



City of Portland, Oregon
Bureau of Development Services
Land Use Services
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

Ted Wheeler, Mayor
Rebecca Esau, Director
Phone: (503) 823-7300
Fax: (503) 823-5630
TTY: (503) 823-6868
www.portlandoregon.gov/bds

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 16, 2019
To: Kim Lan | AM/DRI Willamette LLC
From: Staci Monroe, Development Review
503-823-0624
Re: 19-205006 DA – SOWA Willamette Blocks
DAR Summary Memo from August 29, 2019 Meeting

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 August 29, 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/13150377/>

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 August 29, 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 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.

Encl:
Summary Memo

Cc: Design Commission
Respondents

This memo summarizes **Design Commission** design direction provided on August 29, 2019.

Commissioners in attendance on August 29, 2019: Julie Livingston, Sam Rodriquez, Jessica Molinar, Do Vallaster, Brian McCarter, Chandra Robinson, Zari Santner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Context – The towers need to step back from River Parkway while the podiums below need to further erode with more setback from the greenway trail.

Public Realm – More meaningful, inviting and active public spaces are needed to support the public realm. Additional attention is also needed where residential occurs at the ground floor and vehicle and back of house elements need to be minimized.

Quality – The buildings are overly complicated. The massing, articulation and number of materials need to be simplified to improve coherency. More carving into the massing of the western blocks is needed.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Context

- The majority of the Commission supported the stepping on both towers and the and L-shaped tower on Block 44. A couple of Commissioners did not agree that these moves are contextual, stating while the district may contain towers of different shapes, they are straightforward extruded forms.
- The majority of the Commissioners supported the idea of stepping back the towers from the podium along River Parkway to support the view corridor created by the tower's setback from the street to the north.
- The massing of the towers and podiums are incredibly complicated, which is compounded with too many material changes. Therefore...
- The majority of the Commission supported further erosion of the podiums along the greenway (more vertical as well as horizontal) in order to meet the intent of the guideline. A couple of Commissioners found the massing along the greenway acceptable.
- The east-west dimension of the towers is very out of context in the district. In addition, the Towers along the river do not respond to guideline A1-1 (Develop River Edge Variety).

Public Realm

- The public spaces are too small to be meaningful and the depth and narrowness will result in dark spaces that are not inviting. The covered space at Block 42 is of particular concern. Aggregating them and creating more linear open spaces that meander along the sidewalk, similar to the John Ross and Ardea, should be explored.
- The public spaces are too passive as designed and are not adjacent to conducive active spaces.
- If Abernethy is envisioned to be a focal point of energy and trail access, its character and uses need to be studied and it needs more breathing room.
 - The terminus should open up to the river by eroding the ground floor residential units at the eastern edges and the green river's edge should be pulled into Abernathy to soften the paved area.
 - Should be reinforced with community outdoor space at the upper corners on both western buildings.
- The paseo on Block 45 is nice idea and a good move to respect block structure, however, it is narrow and not inviting. The width and character need to be studied ,for example wider at the edges. Cross-sections will be needed. Regardless, the width needs to be at least 40' to provide a successful, welcoming space for the public.
- The John Ross and Elliott Tower have successful spaces to reference in terms of width, landscaping and residential unit character and transitions.

- The distance between the building and the greenway trail is too tight and needs to be reconsidered to allow more space between the public bike trail and the residential units.
- The garage entries as proposed are okay so long as their width is minimized and back of house elements are consolidated to reduce the impact on the public realm.
- Two Commissioners were not supportive of the garage entry off of Lowell for Block 44.
- The richness of the ground floor along the accessways needs to occur along the rest of the frontages.
- Live/work at the ground level must be designed to be successful as either a commercial or residential use along the public realm (i.e. adequate height and depth to ensure residential use does not occur at-grade at the back of the sidewalk).
- Ground floor residential units on Bond are appropriate on the southern bar of Block 45 so long there is a vertical and horizontal transition (i.e. elevated with an entry sequence).
- For Block 45, consider shifting the residential lobby from Lowell to Bond (as Lowell is the more active frontage with the Streetcar). The lobby should have a distinctive awning to highlight it.
- An active use at southeast corner of Block 44 along the greenway was supported by some Commissioners, while others were okay if were not commercial space. The latter would require a Modification, however, as commercial use at this location is required by the Plan District. Modification criteria would be difficult to meet if you choose to pursue a Modification.
- Internalizing the parking was a huge move and improvement for the project and district.
- The active uses and edges of the proposal are consistent with the desired character of the district.
- There appears to be a good amount of weather protection along the edges.

Quality

- The tower blocks are overly complicated and missing the “big idea” like at the Atwater; a simple idea carried down to ground.
- The tower blocks are very busy and incoherent due to too many material changes.
- The podiums on the tower blocks are working well in terms of articulation. However, look at reconciling the architectural moves on all facades to improve coherency.
- The “sidecar” elements on the riverward blocks appear tacked on and not integrated.
- More variety between the two towers is needed as they appear too similar; the towers in the district are each unique.
- Appreciate the amount of plane changes on the towers. It helps to humanize them.
- Block 41:
 - The stepping of the tower needs to be better integrated. As proposed, the change in material overemphasizes the step and is a bit jarring.
 - Need to study how to better integrate the tower with the base. As proposed, carrying the stepping down into the podium isn’t working well.
- Block 44:
 - Some of the façade articulation on the tower does not make sense.
 - The gable on the podium is not a coherent element as proposed and has to work with overall building. Could be successful and charming if done right.
- The 6-story buildings need to be better articulated, with more finesse and some variation in the rooflines.
- Block 42:

- More carving away at the mass is needed. Stepping down and back or a full break in the façade for a courtyard were suggested. Bar buildings (rather than a donut) are more contextually appropriate.
- Too much variety of windows and no hierarchy among them.
- The scale of the window to walls proportion is off.
- The addition of balconies should be studied. Recessed balconies would be a way to also address the massing concern.
- The heavy secondary cornice is not working with the parapet.
- The industrial history of area could be reflected in the architecture and materials.
- Block 45 *northern* building:
 - Wants to be rigidly simple with perhaps 3 rules.
 - Should not try to relate to downtown buildings. This district is less formal and more playful.
 - The design still feels too formal, which contributes to its blockiness.
 - The rounded corner could work as a gateway at Abernathy but needs to be simple. The Bridgeport curve was referenced as a successful example.
- Block 45 *southern* building:
 - Lacks articulation and design details. Needs another wholesale pass to bring it up to par with the other buildings.
 - Can have similar vocabulary as the northern building but be applied differently.
 - Is less complicated and more successful than the northern building.
- There are lots of joints in the cladding which add to the complexity. Look at reducing the number of materials.
- Regarding materials:
 - Bring samples of glass to future hearing.
 - The use of faux wood is not supported.
 - Generally, the building materials appear to be of good quality, however, details will be needed to further evaluate.
 - The dark color of the brick along the greenway is foreboding.
- The riverward buildings are doing a great job at creating usable rooftops.

General

- Support for the potential modifications identified was expressed by the majority of the Commission with the caveat that the buildings must do better at eroding along the river and greenway.
- The required digital model will be very helpful to inform the massing discussion at the land use hearing.

Exhibit List

- A. Applicant's Submittals
 - 1. Original drawing set dated 8/2/19
- B. Zoning Map
- C. Drawings
 - 1. through 42
- 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 - none
- F. Public Testimony
1. Ken Fransen, dated 8/22/19, concerns with tower heights & process questions.
 2. Dr. & Mrs. Roger Gertenrich, 8/22/19, requesting the inclusion of a grocery store.
 3. Richard Smith, dated 8/22/19, concerns with traffic.
 4. Ellen Huang, 8/23/19, requesting the inclusion of a grocery store.
 5. Kevin Moore, 8/23/19, requesting information on height and tower separation requirements.
 6. Renee Fellman, 8/28/19, concerns with impacts on view corridors, location of towers, the need for a grocery store, noticing concerns.
 7. Neil & Annette McFarlane, 8/28/19, concerns with impacts on view, building massing, public space design.
 8. Todd Woodruff, 8/29/19, concerns with impacts on views.
 9. Ann McMahon, 8/29/19, concerns with impacts on views.
 10. Testimony Sheet from 8/29/19 meeting
 11. Michael Demshki, 8/29/19, concerns with impact of views.
 12. Marilyn Durkin, 8/29/19, concerns with the amount of public space, impacts on views and parking.
- G. Other
1. Application form
 2. Staff Memo to Design Commission dated 8/16/19
 3. Copy of Staff Presentation from 8/29/19 DAR meeting