

From: [Jeremy Braun](#)
To: [PRC](#)
Subject: Design Review Public Comment, Project #3020338
Date: Wednesday, July 13, 2016 8:24:14 AM

ATTN: Magda Hogness (Assigned Planner)

To whom it may concern:

I'm writing to provide comment on the following project for preparation of the early design guidance.

Project#: 3020338
Address: 2925 E Madison St.

I've reviewed the EDG packet provided by the applicant, including their assessment of how they applied the Seattle Design Guidelines. Please find my own opinions and feedback below. I've organized this into responses to specific Design Guidelines, and then a few sections on specific building features.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, I look forward to seeing the Design Board's guidance and recommendations.

Jeremy Braun

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== CONTEXT AND SITE
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- * CS1-B, CS1-C: The preferred design, Option 3 is successful at minimizing shading to adjacent structures and using the natural topography to inform the design. The stepped design follows the slope, and the massing on Madison allows for more afternoon light into the valley below.

- * CS2-A: This building will serve as the east anchor of the Madison Valley commercial district, and along with the Madison Lofts building will serve as the gateway to the neighbourhood from the east. Many of the buildings in the area feature square-paned/divided windows (see Madison Lofts and Café Flora). I'd like to see that feature repeated here, particularly in the transoms above the large retail windows. The transom windows shown in the EDG renderings come close, but are a more modern, rectangular pane. Also see:
 - * The Voilà store front, which I consider to be the best façade/store front in the neighbourhood.
 - * My comments on CS3-A below.

As you approach the neighbourhood from the west more balance is required between this building's NE corner and the Madison Lofts building to it's north. The west end of the Madison Lofts building contains a significant deck/patio with potted landscaping, one floor

above street level. I'd love to see that feature mirrored in this design. Option 3 provides a roof garden on that corner, but three stories above Madison. Bringing it lower by a floor would help balance this building against the Lofts building. (CS2-C stresses that corner sites require careful detailing on the first three floors) Lowering the roof garden has the added benefit of reducing the height of the tallest vertical span on Dewey Pl. This additional terracing would also contribute to a successful transition to the parkland to the east (CS2-D4).

- * CS3-A: In my opinion, the building designs shown are not the best match for the existing neighbourhood's architectural style and character. A great deal of our retail core features fabric awnings, peaked roof lines, and overall has a strong "village or neighbourhood feel." The rotating photos on the main page at <http://madisonvalley.org/> do a good job of showcasing "Seattle's European Village". The window stencilling, window divisions, flower boxes, fabric coverings all contribute to our unique sense of place. Also see DC4-B.

Just east on Madison, Belle Epicurean's renovation of an unremarkable video rental store transformed that retail space into a vibrant neighbourhood café and shop, inside and out. The outdoor treatments such as awnings and planters distinguish it from the surrounding retail and continue the pedestrian-friendly walk-up/village feel of the retail core to the west.

The design is a good match for the Madison Lofts building across the street: see DC2-C3, and the roof garden comments above. However, I believe the design of the Lofts building can be improved upon in this building:

- * This proposal does include a mix of more interesting and varied materials than the Lofts building, which is good. I don't believe the Lofts building is particularly well-integrated with the neighbourhood, with its plain brick and repetitive design.
- * The design of the wall along Dewey Pl. E. is better than the blank grey wall that makes up the north side of the Lofts.
- * The Madison Lofts building failed at providing adequate pedestrian weather protection (PL2-C). The residential balconies allow rain to drip through. The awnings used in other buildings on the street are much more effective.
- * DC4-B, DC4-C: Lighted signs will have a huge impact on residents on both sides of the building. I'd prefer to see unlit stencils and awning signage that mirrors the rest on Madison. I do think that lighted signage is appropriate in this instance, considering that the retail will be open late, and often long past dark. Efforts should be made to direct the light away from the residents of the Madison Lofts building. Perhaps an incandescent front-lit sign placed at right angles to the building would be a better fit. The warmer light would soften the impact of the additional illumination (vs fluorescent or blueish LED lighting), and the perpendicular placement would direct the reflected light up and down Madison Street, rather than across to the residential building.

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== Corner retail/café space with outdoor seating

I love the 1,600 sq ft retail space on the NE corner, and look forward to seeing what it will become. It's the first retail space most westward-bound travellers will encounter in the retail core, and as such should be distinctive: see CS2-C. (The Pagliacci building is separated from the retail core by park and the unopened portion of Mercer St.) The floor to ceiling windows on both sides of the "café" will allow customers to take in the terrestrial view of the Valley, with its craftsman homes and unique character.

I'd love to see the windows in this space capable of opening fully to better connect the the interior to the the green spaces to the east and the street. Café Flora's atrium dining room is fronted with huge windows that can open the entire space to the outside. It's an incredibly popular seating area for the restaurant, and provides a much needed "al fresco" experience in a city whose weather prohibits outdoor dining for much of the year. This sort of design feature will also strengthen the connection to the green space to the east, and the suggested P-Patch improvements along the proposed public stair, proposed below.

Another nearby example of highly successful corner café space that makes an outdoor connection is the patio space at Liam's in the University Village shopping center. It's connection to the green space around it (and inside with all the planters) is similar to Café Flora's, but is provided in a more modern (architecturally) space.

A list of applicable Design Guidelines:

- CS2-B: site should inform design and connect to the street
- CS2-C: corner sites serve as gateways to the block
- PL1-A: outdoor dining/tables
- PL2-B: enhance transparency: visible-through windows walls reduce the visual impact of the building on pedestrians at Madison St.-level.
- PL3-C: provide room for restaurant dining at retail edges.

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== Madison Courtyard - Option 2 vs Option 3

The proposed building will be replacing the City People's Garden Store, which has been a part of the neighbourhood for nearly 30 years. The indoor and outdoor nursery have served as vibrant public space for the neighbourhood, in addition to providing residents and visitors with all their gardening needs. These spaces are wonderful, organic, colourful, plant-filled havens from the traffic on Madison. The loss of this public space will be felt dearly by all who visit or live in the neighbourhood.

I feel that the Option 2 design concept is more suited for greater

community involvement, and is better for more users of the site. The preferred design (Option 3) does include a generous setback for the retail entry (10'), but its width along the street front is limited compared to Option 2. The increased setbacks in Option 2 along Madison St. provides more opportunity for landscaping or sidewalk vending at the retail entry, and the increased setback east of the retail entry provides an opportunity for outdoor tables, performance space, and/or community gathering. The residential floors are cut away from the retail floor, which provides relief to the street and to the Madison Lofts residents from this building's mass. Option 2 also improves the views for the residents on the west side of the building: the units look out on Madison St, vs the grey apartment building to the west.

Option 2 does have a greater impact on the residents in the valley below, and that must be addressed.

I'd suggest that this may be an appropriate situation for a height departure. While unusual, I think the unique topography of the site and its relation to the valley below may warrant a taller height limit along Madison St. A departure would allow the top floor of units along Dewey Pl. E. to be moved to a 5th story along Madison St (set back from the property line as shown in Option 2's massing study). This would effect:

- * The building's Floor Area Ratio to be retained/met.
- * The stair-step design from Option 3 to be retained, providing relief to the neighbourhood below.
- * The greater Madison St. setbacks from Option 2 to be retained, preserving more open, public space along the pedestrian corridor.

Permitting a height departure may also allow for stepping back the residential floors above the smaller NE retail space, softening the building's impact at the neighbourhood's east entry, and preserving some evening light for the P-Patch below.

A list of applicable Design Guidelines:

- CS2-B: strong street connection
- PL1-A: Adding to public life
- PL3-C: Allow space for sidewalk vending, seating and restaurant dining to occur.

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== The E. Mercer St. Staircase and the P-Patch

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Both the PAR and EDG Packet mention that SDOT may require a lighted staircase in lieu of street improvements in the unopened portion of E. Madison St. Such a staircase would provide additional pedestrian connections to the street above. I question whether those connections are necessary, given the short walk to 29th Ave E. around Café Flora. The staircase's utility would be enhanced if the bus stop moves in front of this building, providing a more direct connection for residents below to the bus stop (see Transportation below).

Despite my reservations about the direct utility of a staircase, a great design opportunity exists with its addition. A distinctive feature of the valley below and east of the site is the P-Patch on E. Mercer St. The stairway would require a great deal of foundation and shoring work up the hillside to Madison St, much of which would be adjacent to the P-Patch. It may be feasible to grade and lightly terrace the area east of the staircase into additional P-Patch space, allowing for more public gardening opportunities, and offsetting the loss of the plant-rich nurseries of the garden store.

A list of applicable Design Guidelines:

- CS1-D: existing plant features
- PL1-A: enhance open space
- PL1-B: pedestrian connections and amenities
- PL2-A: enhance walkability and safety
- DC3-C: support natural areas

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== Transportation

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The Madison Greenways group has been in discussions with the city and SDOT to implement a greenway through the neighbourhood, with the greenway crossing Madison St. at 29th Ave E. As a part of that effort, Madison Greenways, SDOT and Metro are in talks to move the existing eastbound bus stop along Madison east one block to the front of this building site. The bus stop is currently located in front of Café Flora at 29th Ave E, right where the greenway crossing will go. The increased bus trips to visit this building's retail will further warrant this bus stop modification.

I believe that the design should plan for the repositioning of this bus stop, allocating space for future covered bus stop seating, and ensuring that a bus stop can be incorporated without negatively impacting the public space along Madison St. mentioned above (Option 2), or the entry to the retail spaces. The larger Madison St. setbacks of Option 2 allow for more design flexibility in this regard.

Additionally, a huge neighbourhood concern has been the traffic impact to Madison, particularly during rush hour. I believe the split garage entrance helps address this. The residential traffic impact will be concentrated at rush hour as people leave for and return from work. Having those cars enter/exit from Dewey Pl. E. below keeps them off of Madison St. directly outside the building, and prevents left turns from the garage entrance during the morning rush hour as residents head downtown. Cars from this building can make use of multiple exits from the residential neighbourhood, rather than the single point along Madison St.

A list of applicable Design Guidelines:

- PL2-C: overhead protection while waiting for transportation
- PL4-C: plan for future transit
- DC1-B: minimize conflict between cars and pedestrians

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== Overall scale and zoning transitions
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Building scale is difficult to assess. Besides the Madison Lofts building, this is the first _big_ development to occur in this neighbourhood in the decade+ that I've lived in the area. The building's height conforms to the Seattle Municipal Code. I believe the architect has done a good job in Option 3 (their preferred option) of transitioning to the single family zones to the east and south. The slope of this lot in particular makes such transitions difficult. The terraced design and the trees planted in front of and above the garage masks the building from the houses below. I think some of this aspect of the design should be preserved as other changes are made to improve the Madison street front, please see my comments on a possible height departure above.

The preliminary designs show modulation of materials and setbacks along Dewey Pl. E., along with plantings along the sidewalk and on the building itself. All of these design features will help mask the structure, as well as providing privacy to the residents of the building and the valley below.

I also appreciate the setbacks on the upper story along Madison St. in Option 2. For the Madison Lofts residents, the residential floors of this building are at eye level. These setbacks distance the residential floors of this building from those of the Madison Lofts, providing benefit to residents of both buildings. The upper floor setbacks and the modulation of the west end of the building in Option 2 provides some interest to drivers and pedestrians of Madison St., rather than a 3 or 4-story corner on the ends present in Option 3.

A list of applicable Design Guidelines:

- CS2-D1: mass vs existing buildings and zoning
- CS2-D3: zone transitions
- CS2-D4: strive for a successful transition between zones
- DC2-A: reducing mass using secondary architectural elements
- DC2-C: fit with neighbouring buildings