



## MEMORANDUM

Date: December 05, 2018  
To: City of Austin Design Commission  
From: Planning & Urban Design Working Group  
Subject: Density Bonus Program review of 1700 Guadalupe Street project for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.  
Meeting Date: November 29, 2018; 12:00 pm, One Texas Center, Room 500  
Applicant: Michael Whellan – Armbrust & Brown  
Architect: Gensler

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The project location is the city block defined by Guadalupe Street to the east, San Antonio Street to the west, 18<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, and between 17<sup>th</sup> Street to the south.

Existing zoning for the property is DMU and it lies within the Downtown Austin Plan Boundary. The lot area is 1.76 acres and the total proposed project area is 725,138 square feet. The proposed FAR for this project is 9.5:1, this is more than the 5:1 maximum allowed for DMU zoning, so an increase in FAR of 4.5:1 is being requested. The proposed building height is 242 feet; Two buildings are included in the Density Bonus request; a 14-story office and a 12-story court facility. The 14-story office building will not be built immediately and is part of a future Phase II.

Per the Density Bonus Program ordinance, the applicant is required, at a minimum, to meet the three gatekeeper requirements:

1. Substantially comply with the Urban Design Guidelines
2. Provide streetscape improvements along all public street frontages consistent with the Great Streets Standards.
3. Commit to a minimum of 2-star Austin Energy Green Building rating.

### WORKING GROUP COMMENTS REGARDING COMPLIANCE WITH THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

#### AREA WIDE GUIDELINES

1. Create dense development-  
9.5:1 FAR being requested is nearly twice that of base zoning and is located on major corridor. Height is taller than most building in this area. Project complies with this section.
2. Create mixed-use development-  
The project has one main use: a courts facility. There are not two uses per half block. This project does not comply with this section. Provide a greater amount of uses to comply.
3. Limit development which closes downtown streets-  
This project is requesting to vacate the current alley (ROW) between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets. Project does not comply with this section.
4. Buffer neighborhood edges-  
The neighborhood to the west of San Antonio is identified as a potential National Historic District in the Downtown Plan. The proposed plaza and terraced walls provide a buffer in Phase I, but once the office tower is built there will no longer be a buffer. The project does not comply with this section.
5. Incorporate civic art in both public and private development-

There is no art shown for this project other than some covering for the switch gear. This project does not comply with this section. Provide Civic Art for public to achieve this section.

6. Protect important public views-  
Project is not within the Capitol View Corridor and does not encroach ROW. This project complies with this section.
7. Avoid historical misrepresentations-  
Project design in a modern style. Project complies.
8. Respect adjacent historic buildings-  
Adjacent buildings are identified as potential historic buildings, but not currently designated. Project complies.
9. Acknowledge that rooftops are seen from other buildings and the street-  
Mechanical equipment will be screened. Project complies with this section.
10. Avoid the development of theme environments-  
No theme shown. Project complies.
11. Recycle existing building stock-  
Existing building will be demolished. This project does not comply. Reuse existing building to comply

\*Project complies with 6 of the 11 Area Wide Guidelines.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE**

1. Protect the pedestrian where the building meets the street-  
Overhead protection does not appear to cover the sidewalk. The project does not comply with this section. Increase depth of overhangs to comply with this section.
2. Minimize curb cuts-  
There are no curb cuts planned for Guadalupe Street. There will three curb cuts total. Security necessitates separate parking garages. Project complies with this section.
3. Create a potential for two-way streets-  
There are no curb cuts on Guadalupe or 17<sup>th</sup> Streets, which are the only one-way Streets. Project complies with this section.
4. Reinforce pedestrian activity-  
This is not a destination place, but the plaza will reinforce pedestrian activity for the people using the space as well as others who might want to hang out. Project complies.
5. Enhance key transit stops-  
No transit stops on site. Not applicable to this project.
6. Enhance the streetscape-  
Incorporation of Great Streets and water feature on 17<sup>th</sup> Street enhances the streetscape, however the walls along San Antonio Street are not ideal. Project minimally complies with this section.
7. Avoid conflicts between pedestrians and utility equipment-  
Electric vaults are house behind façade on 17<sup>th</sup> Street side. Switchgear is placed in landscape area along San Antonino side. There are no conflicts. Project complies with this section.
8. Install street trees-  
Street trees included with incorporation of Great Streets. Trees and landscaping included on all four sides. Project complies with this section
9. Provide pedestrian-scaled lighting-  
No lighting is identified on drawings. Project does not comply with this section. Please include pedestrian lighting on plans to comply.
10. Provide protection from cars/promote curbside parking-  
Pedestrians are protected from vehicles by above-ground planters. No curbside parking is provided on Guadalupe Street. Project minimally complies.
11. Screen mechanical and utility equipment-  
Equipment is screened and/or within building envelope. Project complies.
12. Provide generous street-level windows-  
Elevations depict double height windows on first level. Project complies

13. Install pedestrian-friendly materials at street level-  
Use of large precast elements and large plinth do not create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Project does not comply. Masonry would be friendlier at smaller scale.

\*Project complies with 9 of the 12 applicable Guidelines for Public Streetscape.

## **GUIDELINES FOR PLAZAS AND OPEN SPACE**

1. Treat the Four Squares with Special Consideration-  
Project is not adjacent to any of the four squares. Project not applicable.
2. Contribute to an Open Space Network-  
There is no adjacent open space. Not applicable to project.
3. Emphasize Connections to Parks and Greenways-  
No adjacent parks or greenways. Section not applicable.
4. Incorporate Open Space into Residential Development-  
There is no residential development- Section is not applicable.
5. Develop Green Roofs-  
Vegetated plaza covers underground parking. Project complies.
6. Provide Plazas in High Use Areas-  
Public plaza provided behind court facility. Project complies.
7. Determine Plaza Function, Size, and Activity-  
A variety of areas have been proposed. Project complies.
8. Respond to the Microclimate in Plaza Design-  
Plaza is designed with shaded seating, open air, and trees. Buildings will shade a good deal of the plaza most of the time. Project complies.
9. Consider Views, Circulation, Boundaries, and Subspaces in Plaza Design-  
Plaza is raised from street level on all sides and does not create a strong connection to the adjacent ROW. It is also "hidden" behind the courts building. Project does not comply.
10. Provide an appropriate amount of Plaza Seating-  
An appropriate amount of plaza seating appears to be provided in addition to Great Streets seating. Project complies.
11. Provide Visual and Spatial Complexity in Public Spaces-  
Plaza is broken into distinct areas. Project complies.
12. Use Plants to Enliven Urban Spaces-  
Plaza appears to provide at least 30% plant coverage. Project complies.
13. Provide Interactive Civic Art and Fountains in Plazas-  
No art or fountains are shown in plaza. Project does not comply.
14. Provide Food Service for Plaza Participants-  
Food service is provided in the building, behind security. This could discourage public use. No food vendors are proposed for the plaza. Project does not comply.
15. Increase Safety in Plazas through Wayfinding, Lighting, & Visibility-  
Lobby entrance is signaled by hierarchy of the canopy, but lighting and wayfinding are unclear on the provided drawings. Project does not comply.
16. Consider Plaza Operations and Maintenance-  
Durable materials and indigenous plants appear to be proposed. Project complies.

\*Project complies with 8 of the applicable 12 Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space.

## **GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS**

1. Build to the street-  
Project complies
2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level-

Project lacks pedestrian-oriented development as envisioned in UDG and DMU zoning Project does not comply. Provide multiple street level uses to comply with this section.

3. Accentuate primary entrances-  
Primary entry to court facility is recessed and corner is cut, however the primary entrance to office building is unclear. Project does not comply.
4. Encourage the inclusion of local character-  
The building shows no indication of local character. The plaza is not considered under this building guideline. Project does not comply. Provide local character as outlined in the UDG to comply.
5. Control on-site parking-  
All parking located below grade. Project complies with this section
6. Create quality construction-  
Project appears to comply.
7. Create buildings with human scale-  
Lower levels with pilotis help break large scale of buildings, but large precast elements do not help in this matter. Project minimally complies.

\*Project complies with 4 of the 7 Guidelines for Buildings.

The raised parking base presents a challenge for the building to relate to the street, though an alternative approach has been presented, largely due to the topography of this site. The project creates a large, publicly accessible plaza that relates both to the building and to the surrounding right of way in several ways. The parking base concrete is patterned, giving it a scale, and plantings are proposed to soften the surfaces. The SW corner of the base is set back to create landscaping at the corner. A large stair at the west and at the south serves to terrace back the wall to help the plaza relate to the streetscape. It is important that these details be maintained for this project. The Working Group has a few additional concerns with how this project aligns with the Urban Design Guidelines:

- 1) This property is zoned DMU and therefore has been specifically planned for mixed-use. The court use, however, does not meet the spirit of DMU.
- 2) For a prominent civic building, there should be more emphasis on sustainability that can be easily recognized. Exposed elements such as photovoltaics, solar heating, windmills, etc. that are nicely built into the architecture are always captivating, especially when they improve the building's performance.
- 3) The Downtown Austin Plan identifies the west side of San Antonio Street as a Potential National Register Historic District. The proposed project does not appear to address this in anyway.

The Working Group has determined that this project, as presented to us, is not in substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines. We would encourage you to address the larger concerns listed above before presenting to the full Commission. The Working Group has appreciated the opportunity to review and comment on this project.

Respectfully submitted,



David Carroll, Chair  
City of Austin Design Commission

Urban Design Working Group Commissioners- David Carroll, Evan Taniguchi, Bart Whatley

cc: Benjamin Campbell  
Density Bonus Program Coordinator & Executive Liaison to the Design Commission