



MEMORANDUM

Date: June 26, 2020
To: City of Austin Design Commission
From: Planning & Urban Design Working Group
Subject: Downtown Density Bonus Program review of the Block 16 project for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.
Meeting Date: June 19, 2020; 1:00 pm, Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)
Applicant: Richard Suttle, Armbrust & Brown
Architect: Gensler

The project is located at the north side of 2nd Street between Trinity Street and San Jacinto Blvd.

Existing zoning for the property is CBD. It is not within the Capitol View Corridor. The lot area is 35,309 SF and the total proposed project area is 741,319 square feet with Office use and limited restaurant use. The proposed FAR for this project is 21:1, this is more than the 8:1 maximum allowed in CBD, so an increase in FAR of 13:1 is being requested. The proposed building height is 723 feet with 47 floors. 17 levels of above ground parking are being proposed, along with 3 levels of underground parking.

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

1. Substantially comply with the City's Urban Design Guidelines
2. Provide streetscape improvements that meet the Great Streets Program Standards.
3. Commit to a minimum of 2-Star rating under Austin Energy's Green Building Program.

WORKING GROUP COMMENTS REGARDING COMPLIANCE WITH THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

AREA WIDE GUIDELINES

1. Create Dense Development:
21:1 FAR being requested. Project complies with this section.
2. Create Mixed-Use Development:
The project has office and retail/restaurant use, but at 0.2% of the building area, the retail use is not adequate in size to create a sense of variety at street level. This project does not comply with this section. Provide more retail space or additional uses to comply.
3. Limit Development which Closes Downtown Streets:
This project is not proposing to permanently close any streets. Project complies with this section.
4. Buffer Neighborhood Edges:
Project is not adjacent to a neighborhood. Section is not applicable.
5. Incorporate Civic Art in both Public and Private Development:
Public art is being proposed at both street corners. Project complies with 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 is a modern style. Project complies.

8. Respect Adjacent Historic Buildings:
There are no adjacent historic buildings. Section is not applicable.
9. Acknowledge that Rooftops are Seen from other Buildings and the Street:
Lower roof has proposed green space, but no information has been provided for upper roof. Project does not comply. Provide upper roof documentation to comply.
10. Avoid the Development of Theme Environments:
No theme shown. Project complies.
11. Recycle Existing Building Stock:
Existing buildings are being demolished. This project does not comply. Recycle existing building stock to comply.

*Project complies with 6 of the 9 applicable Area Wide Guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE

1. Protect the Pedestrian where the Building Meets the Street:
A colonnade is provided along 2nd Street, but no protection is provided along Trinity or Street or San Jacinto Blvd. Project minimally complies.
2. Minimize Curb Cuts:
Project is proposing more curb cuts than exist today. Project does not comply with this section. Reduce curb cuts to comply.
3. Create a Potential for Two-Way Streets:
Garage entries are designed as two-way. Project complies with this section.
4. Reinforce Pedestrian Activity:
Great Streets compliance and proposed colonnade supports pedestrian circulation; however, a lack of pedestrian oriented uses on the first floor, along with an oversized unprogrammed lobby, does not help to enhance activity. Additionally, the existing wayfinding signage at 2nd and Trinity Streets appears to be removed in the proposed plan. Project does not comply. Encourage street vendors and preserve wayfinding to comply.
5. Enhance Key Transit Stops:
There are no transit stops on site or adjacent site. Not applicable to this project.
6. Enhance the Streetscape:
A very small retail space is proposed for pedestrian oriented use. This does little to enhance the streetscape in an area of town that is desolate at 5pm. Much of the outdoor space appears unprogrammed and allotted to two public art spaces. The segmented bench running horizontally down 2nd street bifurcates the streetscape into "2-way" pedestrian flow and if there is a "cafe zone" then the circulation is squeezed into "one lane". Project does not comply. Provide more pedestrian oriented uses and coordinate proposed bench configuration to unify the pedestrian experience. Show cafe tables or other seating if they occupy space in the public realm.
7. Avoid Conflicts between Pedestrians and Utility Equipment:
No utilities appear to be placed in conflict. Light poles in furniture zone. Project complies
8. Install Street Trees:
Full street trees are provided along 2nd St., but not along Trinity or San Jacinto. Total amount of trees is increased from existing conditions. Project complies with this section
9. Provide Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting:
Street lights are indicated, but no pedestrian lighting is shown. Project does not comply. Provide pedestrian lighting to comply.
10. Provide Protection from Cars/Promote Curbside Parking-
Street parking is provided along 2nd Street. Trees help buffer along Trinity and San Jacinto. Project complies.
11. Screen Mechanical and Utility Equipment:
Equipment appears to be contained within building. Project complies.
12. Provide Generous Street-Level Windows:
Project appears to comply.
13. Install Pedestrian-Friendly Materials at Street Level:

Street level materials appear to be large glass panels and marble or granite cladding, which is very cold. It is unclear what the proposed bench construction is. These are durable, but not pedestrian friendly. Project does not comply. Provide some warmer/softer materials to comply.

*Project complies with 7 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. Not applicable to this project.
2. Contribute to an Open Space Network:
Public spaces under colonnade contributes to open space network near the convention center. Project complies with this section.
3. Emphasize Connections to Parks and Greenways:
Brush Square is a few blocks away. Not applicable.
4. Incorporate Open Space into Residential Development:
This project does not propose residential use. Not applicable to this section.
5. Develop Green Roofs:
Green roof is proposed on 36 level roof deck. Project complies with this section.
6. Provide Plazas in High Use Areas:
Public plazas are provided at each intersection. Project complies with this section.
7. Determine Plaza Function, Size, and Activity:
Plazas seem unprogrammed and appear to serve the public art only. Project does not comply with this section. Provide a better sense of how plazas will be used to comply with this section.
8. Respond to the Urban Microclimate in Plaza Design:
Shade and water feature are provided. Project complies with this section.
9. Consider Views, Circulation, Boundaries, and Subspaces in Plaza Design:
Plazas are divided from pedestrian circulation with benches. Plazas lack variety of spaces. Project does not comply with this section. Provide subspaces and better access from public ROW.
10. Provide an Appropriate Amount of Plaza Seating:
Very little seating is shown on plan. Benches provided are not in plaza area. Project does not comply. Provide more seating as well as a variety as outline in the UDG.
11. Provide Visual and Spatial Complexity in Public Spaces:
Other than public art there is no delineation of spaces or visual complexity shown. Project does not comply with this section. Provide greater level of spatial complexity to comply.
12. Use Plants to Enliven Urban Spaces:
Other than what appears to be grass at public art there are no plants shown on drawings. Project does not comply. Provide planting plan to illustrate compliance.
13. Provide Interactive Civic Art and Fountains in Plazas:
Public art is shown, but does not appear to be interactive. A water feature is proposed. Project complies.
14. Provide Food Service for Plaza Participants:
No food service is being shown. Project does not comply with this section. Illustrate how food kiosks can be integrated into the plazas and not interrupt pedestrian traffic to comply.
15. Increase Safety in Plazas through Wayfinding, Lighting, & Visibility:
Exhibits have not been provided to demonstrate compliance with this section. Project does not comply. Provide exhibits illustrating where the UDG recommendations have been incorporated in order to comply.
16. Consider Plaza Management and Maintenance:
Exhibits have not been provided to demonstrate compliance with this section. Project does not comply. Provide exhibits illustrating where the UDG recommendations have been incorporated in order to comply.

*Project complies with 5 of the 13 applicable Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space.

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS

1. Build to the street:
Building is built to the street, except at open space. Project complies.
2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level:
Public plaza occupies more than half the block. More than 25% of street frontage discourages walk-in traffic. Project does not comply. Following recommendation is UDG to comply with this section.
3. Accentuate primary entrances:
There is not discernable difference between entrances. Project does not comply. Accentuate entrances to comply.
4. Encourage the inclusion of local character:
The materials and articulation of the building in both form and detail is beautiful; however, it does not seem to contextually draw from any other structures or local materials. Project does not comply. Provide local character as outlined in the UDG to comply.
5. Control on-site parking:
Two parking garages are provided, but they are screened. Project minimally complies.
6. Create quality construction:
Proposing glass and marble façade. Project complies
7. Create buildings with human scale:
Street level is double-height, with large panes of glass and large marble columns. Project does not comply.
Provide more variety of scales to comply.

Project complies with 3 of the 7 Guidelines for Buildings.

Positive features of this project are the inclusion of the colonnade with plazas and public art. However, the scale of the water feature, and associated public art, consumes a significant amount of space which reduces the area available for public use. Additionally, the oversized lobby, the unprogrammed plaza spaces, and the small amount of area dedicated to pedestrian oriented uses on the ground floor inhibits the activation of the public realm. Further, the relationship between the plazas and the public sidewalk is unclear. The proposed benches appear to bifurcate these from one another.

Lastly, we are concerned about the loss of the established trees. Please clarify and show calculations of the existing trees being removed (by species and caliper) and the trees to be installed (by species and caliper). If inches are being mitigated, present this as well.

The Planning & Urban Design Working Group has concluded that this project, as presented, does not substantially comply with the Urban Design Guidelines. We encourage you to address the concerns listed in this letter, and provide exhibits illustrating compliance, before presenting to the Design Commission in order to achieve a finding of substantial compliance. The Working Group has appreciated the opportunity to review and comment on this project.

Respectfully,



David Carroll, Chair
City of Austin Design Commission

Working Group Members in attendance - David Carroll, Evan Taniguchi, Aan Coleman, Bart Whatley

cc: Evan Taniguchi, Aan Coleman, Bart Whatley, Aaron Jenkins, Jorge Rousselin