



# City of Seattle

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Mike McGinn, Mayor  
**Department of Planning & Development**  
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**DESIGN GUIDELINE PRIORITIES  
OF  
THE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD (AREA 7)  
December 15, 2009  
Notes available: February 11, 2010**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Project Number: 3009393  
Address: 901 Stewart Street  
Applicant: Kimberly McKittrick, SMR Architects, for Gethsemane Lutheran Church  
Board members present: Bill Gilland (Chair)  
Dan Foltz  
Jan Frankino  
Brian Scott  
Board member absent: Marta Falkowska  
Land Use Planner present: Michael Dorcy

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Downtown development site is bounded by Stewart Street on the north, 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the west, by the multistoried Regence office Express building to the south and an alley on the east. Included within the development site and occupying the southernmost portion is the existing nave of Gethsemane Lutheran Church, constructed in 1954. An attached office and service wing, added in 1960, occupies the northern portion of the site.

The current nave is to be kept and renovated; the rest of the church complex is to be demolished. A new, seven-story structure with five floors of workforce housing over church offices and congregation spaces will be constructed on the northern portion of the site.



The site and surrounding area to the north, east and south is zoned for high-rise development (DMC 340) with even higher height limits allowable across 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the south (DOC2-500).

Most of the structures in the immediate vicinity, except for the Greyhound Bus Station to the south where a fifty-story hotel has been recently proposed, have been built in the past 20 years.

The residential portion of the new structure will contain consist of 50 studio, one bedroom and two bedroom units. No parking is required or proposed for the project.

Stewart Street is a class one pedestrian street. 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a designated Green Street with special street level requirements.

### **ARCHITECT'S PRESENTATION**

Although small, the development is not without its complexities. Members of the overall development team initially described a project which was intended to reinvigorate an existing community of believers, members of the Gethsemane Lutheran Church, by creating 50 units of workforce housing above a new base of church office and service spaces, interconnected to an existing nave and basement homeless shelter that would be renovated in the process. The housing would be provided through an affiliation with LATCH, with the assistance of Office of Housing funding.

While SMR Architects would be designing the housing portion of the project, OSKA Architects would be commissioned with the design of the new church-related spaces at the first two levels, together with the renovation of the existing nave. Bob Jakubik of OSKA briefly discussed how the church portion, which would not be subject to the design review process, had conceptually evolved to date. He explained that the existing nave would remain and be connected to new church facilities on two lower floors totaling approximately 12,000 square feet and basement space of some 6,700 square feet.

The bulk of the presentation of the housing portion of the project, which would be comprised of five stories above the two-story church base, was undertaken by Kimberly McKittrick of SMR Architects. Three alternate massing models for the site, with slight variations, were presented to the Board. The first, a "code-compliant" massing, showed two boxes stacked above a two-story base that contained church offices and functions. The first residential box sat along the Stewart Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and alley property lines and was set back from the existing nave. The third, fourth and fifth residential levels were set back from 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, as required by Code along the designated "Green Street." A second conceptual massing showed a single box, above the two story base, extending from 9th Avenue to the alley and to the property line along Stewart Street. It was likewise set back from the wall of the existing nave to the south. Massing option three, noted as the "preferred option, was basically option two with the addition of three saddle-bag bays hanging off the structure of the residential box and extending a short distance into the right-of-way of Stewart Street with a fourth bay hanging off the 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue façade and extending into that right-of-way,

In making her presentation, the architect noted that the design team anticipated requesting three departures from development standards in order to realize their preferred design: from the green street upper-level setback requirement along 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, from the size and configuration of the structural building overhangs, those bays proposed over the rights-of-way, and the requirement from providing continuous overhead weather protection along the street frontages. Anticipating a repositioning of the large Christus sculpture now on the nave façade facing onto 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue

onto the new structure facing Stewart Street, the canopies providing the weather protection would break on either side of the statue. In the presenter's words, this was the "give Jesus a break departure."

The design team referred to page 23 of the design review presentation packet where the applicants had selected those design guidelines which they thought were most pertinent to this project. Among these were the following: B-4, C-2, C-3, C-4, C-5, D-1, D-2, D-3 and D-5.

Following the presentation, the Board members asked a few clarifying questions prior to opening the meeting to public comment: one Board member asked whether there had been any other options under consideration since the options that were presented were nearly identical; another wondered whether there had been any consideration of finding a way to provide light wells into the old and newly contemplated basement areas.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

One member of the public, after noting that the church had been a presence for 125 years, and questioned whether the "boxes" that had been presented were really the best solution to the challenge of maintaining a physical presence at that spot that was overwhelmed with and literally overshadowed by buildings of immense height.

### **BOARD'S DELIBERATIONS**

The Board chair began deliberations by pointing to some of the positive features of the presentation: the Church's providing of the housing was an admiral goal; the retention of the nave was a positive decision; the decision not to provide parking on site was likewise a positive move; and finally, the provisions for the garden court and chapel at the sidewalk level, although still pretty conceptual, gave promise of enlivening the street. He noted that the real issues and challenges were: the sheer factualism of the context—this was a diminutive structure surrounded by giants; and, the need to integrate the design of church and the housing, a challenge compounded by the fact that two separate firms were involved in the process.

One Board member noted that what was being proposed was "a low rise project in a high rise jungle." Another of the Board members quipped that it was "a case of inviting a lot of people over when you hardly had room for yourselves." Whereas the ground-level treatments had the beginning of a nice feel, the integration of the top and bottom was clearly unresolved and the Board members were generally agreed that they didn't perceive any real "wrestling" with the problem to date.

### **PRIORITY GUIDELINES**

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 those guidelines found in the City of Seattle's *Design Review: Guidelines for Downtown Development* which are to be considered of highest priority for this project in addition to those already identified by the applicants as being of highest priority (see above), except for D-5 which the Board did not choose to designate as of highest priority..

## **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

### ***A Site Planning and Massing***

#### ***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.***

The guideline above was chosen by the board to be of high priority. The Board noted that the proposed development would be the “small kid on the block,” and future design development should clearly demonstrate how the design holds its own within its context. It was pointed out that the church currently has a high visibility which the Board felt was subject to some diminution in the massing studies shown.

#### ***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.***

The Board's question, related to the A-1 guideline already cited, was “how do you make this project hold its own?” The overall structure needs to be “beacon-like” in some metaphorical sense. The challenge was to make this project look like it just didn't land downtown by mistake. The biggest issue, as one Board member put it was its “type of construction (5 over two) and its materiality.” How do you convert that into something urbane, something that seems to belong in the context of other large, substantial structures. The problem with fitting was not the “3-box” *parti* but that the concept wasn't being pushed further and wasn't made “edgier.” Part of the challenge was the loss of the campanile. A question for the design was how to compensate for that loss in verticality. Could there be a way to compensate for and commemorate the lost campanile?

#### ***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.***

If the Courtyard of “garden” were to be a truly exquisite space, it might well serve in place of the Greenstreet setback.

The following Guidelines, identified by the applicants to be of highest priority for the project, were affirmed to be such by the Board, but with little or no specific comment.

***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*

There is an inherent conflict between this new development and the existing pattern of newer highrise residential and commercial buildings in the neighborhood. A challenge, already discussed under the Board's general deliberations, was the need to integrate the "five" with the "two." The resulting, integrated building, must be made to sing to hold its own.

***C-2 Design facades of many scales.***

*Design architectural features, fenestration patterns, and materials compositions that refer to the scale of human activities contained within.*

*Building facades should be composed of elements scaled to promoted pedestrian comfort, safety and orientation.*

Remember that the roofs are also the "fifth facades" and will be highly visible to the neighboring buildings.

***C-3 Provide active-not blank- facades.***

*Buildings should not have large blank walls facing the street especially near sidewalks.*

***C-4 Reinforce building entries.***

*To promote pedestrian comfort, safety, and orientation, reinforce the building's entry.*

While the new church entry seems headed in the right direction, the sense of arrival and homecoming for the residential portion needs further examination and resolution.

***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.*

In order to enhance the pedestrian experience, the project should provide overhead weather protection continuously along Elliott Avenue as well as Western Avenue.

***D-1 Provide Inviting and Usable Open Space***

*Design public open space to promote a visually pleasing, safe, and active environment for workers, residents and workers, Views and solar access from the principal area of the open space should be especially emphasized.*

***D-2 Enhance the building with landscaping***  
***Enhance the building and site with substantial landscaping, which includes special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, and site furniture, as well as living plant material.***

***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.***

The “garden” off 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue provides a golden opportunity to provide a special downtown space.

**Departures from Development Standards:**

The Board indicated that they would be willing to consider granting the requested departures provided the design development adequately addressed the concerns expressed and addressed the guidelines and guidance specified by the Board.

One member of the Board remarked that the presentation had been “EDG lite” and somewhat below expectations for a downtown project. The Board did recommend, however, that the applicants could proceed to design development and MUP application. In returning for a Recommendation meeting, the Board’s expectation would be that the applicants’ presentation would be taken up “a couple of notches.”

**Staff Comments:**

DPD concurs with the Board’s recommendation that development of the design should follow the Board’s General Directives and Guidelines selected to be of highest priority for the project as noted above and proceed to MUP application.