



City of Seattle

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

DESIGN
REVIEW

FINAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE NORTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3017177

Address: 1506 NW 61st St

Applicant: Jay Janette, architect, for Tyson Alexander

Date of Meeting: Monday, August 17, 2015

Board Members Present: Ellen Cecil, Chair
Chris Bell
Joseph Hurley

Board Members Absent: Marc Angelillo
Dale Kutzero
Keith Walzak

DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: NC3-40

Nearby Zones: (North) NC3-40
(South) NC3-40
(East) NC3-40
(West) LR1

Lot Area: 4,753 SF



Current Development:

Uninhabited Single-family residence

Surrounding Development and Neighborhood Character:

The Lot to the east is developed with a commercial building housing a Taco del Mar restaurant, with angled surfaced parking running along 15th Avenue NW. Access to the parking is from a widened curbcut on 15th Avenue NW adjacent the alley with a curbcut for exiting onto NW 61st St. A narrow strip of commercial uses, several lots with surface parking, runs north and south along 15th Avenue NW coincident with NC3-40 zoning. Immediately to the west, the site is abutted by LR1 zoning and single-family, duplex and triplex development on a large swath that runs north and south and a mile to the west. A single-story single-family residence is located directly west of the development site. The building currently on site, as well as those directly west of the proposed development, are sited so as to sit atop elevated ground that rises a good four feet above the sidewalk level of NW 61st Street.

There are two large fir trees near the west property line of the property to the west. The grand fir located near the southwest property line of the development site has been identified as a City of Seattle “Exceptional Tree.” A substantial portion of the root systems of each of the trees extends into the development site.

Access:

The site abuts a 10-foot wide alley to the north.

Environmentally Critical Areas:

There are no ECAs on the site.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a 4-story residential apartment building, with approximately 30 units. No parking is proposed. The units are described as “workforce housing” affordable to workers who would rely on the proximity to public transportation rather than private vehicles for getting around.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION MEETING August 17, 2015

The packet includes materials presented at the recommendation meeting, and is available online by entering the project number (3017177) at this website:

http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Project_Reviews/Reports/default.asp.

The packet is also available to view in the file, by contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD:

Mailing Public Resource Center

Address: 700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Email: PRC@seattle.gov

The packets for the first and second Early Design Guidance meetings include materials presented at the respective meetings and are available online by entering the project number (3017177) at the above website.

At the conclusion of their deliberations at the November 2014, Second Early Design Guidance Meeting, meeting, the Board had provided the following guidance regarding design development:

- The Board acknowledged the greater range of alternatives presented than had been the case at the first EDG meeting;
- The third scheme, Option C, was generally thought to show the greatest promise and the “respect” for the adjacent LR1 zone;
- The basement units remained troubling for members of the Board, and the Board would like to see studies that would better convey some of the experience of inhabiting the units and the below-grade amenity space adjacent the units;
- The Board would like to see a more comprehensive study of the shadows from the proposed structure, at a broader scope of times, as these impact the structures and yards of the neighbors to the north across the alley;
- The Board would like to see more analysis and details of how the entry sequence works and how the interface of building entry and landscaping and sidewalk will be laid out and layered;
- The Board would expect to hear a better rationale for the requested departure required for Option C, namely one that would indicate how the departure, if granted, would better meet the intentions of the identified guidelines.

APPLICANT PRESENTATION, AUGUST 17, 2015

Design Development

The project as currently proposed is for a 33-unit residential building, with no parking provided.

As explained by the design team, the current design was largely a response to the two large trees (one a City of Seattle “Exceptional Tree”) located near the development’s west property line. Desirous of maintaining the health of the two trees, the applicant proposes an L-shaped structure that provides a relatively wide open area along the adjacent structure to the west.

The applicant proceeded with a summation of an understanding of the Board's guidance from the second EDG meeting held in November 2014. The Board had indicated that the applicant's 3rd scheme, which hugged the eastern property line and pulled away from the single-family structure to the west was the most promising. The current design shows all levels with a single-loaded corridor located along the east edge of the structure. While decks occur at the second through the fourth levels along the south façade, they occur only at the fourth level of the west façade in a gesture to respect the privacy of the adjacent residence. The roof-deck amenity area has been located along the east edge of the structure, situating activities away from the adjacent residential use as well.

The Board had asked to see more analysis and details of how the entry sequence works and how the interface of building entry and landscaping and sidewalk will be laid out and layered.

It was explained that the entry sequence was developed to allow for pedestrian stairway access directly from the sidewalk at a location closest to 15th Avenue NW and ADA access by means of a ramp from the sidewalk along the western edge of the site. The bulkhead along the sidewalk and raised entry levels was consistent with other residences to the west along NW 61st Street and the elevated entry met the height separation dictated by the Land Use Code.

The Board had requested that the design team provide further shadow studies based upon the preferred scheme.

The proffered shadow study shows that the building's shading impact at multiple times throughout the year. At the maximum shading occurrence, December 21st at 2:00 PM, the project as designed would have less impact than the maximum building envelope that would be allowed by Code. This has been achieved by placement of the circulation cores and rooftop access toward the middle of the building and away from the northern edge.

Among other salient features of the current design:

- The bicycle storage area, intended to store 18 bikes, announces itself very visibly and conveniently at the ground-level, front (southwest) corner of the building.
- Garbage and recycling storage is located at the northeast corner, totally enclosed within the structure and adjacent to the commercial building to the east for alley pickup.
- The material palette generally consists of "warm" neutral colors, intended to blend with other treatments of residential uses in the area.
- The treatment of the massing and the façade expressions are differentiated between a regular, flat-roofed, box-like commercial expression at the eastern edge of the site and a lighter but more expressive "townhouse vernacular" style with pitched roofline for the rest of the structure, the two modalities being stitched together with horizontal banding.
- Several expressions and treatments of the largely blank eastern façade were shown, including a dynamic scheme featuring abstract circle patterning, which elicited a strongly favorable response from the Board members.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment included the following:

- Concerns regarding the lack of parking.
- No objections to the design, but thought it bland.
- A concern regarding the noise generated from the top-floor, west facing decks.
- A question regarding the amount of landscaping proposed, both on site and along the sidewalk in front. (*Plan calls for new street trees, ground cover in planting strip, 5-foot landscaped strip along west property line and west half of lot at alley, as well as 2-foot strip inside sidewalk abutting bulkhead*).

<h2>BOARD DELIBERATIONS</h2>

Façade Design / Materials:

The board discussed how the materials had been applied to the “commercial bar” and the residential element. The board felt that the design *parti* read through, but questioned the treatment of the top portion of the residential volume beneath the sloped roof, the entablature, and its being expressed by the same color and materials as the “commercial bar.” The board did not set conditions, but they did strongly encourage the applicant to further explore the materiality below the roof and work through an acceptable solution with the Land Use Planner.

The board was in agreement that the applicant’s preferred option for the East Façade was suitable and felt that the abstract, circular pattern would be a successful solution to the blank wall in this zero lot line condition.

The board had concerns about the durability of the natural cedar siding and suggested a more durable composite material would be preferable.

Basement Units:

The board appreciated the improvement made since the EDG presentations to the lower level units, but there was concern about the southern-most lower level unit’s ability to access light. The board members felt that by lifting the first level to the code-prescribed four feet above sidewalk grade and the construction of an ADA ramp the unit’s light and air access was being compromised. The board decided to offer a departure of the 4’ above sidewalk grade requirement (SMC 23.47A.012.1a.1b), if the design team would consider lowering the building and re-designing the access ramp.

There was some disagreement about the bike storage location, with one board member expressing that it would be better to have the bike storage below grade, and provide a unit (the southernmost basement unit) at its current location, with better access to light and air. The other board members did not agree, and felt the transparency of the proposed bike storage location was a successful choice and strategy

Decks:

The board discussed the west-facing decks at level 4 and their impact on the privacy of the neighboring property. The board noted that while there are always privacy concerns where zones abut, the size of the decks and their location at only level 4 mitigated noise and privacy concerns. The board requested, however, that the transparent / wire railings be replaced with a material (either opaque or translucent) that would block direct sight lines that could compromise the privacy of the adjacent dwelling or the decks themselves.

DEPARTURE

A good deal of the Board's discussion focused on the requested departure (SMC 23.47A.014.B.3.a). Board members questioned how the proposed departure improved the building massing and design, how it better met the design guidelines and whether it effectively represented a better response to the neighboring property. Some members of the board argued that the proposed departure created a better streetscape along NW 61st, presenting a preferred urban form along the street, and created a significant separation between the building and the adjacent residence along approximately 80 percent of the west property line. The board appreciated the protection afforded the southern, adjacent fir tree, but expressed some concern with the impact of the departure on the northern neighboring fir tree. At discussion's end the board voted 2 – 1 to approve the requested departure.

Design Review Board Decision

The three Board members present unanimously agreed to approve the applicant's proposed design with the following guidance.

The West facing level 4 decks shall be faced with something more solid materially or at least with materials configured to block vision from residents looking down into the adjacent property. The material could be either opaque, translucent, or perforated (but would have to meet the requirements of SMC 23.47A.014.E.1).

The East façade shall have the dynamic geometric, abstract patterning presented in the recommendation packet.

The offer of a departure from the 4' required height difference between the sidewalk and residential use (SMC 23.47A.008.D) is available and recommended for approval by the Board if the design team should choose to use it to improve the light and air access to the lower level units. Any improvements shall be made with the approval of the Land Use Planner assigned to the project.

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