



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** August 31, 2020  
**To:** City of Austin Design Commission  
**From:** Planning & Urban Design Working Group  
**Subject:** Downtown Density Bonus Program review of the River Street Residences project for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.  
**Meeting Date:** Date; 11:00 am, Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)  
**Applicant:** Amanda Swor, Drenner Group.  
**Architect:** Gensler

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The project is located at the ½ block of Rainey St, River St, and East Ave

The applicant is seeking a density bonus to raise the FAR from   :1 to   :1 FAR (within   25:1 maximum allowance). The lot area is    sq ft, and the total project area is    sq ft.

The applicant is seeking additional height to    feet, over the base height limit of    feet. The total building height is    feet. The maximum height achievable under the density bonus program in this portion of downtown is    ft.

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: The building occupies 100% of the property. By definition, it is dense.
2. Create Mixed-Use Development: The building floor plans indicate that approx 25% of the ground floor is retail. The other use is residential.
3. Limit Development, which Closes Downtown Streets: There was discussion from Commissioner Whatley regarding the "bridging" of the alley. He is concerned about the perception that this public access will appear private; dissuading pedestrians (and service) by the public.
4. Buffer Neighborhood Edges: N/A
5. Incorporate Civic Art in both Public and Private Development: Not mentioned or shown in back-up

6. Protect Important Public Views: Building focuses on views to downtown, Lady Bird Lake. It does not interfere with any important public views. Commissioner Whatley was concerned that the building “turns its back” on IH 35 and East Ave.
7. Avoid Historical Misrepresentations: OK
8. Respect Adjacent Historic Buildings: N/A, However, Commissioner Coleman brought up the missed opportunity to provide an outdoor experience for pedestrians along Rainey St. for use by the public and to connect visually to the MAC.
9. Acknowledge that Rooftops are Seen from other Buildings and the Street: OK
10. Avoid the Development of Theme Environments: OK
11. Recycle Existing Building Stock: N/A

\*Project complies with 6 of the 8 applicable Area Wide Guidelines. \*when comments were brought up, these guidelines were not included in the total.

#### GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE

1. Protect the Pedestrian where the Building Meets the Street: Commissioner Coleman brought up the need to have an at-grade pedestrian crossing at the alley with some kind of articulation or signage (or both) to alert the pedestrian to the alley use.
2. Minimize Curb Cuts: OK
3. Create a Potential for Two-Way Streets: N/A
4. Reinforce Pedestrian Activity: Commissioner Coleman discussed the need to activate the corner of Rainey St. and River St. to further reinforce pedestrian activity at the building for the public. The retail use at this corner will also accomplish this.
5. Enhance Key Transit Stops: Wasn't discussed.
6. Enhance the Streetscape: Great Streets is being installed, but there is no other at grade/pedestrian enhancements. Additionally, Commissioner Coleman discussed the conflicts of the building columns with the ADA ramps at the pedestrian crossings and the minimal distance between the columns and the façade, which substantially inhibits pedestrian movement in the streetscape.
7. Avoid Conflicts between Pedestrians and Utility Equipment: OK
8. Install Street Trees: Per Great Streets only
9. Provide Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting: Per Great Streets only
10. Provide Protection from Cars/Promote Curbside Parking-ADA spaces shown
11. Screen Mechanical and Utility Equipment: OK
12. Provide Generous Street-Level Windows: OK with exception of East Ave. as expressed by Commissioner Whatley
13. Install Pedestrian-Friendly Materials at Street Level: None other than the Great Streets

\*Project complies with 4 of the 12 applicable Guidelines for Public Streetscape.

## GUIDELINES FOR PLAZAS AND OPEN SPACE

1. Treat the Four Squares with Special Consideration:
2. Contribute to an Open Space Network: N/A
3. Emphasize Connections to Parks and Greenways: N/A
4. Incorporate Open Space into Residential Development: N/A
5. Develop Green Roofs: None
6. Provide Plazas in High Use Areas: None shown
7. Determine Plaza Function, Size, and Activity: None shown
8. Respond to the Urban Microclimate in Plaza Design: None shown at ground level. Substantial plantings shown ON the structure.
9. Consider Views, Circulation, Boundaries, and Subspaces in Plaza Design: Views from the building were considered only.
10. Provide an Appropriate Amount of Plaza Seating: None shown
11. Provide Visual and Spatial Complexity in Public Spaces: None shown
12. Use Plants to Enliven Urban Spaces: Substantial plantings shown on the building. None at grade.
13. Provide Interactive Civic Art and Fountains in Plazas: None
14. Provide Food Service for Plaza Participants: None specifically; however, Retail use is shown.
15. Increase Safety in Plazas through Wayfinding, Lighting, & Visibility: N/A
16. Consider Plaza Management and Maintenance: N/A

\*Project complies with 3 of the 10 applicable Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space.

## GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS

1. Build to the street: OK
2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level: OK (Retail shown)
3. Accentuate primary entrances: OK
4. Encourage the inclusion of local character: The plantings on the building are the most significant visual character item (OK)
5. Control on-site parking: OK; only ADA shown
6. Create quality construction: OK
7. Create buildings with human scale: OK (arcade)

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

## Working Group Conclusion (Summary)

Based on the information provided, the Planning & Urban Design Working Group has concluded that the project just does substantially comply with the Urban Design Guidelines. Since this was not an easy conclusion, we encourage you to address the additional concerns listed above before presenting to the full Design Commission in order to ensure a finding of substantial compliance from the larger body. The Working Group has appreciated the opportunity to review and comment on this project again.

Respectfully,

City of Austin Design Commission

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

cc: Evan Taniguchi, Bart Whatley, Aan Coleman, Aaron Jenkins, JorgeRousseli