feet in depth. The above-grade setback along the rear of the building was a minimum of 15 feet in depth, while averaging 18 feet in depth. Outdoor amenity areas at the first residential level were well below the level of the neighboring backyards and the proposed private patios were located behind a robust and tiered planting area intended to create a privacy buffer for residents on either side of the property lines. Following the guidance offered by the Board, the east façade had been given a more elaborate composition, maintaining the same vocabulary of that on the west side, but with warmer and muted colors.

The windows proposed for the east façade were generally smaller in size than those on the west side; whereas the residential fenestration on the west comprised 39 percent of the façade surface, those on the east comprised 32 percent of the total. An effort had been made to reduce the alignment of windows on the east façade with windows on the existing single-family structures along 42nd Avenue SW.

Details were offered regarding the choice of materials and façade lighting fixtures, a sectional view of the bridge connecting the north and middle buildings, and the array and location of planting materials.

Departure Request and Rationale

In the attempt to differentiate between the middle and south “building,” and to provide a “step” between the two rooflines, following cues from the Board, the central “building” was pushed down and the south “building” raised up. This resulted in the retail space at the southern end of the middle building having an 11-foot, 6-inch floor-to-floor height in order to be flush with grade and the two live/work units in the south “building” being 2 and 11 inches shy of the floor-to-floor height requirement. The requested departures were required in order to locate the floors of the retail space and the live/work units to be flush with the grade change that occurs across the California Avenue SW façade, which was better in keeping with Guidelines, in particular A-2 which deals with “Streetscape Compatibility.”

Public Comment

After some clarifying questions from the Board members, comments were elicited from members of the public attending the meeting. Among the comments were the following:

- The mass of the building remained out of proportion to the neighborhood;
- Worries about the garage entries and impacts on pedestrian traffic, especially children traversing the sidewalk;
- The building is too big and sets a dangerous precedent for further development in the area, for instance, across the street;
- How does it fit? Good retail needs an alleyway for success;
- Doesn't look like three distinct buildings if that is the intention;
- No distinction between the north and middle so-called “buildings”;
- Too tall;

- Changes imperceptible since the last time the project was presented; changes in colors only; no real quality materials; no real transition to single family zone to east; out of character with neighborhood;
- Needs dramatic changes; might be more palatable if it were a great building, but not a great building;
- Size is still the major issue.

Board Deliberations

The Board chair began by identifying a set of issues: 1) the footbridge between the north and middle “buildings,” 2) the glazing on the east façade, 3) the requested departures, and 4) the proposed building materials.

The Bridge. Regarding the bridge, it was observed that the renderings showed no real transparency. It was further observed that the gap between the north and middle building had actually shrunk since last reviewed. The north and middle buildings, consequently, appeared as one long segment of structure. This impression was not helped by the proposed materials and colors which intensified the singleness of the two chunks of structure. A strong suggestion from several of the Board members was “to lose the bridge.” At one point the Chair asked whether the issue was to lose the bridge or to make it more transparent and to widen the gap between the north and middle buildings which appeared to have shrunk from earlier presentations. The strong response of the majority of Board members was that the gap should be widened, but it was also necessary to lose the bridge.

Glazing on the East Façade. One of the Board members thought the glazing was more acceptable than what had been shown in earlier presentations, but others saw no dramatic change nor obvious mitigation in the choice of size or arrangements of the windows that was adequate to address the privacy question raised at earlier meetings.

Departures. The Departures were from the same Code provision that requires a floor-to-floor height of the non-residential spaces on the ground floor to be 13 feet (SMC 23.47A.008). It was felt that the departure question was not of paramount importance at the moment and could be delayed until issues more germane to a successful outcome of the design were resolved.

Materials. It was generally thought that the double-height brick treatment of the north mass succeeded in heightening the place and importance of the retail spaces and imparting a granularity that enhanced the pedestrian experience at the sidewalk level. Other areas along the California Avenue SW street-level frontage were considered less successful. In general, the retail level was in need of a finer scale and greater granularity. The use of large-scale panels, for instance those shown in the vignettes on pp. 16, 17, and 18, was not thought to contribute to the “streetscape compatibility” of Guideline A-2 nor to the “smaller scale retail” experience as one would move south on California Avenue SW. The greater intimacy of the smaller scale retail seemed to call out for a fine grain of materials, and the renderings appeared at odds with the textual statements of experiential intentionality. Brick, in different sizes textures and colors, was one possibility. It was suggested by a couple of the Board members that not just at the ground level, but at the upper levels, a smaller scale of fiber cement panels and wood accent panels, or

other facing materials, might contribute to diminishing the impression of the overall height and mass of the structure. It was agreed to by all of the Board members that the “middle building” needed to be materially differentiated from the mass of the structure to the north, even if that meant a use of “radically different” materials.

The discussion of materials occasioned the observation that the residential windows need not all be of uniform size nor of white vinyl. A different color of window might broaden the pallet and used strategically could provide for critical versatility in dealing with façade transitions. This could be of special significance, perhaps, in fine tuning the east façade. It should be noted that there are discrepancies in the renderings that are part of the presentation packet for the Design Review meeting of February 6, 2014. The elevations on pp.8-9 and 27 indicate the use of monochromatic residential windows throughout. The cover (and p.10) would suggest a second color of residential windows in a least four locations.

At one point during the course of the Board’s deliberations the Chair had asked whether the members thought that any minor massing moves were possible to rectify what had been noted as major issues with the proposal. One response was that the design team would keep “tweaking it” and it was not going to get to where it needed to be. At the end of their deliberations, the Board members were unanimously agreed that the gaps between the “buildings” needed to be a full 25 feet in width. They also agreed on the need for greater material differentiation between the “buildings”; this was particularly applicable to the middle building which had been the object of their greatest attention. Four of the five members agreed that the proposal needed to lose the sky bridge. Two of the board members thought that the north building required “an upper level setback”; three members thought that the north building needed to be reduced in height by 10-15 feet. The Board directed the applicants to come back to the Board ready to show and discuss the two mentioned options, the “set back” and the overall reduction of the top of the north building. The applicants should also be prepared to address the other issues raised in their deliberations, particularly comments regarding the bridge, glazing and materials.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING—April 3, 2014

Architects’ Presentation

The architectural team began by focusing on those points that were identified by the Board as unresolved issues at the February 6th meeting. First were the massing issues and the project team’s responses, the most dramatic being the elimination of the top floor of the northernmost portion of the overall structure which created a stair-step effect for the three “buildings” from south to north. Additionally, the top floors of the south and middle “buildings” had been set back an average of three additional feet from the east property line and the gaps between the buildings had been expanded to a full 25 feet. The controversial bridge between the north and middle building, had with the reduction in height of the north building, been reduced one story in height, with a catwalk access running along its top connecting the top floor of the middle building to the rooftop outdoor amenity space on the north building.

Addressing the issue of totally eliminating the skybridge, suggested By members of the Board at the previous meeting, the architectural team indicated that it would be almost invisible at street level due to its loss of a story and explained that its total removal would necessitate more exits to the ground floor along the sidewalk and higher penthouses at the structure's top. Easy access to the rooftop amenity space would likewise be hampered for residents in the two south "buildings."

Finally, the design team discussed the choices in materials and how those imparted a sharp differentiation between the three "buildings" that had evolved over the course of time and presentation from "brother or sister" buildings to "cousins" and finally to "friends, not family." One sticking point, with both Board and the public would be the green accent color on the front façade of the middle building which became a significant swath of color on the east façade. Various descriptions as "Kermit the Frog green," "Post-It note green," and "scary green," it became a matter of considerable concern and the hue and tonality the occasion for the Board's conditioning their approval of the project.

Public Comment

Approximately twelve individuals expressed a variety of comments, among them the following:

- The project team had taken "great steps" with the design, especially by eliminating the top floor of the north building; still, the bridge should go, and the railing surrounding the rooftop amenity space should be of glass;
- The loss of the top floor fine, but the setbacks of the top floors of the other two buildings insufficient in depth;
- The touted urban feel of the sidewalk-level façade not desirable: "this is not downtown, this is West Seattle;"
- The reduction in shadowing from the top-floor setbacks insignificant for neighbors to the east;
- Closing in on a building that won't be an embarrassment to the Admiral neighborhood; ideally, the other two buildings should be shortened as well; middle building needs additional moves to dispel the "scary green";
- Other than at the summer solstice, the setbacks provide insufficient mitigation;
- The front and the backs of each of the buildings should speak the same language;
- The project team had done a terrific job in addressing issues from the earlier meetings;
- The project will enliven existing dead space and create a synergy between the two junctions;
- It would not appear that the rooftop amenity area would violate accessibility standards if the bridge were to be lost;
- Complained that some of the slides shown by the applicants had not appeared in the packet they had uploaded to the DPD website.

Board Deliberations

The Board members were generally pleased with the massing revisions, specifically the removal of the top floor of the north building and the setbacks at the top floors of the middle and south buildings. They were also generally agreed that the extensive field of green in the middle of the backside of the middle building needed to be toned down or muted, probably by a change in color and the addition of other materials. The mid-section of the middle “building” exhibited too much pop and needed to be more deferential in the manner by which it presented itself to its eastern neighbors. Portions of the walls surrounding the two vehicular parking entrances were also thought to be “too blank” and unengaging as perceived by pedestrians on the sidewalk. The vertical balusters of the metal handrail that edged the rooftop amenity space on the north building seemed “out of place”; a guardrail composed primarily of glass, like that on the crosswalk atop the bridge, was seen as a better and more compatible expression for this area. There was vigorous discussion between two of the Board members regarding the differential colors and scoring of the sidewalk adjacent the storefronts and entries on California Avenue SW. While acknowledging the desirability of the changes in paving color and scoring, one of the Board members called for fewer accents within a given measure of the street frontage while the other advocated for the more pronounced staccato effect portrayed in the drawings. Without coming to any resolution, the opinions seemed agreed in that variety in texture and the scoring pattern were equally important with color changes and that a closer look at the rhythm and rationale of the proposed hardscape should be undertaken by members of the design team who needed to make some landscape changes along California Avenue SW at any rate.

Departures

Three Departures from Development Standards had been requested by the proposal team, each relating to the requirements that non-residential uses at street-level should have a minimum floor-to-floor height of 13 feet (SMC 23.47A.008). Two of the departures were associated with the two live/work spaces proposed for Building C, one 5 inches shy and the other 10 inches shy of the required height. The third departure was associated with a portion of the retail space located at the southwest corner of Building B. Here the height was 2-feet 6-inches shy of the development standard. Granting the departure requests would allow at-grade entries to each of the spaces, better meeting, as explained by the design team, Guidelines A-2 and D-1 which encourage appealing and successful building entries. If the departures were not to be approved, the three affected spaces would be depressed below sidewalk grade to provide the required floor-to-floor heights, but less desirable stairs and ramps would then be provided for circulation inboard of the entries. The three departure requests were approved by the Board, 4-0.

The question whether to retain or get rid of the bridge between the north and middle buildings was the matter most extensively argued. Two of the Board members were convinced that the building worked better with the bridge and that the bridge provided the mechanism by which the number and height of the stair and elevator penthouses could be reduced overall. One Board member was adamantly opposed to retaining the bridge. The final vote was 3 to 1 in favor of retaining the bridge and recommending approval of the proposal as presented with a less Solomonic kit of ameliorations as conditions of that approval.

Conditions of Approval

In recommending approval of the proposal, the Board recommended imposing the following Conditions of their Approval:

- The area of wall surrounding each of the vehicular entries should be treated in such a way, through relief or scoring lines, changes in texture, or through application of additional color or materials, adequately to counter any impression of being a “blank wall.”
- The middle portion of the east façade of the middle building should be redesigned through changes in color and/or materiality, and other adjustments as necessary, to mute what was perceived as “an extremely green statement to neighbors who live so close,” while maintaining an integrated architectural feeling within a conceptual whole that provides coherency with the other three elevations of that building.
- The metal security railing and balusters surrounding the amenity area on the roof of the north building as shown at the meeting and in the packet should be replaced by a railing system supported by posts with transparent glass panels between.

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