

Herbaugh, Melinda

From: Paddy <padriff@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 25, 2016 10:32 AM
To: PRC
Subject: Project #3020338, 2925 E Madison St.

Dear Ms Hogness,

I am writing to you with regard to the publicly available documents at this time for the second proposal for 2925 E Madison St., project #3020338.

It appears to me that this second proposal, like the first, is not a good faith effort to comply with the City of Seattle's Design Review Guidelines nor does it adequately address the Early Design Guidance and feedback provided to the developer and architect by yourself and the members of the East Design Review Board following the initial Design Review meeting on the 13th of July.

I shall try and make use of the memorandum dated 10/18/2016 as a guide to categories to address as these appear to be especially of concern, but I have so many areas of concern that should be addressed in the proposal that can be sliced many different way, so please forgive me if specific items appear in multiple categories.

I will try and reference the Seattle Design Guidelines dated December 2013 which I believe is the current set of guidelines.

1) General impressions of the EDG#2 packet

The "Design Option – No Departures" does not seem to be a good faith effort to provide the Board with a real or viable alternate to the "Preferred Design". It is inadequately fleshed out and appears for all intents and purposes to be as unappealing as possible. I question whether it fulfills any of the guidance or requirements for a viable design alternate that preserves the exceptional trees / groves. I doubt very much that any tree in the cut out would survive the construction or in the unlikely event that it did remain healthy with the destruction of its roots to make way for the building.

There are glaring errors in the way that Madison Valley is represented that continue to indicate that the applicant has spent little to no time in the community to understand the existing context of the project. For example, we still have the Bailey-Boushay House at the heart of Madison Valley labelled as "an office building". The selection of buildings chosen to represent the community are still cherry-picked from the larger commercial and residential buildings rather than truly representing the commercial and residential context.

2) Height, Bulk, Scale, Response to Context and Topography

CS1.C both 1 and 2

The proposed design continues to go beyond ignoring both topography and elevation changes. It obliterates them.

CS2 – Urban Pattern and Form

The sheer scale of the project continues to dwarf everything around it. No attempt has been made to harmonize the footprint of the building with the pattern of buildings surrounding it either within the commercial or the residential zoning. Breaking it up into multiple smaller buildings would address this.

CS2.D3 and 4 – Zone Transitions. In particular: "For projects located at the edge of different zones, provide an appropriate transition or complement to the adjacent zone(s). Projects should create a step in perceived height, bulk and scale between the anticipated development potential of the adjacent zone and the proposed development"

The proposed building stands on the transition between commercial and residential, a fact that the developer and architect are well aware of. Yet in the proposal on page 15 we see that the façade of the building facing the single-family residence is marked as 46' 6". This is practically the full allowed height of the building on E Madison (47').

It gets worse as you look at the other section on page 21: a retaining wall of indeterminate height (but it appears taller than the human figure adjacent), then the 46' 6" vertical wall, then a 5' setback, then another almost 20' vertical wall.

This is not a step in perceived height, nor is it a transition of any type.

CS2.D5 - Respect for Adjacent Sites: Respect adjacent properties with design and site planning to minimize disrupting the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings

The combination of the height, bulk and scale of this building with its apartments staring down into the back yards of the neighboring single-family residences along with the traffic that will be caused by the proposed garage entrance on a non-conforming street will severely stifle and restrict the privacy and outdoor activities of the neighbors.

CS3 – Architectural Context and Character

In no way does the proposal “Emphasize positive neighborhood attributes” – it simply overwhelms the neighborhood.

Nor does it in any shape or form have anything that relates to “Local History and Culture” – this proposal is more appropriate for an area that already has city block sized buildings, and where on earth is there anything in this building that even nods to local history? Has the architect or developer spent any time investigating the neighborhood and its history – I would suggest this is doubtful.

DC1.B1 - Choose locations for vehicular access, service uses, and delivery areas that minimize conflict between vehicles and non-motorists wherever possible

The additional traffic caused by locating a garage entrance on Dewey will significantly decrease the usability and safety of the currently quiet residential streets which are used by children to play and the neighborhood to walk up the existing staircase at the end of 30th Ave E to connect to both the p-patch and the arboretum.

DC1.C1 Below-Grade Parking: Locate parking below grade wherever possible. Where a surface parking lot is the only alternative, locate the parking in rear or side yards, or on lower or less visible portions of the site

and

DC2.B1 and B2 – Façade Composition and Blank Walls

and

DC2.D1 Human Scale: Incorporate architectural features, elements, and details that are of human scale into the building facades, entries, retaining walls, courtyards, and exterior spaces in a manner that is consistent with the overall architectural concept. Pay special attention to the first three floors of the building in order to maximize opportunities to engage the pedestrian and enable an active and vibrant street front.

The proposal still calls for 2 stories of exposed above ground concrete faced parking on Dewey with another story of retail on top.

The proposed “green wall” of a metal lattice work over which vines are supposed to climb is little more than lipstick on a pig – it is still going to be 2 stories of a blank concrete wall of an exposed parking garage fronting directly onto single-family residences. This supposed “softening” of the blank concrete wall may be an appropriate step on a shopping mall parking garage, but it remains unsuitable for a single-family residential context.

DC4.C2 - Avoiding Glare: Design project lighting based upon the uses on and off site, taking care to provide illumination to serve building needs while avoiding off-site night glare and light pollution

At the MVCC/LURC presentation the architect indicated that he wanted this to be a lights-on building and certainly the presence of a destination supermarket like PCC that will be open at least until midnight night glare and light pollution will be a significant problem with the building perched atop the slope above single-family residences – something that remains unaddressed in this packet #2.

3) Height Calculation

I must first point out that the architect made representation to the community that their method of height calculation was prescribed by the city (this was at a MVCC \ LURC meeting where the Architect presented their vision to the community).

We have learned from Peter Steinbreuck at the first EDG meeting and subsequently from your memo that this is an allowed alternate calculation, but not one that is prescribed by the city.

It does however appear to be the most generous to the architect as far as allowing a much larger building envelope than would be reasonably expected given the 20' to 30' steep slope on the site. I for one would be most interested in what the height calculations would be for all the other alternates to compare the favorability to the result the architect has gained from using this methodology.

CS2 has an informational block that states “Under the City’s SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act) policy, multi-family and/or commercial projects with substantial height, bulk, and scale impacts will be analyzed through the design review process. Siting and design based on the principles of these guidelines will help to mitigate some of those impacts, while others may require a reduction in the height, bulk, and scale of the project. Consult SMC 25.05.675 for additional information”

In addition, you state in your memo dated 10/18/16

“For example, the DRB could state that while the project appears to meet the code compliant height calculation, it is too tall in light of the Design Guidelines.”

It would seem to me that this informational bulletin and your comment are extremely relevant to this unique site where an egregious use of an allowed height calculation and irresponsible design has proposed a behemoth of a building that will overshadow the Single-Family residential zone on the valley floor below.

4) Northeast Corner

According to page 21 of the EDG#2 packet, this remains in effect a 66' vertical wall perched atop a retaining wall of indeterminate height (one that appears to be taller than an average human). This is on the transition from a 40' commercial zone to a Single-Family residential zone.

The initial 2 stories of this wall will be an exposed parking garage.

Does anything more really need to be said?

The architect has failed to provide any solution to the problems presented by this corner of the building which will loom large over the p-patch and residences on the valley floor.

5) Exceptional Trees / Grove and Landscape Concept

The proposal’s No Departures option fails in any way to provide a viable design that would retain any of the trees on the slope:

DC3.C3 Support Natural Areas: Create an open space design that retains and enhances on-site natural areas and connects to natural areas that may exist off-site and may provide habitat for wildlife

Nor does the proposal contain anything like enough viable space to replace the removed trees or existing eco-system

M. S. Patterson, MSES/MPA states in his letter: “The proposed development deprives the city and neighborhood of significant mature tree canopy does not adequately compensate for the permanent loss of ecological services and aesthetic benefits that exist today on the site. Little has been to modify the design to protect the existing tree canopy or provide for its replacement.”

M. S. Patterson, MSES/MPA also states: “The landscape zone along Dewey should be increased to at least 20 ft. in width, and should be continuous along the full length of the property to ensure healthy, layered tree growth, fuller continuous canopy development, and adequate landscaping buffer.”

Additionally the landscape concept as presented does little to nothing to mitigate the vertical concrete façade of 2 stories of exposed parking garage topped by a story of retail space.

6) Miscellaneous points

The board asked the architect and developer to work with the community post EDG1. To my knowledge this has not happened. They did not reach out to Save Madison Valley, and the current president of Madison Valley Community Council has indicated that she has no knowledge of them reaching out to the community council. While there was initially a joint president of MVCC that person resigned and this information was conveyed to the community via well-known social media outlets at least one of which appears to be monitored by persons associated with the development project.

To be honest I do not find this surprising given the response I got from the architect at the MVCC / LURC meeting who called me, and forgive the language but this is a direct quote to the best of my recollection: “Nothing but a fucking NIMBY”. That phrase stuck in my head when it was hurled at me.

In your memo dated 10/18/16 you also highlight that

“The Board supported the inclusion of a community space along the street as shown in Option 2”. What we get on pages 16 and 17 of the proposal appears to indicate that the entrance way of the destination supermarket is to be considered the “Gathering” space. I do not find this to be adequate to address this concern.

Overall the experience on Dewey is still of great concern. We have a very stark pedestrian experience with concrete retaining walls immediately adjacent to the sidewalk. We have practically nothing in the way of meaningful transition from the single-family residences to a building which utilized almost the full height of the commercial zone. The building façade on Dewey and E Republican is still effectively a blank concrete wall. We still have not seen anything to address the light, noise and air pollution that will be created by this building and will be washing out onto the residences across the valley floor.

It comes down to the fact that the building, and in particular the parking garage are simply far too large for this site and neighborhood context. Given that the BRT is coming to this area the parking provided could be cut by more than one half and still be in excess of what the city would require.

This second proposal has ignored the input of many in the community, the feedback from the sitting members of the East Design Review Board and yourself as the representative of the city. It is appalling that the architect and developer treat the rest of the participants in this process with such disregard.

My thanks go to yourself and all the members of the East Design Review Board for your earnest efforts and commitment to the Design Review process and in listening to the input of the community at large and helping to ensure that any proposal brought before you respects Seattle’s ordinances, design guidelines and process.

Yours sincerely

Paddy McDonald