



## MEMORANDUM

Date: November 24, 2020  
To: City of Austin Design Commission  
From: Planning & Urban Design Working Group  
Subject: Downtown Density Bonus Program review of 90 Rainey Street project for substantial compliance with the Urban Design Guidelines.  
Meeting Date: November 19, 2020; 12:00 pm, Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams  
Applicant: Amanda Swor – Drenner Group  
Architect: Nelsen Partners

---

The project is located at the corner of Rainey and Davis Streets.

Existing zoning for the property is CBD. It lies within the boundary of the Rainey Street Subdistrict of the Waterfront Overlay and the Rainey Street District of the Downtown Austin Plan. The lot area is 0.3674 acres (16,004 SF) and the total proposed project area is 506,942 square feet. The proposed FAR for this project is 31.7:1, this is more than the base 8:1 FAR allowed and more than the maximum 15:1 FAR administratively allowed so City Council must approve FAR increase. The proposed building height is 602 feet with 51 floors. This proposed project is Residential Use with 446 units. The breakdown of area is Residential: 494,948 SF and Bar/Lounge: 11,994 SF.

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-  
Proposing over 1,200 units per acre density. Height is also taller than most building in this area. Project complies with this section.
2. Create mixed-use development-  
The project has residential and bar use at street level. This project complies with this section.
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 on a neighborhood edge. Section not applicable to this project.
5. Incorporate civic art in both public and private development-  
Project is proposing wall mural along Davis Street. 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-  
Project complies.
9. Acknowledge that rooftops are seen from other buildings and the street-  
Project complies with this guideline.
10. Avoid the development of theme environments-  
Project complies with this guideline.
11. Recycle existing building stock-  
Existing house is being removed. This project does not comply.

\*Project complies with 9 of the applicable 10 Area Wide Guidelines.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE**

1. Protect the pedestrian where the building meets the street-  
Overhead cover does not occur between 9-14 feet and only appears to be about 5 feet deep. Project does not comply with this guideline. Provide appropriate protection to comply.
2. Minimize curb cuts-  
There are no curb cuts planned for Davis or Rainey Streets. Garage access is off of existing alley. Project complies with this guideline.
3. Create a potential for two-way streets-  
Both streets are currently two-way streets and access is from alley. Section not applicable.
4. Reinforce pedestrian activity-  
Very little strategies presented for reinforcing pedestrian activity. Concerned that bar use will only reinforce activity at night, leaving daytime hours dead. Additionally, one of these bars is in the basement level, which will not activate the streetscape. Project does not 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-  
Project appears to comply with Great Streets and provides outdoor bar seating. Project complies with this guideline.
7. Avoid conflicts between pedestrians and utility equipment-  
No conflict. Utilities are hidden in alley, and behind mural. Project complies with this guideline.
8. Install street trees-  
Project complies except at drop-off along Davis Street. Project complies.
9. Provide pedestrian-scaled lighting-  
Exhibit is provided, but pedestrian lighting is not shown on plans or renderings. Project does not comply with this section. Please include pedestrian lighting on pathway to comply.
10. Provide protection from cars/promote curbside parking-  
No protection shown at drop-off. Renderings and plans do not match in this area. Project does not comply with this guideline. Provide pedestrian protections, like bollards, to comply.
11. Screen mechanical and utility equipment-  
Equipment is screened and/or within building envelope. Project complies.
12. Provide generous street-level windows-  
Street level windows are provided. Project complies.
13. Install pedestrian-friendly materials at street level-  
Concrete and glass do little to soften street level, but planters help soften. Project complies.

\*Project complies with 7 of the 11 applicable Guidelines for Public Streetscape.

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

Project not applicable to Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space.

## GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS

1. Build to the street-  
Building is not built to the street, but it is accommodating additional sidewalk width. Project complies.
2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level-  
Project has bar use along Rainey Street frontage and Residential Lobby along Davis St. Project complies.
3. Accentuate primary entrances-  
Project complies.
4. Encourage the inclusion of local character-  
Other than incorporating a mural wall, the building shows little indication of local character. Building appears to be concrete and glass. Project does not comply. Provide local character as outlined in the UDG to comply.
5. Control on-site parking-  
All parking is in above grade garage, but it is screened and access is off of existing alley. Project complies with this guideline.
6. Create quality construction-  
Project appears to comply.
7. Create buildings with human scale-  
The large scale of tower and double height windows at ground level do not provide human scale. Likewise, the large concrete columns do not provide human scale. Project does not comply. Provide human scale elements, like lower shading devices, to comply.

\*Project complies with 5 of the 7 Guidelines for Buildings.

The Working Group appreciates the project's proposed reduction in parking as well as the lack of curb cuts on Davis and Rainey Streets. We also appreciate the effort to minimize the Residential Lobby and maximize the retail space. However, the bar use is concerning as it will inherently only serve to activate the streetscape during nighttime hours, leaving it lifeless during the day. Additionally, the second bar use in the basement will not serve to activate the streetscape during any part of the day.

While the project appears to be meeting the minimum gatekeeper requirements, the Working Group has concerns over the large amount of FAR being requested. Since this project is seeking a FAR that is more than double the maximum allowed under the Downtown Density Bonus Program, the Working Group believes the applicant should provide more onsite Community Benefits than the minimal affordable housing and fees-in-lieu being proposed. One example of this is to dedicate at least 1,500 square feet of the project area to Day Care Services, as outlined in the Downtown Density Bonus Program Ordinance. There are few options for children in this area of downtown and providing a space for children to have safe, supervised activities onsite would be a huge benefit for the building's residents, as well for the neighboring community.

Additionally, the Working Group still questions how responsible it is to add this much FAR to an area like Rainey that already suffers from major mobility issues. The 446 families being added to this corner will rely on some type of transportation and given Cap Metro buses cannot maneuver in this area, it will only add to the Rainey mobility nightmare. While it is not our intent to punish the applicant for the City's planning failures, requesting such a drastic increase in FAR, under the current Rainey climate seems hasty. Therefore, another example of additional Community Benefits for this project could be to provide onsite shuttle services for residents to reduce the use of single occupancy vehicles.

The Working Group has determined that this project, as presented, does not substantially comply with the Urban Design Guidelines. We would encourage you to address the concerns listed above before presenting to the Commission in order to ensure a substantial compliance recommendation.

The Working Group has appreciated the opportunity to review and comment on this project.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Carroll". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Carroll, Chair  
City of Austin Design Commission

Working Group Commissioners in attendance- David Carroll, Evan Taniguchi, Aan Coleman

cc: Aaron Jenkins, Jorge Rousselin