



City of Portland Historic Landmarks Commission

Design Advice Request

SUMMARY MEMO

Date: April 11, 2019
To: Gavin Smith, Perkins + Will
From: Hillary Adam, BDS Land Use Services
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Re: EA 18-272873 DAR – New Office Building at the Weatherly Site
Design Advice Request Commission Summary Memo – February 11, 2019

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. Following, is a summary of the comments provided by the Design Commission at the February 11, 2019 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: <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/Record/12664306/>.

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 February 11, 2019. 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 land use review application, public notification and a Final Decision] 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 Type III Land Use Review Application or an additional Design Advice Request.

Encl:
Summary Memo

Cc: Design Commission
Respondents

Executive Summary. The Commission thanked the applicant for coming to engage with the Commission early in the process. The Commission stated that neither scheme responds adequately to the Weatherly Building, but rather overwhelm the historic building. It was noted that the guidelines do not appear to have been considered in the proposal, particularly with regard to compatibility of adjacent historic buildings. The Commission was less concerned about the proposed height of the building than with the massing and material expression of the building but noted the massing could be sculpted so that the height could be reduced slightly to be more deferential to the Weatherly.

Commissioners Present. Foty, Fuenmayor, Smith, Roman.
Chung – absent. Minor, Mahoney – recused.

Summary of Comments. Following is a general summary of Commission comments organized by macro- mid- and micro-level issues.

Macro Level Issues

1. Siting and Building Orientation.

- Neither option defers to the Weatherly and neither hits the mark. Neither scheme connects with the Weatherly with regard to scale, datums, nor with the surrounding buildings.
- Support for pulling the building away from the south side of the Weatherly to allow visual access to the westernmost portion of the Weatherly which helps the Weatherly to still read as a solitary tower. When driving north on Grand, the westernmost portion of the south façade has an articulated 3-window expression, so it would be nice to be able to continue to see that original expression without setting the new building back from the street lot line which would break the street level pattern.
- There is no precedent for a pedestrian alley in the district; however, the bridgehead location is unique and could support additional connectivity through the site if properly designed for pedestrian use. However, the Commission had concerns about the character of the alley, noting no supportive uses are proposed on 6th Avenue to ensure this is a desirable place to be.
- The commission was not supportive of setback from streets, particularly at the street level.

2. Height, Scale, Form, and Proportion.

- Most of the images presented show the proposed building in relative isolation, but we need to understand the proposal in its greater context (surrounding context), not just in relation to the Weatherly and immediately adjacent buildings.
- The Weatherly is the largest building in the district and is unique in that way. The proposal needs to respond to the Weatherly much better than it is currently; the current proposal overwhelms the Weatherly. The Commission agreed with staff's comments that the new building has to be more deferential to the Weatherly because it is one of the more important buildings in the district.
- It has the advantage of being at the bridgehead and near the Weatherly, which has this weight that isn't found elsewhere in the district, so this site could support a taller building or counter-point tower. Other sites in the district would likely not support a building of this scale.

- Pulling a base out toward Grand is interesting because of the history of the Oriental Theater on this site and the Weatherly's response to that building up to its fourth floor. A four or five story mass pulled out to Grand would be more appropriate than a two-story volume; a tower could be set back from that volume and rise to a lower height than proposed to defer to the Weatherly. Scheme B feels too big brotherly to the Weatherly as proposed.
- Guidelines require that the siting and orientation be visually compatible with adjacent buildings and the district's architectural character; currently, there is very little relationship between the building and the existing. The guidelines also state that buildings should be built to the street and front on Grand Avenue and setbacks are discouraged as they break the traditional development pattern of the district.
- One commissioner noted that if the building is going to be this tall, it can't be this tall all the way out to Grand; some setback above 4 or 5 floors should be incorporated to reveal the south side of the Weatherly.

3. Architectural Character.

- The Commission agreed with staff and are not convinced that a glass box is appropriate for this site in a historic district.
- The Commission appreciated the use of CLT and moves toward sustainability but noted the use of CLT and the visibility of it is not a sufficient means of meeting the guidelines with regard to interpreting historic buildings in a modern way. Appreciate modern interpretations if there is a lot of thought that goes into the references to the historic buildings. This will be the first building that people see and it does not reflect the character of the historic district. If this is a modern interpretation, diagrams should be provided showing how the proportions are derived from the adjacent historic buildings.
- Sheet 9 of the drawings set is representative of what's in the district while Sheet 11 is representative of buildings outside the district, not approved by this Commission. A more modern building could be appropriate if it incorporates more of the DNA (as represented on sheet 9). The proposal should feel more a part of the district than like those outside of the district.
- Sheet 9 references all ornate, detailed classical buildings and some modular more utilitarian buildings like the Cereal Mill. The proposal does not appear to have any relationship to the Weatherly building with regard to its specific character or modularity. The guidelines speak to referencing cornice and roof lines of adjacent historic buildings so that should be considered in the design to make it more compatible.
- Most important part of compatibility is the pedestrian realm. Look at the streetscape up and down the length of Grand Avenue as a guide for how the ground level should interact with the sidewalk; the proposed is atypical of the district. A glass curtain wall does not meet the guidelines.

4. Parking and Loading Location and Access.

- Even though the Green Loop will be on 6th, 6th is not auto-prohibited and may be the best opportunity for accessing parking.
- Cars stopping and turning into a driveway from Grand does not make sense with how much traffic is on Grand, as well as the streetcar.
- Getting trucks off-street in a forward motion is a positive direction.

Mid-Level Issues

1. Building Entrance.

- Guidelines say the entrance should be centered on Grand. If it's located at the northeast corner, it centers it on the block and meets the spirit of the guideline.
- As the design is developed, if the entrance is set back it should not be so far back that it is disengaged from the public realm.
- Main entrance details should be as grand and detailed as the Weatherly.
- Canopies should be provided and should highlight the main entries. Refer to guidelines. Long, extended awnings are discouraged.

2. Materials, Colors, and Textures.

- The Commission has approved modern buildings like Mercy Corps and the one at 500 NW 23rd; these buildings reinterpret materials from the district in a modern way rather than introducing completely modern materials in a way that does not reference historic materials.
- The guidelines are very clear that exterior materials should be visually compatible with adjacent buildings and character; the use of brick and concrete is encouraged, and the use of wood, metal, and plastic is discouraged.
- One commissioner stated that metal with a matte finish and hung in a way that mimics punched openings could be a possible path forward, but it would depend on the detailing – depth, texture, color, and shadow.
- Metal could be used as a decorative element, but as a façade treatment, it will require highly compatible detailing.

Micro Level Issues

1. Building Details.

- Be mindful of the level of craft that went into District buildings that are 100+ years old; bring that same level of craft will serve you and the district well. When you look at the historic buildings in the district, everything is human-scaled so when you have large panes of glass and metal, it's overwhelming and does not make it feel rooted in this historic district. This design may be great elsewhere but is not appropriate at a critical intersection in this historic district.
- Where possible, make it look handmade, not machine made. This can be attained with modern materials through attention to details, if it's done thoughtfully.
- The start of this craft and handmade character is there with the scale of the entrance and the structure.

2. Datums.

- Some more analysis of datums would be instructive to the ultimate design.

3. Other Design Comments.

- One Commissioner noted that he could imagine a scheme that abuts, but does not connect to, the Weatherly up to its 4th or 5th floor where the façade is relatively blank and/or where storefront allows public access to the alley.

- The Commission is supportive of a stronger base that extends to the height of the former Theater Building, allowing additional height in either a stepped-back tower that responds to other architectural datums on the Weatherly and allows the westernmost portion of the south side of the Weatherly to still be viewed from the south.
- All liked and appreciated the visibility of the Weatherly allowed by the separation of buildings due to the proposed alley, noting whether or not the alley extends all the way between 6th and Grand, maintaining separation at the upper floors is important for honoring the south façade of the Weatherly.
- If Scheme A moves forward and the non-contributing building stays, a taller mass approaching the height of the former Theater, would still be appropriate between it and the Weatherly.

Public Comments.

1. Doug Klotz spoke in favor of the proposal. He noted that adding development at the transit lines helps meet climate change goals and the proposal will help with seismic retrofit of the Weatherly. Should be able to fill the site in height and length the way the Weatherly filled its site. Could change materials and details to fit better with the Weatherly.
2. Tim Erdman spoke in opposition. Has requested seismic retrofit plans for the Weatherly from the owners but have not received that information.
3. Bart Garmon spoke in opposition. The building is too modern for the historic district. A parking garage should be constructed here to meet parking demand in Southeast.

Exhibit List

- A. Applicant's Submittals
 - 1.
- B. Zoning Map
- C. Drawings
 - 1.
- D. Notification
 1. Posting instructions sent to applicant
 2. Posting notice as sent to applicant
 1. Applicant's statement certifying posting
 2. General information on DAR process included with e-mailed posting/notice
- E. Service Bureau Comments
 - 1.
- F. Public Testimony
 - 1.
- G. Other
 1. Application form
 2. Staff memo to Design Commission, dated