



City of Portland, Oregon
Bureau of Development Services
Land Use Services

FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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MEMORANDUM

Date: August 8, 2014
To: SOLTERRA SYSTEMS *ANDREA WALLACE*
From: Hillary Adam, Development Review
Hillary.Adam@portlandoregon.gov
Re: 14-161053 DA – The Woods
Design Advice Request Summary Memo July 17, 2014

Thank you for taking advantage of the opportunity to hold a Design Advice Request regarding your project. I hope you find it informative and valuable as you continue with your project development. Attached is a summary of the comments provided by the Design Commission at the July 17, 2014 Design Advice Request. This summary was generated from notes taken at the public meeting and a subsequent review of the public meeting recordings. To review those recordings, please visit:

http://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/webdrawer.dll/webdrawer/search/rec&sm_class=uri_7547&sortd1=rs_datecreated&count&rows=50

These Design Commission comments are intended to guide you in further design exploration of your project. These comments may also inform City staff when giving guidance over the course of future related land use reviews. It should be understood that these comments address the project as presented on July 17, 2014. As the project design evolves, the comments, too, may evolve or may no longer be pertinent.

Design Advice Requests are not intended to substitute for other Code-required land use or legislative procedures. Please keep in mind that the formal Type III land use review process [which includes a pre-application, a land use review application, public notification, a Staff Report and a public hearing] must be followed once the Design Advice Request meetings are complete, if formal approval for specific elements of your project is desired.

Please continue to coordinate with me as you prepare your formal land use application, or if you desire another Design Advice Request meeting with the Commission.

Encl:
Summary Memo

Cc: Design Commission
Respondents

This memo summarizes **Design Commission** design direction provided on July 17, 2014.

Commissioners in attendance on July 17, 2014: Guinevere Millius, David Wark, Tad Savinar, Jeff Simpson, Jane Hansen.

Design Concept

- The Commission noted that while the green wall is a really interesting concept, the green wall, as opposed to the human experience, seemed to be driving the project.
- One commissioner noted concerns that the building design was focused on the presentation and protection of the green technologies, rather than designed as a place where people might live, adding that staff and the commission looks at buildings through a lens focused on the human experience. She clarified that the purpose of design review is to carefully consider how the building interacts with the public realm – how a building meets the ground floor, how it treats the ground floor and how people interact with it in the city, adding that it is also within our purview to protect the public realm by advocating for really humane living spaces, living spaces that read as humane from the outside, and that protect the value of the properties around them.
- Generally, the commission was supportive of the concept and the intended goals of the project but had significant concerns primarily with how humans would experience the building, noting several areas of concerns, including the narrowness of the interior courtyard and walkways, access to light, and the successful interpretation of architecture inspired by nature. A re-thinking of what is driving the project was suggested. The Commission recognized the importance of the green wall to the design team, but stated that bigger urban design elements and livability issues relative to occupants and how it all works should drive the project.

Interior Courtyard Space

- The Commission noted that everything seemed to be approached with a mindset of providing the minimum area required, such as the 4' wide corridors, courtyards, and setbacks, resulting in an overwhelming minimal and cramped feeling. They noted it seemed to be a result of trying to put too much on the site and in the program.
- The commission noted that the 4' wide corridors have to be wider, as it just isn't big enough to accommodate people moving bikes and furniture around and negotiating corners, adding that the building would be damaged.
- The Commission noted that with the cramped feeling of the courtyards and corridors, there needs to be a release, an "aha" moment, at some point, where you can experience something that isn't tall and compact.
- The Commission noted that the project encompassed a lot of great ideas but stated that the desire to include everything has resulted in a quantity of less than successful spaces, while a different approach that focused on quality spaces without trying to provide every amenity would result in a more successful and humane building. The Commission suggested that the design team approach the project as designing the best possible spaces rather an abundance of amenities. They also suggested that the value of each space be reconsidered as some amenities, such as a grill and a sink may have more value than an entire extra kitchen amenity, or additional outdoor space versus storage space.
- The Commission noted that each of the amenity spaces, interior and exterior, seemed to be too small to meet the needs of the building and feel comfortable to the users, as most appeared only large enough to accommodate a couple of people, and therefore do not seem inviting but rather constrained. They also noted that their proximity to the corridors and units results in a lack of privacy that doesn't allow the users to really relax or feel like they are in a restful place.
- The commission liked the organization of the courtyard and amenity spaces on different levels, rather than just proposing one large space, but stated significant concerns regarding the quality of light, the narrowness and the constricted nature of the program.
- One commissioner questioned the clarity of the metaphor and wondered if it would really work, asking if the building can be a metaphor for both woods and a narrow gorge with 50 other residents. She wondered if the project would be more successful if the green wall courtyard concept was north-facing and eroded away in that direction where there could be more breathing room, as the existing configuration feels really closed off.

- One commissioner noted that the intent is to reconnect people to nature, but the cramped corridor and narrow windows seem to contradict that intent. He added that the horizontal windows are aesthetically striking, but in terms of providing people a home and connecting them to light, a basic ingredient of nature, they seem contradictory.
- Several commissioners noted that Oneonta Gorge has a different orientation than the proposed building, adding that this orientation will result in very little light reaching the interior courtyard.
- One commissioner noted that the orientation of the sun is going to be different for each façade and perhaps the amount of windows on each façade should respond to that reality, to better integrate the concept of design inspired by nature.
- The Commission suggested a sun/shade study would be critical to really understand how the courtyard space will be throughout the year. They also noted that somebody else's livelihood relies on the access of the sun on the property to the north so they also need to know how the building will affect their access to the sun.
- The Commission noted that the interior courtyard will be wet and dark for most of the year, with water tracked down the corridors, the slickness will need to be mitigated.
- One commissioner suggested that the design team should draw a roof plan and look at what's covered and what isn't, noting that rain could be an interesting and dynamic element in the space, it's how you're dealing with it and what surfaces it is hitting. She suggested that you can funnel it and manage it in a way that makes the space a great place to be even on wet days. She suggested that maybe some of the courtyards are covered in order to increase their use.
- The Commission suggested that changing the unit mix and count may help alleviate some of the pressure of the tightness of all of the spaces and allow you to design more useful and valuable amenity spaces that are more in keeping with your design goals and free you to create a really innovative project.
- One commissioner noted that, given the program and the goals that you have, the outdoor spaces should be really great, not just merely adequate.

Ground Floor

- One commissioner noted that the ground floor does not feel well put together, like there's a lot of stuff just jammed in, such as the tight turn to the loading space and parking spaces at the south end along the wall that do not seem easily accessible, adding that the garage translating to a dead space between the lobby and the commercial space. She suggested there needs to be more study on how all of that goes together.
- The Commission appreciated the setback of the storefront, noting that it is a gracious move, and suggested applying this gracious treatment to the other parts of the building.
- The main entrance needs to be more prominent and wider. It was suggested that a Modification on the size of the loading space may be possible if it meant that the lobby and main entrance is more generous. One commissioner noted that he was not concerned with the location of the lobby entrance, while another commissioner noted that it was concerning to have a garage entrance in the middle of the building with the pedestrian areas separated by the garage.
- One commissioner noted that the north wall of the garage must be closed and not open to the adjacent property.
- One commissioner noted that devoting a significant amount of area to dogs is a lost opportunity and suggested that perhaps that area could accommodate some of your desired program with additional building footprint.

Form & Material Quality

- One commissioner noted that architecture as metaphor can be a slippery slope, as it can be awe-inspiring or fall flat. He noted that the undulations, the metal, wood, the horizontal windows, and the composition as a whole, don't sing yet. He wondered if you could be more literal and express wood in its truest form as a structural element, noting that the closest thing to a tree is a timber and the honesty of that has more authenticity than trying to do something that harkens to an idea but is separated from it.
- One commissioner noted that with the southern exposure, you could incorporate solar technology, then with the triad of green roofs, green walls, and solar, you could be more complete in who you are, as a company, and integrate these concepts in a more direct way, rather than playing with metaphors and futzing with the curvy walls.

- One commissioner noted that everything is squeezed down and then the oriels are asking for more over the property line, suggesting there needs to be more of a balance of give and take with regard to program, enclosed spaces and open spaces.
- The Commission noted that the problem isn't the curves themselves, it's the things that they're forcing you to do, like the small windows, noting that a rectilinear building would allow for larger window openings, and that even if the windows feel generous from the inside, they feel small when viewed from the outside. They noted that the curves may become more trouble than they are worth and that a rectilinear building would give you more freedom as you would not be limited by the horizontal windows which are necessary with the bowed walls.
- One commissioner noted that the shapes seem to be arbitrary, acknowledging that they are coming from an organic inspiration, but lack the magic of arbitrary nature. He wondered if nature could be evoked in honest materiality or through texture, like bark, adding that there may be solutions to evoke an organic experience but with a more rectilinear building.
- The Commission noted that in addition to how the project fits into the neighborhood and how it fits on the site, and how it treats its neighbors, and whether the ground floor is really feasible as designed, they are also concerned about the detailing and how the metal is going to meet the wood and the kind of gymnastics you're going to have to go through to do that well so that it is smooth.
- The Commission noted that there will be more scrutiny in the design review with a non-standard application of materials, such as with the curvilinear forms. They noted that you will need to demonstrate how the materials and forms come together, adding that bend metal and wood into curves in a way that looks good is expensive. They added that you must consider how the materials are fastened and design it in such a way to prevent oil canning stating they have significant concerns about whether or not it can be assured to be smooth and not crinkly like wrapping paper.
- One commissioner noted that the "wood" seemed to be the filler in a design primarily composed of metal and it seemed it should be the other way around to be more in line with the concept.

West Wall

- The Commission offered different suggestions for the west wall, recognizing that this façade would not be exposed for long. Some commissioners suggested that columnar trees could be planted in the narrow setback, but they would be unnecessary once a building went in on the adjacent property. Another commissioner suggested pulling the façade back to the property line to eliminate the narrow setback. The Commission noted that if you pull the building away from the property line, you are creating a light well, therefore there should be windows on that façade. With one commissioner suggesting they be located at the corners and a simplification and resolution of the west façade including wrapping the base material around that side.

Summary

The Commission was supportive of the design team's intent to reconnect residents with nature, but felt that the aggressive program of the project resulted in contradictions with this concept. It was strongly expressed that the width of the courtyard and corridors were a few feet too narrow to be successful and inviting. It was suggested that the design team take a different approach to the project and consider how humans will use the spaces and what kinds of spaces with regard to size, program, and treatment are necessary to create truly meaningful and valuable amenities. The Commission noted that a reduction of units and program items may be necessary in order to develop a truly innovative and successful building in which humans will reside. In addition to integrating the building into the neighborhood with its design and program, the Commission also noted that high quality detailing of the building elements and how all of those pieces and forms come together will be essential to developing a successful project.

Public Comments

- Amanda Morse, owner of Blue House Greenhouse Farm, concerned about shadow and farming and growing food relies heavily on the sun. Land is leased from long-time residents. Been there 4 years. Private business but also a community asset, providing green space and food for the neighborhood. I understand that the neighborhood is rapidly growing, but also believe in the value of green spaces and places you can see food growing.

But a 6-story building for most of the year would create a significant amount of shade on the garden. Existing 1-story building creates significant shade for half the year.

- Jennifer Morse, neighbor and farm customer, this proposed development, while espousing admiral concepts, there is a serious irony that the building would compromise an existing effort to promote urban sustainability through an agro/eco-system. The shade of this building would basically kill this farm. A green building and small urban agriculture would be in conflict. A small business, like Blue house Greenhouse Farm should be considered.
- Jeff Ramsay, neighbor, the heights of the buildings going in on Williams are out of scale with the neighborhood, nor in the character of the neighborhood. In this case, the building heights negatively impact a local business, which hasn't happened before. So its height should be considered in that regard.

Exhibit List

- A. Applicant's Submittals
 - 1. Original drawing set
- B. Zoning Map
- C. Drawings
 - 1. Cover Sheet
 - 2. Concept
 - 3. Courtyard
 - 4. Courtyard Axon Diagram
 - 5. Courtyard Plan Diagram
 - 6. Site Overview
 - 7. Vicinity Map
 - 8. Street View Context
 - 9. Program Breakdown
 - 10. Ground Level Plan
 - 11. Level 2 Plan
 - 12. Level 3 Plan
 - 13. Level 4 Plan
 - 14. Level 5 Plan
 - 15. Level 6 Plan
 - 16. Architectural Materials
 - 17. South Elevation
 - 18. East Elevation
 - 19. West Elevation
 - 20. North Elevation
 - 21. Architectural Material Palette
 - 22. Encroachment Diagram
 - 23. Early Assistance Comments and Changes
- D. Notification
 - 1. Posting instructions sent to applicant
 - 2. Posting notice as sent to applicant
 - 2. Applicant's statement certifying posting
 - 3. General information on DAR process included with e-mailed posting/notice
- E. Service Bureau Comments
 - 1. Bureau of Environmental Services
- F. Public Testimony
- G. Other
 - 1. Application form
 - 2. Staff Memo to the Design Commission, dated June 26, 2014
 - 3. Staff Presentation to the Design Commission, July 17, 2014
 - 4. Summary of DAR comments, dated August 8, 2014