



City of Seattle

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



EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3014176

Address: 3210 California Avenue SW.

Applicant: Jodi Patterson-O'Hare, for Intracorp

Date of Meeting: Thursday, April 11, 2013

Board Members Present: Myer Harrell Chair)
Laird Bennion
Todd Bronk
Daniel Skaggs
T Frick McNamara

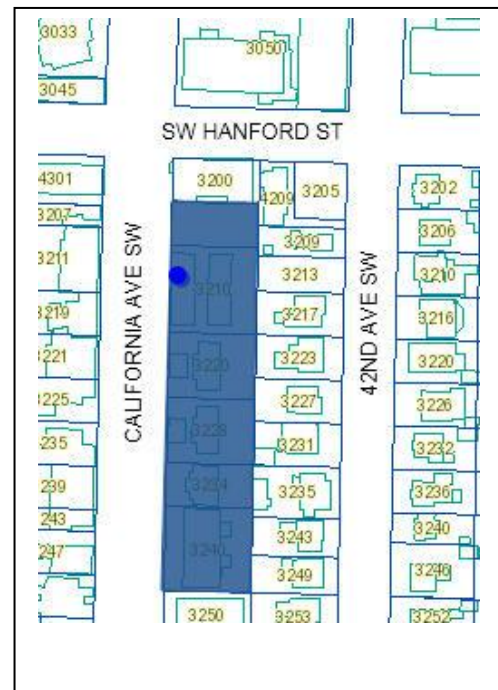
DPD Staff Present: Michael Dorcy

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: NC2-40'

Nearby Zones: (North) NC2-40'
(South) NC2-40'
(East) SF 5000
(West) NC2-40'

Lot Area: The site is rectangular in shape , sharply sloped downward from east to west and totals 44,692 square feet in size.



Current Development: The site is currently occupied by a surface parking lot and a mixture of five single and two-story residential and commercial buildings that are scheduled for demolition. There are a few smaller trees on site, and some street trees within the planting strip running along California Avenue SW. A large sequoia, designated by the City as an “exceptional” tree lies just east of the development site and a third of the way south of the north edge of the site. Provisions will be undertaken by the developer to protect the tree and its root zone.

Access: There is no alley connecting to the site and two new curbcuts along California Avenue SW are proposed as access to the site. Six existing curbcuts would be removed.

Surrounding Development: Directly to the north and south of the site are two modest, three-story multi-family structures that bookend the site. Lowrise multi-family and commercial structures run along the opposite side of California Avenue SW. Directly across SW Hanford Street to the north is a church building and parking lot, and northeast of that sits West Seattle High School. Directly north of those sites lies Hiawatha Playfield and north of the playfield the core commercial area that embraces a narrow strip along SW Admiral Way as well as California Avenue SW. The site lies within the Admiral Residential Urban Village. Outside the cruciform urban village lies large swaths of single family zoning developed with single-family residences. That vicinity characteristic of generally small-scale single family residences is the condition directly to the east of the development site

ECAs: There are steep-slope identified environmentally critical areas on or abutting the site to the east. The site is generally level along California Avenue SW, but rises approximately 6 feet from its southwest the four hundred plus feet to its northwest corner.

Neighborhood Character: As noted, the site lies along the narrow central spine of the Admiral Urban Village and is located south of the central junction of SW Admiral Way and California Avenue SW. An older pattern of development, intermittently in place along California , is that of low scale commercial buildings and surface parking lots, with some homes converted, or partially converted to commercial uses abutting California Avenue SW. Newer mixed-use buildings, with commercial/retail space at grade and residential above are gradually overlaying the older pattern along the arterial.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes a five-story mixed-use building containing approximately 180 residential units, 4,000 square feet of live-work space at grade and parking for approximately 180 vehicles.

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DESIGN PRESENTATION

Steve Fischer of Nicholson Kovalchick Architects introduced the project on behalf of the design team to the Board and members of the public attending the meeting. After explaining opportunities offered and constraints of the site, he set forth the development objectives of creating a community and structure that would integrate itself into its context and respond to broader development patterns occurring in West Seattle. The proposed structure was said to both preserve and enhance the existing character of the neighborhood by introducing a mix of sidewalk level commercial uses (live/work units) and residential apartments.

The presentation identified for the Board those individual Guidelines which the design team thought of special importance for the proposal: A-1, A-2, A-5, A-6, A-7, A-8, B-1, C-3, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-5, D-6, D-7, D-12, and E-2.

Kurt Andersen of NK Architects then presented three different options that had been explored by the design and development teams. The first was described as a design that was “Code compliant,” essentially a single massing extending from one end of the site to the other, with the California Avenue façade modulated “to reduce the perceived bulk of the structure.”

A second scheme moved the north, south and east facades away from adjacent properties, allowing, as explained, for more solar exposure to the adjacent single family homes on 42nd Avenue SW. The access to the lower parking garage in this scheme would be adjacent to the neighboring apartment building to the north. A departure would be required for this scheme to work since one of the street-level residential units would not meet setback or height regulations.

The third and preferred pulled its mass further from the east property line and the upper floors were separated by a courtyard at the second residential level in order “to create the appearance of 2 separate buildings.” In this scheme, both residential and live/work units would connect to the sidewalk, the residential units through use of “stoops.” Patios along the eastern edge of the building would be located below the levels of the adjacent single family rear yards. As in scheme two, a departure would be required since a proposed residential unit would not meet setback or height requirements from the sidewalk. A shared amenity space would be located above the lobby area at the notch in the building.

Andy Rasmussen from the Weisman Design group then took a few minutes to explain proposed landscaping. In doing so he noted that, in addition to keeping or rather protecting the “exceptional” sequoia (actually located in a neighbor’s rear yard), the existing street trees would be kept and probably added to. Street improvements and Landscaping along the California Avenue SW frontage would be enhanced to provide an “uninterrupted passage” for pedestrians along the sidewalk. It was noted that, despite the dual entries/exits for the new structure, the parallel parking on the street would be added to since some 160 feet in curbcuts would be eliminated by the proposal.

After the design team’s presentation the Board asked a few questions to clarify their understanding of the proposal: How steep was the driveway to proposed parking? (“15%”); Could not the “commercial” spaces be better located at the north end of the site? (“A rise of about 6 feet from the south end to the north end of the site made this a challenge”); Could not the live/work spaces be true commercial spaces? (“They will start as live/work and since they will have 13-foot floor to ceiling heights, they come be changed to retail/commercial depending on the market.”

PUBLIC COMMENT

After asking their clarifying questions of the applicant, the Board elicited comments from members of the public. Approximately 50 members of the public attended the meeting; 39 signed in to become “parties of record.” About nine or ten individuals voiced comments and concerns to the Board, among these:

- This project would be precedent-setting for West Seattle;
- The third scheme showed a “break,” suggesting two structures; Why not break it into 3 masses?”
- Guideline A-4 calls for something that encourages Human Activity; so-called Live/Work units have not historically been very successful at doing that;
- The length of this amalgamated development parcel offers an exception case, requiring exceptional design moves; more can be done and should be done with the design;
- Just because the Code allows it does not mean it should be done; Land Use Code does not contemplate 450’ parcels in Seattle; conversations regarding a rezone in this area never contemplated buildings as long or as high at that proposed;
- Proposed entries and exits pose safety issues for pedestrians, especially for kids;
- Requesting the Board to be an advocate for the community and its wishes;
- Proposed height not right for the site; height at streetfront should be reduced to 4 stories;
- Quoting Guideline A-5, “Respect for Adjacent Sites, questioning the respect of neighbors along the east property lines whose backyards will be “shady fishbowls”; step back upper floors, erode the building’s east façade, angle the windows, misalign the windows for privacy’s sake; question the decks if any, design for solar exposure;
- Length of this project is exceptional and single break in the massing is not enough;

- Split it again;
- Height at the street should be reduced to four stories;
- Project needs a second EDG meeting to adequately address these issues.

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 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 Admiral Residential Urban Village Design Guidelines , for sites abutting single Family Zoning, specifically call for “composing the structure’s massing to enhance solar impacts on adjacent structures....”

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

Varying façade heights, the variety in east and west facades would appear to be a component of existing desirable spatial characteristics of the California Avenue SW right-of-way. The project needs to show respect for the different relationships called for in each of the two main facades, employing a kit of parts that deals with both vertical and horizontal modulation and variation in façade heights. It would not be a successful building that replaced the current positive feeling of vibrant variety along the streetfront with drab sameness.

- 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.**

In choosing this to be of high priority in guiding the design, the Board discussed the opportunity to provide something other than a monolithic façade on the east exposure by providing variation and even an erosion of the façade. They questioned the sameness and the usability of the sunken terraces proposed for the lower units and

suggested that the presence of the “exceptional” tree called for an architectural response to its presence from the building.

- A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street. For residential projects, the space between the buildings and sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.**

The Board noted that the street-level residential units might be better suited to the southern end of the development, with true retail/commercial uses provided at the north end of the side. While the spaces with residential components might well be served by setbacks and stoops, however, entrances to the retail/commercial spaces should be at the sidewalk and at-grade requiring some significant adjustments that need to be addressed in the proposed structure.

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

The viability of the sunken private open spaces adjacent the hillside and SF 5000 zoning was questioned while encouraging a fresh look at providing larger, common amenity spaces, strategically located with a better relationship to modulating massing impacts and more obvious responses to topography and adjacencies. How these amenity spaces related functionally and were integrated within the whole building would be important for their success and the Board would be waiting to see how the details of these areas were worked out in the design.

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 anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.**

The Board was agreed that because of its context the impacts of the length and height of the building needed more mitigation than they had been shown in the three alternative schemes. They wanted the applicants to return with a scheme that showed the building divided into three chunks rather than one or just two as in the preferred scheme. The proposed structure stood in need of greater vertical modulation than had been shown.

C. Architectural Elements and Materials

- C-1 Architectural Context. New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.**

The Board observed that although there might be a lack of any “well-defined and desirable character” strictly speaking, especially since it was a neighborhood in transition, nevertheless there was the context of the platting which could provide a kind of palimpsest. This could then be read to create spatial patterns and should suggest opportunities for rhythmic aggregation, modulation, and separations that could be more contextual than what had been shown.

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

The Board acknowledged that it was a particular challenge in a building of this length to provide architectural consistency or a discernible architectural concept, but encouraged a greater effort in that regard. The exceptional length of the street façade in particular called out for variegation, but the building should not become a hotchpotch of different stuff just for variety’s sake.

- 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 the questions of scale and human interaction were matters of special concern along the northern portion of the structure along California Avenue SW where genuine commercial/retail spaces should be provided for.

- 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 indicated that the “stitchery” of the street-facing façade elements would be an important part of a successful design as would be the choices in cladding materials.

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

The parking entry at the north end of the site would seem to interfere with the notion of providing viable and active street-level commercial uses there. Additionally, the safety and comfort of pedestrians moving along California Avenue SW, as mentioned by more

than one of the public commentators, is a concern at both parking entrances. To address these concerns, at the very least the driveways must meet the sidewalk at a level from the inside so that visibility is optimal for drivers. This guideline should be considered in tandem with Guideline D-5.

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.

Board members commented that while the applicants were proposing one main residential entry on California Avenue SW, , they would like to see a more thorough investigation into the location and distribution of retail spaces and an examination of locating as many as three residential entries, perhaps off street-level plazas, on California Avenue SW.

- 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.

The Board considered this guideline too be particularly applicable to the design of the north-facing and south-facing façades.

- D-5 Visual Impact of Parking Structures.**

See the comments under Guideline C-5, above.

E. Landscaping

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

There appears to be plenty of opportunities for landscaping not only at the street level but as part of the amenity spaces above ground. The applicant is encouraged to work with SDOT regarding the health of the existing street trees and to make a determination of the distinctive characters of landscaping to be provided on California Avenue SW.

E-3 Landscape Design to Address Special Site Conditions. The landscape design should take advantage of special onsite 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 presence of the “exceptional” tree adjacent the east property line provides an opportunity for a design response on the east façade(s) of the structure, including the orientation of windows, amenity areas, etc.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Design team identified departures from requirements for the setback distance and height above or below grade for street-side residential entries. A more thorough discussion of necessary departures, if any are needed, and the Board’s willingness to entertain recommendation of those requested departures, will be undertaken at the time of the second Early Design Guidance meeting.

BOARD DIRECTION

At the conclusion of the EDG meeting, the Board recommended that the project should return for a second Early Design Guidance Meeting at which time the issues and concern cited under the Guidelines above would be addressed. In particular, the next meeting the Board would expect to have the applicants:

- Provide a fourth massing alternative, one that more adequately mitigates for the length of the building, a scheme that breaks the building’s mass into three pieces instead of two.
- Explore how the commercial component could be moved to the north end of the structure and invigorate the pedestrian experience along that portion of the west façade.
- Provide more detailed renderings of the façade treatments, including modulation, terraces, amenity spaces, etc., respond to comments under the Guidelines above,
- Offer a brief review of other successful projects in the City of Seattle approximating the proposed length of this project, together with a brief analysis of how they succeed in an architectural sense.