



# City of Portland Design Commission

## Design Advice Request

### DISCUSSION MEMO

**Date:** February 14, 2019  
**To:** Portland Design Commission  
**From:** Grace Jeffreys, Design and Historic Resource Review  
503-823-7840 | [grace.jeffreys@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:grace.jeffreys@portlandoregon.gov)  
**Re:** EA 19-104982 DA –2135 NW 29<sup>th</sup>, Modera Nicolai  
Design Advice Request Memo – February 21, 2019

Attached is a drawing set for the Design Advice Request meeting scheduled on February 21, 2019. Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

#### I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

DAR for a proposed 6-story apartment building with approximately 200 dwelling units and below-grade parking.

#### II. DEVELOPMENT TEAM BIO

<b>Architect</b>	Kurt Schultz   SERA Design
<b>Owner</b>	Sam Rodriguez   Mill Creek Residential
<b>Project Valuation</b>	\$ 40,000,000

#### III. FUTURE APPROVAL CRITERIA: Community Design Guidelines (see attached matrix).

#### IV. STAFF ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDED DAR DISCUSSION TOPICS: Staff advise you consider the following among your discussion items on February 21, 2019:

##### CONTEXT

**1. Policy.** The following summarizes key policy context as it applies to the subject site.

- a. **Northwest District Plan** (NWDP) adopted in 2003. The Northwest District Plan provides policy direction for a large area in northwest Portland. This site fronts NW Nicolai, which defines the northern border at the western edge of this District Plan.

The NWDP's Urban Design Concept identifies the intersection at NW Nicolai/ NW Vaughn/ NW 29<sup>th</sup> as a Neighborhood Gateway, which is an “*entrance to neighborhoods or other areas within a plan area*”. It further defines Gateways as “*high-visibility entrance points between distinct areas that serve as key passages and connections between these areas. Together with green streets, improvements to gateways are intended to **enhance linkages with surrounding areas and destinations***”.

- b. **Plan Districts.** Plan districts are identified areas with additional zoning requirements. This site sits outside of any Plan District; however, it sits right in the middle between three Plan Districts:
- The Northwest Plan District, which is a smaller subset of the Northwest District Plan described above, lies to the southeast of the site. The Northwest Plan District provides for an urban level of mixed-use development including commercial, office, housing, and employment. Objectives of the plan district include strengthening the area's role as a commercial and residential center and are intended to "***promote housing and mixed-use development and enhance the pedestrian experience***".
  - The Guilds Lake Plan District, to the north of the site across Nicolai, is intended to foster "***the preservation and growth of this premier industrial area adjacent to Portland's central city***" and "***includes provisions to ensure a more pedestrian- and transit-oriented streetscape along NW Vaughn Street and an improved interface with the mixed-use neighborhood to the south***".
  - The Northwest Hills Plan District, to the west of the site across NW 30<sup>th</sup>, is intended to protect "***sites with sensitive and highly valued resources and functional values***", including "***the Balch Creek Watershed and the Forest Park subdistrict***".
- c. **Comprehensive Plan Zoning Designations.** The site also sits at a junction of multiple zoning designations. The site and areas to the east of it are generally designated Employment, to the north are designated Industrial Sanctuary, to the south are designated Multi-Dwelling, and to the west are designated Single-Dwelling and Open Space.
- The site itself is zoned EXd, Central Commercial/ Mixed Use. It was previously zoned General Employment (EG1), which required a Conditional Use review for Household Living Use; however, the zoning recently changed to Central Employment (EX), and Household Living is now an allowed use. It is important to note that under the Employment Zones "***Residential uses are allowed but are not intended to predominate or set development standards for other uses in the area***".
- d. **Transportation.**
- **Streets.** Although the site is not located in a Pedestrian District, there is one transit street frontage, along NW Nicolai:
    - NW Nicolai to the north is classified as a Civic Corridor, Transit Access Street, Neighborhood Collector Traffic Street, City Walkway and a City Bikeway.
    - NW 29<sup>th</sup> to the east is classified as a City Bikeway and a Local Service Street for all other modes. South of the site is closed to through vehicular traffic at the intersection with NW Wilson.
    - The alley to the south may be a public right-of-way once the Property Line Adjustment process for this site is completed (see further information under Site, below).
  - **Streetcar.** Expansion of the Northwest Portland Street is proposed to extend to this area, along NW Wilson to NW 27<sup>th</sup>. This would bring it to within 2 blocks of this site.
- e. **Development Standards** (Title 33). Though early in the design process, the proposal appears compliant with most of zoning code standards and no modifications or adjustments have been identified yet. However, it may not meet:
- **Ground Floor Windows** (33.140.230) along the non-residential uses facing NW 29<sup>th</sup> and NW Nicolai.

- **Site.** The Site is not yet legally defined but is currently under review for Lot Confirmations and Property Line Adjustments (PR 18-283536 and PR 18-283540). These will need to be completed prior to Design Review approval. The site is approximately 200' x 200', about the size of a typical Portland block, and there are two street frontages, NW Nicolai and NW 29<sup>th</sup>. If the alley becomes a public right-of-way, standards related to "streets" will apply to this frontage; however, none appear to impact this current design.
- 2. **Natural.** The site has a sloped topography with an increase in grade of approximately 7' from Nicolai at the north to the alley at the south.
- 3. **Built.** The immediate area is a mix of one- to -two story industrial buildings to the north across Nicolai, with some larger commercial buildings to the east, including the nine- to ten-story Montgomery Park building two blocks east, and lowered-scaled single family residential buildings to the south and west.

**Consider the following CONTEXT discussion topics** (*Guidelines P1, P3, D7*)

- **Massing** – The site is approximately 200' x 200', about the size of a typical Portland block, with two street frontages, NW Nicolai and NW 29<sup>th</sup>, as well as the alley frontage to the south. Generally, the 6-story massing wraps around a small raised central courtyard. It is then conceptually split into two elements, a "front of house" wing with a dynamic corner treatment facing NW 29<sup>th</sup>, and a simpler "C" shaped warehouse wing to the west, in response to a typical industrial building typology. These two "masses" are treated differently with window articulation and materials, and they are separated by vertical strips of residential balconies.

The entire building sits on a board formed concrete plinth created by the lower parking level. Staff is concerned that this solid raised plinth reduces the opportunity for active ground level uses and meaningful pedestrian connections. This is particularly impactful at the important corner of Nicolai and 29<sup>th</sup>, as well as the length of Nicolai where the main building level is about 7' above the sidewalk level.

**PUBLIC REALM**

1. **Site organization.** Resident amenity spaces have been consolidated at the corner of NW Nicolai and along NW 29<sup>th</sup>. The fitness room is at the corner, with a terrace overlooking the intersection, and the leasing office and lobby face NW 29<sup>th</sup>, along with the parking entrance. Residential units front the remainder of the Nicolai as well as the alley. Main level structured parking is wrapped on three sides with residential and amenity uses, and the fourth side fronts the side property line to the west.
2. **Circulation System.** Pedestrian access to this building, which is approximately the size of a city block, occurs in only one location, at the south end of NW 29<sup>th</sup> at the lobby. There is also an egress exit at the west end of Nicolai.

**Consider the following PUBLIC REALM discussion topics** (*Guidelines E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5*)

**NW Nicolai and NW 29<sup>th</sup>** - Lowering active uses to the sidewalk level would create more engagement with the sidewalk, and more opportunities for direct pedestrian entries at the corner and along Nicolai. Additionally, this ground level treatment offers little in pedestrian protection. As noted above, this intersection is identified as a Neighborhood Gateway in the NWDP, and, as such, should "*enhance linkages with surrounding areas and destinations*". And, although this area is currently very transitional, given the strategic

- **The alley** – Residential units along the south property line adjacent to the alley have doors opening onto small front courtyards. The elevations indicate the doors are highly glazed and, with canopies over them, appear to create front porches for these units. Commissioner feedback on the importance of the relationship of these units to the alley is encouraged.

1. **Exterior materials.** The primary building materials under consideration are two types (and colors) of metal siding: a Corten finish is proposed at the “office” mass and a chevron-shaped panel at the “warehouse” mass. Metal panel is a material commonly used in the surrounding industrial area to the north. Metal siding, when of a substantial thickness and when care is taken at material edges/changes, can be a quality material. The base of the building is proposed to be board-formed concrete, a quality material when care is taken at time of construction.
2. **Coherency.** The massing, articulation and materials express the big idea of the “office” wing and the “warehouse” wing.

- **Metal siding** - Discussion of the Corten finish for the metal siding for the “office” massing is encouraged. In the past, the Commission has had concerns about Corten causing staining.

**Enclosures:** 11x17 Drawing set  
Design Guidelines Cheat Sheet



CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON - BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES  
1900 SW Fourth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97201, [www.portlandoregon.gov/bds](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds)



## COMMUNITY DESIGN GUIDELINES (1998)

PROJECT NAME: Modera Nicolai

CASE NUMBER: EA 19-104982 DA

DATE: 2/14/19

PROJECT ARCHITECT: Kurt Schultz, SERA

PROJECT VALUE \$ 40M

CONTEXT	STAFF		COMMISSION	
	+ / -	Comments	+ / -	Comments
P1: Enhance sense of place & identity by incorporating features that respond to area's desired characteristics and traditions	+/-	Response to industrial building typology clear. Better enhancement of pedestrian experience needed.		
P2: Enhance identity of historic and conservation districts, using features that reinforce area's significance		NA		
P3: Develop/strengthen transitional role of gateways adopted in community plan	+/-	Dynamic treatment of massing responds to important corner. Better enhancement of pedestrian experience needed.		
D7: Incorporate elements of nearby quality buildings such as building details	+/-	Metal cladding common in area. Details needed for DR to ensure quality.		
PUBLIC REALM	STAFF		COMMISSION	
	+ / -	Comments	+ / -	Comments
E1: Create a safe and connected sidewalk network for pedestrians	-	Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		
E2: Provide comfortable places along circulation routes to stop, meet and rest	-	Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		

E3: Create a sense of enclosure through design features, gathering places and differentiated facades	-	Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		
E4: Create active intersections through careful scale and location of building entrances	-	Dynamic massing, balconies and terrace respond to corner above grade. Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		
E5: Design to protect pedestrians from sun, shadow, glare, reflection, wind and rain	-	Ground level/plinth needs further consideration.		
D1: Create outdoor areas when possible. Design these areas to be accessible and connected to pedestrian	+/-	Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		
D2: Make main entrances to buildings prominent and transit-oriented	+/-	Street level/plinth needs further consideration.		
D3: Enhance building design through placement of landscape features	+/-	Setbacks and landscaping at residential can create transitions from public to private, and porches at alley are strong response. Street level needs further consideration.		
D4: Integrate parking to minimize negative impacts for pedestrians	-	Lower level parking plinth creates blank walls on frontages. Street level needs further attention.		
D5: Reduce crime through placement of windows and active ground level use	+/-	Units above grade provide eyes on the street. However, street level needs further consideration.		
QUALITY & PERMANENCE	STAFF		COMMISSION	
	+ / -	Comments	+ / -	Comments
D6: Respect building character when making exterior modifications		NA		
D8: All parts of a building should be interesting and long lasting, forming a cohesive composition	+/-	Coherent design and functional massing changes with balconies. However, street level needs further attention.		