



City of Seattle

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



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3013307

Address: 3829 California Avenue SW

Applicant: Scott Jeffries of Caron Architecture LLC

Date of Meeting: Thursday, June 28, 2012

Board Members Present: Laird Bennion
Myer Harrell
Robin Murphy (Chair)
Daniel Skaggs
Norma Tompkins

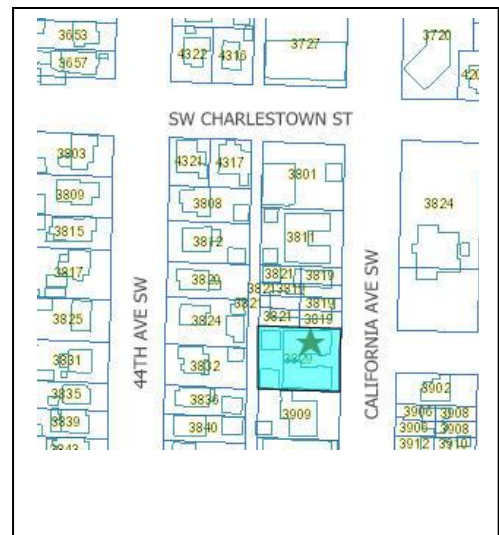
DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: LR3/RC

Nearby Zones: North: NC1-30
South: LR3/RC
East: NC1-30 & LR3/RC
West: SF 5000

Lot Area: 10,554 square feet



Current Development: Single story apartment cluster around central courtyard

Access: From alley to west of site, connecting to SW Charleston St. to the north and SW Andover St. to the south

Surrounding Development: Commercial; residential, multifamily and single family

ECAs: None

Neighborhood Character: Transitional/ mixed development along California Av SW

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposal is to demolish the existing courtyard apartments and construct a 3 story residential building, of approximately 15,700 square feet and 30 units, above 1 level of partially underground parking. One parking space will be provided per residential unit, with 21 spaces in the garage and 9 surface parking spaces proposed directly off the adjacent alley, flanking the parking access ramp. No other uses are proposed. The roof of the building will be accessible and act as an amenity space for tenants of the building. A main residential entrance will front onto California Avenue SW.

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DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

After brief introductions by members of the Board and the Planner, Radim Blazej of the architectural firm *Caron* spoke of the scope and intentions of the development proposal. Three alternative design schemes were presented by the design team with most attention directed to the applicants' preferred scheme. All of the options were said to embrace the main project goal which was create an urban infill apartment building with parking for the most part tucked under the structure. The ground level would offer a residential lobby as well as apartment units, with two levels of apartment units above. The roof of the building would provide amenity spaces for the tenants, with five of the ground floor units provided with small outdoor private amenity spaces. Option A broadly filled the site with a notch at the ground level in the northeast corner. Option B mimicked the existing footprint of the structure already located on site, but with two additional stories above. The preferred option set a rectangular three story bar with slightly more than half of the proposed units along the south edge of the site with a shorter sided square box attached to the north. The entry off California Avenue SW was set almost at dead

center of the street-facing façade. Parking in all three schemes was taken off the alley at the rear. (See the Early Design Packet, DPD Prtoject#3013307, dated June 28, 2012 for further design details.)

PUBLIC COMMENT

Approximately 12 members of the public attended the Early Design Guidance meeting at the West Seattle Senior Center, with nine members of the public affixing their names to the sign-in sheet provided. The following comments and concerns were expressed (in no particular order):

- Concerned that 30 additional cars moving along the alley would create congestion, speed and safety issues; expressed a special concern that vehicles utilizing head-in parking along the alley could possibly back into and damage the fence along the backyard of the single family residence directly across the alley.
- Curious when the current residents will be asked to vacate?
- Concern from single family residents across alley about privacy and overlook issues from the west façade of the proposal.
- Concerned about privacy and project windows opposite existing residential units adjacent to north, and the office adjacent to south.
- Concerned about the adequate number and sizes of parking spaces.
- Strongly concerned that the proposed retaining wall along the south property line is too tall, is stark and blank, and perhaps unnecessary.
- Appreciated the structure has adequate setbacks and that there are no anticipated departures, but concerned that the structure uses full height envelope and sits too high on the site, substantially higher than the existing berm of approximately 18 inches.

PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, after hearing public comment, and asking some clarifying questions of the applicants, the Design Review Board members provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the Citywide Design Guidelines of highest priority for 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 Board took note of the earthen berm on the street side of the site that raised the existing building approximately 18-20 inches above the sidewalk level. The Board was concerned, however, that raising the new structure significantly higher and creating a heightened berm, seemingly to accommodate parking ramp slopes at the alley, created an awkward sequence of entry on California Avenue SW, especially as the integration of an accessible ramp was quite unsuccessful as shown on these preliminary plans. The ramp almost appeared to be something retrofitted onto an existing structure. The design team needed to “push the building down” as far as possible.

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility. The siting of buildings should acknowledge and reinforce the existing desirable spatial characteristics of the right-of-way.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting the Board noted that the placement of the accessible ramp had not been successfully thought out, that the choreography of pedestrian movements needed more exploration and attention, as did the integration of entry and ramp with the location of other elements of the structure.

A-3 Entrances Visible from the Street. Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

The Board thought that this guideline and principle had not been adequately addressed. This guideline ought to be engaged in conjunction with guideline C-2, creating a building that exhibits form and features identifying functions within the building. The location of the entry point and residential lobby are areas clearly in need of revisiting, a revisit that should seriously ask whether the entry stairs, entry, lobby and accessible ramp could not be more integrally located and apportioned.

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 Board thought this was a “big” issue for the success of the project. It related to the location of windows on the north façade, the blank wall along the south property edge, the open stairwell and balcony overlooks that faced the single family neighbors to the west.

A-7 Residential Open Space. Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.

The Board discussed this guideline briefly, noting that the blank wall along the south property line was functionally related to this and of a piece with the choice of size and configuration of open spaces provided for the ground floor units along that edge.

- 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.**

This guideline was included since providing for the maximum allowable driveway slope into the basement parking garage appeared to have been determinative for setting the height of the ground floor of the building as it had been seated on the site. This in turn affected the level of the entry and level of the lobby vis-à-vis the sidewalk as well as the height and length of the accessible pathway structure in the front setback. The Board would like to see a more felicitous interplay of these elements and a better design solution than had been offered at the EDG meeting.

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 concept. Buildings should exhibit form and features identifying the functions within the building. In general, the roofline or top of the structure should be clearly distinguished from its facade walls.**

The Board noted that this guideline was of high priority in conjunction with their remarks about conveying functions through various articulations of the facades.

- C-3 Human Scale. The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.**

The Board noted that they liked the overall composition and massing of the preferred structure. They liked what they had seen in these preliminary renderings of an attempt break down the mass of the structure and modulate the facades through a variety of techniques. The Board encouraged the design team to continue in these directions as design development proceeded.

- C-4 Exterior Finish Materials. Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.**

The Board noted that this guideline was of high importance for any successful design and affirmed their interest in learning particulars about attachments, detailing and the

interface of materials when the project was returned for a Recommendation Meeting. Of special interest would be the materiality and detailing of the accessibility ramp.

D. Pedestrian Environment

- D-1 Pedestrian Open Spaces and Entrances. Convenient and attractive access to the building's entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open space should be considered.**

The Board reiterated the importance of addressing the relocation of the entry and lobby. They also discussed the importance of providing a comfortable pedestrian connection to that entry, one unencumbered by an accessible ramp that appeared to be an add-on to a pre-existing structure.

- 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.**

Although not facing the street, the blank wall running along the south property line would be, at least for the near future, highly visible from the street (and from the property directly to the south). See after D-3.

- D-3 Retaining Walls. Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where higher retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscapes.**

Guidelines D-2 and D-3 were chosen by the Board as of highest importance and, given public comments regarding the wall along the south property line, a key element of the design that would need to be successfully addressed in design development, whether it was a matter of treatment, or of setting back from the existing driveway, or other resolution.

- 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 be 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 was chosen by the Board as a guideline of highest priority, as it related to the “lift” of the building and the resulting inharmonious entry sequence, mal-alignment between entry and sidewalk and awkward interplay of entry and ramp.

- D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions. For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and a visually interesting street front for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.**

Although not in a commercial zone, the Board found this guideline most applicable to the proposal and its treatment of the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk and the challenge of manipulating elements to create a pleasant and inviting transition between the sidewalk and the residential entry which in all likelihood would require a relocation of the physical entry and lobby, with special attention given to its relationship with the level of the sidewalk.

E. Landscaping

- E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special on-site conditions such as high-bank front yards, steep slopes, view corridors, or existing significant trees and off-site conditions such as greenbelts, ravines, natural areas, and boulevards.**

The Board selected this guideline as being of high priority for this proposal. In doing so the Board noted that 1) a major attempt should be made to soften the project along its southern property line, 2) the project should present a pleasant face to the single family residences across the alley, and 3) serious efforts should be made to integrate the open space areas of the front setback decorously with an inviting residential/pedestrian path and entry and the functional requirements of any needed accessible ramp.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

No particular departures from development standard have been indicated at this time. The Board’s recommendation on any departures that may be subsequently identified and requested will be based upon the departure’s potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s). The Board’s recommendation regarding departures, if needed, will be reserved until the time of the Board’s Recommendation Meeting.

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended the project should move forwards to MUP Application in response to the guidance provided at this meeting.

In making this recommendation and as summary guidance the Board noted that the design team, in addition to responding to the guidance given relative to each of the priority guidelines, should focus on the following key issues:

1. *Provide a better entry and entry sequence.* Seriously contemplate and study relocating the entry lobby to the northeast corner of the structure and lowering the lobby to align more favorably and commensurately with the front sidewalk. Symmetry was a hallmark of the structure on site that is being replaced. Not so of the newly proposed structure. The entry and lobby should be considered malleable features of the present edifice. Take advantage of an opportunity to provide more than just a perfunctory and prosaic “landing” and consider attaining or at least approaching a generosity of amplitude that would enable the dignity of an entry hall or more commodious lobby. Then work to successfully integrate the accessible ramp with the relocated lobby (clearly away from ground floor residential units). Make the entry and residential lobby and the pathway sequence by which to arrive there all clearly visible from the street.
2. *Improve the south façade and provide solutions to mitigate the Blank Walls.* Consider the south-facing façade a critical façade. Seriously consider pushing the wall away from the property line and adding some softening landscape elements between the property line and the wall; additionally, or alternatively, render the wall less of a wall.
3. *Push the building down.* Do this by pushing the garage structure down. Lower the overall impact of the parking structure by altering the floor to floor height of the garage, and seek creative solutions for dealing with the “Van stall.”

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