



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor
Department of Planning and Development
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE
of
AREA 5, THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**Meeting Date: October 11, 2007
Report Date: October 19, 2007**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

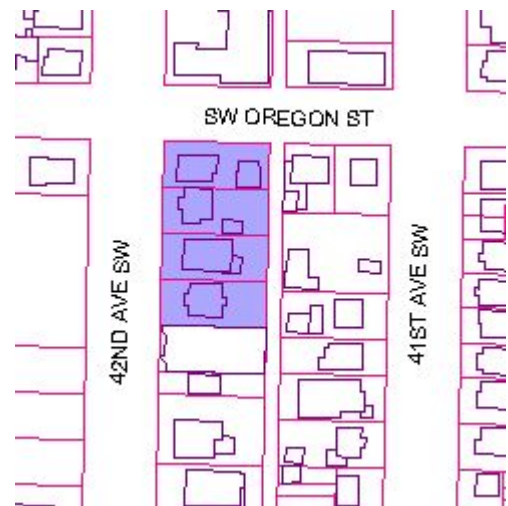
Project Number: 3007547
Address: 4502 42nd Ave SW
Applicant: Mark Travers, Architect, for Hollis Beebe of Oregon 42 LLC, Developer
Board Members Present:
Deb Barker, Chair
Jeff McCord
David Foster
Chris King
DPD Land Use Planner: Art Pederson

PROJECT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

The project proposes a six-story mixed-use building with street level commercial space and two levels of below-grade parking.

The proposed areas for each use are: approximately 85,934 square feet of residential in 90 units, 5,980 square feet of retail / commercial, and 39,458 square feet of parking for 105 vehicles.

The project site is approximately 22,997 square feet in area with approximately 200 feet of frontage on 42nd Avenue SW and the alley, and approximately 115 feet of frontage on SW Oregon Street. The site slopes downward approximately 10 feet from 42nd Avenue SW to the alley along the SW Oregon Street frontage and approximately 6 feet along the south property boundary. The site currently has four single-family structures. The northern two lots currently have vehicle access from 42nd Avenue SW while the southern two have vehicle access from the alley. The zoning designation is Neighborhood Commercial 3 with a sixty-five foot height limit (NC 3-65).



The site's surrounding development and zoning are as follows: to the west and south is NC 3-65

transitioning to NC3-85 along SW Alaska St and California Ave SW and contains a mix of development. Directly to the south is a 3-4 story medical / dental building, then followed by two sites that are under review (DPD MUP # 3004482) or have been permitted for new development (DPD MUP #'s 3007035 and 3007129), all are mixed use developments. The permitted development will front on SW Alaska Street and extend between 41st and 42nd Streets SW. The alley behind the project site will be extended from its north to south directions in this area to open onto 42nd Avenue SW. To the south of SW Alaska Street the zoning reverts to NC 3-65 and contains a mix of commercial, office, and residential structures, including Jefferson Square. Across 42nd Avenue SW is a single family structure, a large surface parking lot for the Alaska Junction businesses, and a 1979 residential tower, The Alaska House. Further to the west is the West Seattle Junction business district along California Avenue SW. Across SW Oregon Street to the north the zoning is NC 2 with a 40 foot height limit (NC 2-40) and includes California Avenue commercial uses, residential structures, and the buildings of the Hope Lutheran Church. To the east of the site the zoning is Lowrise 3 (L-3) and contains a mix of older single-family structures along with newer townhouse developments.

DEVELOPER AND ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION

The project architect gave an overview of the site's surroundings (see above for specifics). The developer's intent is to sell the residential units as condominiums; consequently a high quality of design and materials will be used. One material common to the neighborhood is brick, which could be a part of the material palette. The site's opportunities are easterly views toward downtown and the Cascade Mountains. There are also some view opportunities toward the west from the upper levels, but these are expected to be lost over time when new and similar height development occurs there.

Three development options were shown. All had similar maximum allowed footprints (coverage of the lot), number of stories, courtyards, and vehicle access from the alley. The courtyards would serve as the residential amenity area and as a method to allow light penetration to more interior spaces. The vehicle access entry to the below grade parking would be located as far south on the alley as possible to avoid vehicle cueing conflicts when entering and exiting the alley from the building and to the street. All propose to maximize the amount of commercial space along 42nd Avenue SW. The primary difference between options was the location of the proposed courtyards.

Option 1 placed the courtyard in the center of the 42nd Avenue SW façade and open to the street. Although this creates an open facade toward the street it broke up the commercial façade and could possibly raise security concerns from the open access. Option 2 proposed an interior courtyard enclosed by the building's four sides and extending north to south with the property's long axis. This configuration maximizes the retail frontage along 42nd Avenue and would control public access to the courtyard. However, this location would place the courtyard in shade most of the time and, at full FAR (Floor Area Ratio) build-out, would result in "monumental" sized exterior facades on all sides. Option 3 places the courtyard at grade on the east (alley) side. This is the applicant's preferred option because it maximizes the unit count facing the view potential to the east, also maximizes the street level retail façade length, and would serve to break up the building scale.

DEPARTURES FROM CODE STANDARDS

No *Design Departures* were proposed by the applicant. However, after public comment and Board discussion the possibility of a future *Design Departure* request was discussed that would allow partial vehicle access from 42nd Avenue SW based on overriding traffic safety concerns from a possible reduced driver line of sight along the slope of SW Oregon Street.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Five members of the public attended and gave the following comments:

- The proposed courtyard should face towards the east.
- There should be pedestrian access between 42nd Avenue SW and the alley along the site's south side.
- The building mass should be "stepped" substantially along the alley to create a good scale transition between this uphill lot and the lower L3 zone.
- The applicant should do shadow studies to ascertain what the shadowing impacts will be on the downhill L3 properties.
- The 42nd Avenue SW frontage should have substantial landscaping.
- The proposed lot coverage is too much for this neighborhood.
- Blank walls should not face SW Oregon Street.
- Vehicle access should be from 42nd Avenue, not the alley, to lessen vehicular impacts on the new townhouses along the alley and to avoid dangerous traffic conditions on SW Oregon Street from the poor visibility caused by the hill on that street.
- Vehicle access on 42nd Avenue SW should be on the south end of the lot.
- The courtyard would provide good winter light for residents if it opened toward the west.
- Vehicle access would be best from the alley; there will be a lot of traffic on 42nd Avenue from the expected QFC mixed use development and Office Depot and already too many driveways.

PRIORITIES

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 siting and design guidance described below and identified by letter and number those siting and design guidelines found in the City of Seattle's "*Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily and Commercial Buildings*" and "*West Seattle Junction Urban Village Design Guidelines*" of highest priority to this project.

A. Site Planning

A-1 Responding to Site Characteristics. *The siting of buildings should respond to specific site conditions and opportunities such as non-rectangular lots, location on prominent intersections, unusual topography, significant vegetation and views or other natural features.*

The elevation drop is approximately 10 feet between 42nd Avenue SW and the alley and 23 feet

between 42nd Avenue SW and 41st Avenue SW. This occurs across two zones (NC 3-65 and L-3) with sharply contrasting height and lot coverage limits. Because the subject lot is a corner lot the elevation drop between the street and alley is evident along the SW Oregon Street frontage. The project proposes to be oriented to take advantage of mountain and territorial views toward the east. The intersection of 42nd Avenue SW and SW Oregon Street has high traffic volumes, and with the future build-out of the surrounding parcels, will be a visually prominent intersection.

The building and site design should respond to these conditions by acknowledging its corner location at an intersection, minimize the apparent height of the structure along the SW Oregon Street frontage, and transition over the depth of the lot from the evolving urban street front of 42nd Avenue SW to the smaller scale residential character at the alley. Capture of the natural view opportunities should be tempered by the building design's respect for adjacent sites and height, bulk, and scale concerns (See A-5 and B-1 below).

A-4 Human Activity. *New development should be sited and designed to encourage human activity on the street.*

The site's street frontage currently has a single-family neighborhood character. Directly across 42nd Avenue SW there is a single remaining single-family structure on the corner with the remaining parcels used as a surface parking lot for area merchants. This project should take advantage of this opportunity to help establish a neighborhood commercial and active street front.

A-5 Respect for Adjacent Sites. *Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.*

The assumed building size and scale for an NC zone and its uphill location relative to the adjacent L3 zone and its smaller scale buildings could result in unnecessary visual intrusion into the smaller scale units and their open space areas. The proposed building design should minimize these intrusions by thoughtful location of windows and decks. Stepping of the building mass would allow unit windows and doors to be recessed and thereby break the direct line of sight between units and the adjacent properties.

The project may include live-work units along the alley. The Board felt that this could create a better scale transition across the alley.

A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access. *Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties, and pedestrian safety.*

Vehicle access is required by the Land Use Code to be from the alley to minimize impacts on the pedestrian environment. The project proposes this. Public comments raised the possibility of unsafe vehicle exiting and entering between the alley and SW Oregon Street. Public concern was also expressed about negative vehicle impacts of light, noise, and number on the adjacent smaller scale residential buildings.

The Board observed that alley access is preferable to assure a pedestrian friendly street environment. Impacts on the adjacent residential area can be avoided by proper location of the garage entry / exit relative to the window and open space locations of adjacent buildings. However, the Board directed the applicant to determine if there are inherent and uncorrectable safety problems with the project's anticipated volume of vehicles entering and exiting the alley at SW Oregon Street. This would involve discussions with SDOT (the Seattle Department of Transportation) about traffic pattern changes, including conversion of the alley to one-way only, if necessary. A *Design Departure* from the alley access requirement would only be entertained if it was determined that full alley access was not safely feasible.

B. Height, Bulk and Scale

B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility. *Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less-intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk and scale between the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.*

(From the West Seattle Junction Urban Village Design Guidelines)

Current zoning in the Junction has created abrupt edges in some areas between intensive, mixed-use development potential and less-intensive, multifamily development potential. In addition, the Code-complying building envelope of NC-65 (and higher) zoning designations permitted within the Commercial Core would result in development that exceeds the scale of existing commercial / mixed-use development. More refined transitions in height, bulk and scale – in terms of relationship to surrounding context and within the proposed structure itself – must be considered.

A context sensitive design will respond to the above guidelines and associated guidance throughout this report (A1 and A5 above).

The Board discussed the merits of a courtyard for maximizing light penetration and providing a residential amenity area. However because of the importance of stepping and carving the building's east side to appropriately transition to the L3 zone, the total area of the courtyard may best be provided by "dispersing" it throughout multiple floor levels to achieve the needed height and bulk transition.

The neighboring 4-story medical and dental building is located at its mutual property line with this project and has no window openings. However, the preliminary building design proposes to set-back the south side of the building from this property line and to include windows. The Board noted that locating the proposed building close to or at the property line and without windows on levels 1 through 4 would allow more flexibility to step the building mass on the north and east sides and also avoid south facing windows that face a blank wall.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

C-2 Architectural Concept and Consistency. *Building design elements, details and massing should create a well-proportioned and unified building form and exhibit an overall*

architectural context.

The potential large size of the proposed development relative to its largely underdeveloped surroundings and the topographic difference between the site and the Lowrise zone to the east will create a highly visible building. This requires the project design to have a coherent and responsive architectural concept. The applicant should look for positive architectural cues in the surrounding built environment for guidance (example: determine if there are imitable qualities in surrounding buildings, such as the church buildings to the north).

C-5 Structured Parking Entrances. *The presence and appearance of garage entrances should be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of a building.*

This guidance also applies to the alley façade of the proposed project. The proximity of a variety of smaller scale residential structures with their living spaces and some ground level open spaces make this façade more “street-like” than an alley bordered on both sides by an NC zone.

The design of the alley façade should respond to this context. The garage entry should be placed so it is functional but does not dominate the façade. The architect’s suggestion of possible live-work units along the alley could serve to lessen the garage entry size and appearance and is encouraged.

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-2 Blank Walls. *Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.*

This guidance should be applied to the SW Oregon Street façade and where this façade wraps into the alley. These walls will be particularly visible from the right of way because of the grade change and propensity to have this wall at the lower levels to be a solid garage / foundation wall.

(Planner Note: In NC Zones street-level parking must be separated from the street-level, street-facing facade by another permitted use [SMC 23.47A.005.C]. I.E. a street-level, street-facing foundation wall by itself can not separate parking from the street front; there must be an intervening permitted use. This Code provision is eligible for a *Design Departure* and could be granted if the applicant demonstrates how the departure results in an overall design that better meets this and other guidelines.

The alley façade at grade should be treated better than a utilitarian alley façade because of the adjacent residential zone.

D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures. *The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.*

This guideline applies to the alley façade per the above guidance. It will also apply to any proposed 42nd Avenue SW parking entry, if that option proves to be preferable.

D-11 Commercial Transparency. *Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.*

As one of the first large neighborhood commercial mixed-use developments on this nascent “off-California Avenue” commercial area, this project should seize the opportunity to create a pedestrian and neighborhood supportive commercial frontage by providing extensive commercial transparency.

E. Landscaping

E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site. *Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellis, screen walls, planters, site furniture and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.*

The project design should consider including a combination of some of the above landscape features (and others) to address the harsh pedestrian environment caused by vehicle noise and the relatively narrow pedestrian zone (planting strip, sidewalk, and remaining area between the sidewalk and building).

Landscaping can also be used to soften and bring visual interest to portions of the building base that are not occupied by an allowed use (see SMC 23.47A.005.C, which requires an allowed use between interior parking and any street level street facing façade).

Staff Comments

The Board asked that the project return for a second EDG meeting. Successive EDG meetings are either held at the request of the applicant or required by DPD. DPD has determined that the Board was able to give comprehensive priority design guidance based on the site’s neighborhood context and design proposal. With this guidance the applicant should be able to precede Master Use Permit (MUP) application with the expectation that the project design response will be fully reviewed by both the project planner in preparation for the Board presentation and by the Board at the MUP Recommendation meeting (or meetings, if necessary).

MUP submittal must include shadow studies of any proposed courtyard and the building’s shading on the adjacent L-3 zone. This should be done for the summer and winter solstices and the autumnal and vernal equinoxes in the AM, Noon and PM times. Include colored and shadowed elevation drawings and site/landscaping plans in the MUP submittal plans. East to west section drawings at various points along the alley should be submitted to clearly show the *Height, Bulk, and Scale* relationship of the proposed project to the L-3 zoned lots to the east. Three dimensioned modeling should be developed to show alternatives for creating a good transition in *Height, Bulk, and Scale* to SW Oregon Street and to the L3 zone. Show the outlines of all built and proposed / permitted development in the area in 3-D axonometric with the proposed project design.