



City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development
Nathan Torgelson, Director

DESIGN
REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3022652

Address: 911 Western Avenue

Applicant: John Thomas NBBJ , for BCSP Maritime Building LLC

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, June 21, 2016

Board Members Present: Anjali Grant (Chair)
Grace Leong
Patrick Doherty

Board Members Absent: Murphy McCullough
Alan McWain
Gundula Proksch

SDCI Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: DMC-160

Nearby Zones: (North) DMC-160
(South) DMC-160
(East) DMC-160
(West) DH1/45



Lot Area: 35,940 Square feet

Current Development:

The site is occupied by a five-story commercial building built in 1910, bounded on the east by Western Avenue, on the west by Alaskan Way (formerly Railroad Avenue S.), on the north by Madison Street and on the south by Marion Street.

Surrounding Development and Neighborhood Character:

Located adjacent to the elevated Alaskan Way viaduct (scheduled for demolition once the waterfront traffic tunnel (SR99) is completed), the Maritime Building is set back 16 feet from its western boundary along the right-of-way of Alaska Way. It sits almost directly across from Colman Dock, the Seattle Ferry Terminal that provides the major transportation link across Puget Sound. The Old Federal Office Building and Courthouse, a designated Landmark building, currently used for federal offices and as a facility for the U S Postal Service, lies directly across Western Avenue and fills the entire block east of the subject site.

The neighborhood boasts a number of other substantial structures near the Maritime Building. A considerable amount of new development, including residential apartments, is underway or in the planning stages for enhancing the area. Across Madison Street to the north is Waterfront Place, a thirteen-story condominium and office building, with retail at ground level and three stories of enclosed parking. It was constructed in 1983. Across the Madison and Western Avenue intersection to the northeast is the six-story National Building (1905), like the Maritime Building designed as a substantial warehouse building to serve the hub of produce dealers in what was historically known as the “Commission District.”

Access:

Pedestrian access is possible from each of the adjacent streets. Vehicular access to underground parking at the eastern edge of the site is available at grade from a curb-cut on Western Avenue which will remain to service underground parking. On-street loading for the building will be available from Madison Street at the building's north side.

Environmentally Critical Areas:

There are no environmentally critical areas on site.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The design team proposes to preserve and expand a significant waterfront building dating from 1910, a time when Seattle was primarily conceived as an *entrepôt* and trans-shipping center, defined by the water, docks and rails at this building's doorstep. The team intends to undertake an adaptive re-use and augmentation of this historic structure which, as a vital piece of the "West Edge Neighborhood," would resolutely realign its face (and office lobby) to the west and to the water and to the developing vision of a grand public promenade and open space once the structure of the elevated State Highway 99 has been removed and replaced with a subterranean tunnel beneath a broad promenade.

The applicant is proposing an adaptive reuse of the existing 5-story reinforced concrete and heavy timber structure. The mixed-use development would consist of two (and possibly three) new stories of office space added to the existing 185,000 square feet of office space on floors two through five. Approximately 23,000 square feet of retail space would be provided at street level. The project would also provide a rooftop amenity pavilion, landscaped terraces on the rooftop and at the sixth level, with parking for approximately 86 vehicles in the existing basement.

The design packet includes materials presented at the meeting, and is available online by entering the project number (3022652) at this website:

<http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/aboutus/news/events/DesignReview/SearchPastReviews/default.aspx>

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

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

Email: PRC@seattle.gov

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

A lobby for the building's expanded office space will be centrally located along the newly configured Alaskan Way. Together with retail spaces that will overlook the new waterfront from the repurposed elevated railroad and truck loading dock, the structure will figuratively reposition itself as a dominant presence along the shoreline promenade. Now lacking an addition of 6 floors of residential units, as had been shown at the Early Design Guidance meeting, but with two floors (and possibly three) of added office space, the Maritime Building is proposed by its developers as promising to become a centerpiece of the reclaimed waterfront.

Ev Ruffcorn of NBBJ, made the presentation on behalf of the development and design team. At a public meeting held on January 6, 2016, the day after the Design Review Board Early Design Guidance Meeting for this proposal, the City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Maritime Building at 911 Western Avenue as a Seattle Landmark. While the three conceptual massing models originally shown to the Design Review Board had envisioned two additional office floors topped with six residential floors, with the entire addition set back from the north and south edges of the existing building because of view corridor requirements, the Architectural Committee of the Landmarks Board, meeting after Landmarks designation, had objected to the "wedding cake" effect of the massing. Directed to maintain the horizontality of the Landmarked structure, the proposal had been pared back to embrace two new floors of office space, more or less aligned with the west, north and south edges of the existing form, and with no residential units.

Additionally, the packets included a potential third floor of additional office development in anticipation of future legislative action to enable a Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program that would contain among other items that new commercial buildings could pay a fee towards affordable housing in exchange for development capacity. The added MHA floor was included to elicit the Design Review Board's comments and guidance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Two individuals signed in to become parties of record at the meeting. One individual, speaking on behalf of the Friends of the Waterfront District, I addressed the Board during the public comment period, and indicated support for the proposal.

All public comments submitted in writing for this project can be viewed using the following link and entering the project number: <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/edms/>

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 priority Citywide and Neighborhood guidelines identified by the Board as Priority Guidelines at the Early Design Guidance meeting are available in the report for that meeting. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

No departures were identified or requested for the current proposal. At the time of the Recommendation meeting the following departure was discussed regarding a future HALA design option for an additional floor in exchange for an off-site contribution toward affordable housing:

1. **Upper-level development standards (SMC 23.49.058):** The Code requires façade modulation above a height of 60 feet above the sidewalk for any portion of a building located within 15 feet of a street property line.. Any portion of a façade exceeding the maximum length of façade prescribed in Table 23,49,058.A (125 feet) has to be set back a minimum of 15 feet from the street property line for a minimum distance of sixty (60) feet before any other portion may be within fifteen (15) feet of the property line. The applicant would propose an unmodulated façade length of 220 feet forward of the 15-foot setback line along Western Avenue, in order to achieve a design that would remain proportionally within the predominately horizontal composition of the existing Maritime Building.

The Board expressed its preliminary support of the so-called “HALA” requested departure, since a new three-story office top could strengthen the overall horizontality of the Landmark-cum-addition. The addition of three stories of office space with the second floor canted and pulled back at the northwest corner was also thought to make a strong architectural statement, one that clearly differentiated the addition from the historic building it capped. While recognizing the compelling feature of the notch, the Board noted that it really needed to be located, as shown, as a feature of the second added floor and not the first. In addition, the notched deck should be subtractive only. It should not be combined, as shown, with an angular projection of the second added floor on the Madison Street side which exceeded the external limits of the existing structure. In brief, the Board recommended that the seventh floor floor-line at the northwest corner of the addition should not exceed either the rectilinear box of the addition or the outside north wall of the existing structure.

The seventh floor floor-line at the northwest corner of the addition should not exceed the limits of either the conceptual frame of the existing structure or the three office floor addition rectilinear addition. The Board's recommendation of the departure approval would be conditioned upon that condition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All three of the Board members attending the meeting agreed on the following:

- The applicant's preferred new scheme showed promise; the wedding cake effect of the original massing studies were generally inferior to the present massing and design; the Board was in general agreement with the sentiments of the Architectural Committee of the Landmarks Board, namely that it was important to maintain the basic horizontal feeling of the structure; while the proposed addition should not imitate the original building, it should nonetheless be carefully designed in deference to the existing structure;
- Further detailing of the north and south upper facades should embrace a concept of knitting together the east and west facades, but they need not be identical, one to the other;
- The raised dining terrace and circulation space along the ground floor of the waterfront façade was conceptually strong and needed to keep its industrial feel and look as a loading dock in the detailing of awnings, railings, windows, etc.;
- The masonry band above the first floor must remain fully visible;
- The canted west façade and the subtractive angling-in of the first add-on floor is a compelling detail; the floor above, however, should not exceed the limits of the conceptual frame of the two-floor addition; the strong protrusion (as indicated in the graphic beneath the "Board Briefing, May 18th Summary" in the packet, for instance) should be eschewed ; the entire deck area should be subtractive only;
- Compositionally the three-story-plus (MHA or HALA alternative) addition, shown on the cover of the packet and renderings within, was a strong and compelling one; as part of that strong composition, the canted façade and subtractive (only) deck area needs to be positioned at the second added level, as shown, sandwiched between the two rectilinear floors above and below;
- The layout of the mechanical elements and rooftop amenity areas should be designed meticulously; there was a lack of detailing provided on the proposed screening wall, for instance;
- The Board urged the design team to further explore how the new upper facades and features of the existing building might be conceptually better interlocked in the design, or otherwise be made to complement each other.

BOARD DIRECTION

The three Board members in attendance recommended their approval of the proposed addition to the existing Maritime Building as presented and as qualified by the comments above. Should the project return to the Board for further expansion and approvals, in addition to addressing the concerns stated above, the Board members would like to see explorations of how the new upper facades and features of the existing building might be conceptually interlocked in the design, or otherwise be made to complement each other.

Staff Note

As noted earlier, at a public meeting held on January 6, 2016, the day after the Design Review Board Early Design Guidance Meeting for this proposal was held, the City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Maritime Building at 911 Western Avenue as a City of Seattle Landmark. The features of the Landmark to be preserved would normally include the exterior of the building and features of the site. It should be anticipated that the Landmarks Preservation Board will consider “controls and incentives,” to be determined, which could be applied to preservation of specific features of the structure and site and to limit and guide the composition of the addition. Obviously, the application of controls and incentives could affect color and materials, and windows or other features, and might otherwise limit the applicant’s proposed final design.