



## INITIAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

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Project Number: 3016917

Address: 808 Howell Street

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

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, July 15, 2014

Board Members Present: Mathew Albores  
Anjali Grant  
Murphy McCullough (Chair)  
Alan McWain

Board Member Absent: Gundula Proksch

Land Use Planner Present: Michael Dorcy

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### SITE & VICINITY

**Zone:** DOC 2 500/300-500



## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The three-quarter block development site is bounded by 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the east, by 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the west, by Stewart Street on the north and Howell Street on the south. The development site is L-shaped, with approximately 354 feet along 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, its broadest front. The site and vicinity to the north, south and west are zoned Downtown Office Core 2 with a 500-foot height limit (DOC 2 500/300-500). Across 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and to the east the zoning is DMC 340/290-400

There are currently three structures located on the site, including a 3-story masonry building that formerly functioned as the Greyhound Bus Terminal.

### Project Description

The proposed development is for a 500-foot tower hotel building, with approximately 1,270 guest rooms located above ground floor retail/restaurant space. The hotel would rest upon a five-story podium occupied by approximately 85,000 square feet of meeting rooms and ballroom space. Five levels of proposed underground parking would accommodate approximately 450 automobiles. Six truck-loading bays would also be accommodated at grade off the alley. As proposed in the preferred scheme, the common parking garage would take access from an interior drive connecting 8<sup>th</sup> to the alley. Trucks would utilize the same driveway off 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Project work for the proposal would include landscape and pedestrian improvements along each of the four encompassing streets, with "Green Street" improvements required on the portion of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue abutting the proposal.

### **EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE February 13, 2014**

The packet, including site analysis and materials presented at the meeting is available online by entering the project number (3016917) at this website:

[http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design Review Program/Project Reviews/Reports/default .asp](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design%20Review%20Program/Project%20Reviews/Reports/default.asp)

The packet is also available to view in the file, by contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD.  
Address: 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000  
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Email: [PRC@seattle.gov](mailto:PRC@seattle.gov)

After asking a number of clarifying questions following the architect's presentation, the Board elicited comments from members of the public attending the meeting. Approximately 5 of the attendees elected to make comments regarding the proposal.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Among the comments solicited from the public at the Early Design Guidance meeting were the following:

- Place the tower structure close to Stewart Street since it would be closer to office structures rather than to the residential towers near Olive and 8<sup>th</sup>
- A “giant step backwards,” compared to the earlier proposal (#3013951) for a full-block build-out with an alley vacation; appears “less thoughtful” than the earlier proposal, and “less sensitive”
- The proposal relies on using the public alley for private purposes; given all the functional requirements serving the hotel, there is a question of how the alley can maintain its status as “public space”

## **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, hearing public comment, and addressing their major concerns regarding the proposal, the Design Review Board members, at the time of the first early design guidance meeting, provided the siting and design guidance described above and identified by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle’s *Design Review Guidelines for Downtown Development* they believed to be of highest priority for this project..

### **A. Site Planning**

#### ***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.***

#### ***A-2 Enhance the Skyline***

***Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.***

These guidelines were cited as of special importance for the success of the project, but without further elucidation.

### **B. 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.***

**B-2 Create a Transition in Bulk and 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.**

**B-3 Reinforce the Positive Urban Form and Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area**

**Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development.**

**B-4 Design a Well-Proportioned and 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.**

Of the four guidelines, B-4 was called out as of special importance and ultimately the keystone for successfully responding to the others.

**C. The Streetscape: Creating the Pedestrian Environment**

**C-1 Promote Pedestrian Interaction**

**Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming.**

**C-2 Design Facades of Many Scales**

**Design architectural features, fenestration patterns, and material compositions that refer to the scale of human activities occurring within them. 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.**

**C-4 Reinforce Building Entries**

**To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce the building's entry.**

**C-5 Encourage Overhead Weather Protection**

**Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes.**

**C-6 Develop the Alley Façade**

**To increase pedestrian safety, comfort, and interest, develop portions of the alley façade in response to the unique conditions of the site or project.**

Successful responses to guidelines C-1, C-2, and C-6 would be critical for the proposal.

## **D. Public Amenities: Enhancing the Streetscape and 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.***

### ***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.***

### ***D-5 Provide Adequate Lighting***

***To promote a sense of security for people downtown during nighttime hours, provide appropriate levels of lighting on the building façade, on the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandizing display windows, and on signage***

### ***D-6 Design for Personal Safety and Security***

***Design the building and site to enhance the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security in the immediate area.***

Successful development of the alley, artfully integrating functionality with attractiveness, as well as a well-integrated design of the Green Street area on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, would be key elements for an overall successful design.

## **E. Vehicular Access and Parking**

### ***E-1 Minimize Curbcut Impacts***

***Minimize adverse impacts of curbcuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.***

### ***E-2 Integrate Parking Facilities***

***Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments or suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by.***

### ***E-3 Minimize the Presence of Service Areas***

***Locate service areas for trash dumpsters, loading docks, mechanical equipment and the like way from the street where possible. Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.***

The Board noted that the proposal was headed in the right direction in already responding to the above guidelines.

## **BOARD’S DELIBERATIONS**

At the Early Design Guidance meeting, the Board’s deliberations centered on the following identified thematic considerations:

### **1. LOCATION of the TOWER**

Despite public comment in preference for locating the tower along Stewart Street, the Board members were in agreement that locating the tower to anchor the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Howell as in the applicant's "Preferred Alternative ("C"), made the most sense, functionally and aesthetically. Extending the tower to the street corner provided a northern edge to the Olive/Howell triangle and was considered a strong urban design move. This also allowed for the shadows cast by the tower to fall across the site and to be partially contained. The location allowed the lobby and lounge areas of the hotel to enliven the sidewalks along Howell and 8<sup>th</sup> while the retail wrap of the loading bays parallel to Stewart Street allowed for retail on 8<sup>th</sup>, Stewart and 9<sup>th</sup>, retail uses oriented in a more pronounced way to the upper Denney Triangle area. The Board acknowledged that the applicants had done a good job of explaining "why," in the preferred scheme, "things were where they were."

## **2. FUNCTIONALITY of the ALLEY**

Likewise, the Board was agreed regarding the appropriateness of uses set along the dog-legged alley. Further, in providing a driveway running from 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and joining the portion of the alley running from the middle of the block to 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, truck maneuvering and loading/unloading would as effectively be disengaged from *porte cochere* operations located on the portion of the alley perpendicular to it and intersecting with Stewart Street. There would be sufficient length of the area in the alley for taxi and valet drop off, located away from the truck-loading area and pathway.

While accepting the principles of the separate truck-loading and passenger drop-off/pick-up zones, the Board made it clear that they would like to see much more detail about how the *porte cochere* would actually work. Additionally, the Board made a clear request that questions of functionality should be couched within a wider presentation that addressed the issue of clearly maintaining a sense of public space within the alley. Aspects of sidewalks, staff entries, pedestrian shortcuts, each safe and attractive, would need to be further addressed.

## **3. ENGAGING FACADES**

Providing for an engaging experience as well as for functionality along the lower levels of the podium was an obvious challenge for the project. Since the upper podium levels along the alleyways would be needed for back-of-house functions, and since these upper facades would be clearly viewed from 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and from Stewart Street, their treatment was a vital challenge for achieving an attractive, integrated design. The alley facades should be treated as if they were street-facing facades. Design should address a building with six (or seven) distinct facades. Related to this, the Board would expect at the next meeting to see a clear presentation of what could be built on the lot cornering on the 9th and Howell intersection.

The Board clearly was not impressed with what they were referred to as the "saddle bag" located at the lower portion of the north-west facing (Stewart Street) façade of the hotel tower. This protuberance, fitted to accommodate rooms and elevators terminating at a lower level of the tower, needed to be more finely integrated into a tower of pleasant proportions.

#### 4. OTHER ISSUES

The street-level façade on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue should be made inviting; the area described as “lounge” should become a “nice moment” at the corner and northward along the block of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, especially since it will need to contrast with the large, low-ceilinged entry proposed for abetting large truck turns into the interior of the site; development of this feature would require adequate invitation for pedestrians as well as vehicles to venture in. With the grand gestures made toward porosity and transparency around the whole-block podium of the earlier proposal now gone, even greater attention must be given to the finer grain, to making the retail spaces and areas along the sidewalks zing.

#### DEPARTURES

Two of the three requested departures were from modulation requirements. They were both from SMC 23.49.058.B.1, requiring vertical modulation above the 85-foot level, one applicable to the north elevation along Stewart Street (see p.56 of the presentation packet) and the other along 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. A third departure was from the tower-width requirement of SMC 23.49.058.C, which would not permit any portion of the building above 240 feet to exceed 145 feet in width. Since two of the three requested departures were involved in the proposed “saddle-bag” feature of the tower, the Board noted that they would be reluctant to grant the departures as stated, unless their concerns about the tower were addressed. But, in fact, they would be willing to entertain a departure for a greater width to the tower if they were favorably persuaded by the sculptural integrity of a redesigned tower element. The Board will require a clear statement of all departure requests and an explanation of how such requests better meet the intentions of the design guidelines at the time of the forthcoming Recommendation Meeting.

#### DELIBERATIONS

Generally, the Board members were convinced that this proposal was going in the right direction, that the development team was asking the right questions and that it should proceed to further design development, with the assistance of the Board’s guidance, and to Master Use Permit application. The Board looked forward to reviewing a building with an additional bestowals of elegance and grace and embodying design considerations that would embolden the proposed building to be more than just another Seattle hotel.

#### **INITIAL RECOMMENDATION July 15, 2014**

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## **DESIGN PRESENTATION**

The presentation on behalf of the design team reiterated development objectives and the urban design analysis from the earlier meeting, then proceeded with a detailed formal analysis of the proposed structure. The design proposal was an expression of internal more-public spaces as transparent voids between the more solid forms of ballrooms, meeting spaces and functional elements of a large hotel. The street-level retail and lobby spaces were to be expressed as a nearly continuous ribbon of transparent frontages, topped by two distinct podium expressions, one containing ballroom, the other meeting rooms, with a large, glazed recess incised into the ballroom podium level, revealing pre-function spaces while emphasizing the horizontality of the podium form.

The hotel tower, separated by a recessed gasket with a distinct glass and metal exterior wall system above the meeting-rooms podium, would be further differentiated from the podium by windows of similar shape but of much smaller size. The tower itself had undergone significant refinement, with the north and south facades shrunk in size by approximately 6 feet and a recessed notch running the entire vertical height of the tower and engaging materially the rooftop penthouse, thereby emphasizing the slenderness of that side of the tower. (Refer to the Recommendation Meeting packet for a fuller presentation of the overall massing of podiums and tower and the materials intended for the various components of the structure, especially pp.31-41).

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no comments from members of the public at the Recommendation meeting.

## **BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS**

At the Early Design Guidance meeting, the Board's deliberations had centered on the following thematic considerations. The Board's earlier guidance and the responses elicited from the design team are discussed below:

### **1. LOCATION of the TOWER**

At the Early Design Guidance meeting the Board members unanimously agreed that locating the tower to anchor the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Howell as in the applicant's "Preferred Alternative ("C"), was correct, functionally and aesthetically. Deliberations at the Recommendation Meeting confirmed the applicants' formal composition and refinements, including the revised massing scheme which further articulated the programmatic elements into two distinct podiums and a more unified, streamlined hotel tower.

### **2. FUNCTIONALITY of the ALLEY**

The Board had concerns at the Early Design Guidance meeting regarding a sketchy presentation of the alley functions and appearance. The expressed gratitude at being given a much fuller graphic presentation of the look, feel and operation of the *porte cochere* in the alley. The models demonstrated for the Board that the alley could operate as planned even with a future building on the parking lot site. Truck maneuvering and loading/unloading were shown to be effectively disengaged from *porte cochere* operations located in the alley. The drawings effectively showed how a sense of public space could be maintained within the alley.

### **3. ENGAGING FACADES**

Providing for an engaging experience as well as for functionality along the lower levels of the podium was an obvious challenge for the project, as noted by the Board at the Early Design Guidance meeting. Since both the upper and lower podium levels along the alleyways would be needed for back-of house functions, and since these upper facades would be clearly viewed from 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and from Stewart Street, their treatment was a vital challenge for achieving an attractive, integrated design. The alley drop off entry was clearly seen as an attractive “street-front like” area and the façade of the podium above with its regular pattern of fenestration was engaging. The polished white precast concrete façade of the ballroom podium along the alley, attractively jointed and detailed would help that windowless alley façade, although the alley-level lower portion of the façade would still demand careful attention to make it engaging as well.

### **BOARD’S CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL**

Discussion related to the requested departures led to some further discussion and to the Board’s request for conditions to accompany their endorsements of the departures:

1. The Board was agreed that in approving the first departure of façade modulation on the north elevation, the horizontal slot should maintain a single recessed glass plane, and the glass bump-out for the meeting room at the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Stewart Street must be eliminated.
2. In approving the departure from the upper level Green Street setback, the Board requested that the Green Street landscaping plan for 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue be changed into an integrated strategy that would include special paving and plantings *and* street furniture, a comprehensive design that would foster a strong and distinctive desire for people to want to be there.

The Board was split regarding illuminating the two corners of the north-facing slot in the hotel tower with LED lighting. Two of the Board members were opposed to the lights, the other two somewhat indifferent to the idea. Without conditioning the approval of a departure to allow for extra width to the tower, the Board urged the design team to continue to explore (and perhaps model) whether the proposed change in the color and texture of materials (white to gray) at the slot would be sufficient to accent the slot in a pleasant, if subtle, way. Also, regarding the intention to array the mechanical systems atop the ballroom podium, ganged but without common screening-- and not without a certain attractiveness in its graphic depictions-- the Board voiced a cautionary approval: “as long as it stays neat and tidy.”

## DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The design team requested four departures from development standards (see Recommendation Meeting packets, pp. 85-90).

Standard Requirement	Request	Architects Rationale for Departure	Board Direction
<p>Façade Modulation 23.49.058.B.1</p> <p>Façade modulation is required at a height of 85 feet above the sidewalk for any portion of a structure located within 15 feet of the property line.</p>	<p>The proposal would substitute a 235' by 26.5' horizontally-oriented modulation in lieu of the required vertical 60' wide modulation on the north facade.</p>	<p>This modulated slit on the Stewart Street façade replicates the transparent horizontal strip at the street level, revealing the pre-function activities above and further animating the façade.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The four members of the Board attending recommended approving the requested departure.</li> <li>The requested departure helps the design meet the following guidelines, B-4 designing a well-proportioned and unified building, C-2, designing facades of many scales, and D-3, and proving elements that define the place, among others.</li> </ul>

Standard Requirement	Request	Architects Rationale for Departure	Board Direction
<p>Façade Modulation 23.49.058.B.1</p> <p>Façade modulation is required at a height of 85 feet above the sidewalk for any portion of a structure located within 15 feet of the property line.</p>	<p>The proposal would propose a vertical band of glazing 126' tall and 46' wide recessed 3' along the west façade above 8<sup>th</sup> Av., instead of a 60' vertical strip recessed 15' into the façade.</p>	<p>This modulated slit on the 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue façade announces a clear distinction between the two podium masses, suggesting a separation in functionality and reinforcing the aesthetic and formal composition of the overall structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The four members of the Board attending recommended approving the requested departure.</li> <li>The requested departure helps the design meet the following guidelines, B-4</li> </ul>

			designing a well-proportioned and unified building, C-2, designing facades of many scales, and D-3, providing elements that define the place, among others.
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Standard Requirement	Request	Architects Rationale for Departure	Board Direction
<p>Upper level setback at Green Street. 23.49.058.F.2</p> <p>An upper level setback is required at a Green Street above a height of forty-five feet for any portion of the structure located within 15 feet of the property line.</p>	<p>The proposed design provides a 15' setback at the ground floor to provide a widened sidewalk and an animated area some 35 feet in height, allowing for more direct sunlight onto the right-of-way. The building would return to the property line above 35' up to the roof level of the podium at 150 feet. Also, the podium would thereby be aligned with neighboring buildings along the Green Street.</p>	<p>The proposed design provides a 15' setback at the ground floor to provide a widened sidewalk and enhanced daylighting, thereby enlivening the Green Street experience on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The four members of the Board attending recommended approving the requested departure.</li> <li>• The requested departure helps the design meet the following guidelines, B-4 designing a well-proportioned and unified building, C-2, designing facades of many scales, and D-3, providing elements that define the place, among others.</li> </ul>

Standard Requirement	Request	Architects Rationale for Departure	Board Direction
<p>Upper level width limit 23.49.058.C</p> <p>On lots where the width and depth of</p>	<p>The proposed design seeks to minimize the impact of the tower massing on the street while creating a tower</p>	<p>The proposed design seeks to minimize the impact of the tower massing on the street while creating a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The four members of the Board attending recommended approving the</li> </ul>

<p>the lot each exceed two hundred feet, the maximum façade width of any portion of a building above 240 feet shall be 145 feet along the general north/south axis of a site parallel to the Avenues, and this portion shall be separated horizontally from any other portion of a structure on the lot above 240 feet by at least 80 feet.</p>	<p>that is functional while retaining aesthetic proportionality.</p>	<p>functional tower of pleasing proportions and grace. The tall, vertical form of the tower is emphasized rather than, alternatively, extending the podium massing to an allowable height limit of 240 feet.</p>	<p>requested departure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The requested departure helps the design meet the following guidelines, B-4 designing a well-proportioned and unified building, C-2, designing facades of many scales, and D-3, providing elements that define the place, among others.</li> </ul>
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**BOARD’S RECOMMENDATION OF APPROVAL**

Although the four Board members attending the Recommendation Meeting on July 15, 2014 recommended approval of the project as presented at the meeting, and of the departures requested, with the two conditions of approval noted, subsequent zoning review has indicated the need for additional departures from development standards needing approval in order to proceed with the building design presented to the Board. At the applicants’ request, the proposal will be returned to a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board at which time the departure requests and appropriate rationale, together with supporting graphic materials, will be presented.