



# City of Seattle

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

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE  
OF  
THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD  
February 4 and March 18, 2014**

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3016538

Address: 3031 Western Avenue

Applicant: Brad Hinthorne, Perkins + Will Architects, for  
Martin Selig Real Estate

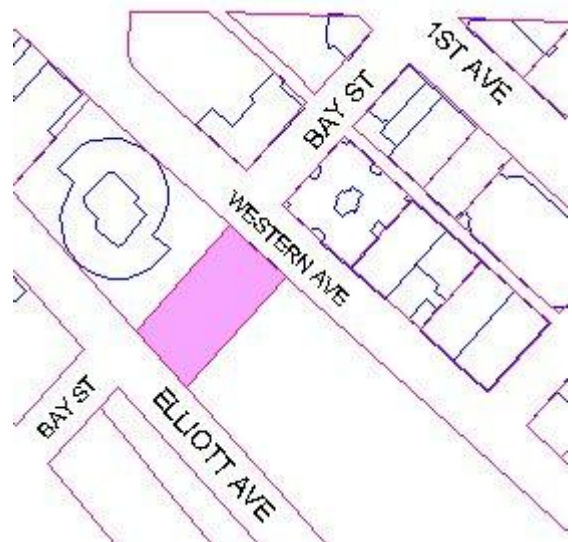
Board members present: Gabe Grant, Chair  
Gundula Proksch  
Murphy McCullough  
Pragnesh Parikh  
Matthew Albores

Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Downtown development site is bounded by Western Avenue on the east, Elliott Avenue on the west, by the Airborne Express building site to the north and the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park on the south. Included within the development site is the former Bay Street right-of-way which was vacated under Ordinance 1114450 of the City of Seattle. Actual development within the vacated right-of-way is restricted by a Property Use and Development Agreement (PUDA). The development site is trapezoidal in shape, with the Elliott Avenue property line flaring slightly outward as it runs from north to south. It measures approximately 100 feet in the north/south direction and 180-193 feet in the



east/west direction. The total area is approximately 18,700 square feet in extent. Currently there is a structure on the site, occupying most of the area south of the vacated Bay Street. Formerly a warehouse building, it is now used for parking and is proposed for demolition in order to accommodate the envisioned development. The development site is zoned DMR/R125/65, with the area north of what was the centerline of Bay Street zoned DMC-65. The area directly across Western Avenue to the east is likewise zoned DMC-65. The areas to the south and southwest are zoned DMR/R 125/65, same as the development site.

The proposed development is for a 12 story residential building, containing approximately 100 units with below-grade parking for 75 vehicles. The parking garage would take access from the existing Airborne Express building's driveway and garage ramp off Western Avenue which bisects the eastern portion of the former Bay Street right-of-way. Project work would include landscape and pedestrian improvements along Western and Elliott Avenues.

### **First Early Design Guidance Meeting –February 4, 2014**

Board member Matthew Albores was absent from the February 4, 2014, Early Design Guidance Meeting.

### **ARCHITECTS' PRESENTATION**

There was a brief introduction by the developer and the developer's attorney, the latter explaining how an earlier residential proposal for the same site, having been recommended for approval by the Downtown Design Review Board and subsequently approved by the Director of the Department of Planning and Development, had, upon appeal, been returned to the Department by the City's Hearing Examiner on the technicality of incorrect public notice. It was noted that the intended design of the current proposal was essentially in keeping with that of the earlier proposed residential building.

First the site and existing uses around the site were briefly described, then a series of public open-space precedents shown with the intention of establishing a comparative basis for discussing appropriate, acceptable and successful precedents when assessing the relationships between the Olympic Sculpture Park and the structures and uses that that should surround it within the context of the City's urban environment. Three different models for the site, differing slightly in massing were next presented to the Board by the architectural team. Each was 125 feet in height as measured from both Elliott Avenue and Western Avenue, yielding a profile that stepped down toward the west at midpoint. The first alternative, identified as the "preferred" alternative, was of a structure 51 feet in width, set back 15 feet from the south property line and with all the mechanical equipment gathered at the north half of the upper roof. Massing option two was similar to the first option, 51 feet in width, but with a horizontal "slot" incised into the uphill portion of the upper tower at the roofline level of the lower portion of the structure. In addition, a portion of the structure at the southeast entry was eroded with the tower cantilevered above. The third option terminated the horizontal slot at the westernmost extent of the entry cantilever, and ran an incised vertical slot to that point, creating an inverted "L" or inverted boot shape resting on the rectangular box of the lower portion of the structure and resolving some of what could be considered the awkwardness of the stepped profile. Each of the alternatives would allow for a large usable recreational space on the lower roof.

In each of the schemes, vehicular access would be from the existing driveway which provides access to underground parking beneath the Airborne Express building.

After asking a number of clarifying questions following the architect's presentation, the Board elicited comments from members of the public attending the meeting.

### **Public Comments:**

Comments solicited from the public included the following:

- The first member of the public to speak was from the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) and expressed some general concerns the SAM had concerning impacts of their Olympic Sculpture Park; these included the following items: balconies, shadows, reflections, blockage in summer of the western sun; there was no question of whether the proposed building would loom over the park, so choice of material and architectural articulation were of paramount importance; it needed to be a beautiful building.
- Several individuals spoke to the important "public interest" issues the proposal raised. Although relatively new, the Olympic Sculpture Park has gained a national and international reputation as a special place; the building should not be allowed to overwhelm the park; elements within the south-facing façade should not be allowed to compete with the park; were the balconies as shown in the packet on p.26 portents that suggested overwhelming? Other comments, variously: nothing should be built there, no structure should be more than 65 feet on the Western Avenue side, it should be a "quiet" building, it should be a spectacular building, "sculptural" like the park it abuts. No question is more important than that of context, both the physical and the cultural context of the proposal.
- Some of those attending were residents from nearby residential buildings; some expressed concerns about view blockage; others raised the broader issue of the "fit" of the height (at the allowed 125-foot zoning), bulk and scale of the proposed structure within the existing neighborhood character.
- "I would like to live there," one person said; the proposal would provide "eyes on the park." Downtown density is a good thing; density is a part of becoming a great city; the park was conceived as fitting into a denser fabric as the city would grow. Here is an opportunity for a quality structure that could enhance the existing context of the area. The architectural firm designing the building has displayed remarkable sensitivity and talent in other instances (Victoria, B.C.) and is quite capable of meeting the challenges here.
- Several other publically-voiced concerns dealt with issues which, as expressed, were less clearly related to elements of design: i.e., the adequacy of the parking proposed for the project, the impacts on the availability of local parking and area traffic, construction noise, the possibility of unearthing contaminated soils.

### **Board's Deliberations:**

After hearing the comments of those attending the meeting, the Board began by noting the responsibility of development on the site to respect the sculpture park to the south which has

become in the short interval since its opening one of the City's great and cherished spaces. Having said that, the Board briefly identified issues and related them to specific questions. The first issue was that of congruency, related to the questions "What kind (size) of development, with what particular orientation and articulation would be congruent with the Sculpture Park?" Given the site and public comments regarding congruencies related to the site, and given the Board's role and responsibilities, the question put to the Board was "Which of the guidelines would set those parameters or benchmarks by which a successful development at this site would be recognized?"

At the moment, however, the Board did not believe that they had been given enough information in the presentation or presentation materials to attempt to assign guidelines, either those to be found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Downtown Developments* or/and the *Design Guidelines for the Belltown Urban Center Village*, which should be considered of highest priority to this project. The four members of the Board present at the meeting were agreed that the project should return for a second Early Design Guidance meeting. At that time the Board would like to be shown development alternatives that were more distinct in character and not just variations on a single theme as they believed those presented at this meeting had been. Given a fuller presentation, and one that responded to concerns expressed at the current meeting, the Board would be in a better position to impart guidance of specific pertinence for development of a successful project at this site. The proposed building would sit next to a world class sculptural park; for years to come it would be eminently visible from within the park. In this regard the basic challenge is the design of a structure that succeeds at some level in emulating the success of the design of the park.

### **Second Early Design Guidance Meeting –March 18, 2014**

The architectural team, as they had at the first EDG meeting, began with a contextual analysis of the site and an assessment of constraints and opportunities for the proposal. It was pointed out that the Weiss Manfredi designed Olympic Sculpture Garden directly to the south of the proposed development had been designed as an urban space and conceptually based upon a processional "z"-shaped path that directs the eye and the foot across the underlying orthogonal grid. These oppositional vectors lead through a series of resting stops and axial vantage points that are oriented to the water view and momentarily away from the garden itself.

Three conceptual massing schemes were presented, variations on those presented at the first EDG meeting. An "interlock" scheme showed two architectonic forms, a lower block rising from Elliott Avenue and a taller one arising from Western Avenue, conjoined around an architectural "slot" that would mediate the height transition of the lower and higher forms. A second scheme, referred to as the "Mobius concept, resulted from applying the folding logic referred to in the analysis of the Weiss-Manfredi sculpture garden design and showed a portion of the higher mass of the Western Avenue building block canted northwesterly across the Elliott Avenue mass. The third and preferred scheme was called the "folded veil" scheme. It referred to the zigzag folded surface of the sculpture garden and over-lay the basic stepped-form of the building's mass, most strikingly along the south façade, with a folded material layering that was intended to create the effect of folded veils.

See the DPD, Design Review website for the graphics presented at the meeting:

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

## **Public Comment**

Approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting, with twenty signing in to be noted as parties of record and fifteen signing in to make comments regarding the proposal. Some of the speakers had prepared extended remarks which were distributed to the members of the Board.

- The Director of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) acknowledge the right of the property owner to develop the property at the sculpture park's northern edge, but noted the need for a balance between public and private interests; of particular concern to SAM were: the massing of the building, the setback from the property line, the potential interaction of choices in materials and any proposed balconies with the sculpture park experience; SAM would likewise be concerned that careful shadow studies be conducted, indicating any impacts shadows from the proposed development would have on the sculpture park.
- The "folded veil" scheme, although more intriguing than any schemes shown at the earlier meeting, was in reality a draped version of the earlier massing and still thought to be out of scale; the 15-foot setback was "disingenuous," in that the actual façade of the building would be closer to the sculpture park; the proposal did not respond to relevant Belltown design guidelines; the project should come back for another EDG meeting.
- Contrary to what had been implied by the developer, the "Friends of" the sculpture park and many others who were concerned with the proposed development had not been invited to the table for discussions of the proposal's impacts; the proposal needed to be more responsive to Downtown and Belltown guidelines and to give more obvious evidence of respecting its setting.
- As a gesture of respect of the context, the building should not exceed 125 feet as measured from Elliott Avenue and should maintain that height evenly to Western Avenue.
- The proposed structure was "grossly out of scale," too high, too large, and thought to impinge negatively on the atmosphere of the park and the waterfront.
- Would like to see a shorter structure there; the proposal does not respect view corridors;
- Alexandra building across Western Avenue —homeowners are not opposed to the construction of a building there, but believe this proposal is too big; a good project would enhance and not be in conflict with the neighborhood; this building does not fit in the neighborhood and is not in harmony with Belltown and Downtown guidelines.
- Although the façade facing the sculpture park was "not there yet," the proposal shows great promise and here is an opportunity for an exceptional building.
- The sculpture park was designed to be an "urban park" and what is here proposed as its northern edge would be a substantial improvement over what is already existing at the park's southern edge.
- The proposed building is on the way to becoming something significant and a real asset to the neighborhood and the city; the proposal is refined and delicate and the Belltown neighborhood is fortunate to have this addition to its built environment.

## 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 Downtown Development Design Guidelines & Belltown neighborhood-specific guidelines, as applicable, of highest priority for this project.

The Neighborhood specific guidelines are summarized below. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

### Site Planning & Massing

#### *Responding to the Larger Context*

**A-1 Respond to the Physical Environment.** Develop an architectural concept and compose the building's massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site.

#### **Belltown-specific supplemental guidance:**

- A.** Develop the architectural concept and arrange the building mass to enhance views. This includes views of the water and mountains, and noteworthy structures such as the Space Needle;
- C.** The topography of the neighborhood lends to its unique character. Design buildings to take advantage of this condition as an opportunity, rather than a constraint. Along the streets, single entry, blank facades are discouraged. Consider providing multiple entries and windows at street level on sloping streets.

**A-2 Enhance the Skyline.** Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.

### Architectural Expression

#### *Relating to the Neighborhood Context*

**B-1 Respond to the Neighborhood Context** – Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighborhood.

**Belltown-specific supplemental guidance:**

Belltown has a rich architectural context, with a wide variety of architectural styles represented within the neighborhood. Contemporary methods of building can potentially create visual conflicts with older buildings due to differences in scale, massing, and degrees of articulation. Sometimes new buildings add exteriors that mimic past architectural styles, creating a sense of unauthentic design. These guidelines emphasize the concept of historical continuity, or in other words, the relationship of structures over time. This relationship encourages diversity within a coherent whole, reinforcing the unique and evolving character of Belltown.

- B-2** **Create a Transition in Bulk & Scale.** Compose the massing of the building to create a transition to the height, bulk, and scale of development in neighboring or nearby less intensive zones.

**Belltown-specific supplemental guidance:**

New high-rise and half- to full-block developments are juxtaposed with older and smaller scale buildings throughout the neighborhood. Many methods to reduce the apparent scale of new developments through contextually responsive design are identified in other guidelines (e.g., *B-1: Respond to the neighborhood context* and *B-3: Reinforce the positive urban form & architectural attributes of the immediate area*). The objective of this guideline is to discourage overly massive, bulky or unmodulated structures that are unsympathetic to the surrounding context.

- B-4** **Design a Well-Proportioned & Unified Building.** Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.

## **The Streetscape**

### ***Creating the Pedestrian Environment***

- C-2** **Design Facades of Many Scales.** Design architectural features, fenestration patterns, and materials compositions that refer to the scale of human activities contained within. Building facades should be composed of elements scaled to promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation.

- C-3 Provide Active—Not Blank—Facades. Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.**

The Board indicated this guideline had particular applicability to treatment of the building's north façade.

## **Public Amenities**

### ***Enhancing the Streetscape & Open Space***

- D-2 Enhance the Building with Landscaping. Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping—which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material.**

**Belltown-specific supplemental guidance:**

Landscape enhancement of the site may include some of the approaches or features listed below, where appropriate:

- A. emphasize entries with special planting in conjunction with decorative paving and/or lighting;**
  - B. use landscaping to make plazas and courtyards comfortable for human activity and social interaction;**
  - C. distinctively landscape open areas created by building modulation, such as entry courtyards;**
  - D. provide year-round greenery - drought tolerant species are encouraged to promote water conservation and reduce maintenance concerns; and**
  - E. provide opportunities for installation of civic art in the landscape; designer/artist collaborations are encouraged**
- D-3 Provide Elements that Define the Place. Provide special elements on the facades, within public open spaces, or on the sidewalk to create a distinct, attractive, and memorable “sense of place” associated with the building.**

### ***DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES***

***At the time of the Early Design Guidance meetings, the applicants indicated they were not seeking any departures from development standards.***



## BOARD DELIBERATIONS

The Board's deliberations were initially focused on two issues. The first issue was identified as the *volumetrics* of the proposed building. The second was the "appropriateness" of the various designs set forth, especially as these related to the sculpture park. Regarding the first issue, one of the Board members suggested that each of the schemes, essentially of the same stepped-height massing, presented an "awkward volume," and resistance to the proposal as being too big was due to the perception of structure as it rose above Western Avenue. Pushing some of that volume off to the Elliott Avenue portion of the building and presenting a continuous roof top across the site, it was suggested, would go a long way toward alleviating the dis-ease with which the proposed structure was being perceived.

Such a solution would not be possible, however, given the Land Use Code, so the only alternative would be to remove height and volume from that portion of the structure that rose from the Western Avenue edge of the site. In response to that suggestion, the other four Board members were not so concerned either with the height or the "step" in the massing of the building which was dictated by the interaction of site topography and Land Use Code. For them, the more important issue was the appropriateness of the face (or faces) the structure presented both to the sculpture park and within the broader physical context.

That second discussion centered on two elements. The first was the basic question about what the building wanted to be at that location. Should it be a sculptural building? or a backdrop building, one that would leave the sculpture to the park? The message from the Board and some of the public at the first EDG meeting seemed to have been that the building should aspire to be a sculptural thing in itself: "The proposed building would sit next to a world class sculptural park," it was observed, "for years to come it would be eminently visible from within the park. In this regard the basic challenge is the design of a structure that succeeds at some level in emulating the success of the design of the park" (see above, notes from the first EDG meeting.)

Two of the Board members were of the opinion that the building should aspire to be a background building, one that did not compete with the sculpture or the sculpture park. That did not mean that it could not—or should not—be "elegant." One of these Board members was more inclined than the other to think the folded-veil motif had some possibilities, but as presented it was "too heroic" and needed to "be quieted."

The majority of the Board members, who had responded favorably to the folded-veil effect and thought it showed promise, suggested that the scheme had not been worked out to a totally convincing degree, nor should it have been at this EDG phase. Questions regarding the materiality of the veil and the veil's ability to effectively function with balconies and mute their potential obtrusiveness, for instance, clearly needed to be worked out and effectively presented as the design developed. An area of agreement between all the Board members was the need to integrate the veil concept, if pursued, into all the facades of the building. The north façade in particular seemed not in step, less developed in comparison to the south facade, and in need of clearer integration into the overall building concept. The design team was reminded that this

would be a building that would be clearly visible from all four sides and needed to be perceived as conceptually whole. .

#### **BOARD DIRECTION**

**At the conclusion of the second EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should proceed to further design development , taking into consideration the Board's guidance noted above and the Guidelines cited as being of highest importance for the success of the project. After MUP application, the developed design would then be returned to the Board for their further scrutiny and recommendation.**