City of Seattle

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

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE OF THE DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

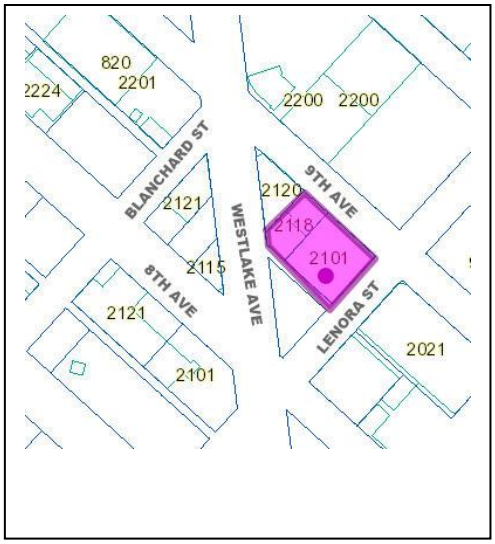
Project Number:	3016305
Address:	2101 9th Avenue
Applicant:	Brian Steinburg of Weber Thompson Architects, for GID Development
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, February 18, 2014
Board Members Present:	Gabe Grant (Chair) Mathew Albores Pragnesh Parikh
Board Members Absent:	Murphy McCullough Gundala Proksch
DPD Staff Present:	Garry Papers, Senior Land Use Planner

SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: DMC 240/290-400

Nearby Zones: (North) DMC 240/290-400
(South) DMC 240/290-400
(East) DMC 240/290-400
(West) DMC 240/290-400

Lot Area: 21,420 sq ft, rectangular



Current Development:	The site is currently occupied by a two story commercial structure at 9th and Lenora Street, and a one-story structure at the Westlake corner of the site (2118 Westlake Avenue).
Access:	Pedestrian access from the two adjacent streets of Lenora and 9th Avenue, and the short chamfer at Westlake Avenue. The adjacent alley to the west is discontinuous, and provides vehicle access to only the north portion of the site, from Westlake Avenue.
Surrounding Development:	The mixed use block of 2200 Westlake is to the east across 9th Avenue. The Braille Library and a residential tower under construction are across Lenora Street to the south. A one story triangular commercial structure occupies the adjacent lot to the north, fronting Westlake and 9th Avenues.
ECAs:	None.
Neighborhood Character:	The existing parking lot across the alley will become a future public park, with no specific design at this time. The surrounding neighborhood is rapidly transforming from parking lots and mixed commercial buildings of various scales, to a high density, mixed use district adjacent to the downtown core, including several residential towers and the 3 million sf Amazon campus nearby to the west and south. The streetcar on Westlake connects this district to South Lake Union and downtown.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project is a 39 story, 400 ft tall building with approximately 430 residential units, with resident amenity decks and about 6,400 sf of ground level commercial use. No parking is required, but all proposed parking (approximately 230 spaces) would be provided in a 5 level below grade garage. The preferred scheme shows parking and loading access from 9th Avenue, which is a designated Green Street; Lenora is also a Green street. The applicants intend to provide an active edge and backdrop to the future park along the current alley facade, and are pursuing an Alley Vacation jointly with Seattle Parks & Recreation. The project does not require or depend on the alley vacation.

EARLY DESIGN GUIDANCE MEETING: February 18, 2014

DESIGN PRESENTATION

The EDG packet includes materials presented at the EDG meeting, and is available online by entering the project number at this website:
http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Design_Review_Program/Project_Reviews/Reports/default.asp.

or contacting the Public Resource Center at DPD:

Address: **Public Resource Center**
700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000
Seattle, WA 98124

Email: PRC@seattle.gov

PUBLIC COMMENT:

During public comment, the following comments, issues and concerns were raised:

- Noted that 9th Avenue is busy and the alley is not continuous, and suggested all vehicle access be from Lenora Street.
- Stated that loading and vehicle access off 9th will impact residents across the street, and suggested access off the alley could be done without compromising the future park. Also requested no exterior trash noises, truck idling or audible alarms on 9th.
- A representative from Seattle Parks & Recreation encouraged the development of a project with activating uses along the park frontage, with no loading or vehicle access there, and confirmed they are jointly sponsoring an alley vacation with the applicants.
- Supported the shape and modulations of the preferred tower.

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 (the Board) provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the following Downtown Design Guidelines of **highest priority for this project**.

The Priority Downtown guidelines are summarized below, while all guidelines remain applicable. For the full text of all guidelines please visit the Design Review website, and: http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/aboutus/whoweare/designreview/designguidelines/default.htm

All page references below are to the EDG booklet dated February 18, 2014.

A. Site Planning & Massing

Responding to the Larger Context

A-1 **Respond to the Physical Environment.** Develop an architectural concept and compose the building's massing in response to geographic conditions and patterns of urban form found beyond the immediate context of the building site.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board applauded the complete context analysis and how it informed the three-part form of the preferred tower. The Board was less convinced the podium form was as sensitive, describing it as a blunt and simplistic box to the property lines; the Board agreed that more refinement and an intentional fit to context was needed (also see Board comments under guideline B-2 and departure # 2).

A-2 **Enhance the Skyline.** Design the upper portion of the building to promote visual interest and variety in the downtown skyline.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the preferred option C, and the preliminary rooftop design described on page 32/right, including the stepped forms, shared amenity decks, and canopy forms shown. These elements provide residential scale and a more gracious transition to the sky than the blocky forms of the other two options.

B. Architectural Expression

Relating to the Neighborhood Context

B-1 **Respond to the Neighborhood Context –** Develop an architectural concept and compose the major building elements to reinforce desirable urban features existing in the surrounding neighborhood.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board applauded the applicants for providing extensive, true commercial uses on the ground floor, for being sensitive to the future park, and for desiring to activate that park edge with appropriate uses. The Board supported the mailroom being internalized, and requested more careful stepping of forms and pedestrian scale along that edge, as discussed under C-6.

B-2 **Create a Transition in Bulk & Scale.** Compose the massing of the building to create a transition to the height, bulk, and scale of development in neighboring or nearby less intensive zones.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed while the zoning on all sides matches the site, Westlake and 9th Avenues have distinct street edge scales which the podium should respond to, especially as seen from viewpoints along Westlake, and from Denny and Westlake plaza (pg 36). The Board was not comfortable with the assumption that the podium should be 70- 85 ft on Westlake, taller than the code maximum 45 ft along the two Green Streets, or that the podium should have a uniform height (also see departure # 2).

B-3 **Reinforce the Positive Urban Form & Architectural Attributes of the Immediate Area .** Consider the predominant attributes of the immediate neighborhood and reinforce desirable siting patterns, massing arrangements, and streetscape characteristics of nearby development.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the façade facing the future park should be studied and designed in conjunction with the Lenora façade of the 2030 8th project (which the Board commended), to create two complementary and human scaled backdrops defining the park.

B-4 **Design a Well-Proportioned & Unified Building.** Compose the massing and organize the publicly accessible interior and exterior spaces to create a well-proportioned building that exhibits a coherent architectural concept. Design the architectural elements and finish details to create a unified building, so that all components appear integral to the whole.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the lobby location at the southeast corner and its associated plaza engaging the park, and the tall (about 16 ft) lobby and commercial spaces. The Board was concerned that the tall proportion be maintained and well integrated into the podium at the Lenora corners, as well as along the park/alley frontage (the dis-engaged columns shown on option C, pg 33 appear overly squat).

C. The Streetscape

Creating the Pedestrian Environment

C-1 **Promote Pedestrian Interaction.** Spaces for street level uses should be designed to engage pedestrians with the activities occurring within them. Sidewalk-related spaces should be open to the general public and appear safe and welcoming.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board supported the tall, highly transparent commercial façade portions shown along Lenora, part of 9th, Westlake and the west portion of the alley. Commercial spillover to the southeast entry plaza was mentioned (despite no doors being shown), which the Board supported, and future ground floor drawings should show multiple doors from commercial uses to the plazas and sidewalks, anticipating a range of tenant demisings over the life of the building.

C-3 **Provide Active—Not Blank—Facades**. Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed the 9th Avenue façade at length, and agreed the approximate 61% blank façade shown (parking, loading and transformer/utilities) was unacceptable on any street, especially a Green Street. The Board's support for a Green Street access exception is contingent on a superior resolution of the vehicle and service functions and blank wall impacts on this street (also see departure #4).

C-5 **Encourage Overhead Weather Protection.** Encourage project applicants to provide continuous, well-lit, overhead weather protection to improve pedestrian comfort and safety along major pedestrian routes.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board was encouraged by the canopy strategy shown at the meeting, that was continuous along all street facades (even if raised height in necessary portions), and advised that canopies also wrap the corner at the Westlake and future park façade, as well as along any southwest facing patio near the lobby.

C-6 **Develop the Alley Façade.** To increase pedestrian safety, comfort, and interest, develop portions of the alley façade in response to the unique conditions of the site or project.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board strongly supported the intention to engage and activate the future park, and agreed the west 'retail' half shown on pg 51 is much more successful than the blank wall middle portion (also see comments under C-5 and D-1).

D. Public Amenities

Enhancing the Streetscape & Open Space

D-1 **Provide Inviting & Usable Open Space.** Design public open spaces to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents, and visitors. Views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board agreed the narrow patio overlook and its blank wall below (shown on pg 51) were not a successful transition to the park, nor a usable, gracious public space, and suggested a stepped plaza and /or a lobby space recessed under the tower. This wall and associated public patio spaces requires careful redesign. The Board strongly supported the relocation of the mailroom off this critical frontage, as mentioned by the applicants.

D-3 **Provide Elements that Define the Place.** Provide special elements on the facades, within public open spaces, or on the sidewalk to create a distinct, attractive, and memorable "sense of place" associated with the building.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board discussed how the podium roof provides an excellent opportunity for shared amenity spaces that overlook and activate the future park. These spaces also afford an opportunity to enliven this highly visible façade with balconies, vegetation and/or other features beyond a generic podium wall of windows. The Board advised the amenity spaces be lower than shown on pg 30 and/or occur at several levels, and not employ the typical high, solid parapets that discourage eyes-on-the-park engagement.

E. Vehicular Access & Parking

Minimizing the Adverse Impacts

E-1 **Minimize Curb Cut Impacts.** Minimize adverse impacts of curb cuts on the safety and comfort of pedestrians.

See E-3.

E-2 **Integrate Parking Facilities.** Minimize the visual impact of parking by integrating parking facilities with surrounding development. Incorporate architectural treatments or suitable landscaping to provide for the safety and comfort of people using the facility as well as those walking by.

See E-3.

E-3 **Minimize the Presence of Service Areas.** Locate service areas for trash dumpsters, loading docks, mechanical equipment, and the like away from the street front where possible. Screen from view those elements which for programmatic reasons cannot be located away from the street front.

At the Early Design Guidance Meeting, the Board grouped these three guidelines (E-1, E-2, E-3) and stated they all concern an integrated approach and detailed handling of the proposed parking ramp, loading and service functions along 9th, a designated Green Street.

Although vehicle access is typically prohibited on Green Streets, the Board agreed the desire for a park frontage without vehicle access and portals outweighed this, as long as every effort is made to reduce the physical presence and impacts of parking, loading and other service functions on the pedestrian and landscape continuity of the 9th Avenue Green Street (the Board did not support access off Lenora Street).

The Board was not convinced this has been thoroughly done to date, and required the following complete and detailed studies be presented at the next meeting (also see Departures #3,4 and 5 discussion):

1) **Relocate transformer and minimize blank wall; any required ventilation can be a transom above a more transparent ground level. Better conceal meters and other utilitarian components.**
2) **Reduce the 33 ft loading zone width and/or consolidate the loading access point with the parking portal (Note: residential loading is not code required, and only if commercial exceeds 10,000 gsf); provide detailed ramp studies of how consolidation could work, even if increasing ramp slope more than 20% shown.**
3) **Bike storage door/frontage: while supporting the direct access off the sidewalk, make this door and adjacent exit door (if required) read as a transparent storefront, rather than solid doors in a blank wall.**

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) 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 will be reserved until the final Board meeting.

At the time of the Early Design Guidance meeting, the following departures were requested:

1. **Upper Level Setbacks (tower) (SMC 23.49.058.F.2):** In brief, the Code requires a continuous 15 ft setback above 45 ft on the entire frontage of the two green streets. The applicant proposes a continuous setback of at least 27 ft along Lenora, and two encroachments along 9th Avenue: an approximate 11 ft setback for a 75 ft length at the middle of the entire tower, and an approximately 10 ft wide stair with no setback at the northeast corner (depending on the podium height departure).

   The Board commended the extra Lenora setback, and indicated a favorable response to the 11 ft setback, especially as it is not at a corner and it adds modulation to the tower. However, the Board requested further studies of that façade and more explanation of how the overall design is better than a code compliant version. The Board was not receptive to the stair encroachment, as it creates an awkward wart on the composition. (B-1, B-4)

2. **Upper Level Setbacks (podium) (SMC 23.49.058.F.2):** In brief, the Code requires a continuous 15 ft setback above 45 ft on the entire frontage of the two green streets. The applicant proposes a podium height that exceeds 45 ft on the green streets; about 56 ft tall at the property line along Lenora, and between 55 and 67 feet along 9th Avenue.

The Board indicated no receptivity to this departure, as the applicants provided a weak design based rationale, and few analytic drawings or street sections of this podium height, including shadow and scale impacts, compared to a code required one. The Board is concerned about the podium scale to the green streets, and to context, especially along 9th Avenue. The Board strongly supports the proposed 16 ft clear commercial height, and not locating the leasing offices at valuable street level, but these program issues do not factor into a design justification to simply add more podium floors on Green Streets. See comments under guideline B-2. (A-1, B-1, B-3)

3. **Distance between Curb Cuts (SMC 23.54.030.F.1.c):** In brief, the Code requires a minimum 30 ft distance between any two curb cuts on the same lot. The applicant proposes about 16 ft between the parking and proposed loading curb cuts.

   The Board indicated receptivity to the proposed reduction, as it consolidates the disruption of the green street treatment, yet maintains a generous curbside planting strip and street tree. However, this receptivity is provisional upon the loading curb cut needing to be 16 ft wide, or being needed at all, per the guideline E-3 comments above. (D-2)

4. **Street Level Transparency (SMC 23.49.056.C.4.a):** In brief, the Code requires the street level on designated Green Streets to be a minimum of 60% transparent. The applicant proposes a compliant façade along Lenora, but only about 39% along 9th Avenue.

   The Board had little receptivity to the magnitude of this departure, although it recognizes some parking and service functions will likely occupy the 9th Avenue façade. The Board advised a transparency between 50 and 60% along this busy pedestrian street, and requested large scale street elevations showing all screening and design techniques, including those listed under guideline E-3. (C-1, C-3, E-3)

5. **Landscaping in 9th Ave Setbacks (SMC 23.49.056.F.4.b):** In brief, the Code requires 50% of the required 2 ft setback along the 9th Avenue building edge, to be landscaped. The applicant proposes (per drawing distributed at EDG meeting) about 14% of the 2 ft strip be landscaped, and to add compensating landscaped area in the curbside planting zone which is about 5 times the minimum required there.

   The Board indicated receptivity to this departure, but still suggested more 2 ft setback landscaping be added north of the commercial storefront, if the revisions under E-3 and departure #4 above result in less curb cuts or service/transformer extent. The Board supported the paving pattern/material continuity across any and all curb cuts. (C-1,E-1)

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.